

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUILDING A SCHOOL
IN BELIZE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

by

STEPHEN TODD SPEER

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DEDICATION

All researchers have stories to tell about why they chose a specific topic. Helping with building new schools in remote areas is my story and passion. This research is dedicated to those who help others, especially my fellow humanitarians Kelly Guerrero, Mark Alvarez, and Ruby Kim.

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BUILDING A SCHOOL IN BELIZE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

STEPHEN TODD SPEER

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In Central America, the country of Belize shares its border with Guatemala and Mexico. These countries, with El Salvador and Honduras, are known as the most dangerous areas in our world outside active war zones (Dudley, 2012; Edwards & Gill, 2002; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2019). Crime is the largest contributor to instability in the region and creates a dangerous environment that must be reduced. Reduction of crime can correlate to an increase in available educational opportunities (Edwards & Gill, 2002; Overseas Security Advisory Council [OSAC], 2019). The U.S. government conducts foreign humanitarian assistance programs that increase educational opportunities in hope of reducing crime and stabilizing the region (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019). The purpose of one of the humanitarian assistance programs is to build schools to increase educational opportunities in remote areas. Minimal research exists from the stakeholders' point of view on the significance of humanitarian school building. Utilizing the stakeholders' point of view, this qualitative action research study was designed to help community and international stakeholders improve the school building process in Corozal, Belize. This research study followed an international non-profit organization, Global Aid Consultants, and stakeholders through a new school building process. The research participants included parents, school faculty, community leaders, and international stakeholders of the school building process. The three data sources of interviews, photographs, and documents were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the grounded theory method.

To better understand the research questions, the data analysis procedures were framed in four steps: (a) identifying codes in the data, (b) creating categories of codes, (c) synthesizing the categories to generate themes, and (d) applying the emerged themes to the study (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). The analysis identified over 600 codes that were grouped into 30 to 35 categories which emerged from the data. The categories were synthesized to develop seven themes. Next, the seven themes were logically applied to one of the three research questions:

1. How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?
2. From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?
3. From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?

These emerged themes are supported by the research study, literature, and my philosophical worldview. This research study highlighted insights into understanding the process of building a new school in Belize and its immediate impact on the local community. The research exposed that it takes partners with resources who communicate together in an environment they support to create developmental change. Developmental change occurs when stakeholders assist communities to develop the capability and capacity to address a problem. For example, in this research a new school was built that increased the outlook for the community. The stakeholders will use this insight to improve the school building process. Another conclusion, and one of the most important parts from this study, was finding a way to articulate the immediate impact of the new school. How does the new school impact the community is one of the most frequent questions asked by others including stakeholders. According to the research, the local, national, and international stakeholders believe that the new school provides a safe learning environment where the people are motivated for school that creates opportunities and grows the community.

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GLOSSARY

Department of Defense: A federal government executive branch department that is charged with synchronizing and overseeing all activities and functions related to national security and the U.S. Armed Forces (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2014).

Department of State: A federal executive department responsible for carrying out international relations through U.S. foreign policy. The Department of State (DOS) advances U.S. goals and interests in the world through its primary role in developing and applying the President's foreign policy. DOS is the lead U.S. foreign affairs agency (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019).

Foreign Humanitarian Assistance Program: Consists of Department of Defense (DOD) activities conducted outside the United States and its territories to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation. FHA is intended to supplement or complement efforts of host nation civil authorities or agencies with the primary responsibility for providing aid (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019).

Global Aid Consultants: Is a private, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit non-government organization (NGO) dedicated to promoting education and health. Global Aid Consultants operates in high risk areas and establishes a long-term presence in regions. Working independently, with other NGOs, with U.S. and U.N. agencies, or alongside the military, Global Aid Consultants assist in the world's trouble spots where humanitarian or other assistance is needed. They have decades of global experience in developmental and humanitarian assistance and always place priority on addressing children's needs first (Speer et al., 2020).

GLOSSARY—Continued

United States Southern Command: United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is one of the eleven unified combatant commands in the United States Department of Defense. It is responsible for providing contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation for Central and South America, the Caribbean, their territorial waters, and for the force protection of U.S. military resources at these locations. SOUTHCOM also conducts humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions through security cooperation activities (Southern Command Strategy [SOUTHCOM Strategy], 2019).

United States Agency for International Development: United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency of the U.S. federal government that is responsible for managing civilian foreign aid and development assistance. USAID is one of the largest official aid agencies in the world (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2020).

Chapter 1. Neighbors Helping Neighbors

Introduction

Some scholars and practitioners believe that education reduces crime (Edwards & Gill, 2002; Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012; Overseas Security Advisory Council [OSAC], 2019). Likewise, the U.S. government, in cooperation with other international governments and non-government organizations, are building schools to help increase educational opportunities in remote areas to reduce crime (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019). Research on this school building process, from the stakeholders' point of view, does not exist. Further research is needed to help the stakeholders improve the school building process and enact change with local, national, and international stakeholders.

This qualitative action research study followed a nonprofit organization to obtain a deeper insight on how stakeholders understood the significance of building a new school. The research participants included parents, school faculty, and community and international stakeholders who participated in the project. Qualitative data was collected through interviews, photos, and other documents from key stakeholders (Leavy, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Stringer, 2014). The data was analyzed using grounded theory's thematic data analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2016).

Chapter 1 introduces the study and provides information on the background of the study, how education impacts crime, how building schools impacts education, and how an international non-profit organization enhances educational opportunities. This chapter explains the rationale for the study, the research questions that guided the study, the overall significance of the research, and describes the Belize research setting.

Background of the Study

Mexico and Central America have the worst homicide rates in the world, outside of war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan (Dudley, 2012; Edwards & Gill, 2002). A report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime suggested that Latin America is the most violent region in the world, with an average of 25 murders per 100,000 population, as compared to the global average of 6.2 per 100,000 population (Ramirez, 2014). Belize consistently ranks among the top 10 countries in the world for homicides (OSAC, 2019). Belize averages approximately 38 homicides per 100,000 citizens (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2019) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

World Homicides Rates



Note. The world map visualizes homicides with red circles. The larger the circle, the higher the frequency of homicides according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Global Study on Homicide (UNODC, 2019). Central America has the largest red circles in the world.

While organized crime is a worldwide issue, it has a significant impact in Central America, and specifically in Belize (Collier, 2007). Human smuggling, drug trade, money laundering, and corruption are problems associated with organized crime (OSAC, 2019; Shelley & Picarelli, 2005). Organized crime is the largest contributor to instability in Belize and creates this dangerous environment. El Salvadoran and Guatemalan transnational criminal organizations use Belize as a transit country with smuggling routes to support drug and human trafficking (Dudley, 2012; OSAC, 2019).

As a result of this, a significant amount of international money funds physical security of borders and targets crime throughout the region. Most countries fight crime with a focus on security (Kolb, 2012). Policymakers are most interested in fighting crime by using enforcement and punishment, while other research suggests that increasing education and improving school quality can significantly reduce crime rates (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012).

According to the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017), the prevention of crime and violence are a priority and used as catalysts to conduct humanitarian and civic assistance programs with host nation governments in remote areas of the Western Hemisphere. Part of this Department of Defense (DOD) humanitarian and civic assistance program is to build new primary and secondary educational schools to help prevent crime and violence (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019).

Building Schools to Increase Education

DOD conducts school building projects in Latin America through foreign humanitarian assistance exercises every year. These exercises provide an opportunity for DOD personnel and host nation personnel to work together on humanitarian assistance projects. The U.S. military forces that participate in exercises are primarily engineers and support civil-military cooperation through school building projects (Southern Command Strategy [SOUTHCOM

Strategy], 2019). U.S. military personnel participate in humanitarian assistance projects for strategic, operational, or tactical purposes that support the National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017), while concurrently reinforcing skills required for the operational readiness of the forces executing the humanitarian mission. For example, military engineers use their construction skills to build schools, and medical personnel use their expertise to help increase the health of the local population.

Each year, DOD begins the initial planning with Department of State (DOS) personnel from the U.S. Embassy in the host nation. Together they prepare and prioritize resources to implement the execution of the projects in coordination with the host nation. The chosen humanitarian project for 2020 was in the community of Corozal, Belize. Corozal was selected by the DOD, DOS, and in cooperation with the government of Belize, to receive humanitarian assistance to build several new elementary schools. The project started in January 2020 and ended in the Summer of 2022.

DOD builds the schools and the oversight and sustainment of these projects are the responsibility of the host nation. DOD and the host nation require assistance in completing the schools and making them immediately ready for use. Global Aid Consultants, an international nonprofit organization, helps complete the schools by providing school desks, tables, chairs, chalkboards, and other school infrastructure to finish the classroom learning environment and make them ready for children.

Global Aid Consultants Enhances Educational Opportunities

Global Aid Consultants works hand-in-hand with the DOD, DOS, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and host nation governments to support the school building humanitarian assistance program (Figure 2). Global Aid Consultants increases educational opportunities within the humanitarian assistance program by completing and sustaining schools.

Figure 2

Global Aid Consultants Support International Agencies



Note. Global Aid Consultants is aligned with the goals and missions of key national and international organizations and will have similar relationships in Belize.

Inspired by conducting overseas humanitarian projects initiated by the DOD, two career military officers, Mark Alvarez and I, wanted to continue our service to others. We partnered with a former Fortune 500 company business executive, Kelly Guerrero, to start Global Aid Consultants. Global Aid Consultants is an international nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2016 to address the social problem of improving educational opportunities in communities with need. By promoting quality education, Global Aid Consultants aims to help transform communities in areas of need.

Also, in 2016, Mark and I began the International Education and Entrepreneurship (IEE) doctoral program at University of the Incarnate Word's (UIW) Dreeben School of Education, in

San Antonio, Texas. The doctoral program provided the educational platform to launch Global Aid Consultants and offered theoretical study into the business and educational systems with cultural context. Due to the IEE program, I was better able to address complex international development issues from the strategic government level to the local community in remote areas. I was immediately able to apply theories learned in class to real world practical application. For example, from the Ethics for the Professional course, I learned ethical theories that prepared me to work through ethical dilemmas that occurred with international development partners operating in different cultures.

Global Aid Consultants fills a specific niche of providing needed infrastructure to humanitarian projects that increase access to early education. From my military service and experience, I found that when the DOD humanitarian program built schools in remote, impoverished locations, obstacles like funding, rules, and regulations kept the U.S. government from providing needed infrastructure to ensure sustainability of the school. Sometimes, these schools would end up as community storage facilities, community centers, or left abandoned (Figure 3). Global Aid Consultant helps to prevent this by connecting and partnering with non-government resources from charitable, private, and public organizations to sustain schools and clinics. Global Aid Consultants makes the new or refurbished school buildings immediately ready for use and provides a safe learning environment that is supported by the community, host nation government, and international stakeholders.

Global Aid Consultants operates in a constantly changing environment and must adapt as a transformative organization led by entrepreneurs. Bloom and Dees (2008) said, "Entrepreneurs not only must understand the broad environment in which they work, but also must shape those environments to support their goals, when feasible" (p. 47). Figure 4 shows the complex ecosystem Global Aid Consultants operates. The ecosystem is a dynamic

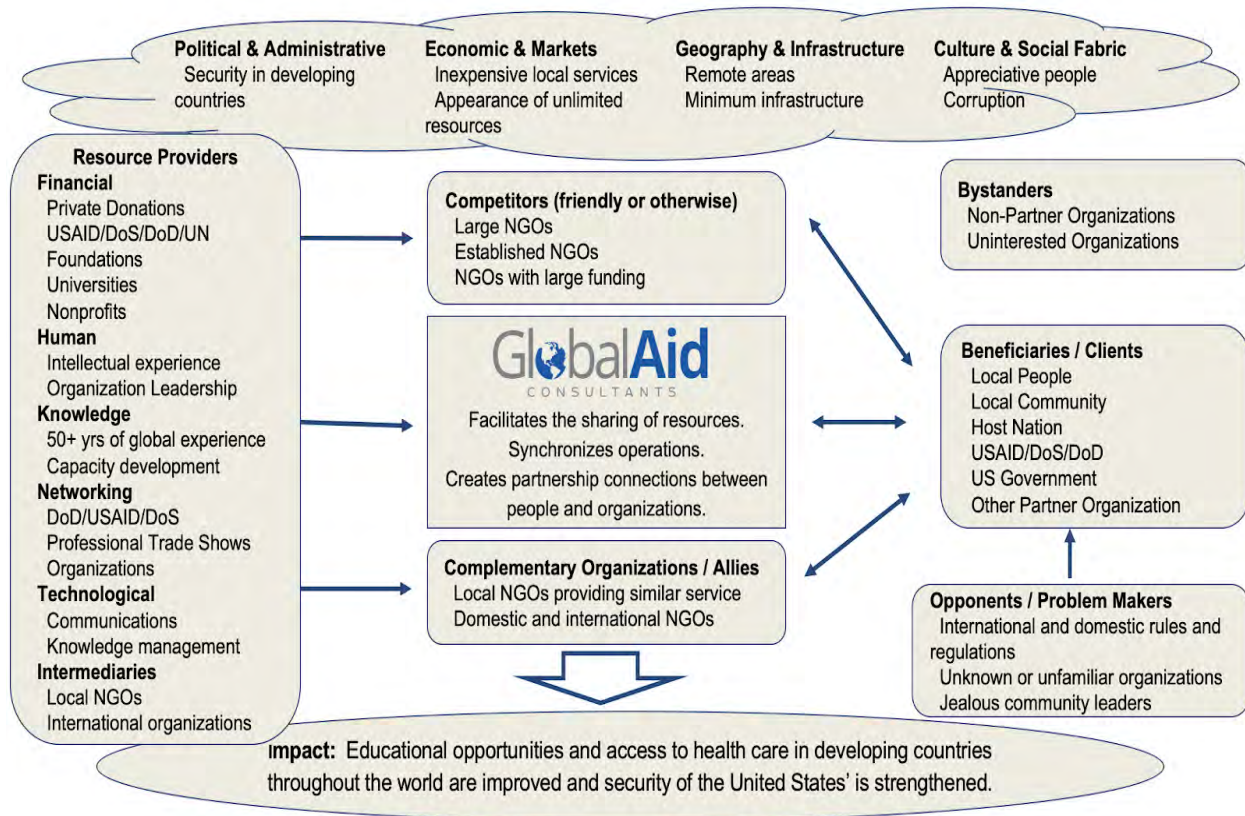
environment consisting of political, economic, geography, country infrastructure, cultural, and social aspects that impact activities (Karns et al., 2015). The organization relies on resources in the form of financial, human, knowledge, networking, and use of technology. Global Aid Consultants competes with competitors for resources and shares resources with complementary organizations. The organization manages this complex ecosystem to increase educational opportunities in developing countries that help the local people, community, country, and many other beneficiaries.

Figure 3

Guatemala School Examples

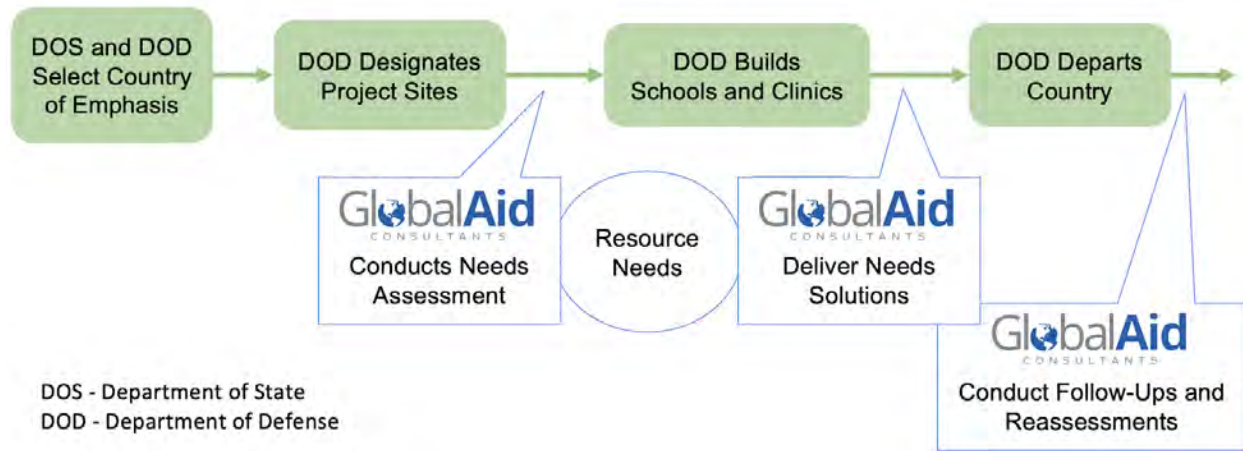


Note. Examples of humanitarian assistance project schools. The goals of Global Aid Consultants are to help complete the schools with infrastructure and make them immediately ready for use.

Figure 4*Global Aid Consultants Ecosystem Map*

Note. The ecosystem map represents the complex environment that Global Aid Consultants operates.

Each calendar year begins with DOD and DOS selecting a country of emphasis based on humanitarian necessity (Figure 5). The DOD identifies a project site within the host country and Global Aid Consultants conducts project analysis on the area. Next, Global Aid Consultants conducts numerous planning meetings with DOD and DOS, and finally conducts a needs assessment to the site. After the needs assessment, Global Aid Consultants raises money for the project and synchronizes people and organizations to deliver needed solutions that help complete the project (Figure 6).

Figure 5*Global Aid Consultants Project Framework*

Note. Global Aid Consultants is integrated at various stages with DOD and DOS throughout the project process.

Figure 6*Global Aid Consultants Stakeholder Meeting*

Note. Global Aid Consultants conducting a project planning meeting with DOD and the Ministry of Education in Belize. Several planning sessions are conducted throughout the year.

For example, in 2019, the country of emphasis was Guatemala. DOS and DOD determined educational opportunities were essential to the country's development. Global Aid Consultants collaborated with stakeholders to ensure the newly constructed four-room school, built by the DOD, had the furnishings, infrastructure, and resources needed to function as a school immediately upon completion. One of the key ingredients of formal education is to have an environment adequate for teaching. To create this environment, Global Aid Consultants provided 160 new desks, tables, chairs, and chalkboards that allowed children to immediately attend school (Figure 7).

Figure 7

Guatemalan Classroom Example



Note. Left panel: Before the project, the children attended school in an overcrowded single car garage. Right panel: Completed Guatemalan classroom ready for immediate use.

Building infrastructure for schools and classroom desks varies in each country. In all countries, Global Aid Consultants utilizes local vendors and organizations to build their school requirements. This allows local industries to benefit from the school building process. For example, in Belize the Mennonites built school desks (Figure 8), in Guatemala the Guatemalan

Army Engineers built desks, tables, and chairs (Figure 9), and in El Salvador, local entrepreneurs built the school infrastructure (Figure 10).

Figure 8

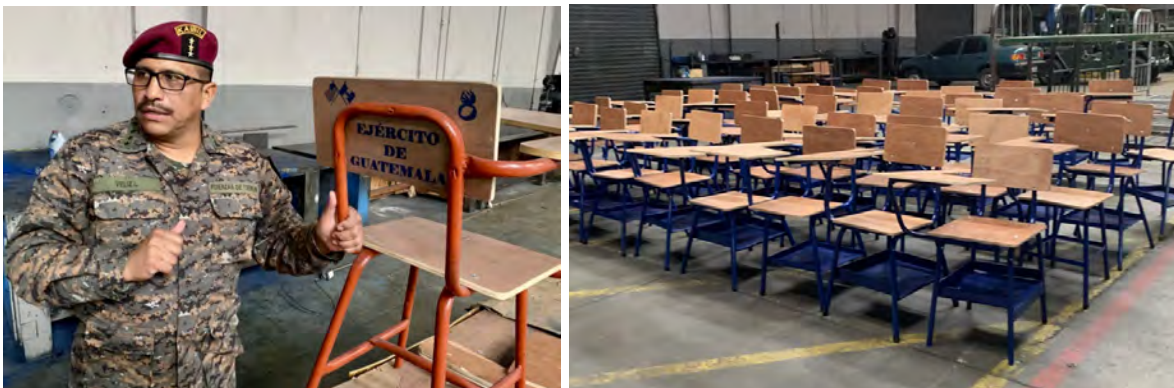
Building Desks in Belize



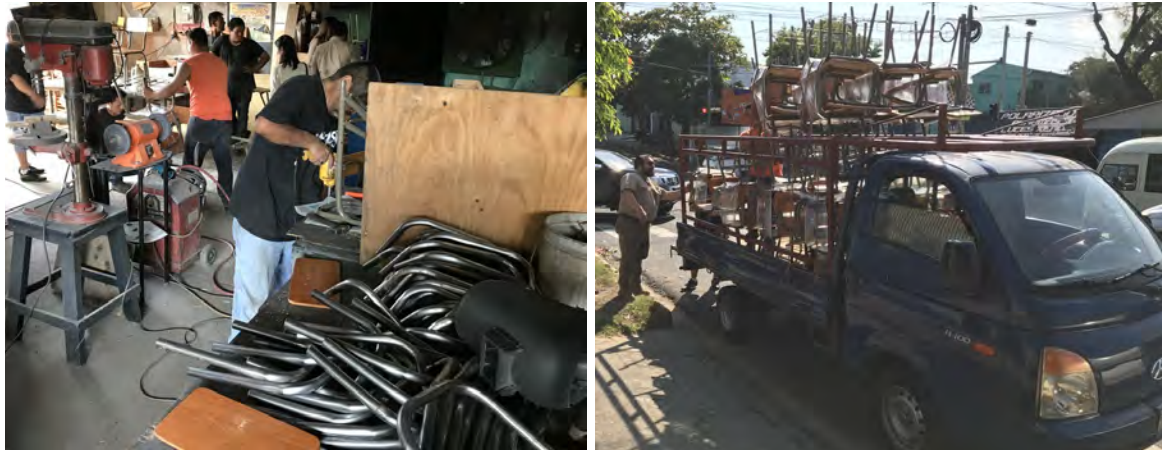
Note. Left panel: Conducting a business agreement meeting with Mennonite community leaders to build school desks, tables, and chairs for a new school in Belize. Right panel: Delivering the finished school furniture built by the Mennonites.

Figure 9

Building Desks in Guatemala



Note. Left panel: Guatemala Army Engineer in charge of building the school infrastructure for new schools. Right panel: School desks ready to be delivered to the new school in Guatemala.

Figure 10*Building Desks in El Salvador*

Note. Left panel: Local entrepreneurs building school desks in El Salvador. Right panel: School desks being counted and ready for delivery to the new school in El Salvador.

Once the school is complete, Global Aid Consultants conducts continuous follow-ups and reassessments to ensure the use of resources, infrastructure, and supplies are enabling the school to succeed. Since the conception in 2016, Global Aid Consultants has completed eight projects across five countries on three continents.

Problem Statement

Schools are being built by DOD's humanitarian assistance program, to increase educational opportunities in Corozal, Belize. At this time, the stakeholders' perception of the significance of the new school building project is not known. To improve the school building process the stakeholders' perceptions should be investigated. By gaining insight into the stakeholder's perspectives, the researcher aims to improve the school building process and maximize the school children's prosperity and security.

Purpose and Rationale

Supported by the foundational implication that education is a means to reduce crime, the purpose of this action research study was designed to help local community and international stakeholders better understand the significance of building a new school. This research study followed the nonprofit organization, Global Aid Consultants, through a new school building process and inspired the local community to voice their opinions. The research results were used by Global Aid Consultants and other stakeholders to enhance the school building process in the future.

The rationale for this study was to gain a better understanding of the new school building process and impact on the local community, through the voices of the stakeholders. Hearing the voices of the stakeholders provided the richest data related to the impact of the school building process which are often not heard.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed as the research progressed. I went into this research with an open mind on what exactly would be investigated. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), the research question often addresses something that the researcher wants to do better or understand more clearly. The questions became more defined as the study progressed due to collaboration with the stakeholders. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school building process?
2. From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?
3. From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?

Significance of the Research and Outcomes

Most current policies and strategies are reactive to mitigating crime. Increasing education opportunities is a proactive, long-term approach to decreasing crime. The findings of many studies in the United States suggest that providing disadvantaged children with better schooling can significantly reduce crime (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). Improving education can produce meaningful social benefits and be a tool to decrease crime (Machin et al., 2011). At this time, it was unknown how the new school building process would impact stakeholders. The list of stakeholders are those who were involved with the new school building process and help better understand the school building process. This study was significant to the following recognized stakeholders:

- Parents: Parents want to promote the health and welfare of their children. They want their children to have greater opportunities and hope for the future.
- School Faculty and Community Leaders: School teachers and staff have a direct interest in providing students with meaningful instruction that can increase the opportunities in the community. Community leaders represent the local area and have a common interest in enhancing the community.
- Belize Government Officials: The vision of the Belizean Ministry of Education (n.d.) is to ensure that Belizeans are given an educational opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills required for their own personal development and become a contributing member of their nation.
- U.S. Government: DOD, DOS, and USAID have an interest in protecting the security and interest of the United States through foreign development. The U.S. government is able to provide funding for these projects.

- Global Aid Consultants: A nonprofit nongovernment organization that promotes quality education by providing school furnishings, books, and supplies to newly built schools.

Overall, this qualitative action research study was significant because it helped local and international stakeholders better understand the impact of the process of building a new school in Corozal, Belize. This study gave voice to community members and brought an understanding of the impact of the new school building on the people. This knowledge was used to improve future projects through the research outcomes. Three research outcomes contribute to the significance of the study:

1. The research will obtain an insight on how the stakeholders understand the school building process.
2. The research can help improve the school building process in the future.
3. The research can reach local, national, and international policy makers with the project's findings to enact change.

Belize Research Setting

According to Gannon and Pillai (2016) Belize can be considered a torn nation. Torn nations have faced significant changes in their core values and have gone through tremendous value changes for decades from where they originally started (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). Belize is a Central American country bordered by the Caribbean, Guatemala, and Mexico. Issues of violence, poverty, and other social problems are as rampant in Belize as in the surrounding countries. Belize is a multifaceted blend of reality, art, customs, and citizens.

English is the official language of Belize and the only language used in the study. Even though all the participants spoke English fluently, it was still important to consider cultural differences. It was important to consider cultural differences and nuances at all stages of the research (Daniels, 2008). Culture is difficult to understand, and it is more than the ceremonial

and spiritual aspects of people's lives, the food they eat or the music they play (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). I kept an open mind to cultural nuances to help develop trust that enabled others to feel safe while conducting the research. A researcher should present themselves as open-minded and nonthreatening as possible (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Keeping an open mind made me more aware of my biases from my worldview, especially when dealing with different ethnic groups.

Belize has four major ethnic groups (Conaway & Morrison, 2006) but to my knowledge only three were engaged during the research. They were Mestizos (mixed Spanish and Indian), Mayan (Indian), and Creoles (Black). The fourth group Garifuna (Black) were not engaged during the research process because the Garifuna represented a small population, less than 6% of Belize, and were not located in the research area. The ethnic groups have similar cultural traits of Mexico and other Central American countries. The power distance ordering of the three cultures are Mestizo, Mayan, and Creoles.

Mestizos are people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent that represent 34% of the population (The World Factbook, 2021). Many come from neighboring Central American countries and speak Spanish. The Mestizos in Corozal are of mixed Spanish and indigenous Mayan descent that mostly came from Belize. Some speak Spanish or Mayan at home but must speak English at school.

The Mayan culture is indigenous to the country and makes up 11% of the population (The World Factbook, 2021) (Figure 11). They usually speak their own Mayan language, and some speak Spanish and English. The Mayans have similar cultural values as the Mestizos. The cultural traits of the Mestizos and Mayans are high context, collectivistic, paternalistic, and authority-ranking where social distance exists between superiors and subordinates (Hofstede, 1991; Hoppe, 2007). While interacting with Mestizos and Mayans, I took charge of the situation

and used authority as an outsider and researcher. I also made sure to get to know the person and their family first over a meal or having a few social drinks before discussing research. This helped develop trust and rapport.

Figure 11

Ancient Mayan City Lamanai



Note. High Temple at Mayan archaeological site Lamanai located near Corozal, Belize. The temple is 108 feet high and dates back over 2000 years. It was used as a religious platform for local indigenous Mayans and represents their long history living in the area (Andres, 2009).

The third ethnic group participating in this study were Creoles. Creoles are descendants of African slaves, and many of them came to Belize as slaves and loggers to cut mahogany hardwood for Europe in the 1800s (The World Factbook, 2021). Belizean Creoles are about 25% of the population (The World Factbook, 2021). Creoles speak a unique version of English. At first it sounds like English, then becomes hard to understand, if understandable at all by an English speaker.

The Creole cultural dimensions are different from the Mestizos and Mayans and must be considered to prevent hindrance of the research. The Creole cultural dimensions are almost equal on the individualism and collectivism scale. They have low power distance, low hierarchy, and are high on uncertainty avoidance, reliance on rules, and spirituality (Hofstede, 1991, 2001). As the researcher, it was important to not use a position of power or authority with the Mestizos and Mayans. I focused on rules and being clear on the research expectations to eliminate any uncertainty. It was imperative to always respect their religious beliefs.

Gannon and Pillai (2016) used the Mexican fiesta as a metaphor for Mexico to better understand the culture. Due to Mexico's influence on Belize, the same metaphor can be used. Belize, like Mexico, holds fiestas for many reasons to include historic events, town traditions, honoring Catholic saints, paying homage to foods and crops, birthdays, baptisms, weddings, national holidays, and many other events (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). The more remote the area for the fiesta the more elaborate the celebration. Indigenous natives dance in colorful costumes which gives the people the ability to express their lives. During this time, they often see relatives from other towns, enjoy friendship, and family. The fiesta is full of energy from music to food (Gannon & Pillai, 2016).

People are the primary focus of Belizean culture. Belize is an authority-ranking/vertical collectivistic paternalistic culture where social distance exists between superiors and subordinates. The immediate family is important, and generations can live together in the same house in rural areas. Many children do not leave home and the family spends most of its time together. When working in Belize, one must have concerns for the family and take them seriously. Conaway and Morrison (2006) state that the family is the most significant organization in this environment.

While conducting research, it was important to protect the dignity of others. In other countries this is like saving face which is to never criticize in front of others (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). Belizeans are agreement seekers and will often lie to evade offended feelings and confrontation. They will easily say what you want to hear to avoid confrontation. For example, similar to Mexico, when asked for directions, they will give a wrong answer rather than saying they do not know (Gannon & Pillai, 2016).

Overall, Belize has a cultural pattern of vertical collectivism where everyone has a role within the group but some members of the group have more status than others. On Hofstede's (2001) power-distance dimension, Belize scores high. There is an unequal distribution of wealth and authority in Belize. In villages, people fill specific roles, and a similar hierarchy can be clearly seen in the family structure. The father is the boss, and the mother is devoted to caring for family members. Children strictly obey their parents (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). At work, the same hierarchy exists, subordinates rarely question the boss and withhold negative information even if it is important. The Catholic Church, bureaucratic government, and schools all have a hierarchical and authoritarian structure where questioning is not encouraged (Gannon & Pillai, 2016).

Belize's Hofstede's dimensions are mostly opposite to U.S. Americans', who are informal, have low power distance between individuals and groups, and have weak hierarchical authority (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). Egalitarian cultures support individualism and a low degree of power distance or horizontal individualism, this does not fit Belize. I have experienced many of these Belizean cultural dimensions while coordinating humanitarian assistance school building projects with government representatives, U.S. Department of State and Defense, and a variety of other governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Cultural differences between the way the United States conducts business and the way Belize conducts business was always a challenge. Americans constantly have a feeling that time is short and must work and speak quicker to keep up. To keep up, one must be constantly on the move (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). I took this cultural knowledge with me and made a conscious effort to not always be in a rush. Sometimes, my team would rush into a remote area and quickly assess a community before going to the next village. As Americans, we overscheduled ourselves and constantly had a difficult time keeping up the fast pace we were used to in the United States.

Belizeans, like Mexicans, are influenced by the past but live for the present. Each day is taken as it comes and follow-through on projects is difficult (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). Time in Belize is often referred to as “Belizean time” or “slow down man” syndrome. They have a very relaxed concept of time and believe there is plenty of it. Tardiness, interruptions, flexible deadlines are common, and many projects are never completed. Foreigners must understand and be patient with Belize’s time standards.

Another cultural challenge I had was being focused on completing projects. Americans are primarily interested in making and accomplishing goals (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). In the past, before understanding Belizean culture, I was definitely goal oriented. I had my mission in mind and did not have time for anything else, including time to build relationships. This was difficult for other cultures to understand, especially high-context cultures that were interested in establishing relationships. It was difficult for the local community leaders, who were used to a slower pace, to understand why I was constantly rushed and why I did not make time to go out to dinner or participate in a social gathering.

Relationships are most important to Belizeans. They tend to hire relatives and friends over strangers. Once a person becomes a friend, they are part of the family and become a

trusted member of the group. Many times, friends are called brother, sister, or cousin (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). In Hofstede's (2001) study of 53 nations, Mexicans have a high need for uncertainty avoidance, they feel threatened in uncertain situations and try to avoid them. They are loyal to the people in a company but not the company itself. In Mexico, it is not what you know but who you know (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). I witnessed these same traits in Belize.

Belizeans perceive themselves as being very polite and sophisticated and will many times make statements and promises they cannot keep (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). Conversation is an art; speakers usually beat around the bush in a dramatic way and repeat statements. Double meanings are common and they place the meaning in context. The language says more than it means. Conaway and Morrison (2006) state that elaborate politeness is a characteristic of communication and can hide true feelings. Knowing who said something and how it was said is important. This is opposite to the U.S. where emphasis is placed on words, and words have meanings (Gannon & Pillai, 2016).

To become less threatening, I spent as much time as possible at the research site. This gave me the opportunity to meet with people informally at the school building work sites, restaurants, coffee shops, and community centers. The more freely researchers can participate in ordinary lives of the participants the more likely the researcher will gain the acceptance which is critical to the success of the action research study (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). The more I became known by the people the easier it was to have conversations with stakeholders.

The research was conducted in a remote underserved area of Belize, known as Corozal, where new school buildings were built in 2020 to 2022. Most of the interviews and data collection took place near the new schools in Corozal, Belize. The schools were built out of cinder blocks and have three classrooms (Figure 12). Each school contained three classrooms that held approximately 30 students each. Very basic amenities support the school to include an

outhouse style latrine, a cooking grill for the students' lunch, limited electricity, and little or no internet connectivity.

Figure 12

Corozal Belize New School Building



Note. Completed K-12 grade three classroom school in Belize.

In order to increase partnership and collaboration it was important to have awareness of cultural issues in the research setting (Bradbury et al., 2008). As an outsider, it is important to understand the nuances of the culture (Gannon & Pillai, 2016). By conducting cultural awareness familiarization, understanding cultural nuances, and history, I was better able to have a stronger connection to the research participants (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Cultural Awareness Familiarization

Note. Global Aid Consultants Kelly Guerrero and Mark Alvarez conducted language and cultural awareness familiarization at the Museum of Belize in Belize City, before moving to the research site. Awareness of local languages, regional history, and cultural nuances enabled more effective research.

Through better understanding the cultural nuances and history of the project site, I established connections between myself and the social environment of my research. Empathizing and sympathizing to better understand the world views of the participants helped establish connections (Saldaña, 2016). Previous success by Global Aid Consultants and the relationships built with the DOD and the Belizean government allowed for easy access to the

project stakeholders (Figure 14). All interviews, conversations, and photographs took place in a setting where the stakeholders trusted and felt comfortable.

Figure 14

Building Relationships



Note. Global Aid Consultants and researchers formed relationships through professional and informal conversations over time with the Belize Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, community leaders, and others throughout the research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Philosophical Worldview

Introduction

Chapter 2 begins with the literature review. The literature review includes studies reported in literature from research reports, professional publications, journals, government agencies, books, and others (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Many references were used in this literature review to better understand the importance of education, how education relates to crime, and how education promotes development. Education is a necessary societal empowerment for long term sustainability. The U.S. government conducts foreign humanitarian and civic assistance programs that increase educational opportunities in hope of stabilizing a region (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019). Humanitarian assistance can also weaken criminal networks by assisting partner nations in building basic school infrastructure and promoting better educational opportunities (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019).

Next, four themes of an education experience from a former graduate level class exercise are discussed in this chapter. They are (a) existence of a learning environment, (b) possessing motivation to learn and grow, (c) availability of a positive mentorship and support system, and (d) availability of opportunities. These themes support the idea that education involves a socialization process that helps individuals become productive members of society.

The four themes are overlapped with the Kellogg Foundation Logic Model to better visualize how increasing educational opportunities are linked with the project Global Aid Consultants conducts (Kellogg Foundation, 2004). The logic model is a structured and visual way to present and share understanding of the relationships among the resources an organization uses to operate its program and the changes that are projected to achieve. This model helped visualize how Global Aid Consultants' mission supports increasing the educational opportunities in developing countries and can be a contributing factor to decreasing

crime. Most importantly, the model displays how education contributes to the production of more educated and skilled citizens (Crawford, 2012).

Three theories used to support this study were feminist theory (Code, 2014), documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997), and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). Feminist theory often focuses on analyzing gender inequality. In this research, feminist theory was used to explore discrimination and oppression. Feminist theory helped shed light on inequality and social roles that have influenced this research (Code, 2014). Documentary photography reflected participants' realities through visual means (Brooks et al., 2008). The grounded theory method was used to analyze the data collected, where repeated elements were coded from the data, grouped into categories, and then into themes (Charmaz, 2014; Leavy, 2017).

Lastly, the positionality and conceptual framework sections were how my perspectives as a researcher were shaped by personal experiences from family, friends, and community. As a researcher and a leader in the community, I felt it was my responsibility to know who I am by understanding my strengths and weaknesses in order to improve my research abilities.

Importance of Education

Education helps people achieve their dreams and goals and is an essential part of understanding our world better (Crawford, 2012). Education helps develop individuals to become productive members of society (Crawford, 2012). Those who attend school can create rewards and opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities. Education can increase an individual's earning potential, and the person who earns more, can usually contribute more economically to society (Bickmore et al., 2017).

Many scholars seek explanations for a variety of educational phenomena around the world. They used quantitative and qualitative methods of economics, political science, and

sociology to define relationships between education and society (Bray et al., 2014). These authors conclude that formal schooling is essential for personal development. Authors believe that schooling: (a) produces a modern and productive citizen (for economic growth), (b) helps create a workforce for new industries (social development), and (c) creates citizens who identify with the nation-state (political development) (Bickmore et al., 2017).

Education and Crime

The concept that education decreases crime with the hope of increasing security for a community is the foremost reason DOD and DOS implement a humanitarian assistance project. This concept is also the reason why crime and education are integral parts of this study. According to Machin et al. (2011), crime is significantly related to lack of education and opportunities. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) state that education is a human capital investment that increases future work opportunities. Reduction of crime can be related to an increase in available opportunities (Edwards & Gill, 2002). For example, if a child's available opportunities increase as a result of education, the chances of that child participating in criminal activities will likely decrease.

Lochner and Moretti (2004) state that, among parents, teachers, scholars, and public officials there is an overwhelming consensus that formal education is one of the most successful and cost-effective methods of preventing crime. Many children from lower socio-economic backgrounds from Central America do not have opportunities to attend school due to the cost of education (August, 2012). In Belize, primary education is free, but related expenses, such as uniforms, books, and annual school fees are a financial strain on most families (Education in Belize, n.d.).

For many, attending school may mean time spent away from the labor market. The national dropout rate between entry and completion of primary school in Belize is 25%

compared to 8% in the United States (World Data on Education, 2010). Some families cannot afford simple school supplies or the economic burden of having their children attend school. Families need their children to enter the labor market as soon as possible, in order to contribute to the economic condition of the household.

Crime has always existed, will constantly be a challenge, and new methods are required to decrease it (Ramirez, 2014). Crime has an immense economic and social cost to society. As a result, numerous countries across the world are spending a tremendous amount of money to fight crime. The United Nations Office of Drug and Crime highlighted crime as a \$870 billion a year business (UNODC, 2012). McKinless (2017) states that most countries spend 60% of their crime budget on supporting police and border security measures instead of investing in education and health. Manchin et al. (2011) and other scholars posit that more money be spent on education because education is viewed as one strategy to proactively address this challenge. While current policies and strategies are reactive to fighting crime, increasing education opportunities is a proactive approach. Improving education can produce meaningful social benefits and be a policy tool to decrease crime (Manchin et al., 2011).

Scholars that support the idea that education reduces crime are found in many books and articles. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) state that an investment in human capital for formal schooling will reduce crime. Lochner (1999) suggests that the amount of education determines the individual's earnings power and criminal tendencies. Lochner (2011) also proposes that education increases the return of legitimate work. Lochner and Moretti (2004) assert that education increases an individual's earning potential, and the person who earns more has more to lose, thereby, increasing the cost of crime for educated individuals.

Increasing educational opportunities today will impact future generations and the relation between crime and education may not be immediately obvious (Usher, 1993). Hjalmarsson and

Lochner (2012) state that providing disadvantaged children with better schooling can significantly reduce juvenile crime. In the United States, it is projected that a 1% increase in male high school graduation rates would save over \$1.4 billion in incarceration costs (Lochner & Moretti, 2004).

Machin et al. (2011) determined that education reduces crime and generates social benefits. Many argue that the impact of education on crime not only benefits the individual, but the social return of schooling has a larger community benefit (Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Machin et al., 2011). Education is a long process and an early investment in educational opportunities can support a future of economic growth.

To benefit from the positive results of education, policy makers and leaders should increase funding to education opportunities in underserved areas with high crime rates in Central America. The DOD and DOS partner to support humanitarian assistance projects in Central America that build schools and clinics in areas of need due to the concept that education decreases crime (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019).

There is a consensus within education and crime literature scholars, and money contributing stakeholders, that education helps decrease crime (Foreign Humanitarian Assistance, 2019). Education can be a key, proactive contributor to decreasing crime organizations and fighting crime (University of Western Ontario, 2011). This general consensus is the main reason the DOD and DOS humanitarian assistance project builds schools. If it were not for this concept that education decreases crime, DOD, DOS, and Global Aid Consultants would not be working on this project in Belize.

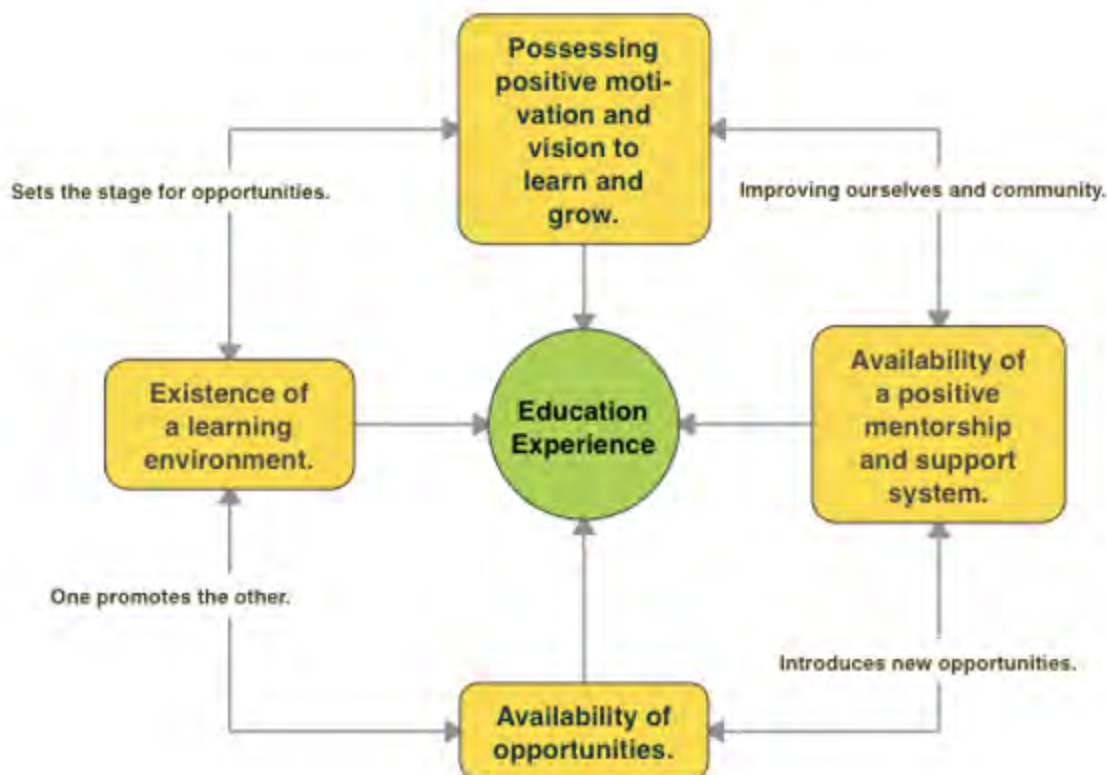
Four Themes of an Education Experience

Scholars say that education can be linked to greater national wealth from economic development, social development by distributing wealth and opportunity, and supporting political

systems (Bickmore et al., 2017). According to Crawford (2012), education supports the national dream of economic efficiency, social equality, and service to the national economy. Those who have a better understanding of their community will have more to contribute.

Teaching is more than methods, facts, formulas, propositions, definitions, rules, and textbooks (Bickmore et al., 2017). Those in charge of designing educational systems need to understand the country's culture to integrate culturally appropriate ways of transferring knowledge into the formal education system. It takes parents, practitioners, policy makers, international agencies, and others to support formal education. It takes different stakeholders with unique purposes to make education successful (Bray et al., 2014).

In 2018, I attended the "Research in Comparative Educational Systems of the World" course taught by Dr. Alfredo Ortiz Aragón at University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas. In this course, I conducted extensive group research work to better understand and reflect on what inspired each of the group members to continue their education. The group found four themes that we had in common. The class group work helped me better understand that even though someone comes from a different culture, they need to have a learning environment, motivation, mentorship, and opportunity to effectively engage in a formal education program. I was looking not for the best explanation of creating an education experience but for one that makes sense from the group. The four themes that emerged from the class group work were: (a) existence of a learning environment, (b) possessing positive motivation and vision to learn and grow, (c) availability of a positive mentorship and support system, and (d) availability of opportunities to go to school (Figure 15).

Figure 15*Four Themes of Successful Education*

Note. Four emerged themes from class group work that led to an educational experience. The exposed themes are highlighted in yellow boxes and each was found to be equally important.

Existence of a Learning Environment

The international community has attempted to establish a learning environment that upholds the universal right to education. This is to help ensure every child receives the opportunity to go to school (Bickmore et al., 2017). Even though many of us in this group grew up in different locations around the world, we lived in a community that had the infrastructure to support and encourage education. I grew up in an environment where the classrooms were furnished with materials to accommodate age-appropriate learning. I was able to engage in

visual, auditory, and kinesthetic explorations that captured and held my attention while stimulating my learning.

Access to universal education is a central part of national development (Bickmore et al., 2017). In many countries, education was used as a source of ideas to legitimize the government it wished to support. For example, the British implemented similarities in education systems throughout its colonies that supported its empire (Bray et al., 2014). One classmate, who grew up in Africa and attended a British colonized school, stated that the British colonist system did not promote her cultural values or take her culture into consideration but promoted legitimizing her nation's government.

It is important to create an education system that emphasizes learning while still respecting cultures, people, and places, and supports the country's national education plan (Bickmore et al., 2017). Often, language influences formal education and ideas that contribute to its development (Bray et al., 2014). This is important to consider so cultures and ideologies can be preserved. There is a fine line between establishing a formal learning environment and preserving culture. Mentors and educational stakeholders need to be creative to ensure learning while preserving cultural values.

Possessing Motivation and Vision to Learn and Grow

From the course group work, we learned that many of us grew up in different areas around the world and still find similarities in our educational history. For example, we were motivated to pursue individual goals and believed in ourselves. According to Bickmore et al. (2017), schooling produces a modern and productive citizen that is essential for economic growth. Education can produce meaningful social benefits and those who have a better understanding of their community have more to give back. One significant goal of my personal education was to become a productive citizen of society.

Cultural factors influence many aspects of education. Many authors state that it is important to not stereotype cultures when comparing one culture to another (Bray et al., 2014). Culture can include shared values and meanings common to members of a group where actions and ideas are learned (Bray et al., 2014). For some reason, my culture gave me the motivation to continue and complete my education. Culture is complex, difficult to understand, and is one of the most complicated words in the English language (Bray et al., 2014). It is not only important to have the motivation from culture to learn and grow, but one must have access to an environment that promotes learning.

Availability of a Mentorship and Support System

Role models help guide students through the education system and many students learn from mentors and leaders in the community. Parents, practitioners, and policy makers play a key part in education (Bray et al., 2014). Teachers and their teachings are central to developing citizens and societies at the local and global levels (Bickmore et al., 2017). Education is affected at different levels by parents, practitioners, international agencies, and academics (Bray et al., 2014) who were mentors to the students.

I was fortunate that my role models stressed the importance of education. These mentors helped nurture my interests and allowed me to grow. My math and business teachers had an interest in me due to my after-school work and photography hobby, who later became lifelong mentors and friends. They constantly gave me realistic feedback, and because of this, I wanted to do more. Mentors who have life experiences and are usually older than their students can introduce new opportunities that otherwise could have been overlooked. Some of my classmates also said they had similar experiences with their mentors.

Availability of Opportunities

Educational systems help produce opportunities from learning, while role models, teachers, and peers introduce students to new opportunities. Knowledge and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce that education helps create (Bickmore et al., 2017). Role models can introduce fresh opportunities that contribute to personal development, social cohesion, and economic growth (Bray et al., 2014). My role models contributed to my personal development and economic growth by introducing me to the rewards that education provides. I was motivated to use their advice to create a vision for the future. As a teenager, my mentors helped me navigate high school, introduced me to opportunities such as a national high school business conference in Washington D.C., and photography workshops that contributed to me becoming the New Mexico high school photographer of the year.

Kellogg Logic Model Applied

Crawford (2014) states that the desired outcome of schooling is to produce a productive citizen. Crawford demonstrates this by using the Kellogg Foundation's (2004) Logic Model. The logic model is a structured and visual way to present and share understanding of the relationships among the resources an organization uses to operate its program and the changes that are projected to achieve (Kellogg Foundation, 2004). The model illuminates the connection between the literature, Global Aid Consultants' resources, and the Four Themes of an Educational Experience.

Displayed at the start of the logic model (Figure 16), an educational process begins with *resources/inputs* that correlate to the existence of a learning environment theme. "Resources include the human, financial, organizational, and community resources a program has available to direct toward doing the work. Sometimes this component is referred to as Inputs" (Kellogg Foundation, 2004, p. 2). The mission of Global Aid Consultants addresses the problem of

access to education designed to prepare students with marketable skills to enter the job market. Global Aid Consultants provides resources in the form of classroom infrastructure that creates this learning environment. The students can use resources from Global Aid Consultants to create knowledge. The existence of a learning environment theme in *resources/inputs* produces *activities*.

Global Aid Consultants' mentorship and leadership are *activities* (Figure 16) that create benefits that the students use to learn and grow. The Kellogg Foundation (2004) defines *activities* as:

Activities are what the program does with the resources. Activities are the processes, tools, events, technology, and actions that are an intentional part of the program implementation. These interventions are used to bring about the intended program changes or results (p. 2).

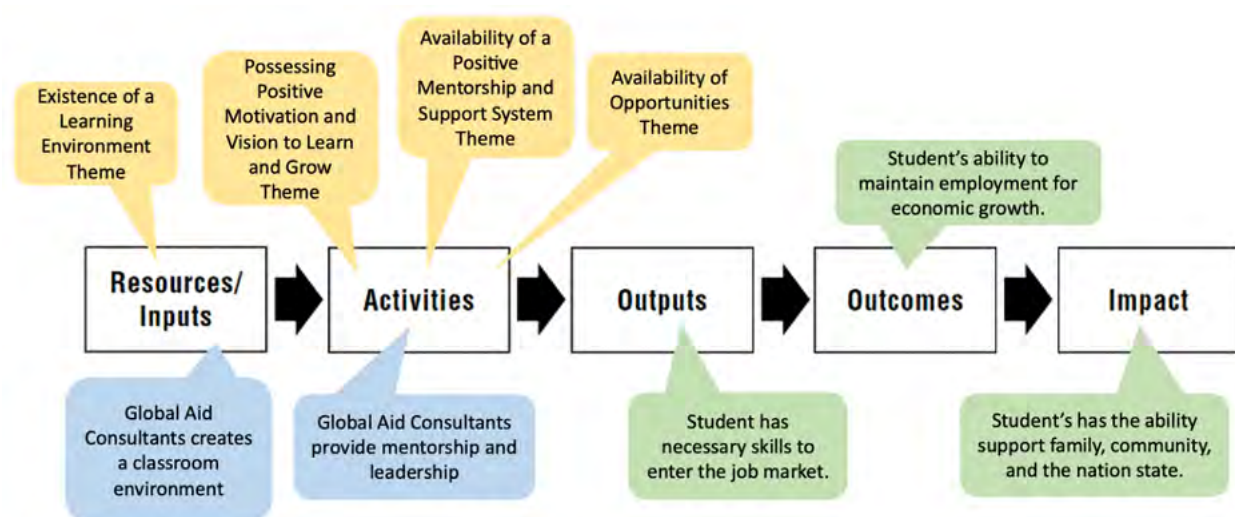
Three themes from the Four Themes of an Educational Experience (Figure 15) are supported on the logic model (Figure 16). The three themes that substantiate the *activities* are: (a) possessing positive motivation and vision to learn and grow, (b) availability of a positive mentorship and support system, and (c) availability of opportunities as activities in the logic model.

The *output box* (Figure 16) represents a student with the necessary skills to enter the job market. "Outputs are the direct products of program activities and may include types, levels and targets of services to be delivered by the program" (Kellogg Foundation, 2004, p. 2). Next, the *outcomes box* is measured in terms of the individual's ability to maintain employment for economic growth. "Outcomes are the specific changes in program participants' behavior, knowledge, skills, status, and level of functioning. Short-term outcomes should be attainable within 1 to 3 years, while longer-term outcomes should be achievable within a 4 to 6 year timeframe (Kellogg Foundation, 2004, p. 2).

The *impact box* (Figure 16) characterizes the individual's ability to support family, community, and the nation state from formal education (Crawford, 2014). "Impact is the fundamental intended or unintended change occurring in organizations, communities, or systems as a result of program activities within 7 to 10 years (Kellogg Foundation, 2004, p. 2). At the end of the logic model, the overall quality of the educational system can be validated if human outputs contribute to economic growth, social development, and political development in their community (Bickmore et al., 2017). Children who have opportunities to attend school are less likely to participate in criminal activities is founded on the principles of Bickmore et al. (2017), who states that education is one of the leading contributors to producing a productive citizen for economic growth and creating a workforce for industries.

Figure 16

Logic Model With the Four Themes of Education Experience and Global Aid Consultants



Note. Logic Model from Kellogg Foundation (2004) adapted to illustrate the connection of *research/inputs*, *activities*, *outputs*, *outcomes*, and *impacts* (white rectangle boxes) between the four themes of education experience (yellow callouts), Global Aid Consultants (blue callouts), and supports Bickmore et al. (2017) statement that education produces a productive citizen for economic growth, creates a workforce for industries, and creates citizens who identify with the nation-state (green callouts).

Philosophical Worldview

This section describes my philosophical perspective about the world and nature of research. Philosophical ideas influence the research and need to be identified (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Guba (1990) stated that worldview is a set of beliefs that guide actions. I developed my worldview over time from family, friends, colleagues, formal education, and life experiences. These influences impacted my conceptual framework, theoretical framework, and positionality.

Conceptual Perspective

The worldview that best supports my experiences and this study is the constructivist worldview. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that constructivists believe that people seek to understand the world in which they live and work. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) believe that through the constructivist lens researchers do not find knowledge, they construct it. The constructivist believes that others hold a different worldview based on their experiences. People often develop meanings from their own experiences and these unique meanings are varied and differ from person to person (Egbert & Sanden, 2014). There is no single observable reality but multiple realities of a single event (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To better identify the unique meanings from an experience, qualitative researchers seek to understand the participants by collecting information personally (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a qualitative researcher, I recognized that my history of personal and cultural experiences shaped my interpretations of events.

Theoretical Perspective

A theoretical framework serves as a foundation and establishes an approach to research. The framework helps guide your research (Egbert & Sanden, 2014). Therefore, it is important to find theoretical concepts that apply to the problem (Egbert & Sanden, 2014). I am

not using these theories as a template for a study but as a way to explain how my worldview is integrated into the study. It is important to be flexible with these theories and not use them as the only lens to view the research. I utilized three theories as guides to support this study. They are feminist theory (Code, 2014), documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997), and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Feminist theory helped shed light on inequality and social roles that have influenced this research. Feminist theory helps those who are marginalized to realize their goals and be heard (Code, 2014). This was important in this research due to the different cultures, ethnic groups, and stakeholders involved. Through this lens, I was able to better understand the nature of stakeholder inequality and examine their social roles during the school building process.

Photography has a long history in research and especially in anthropology research, dating back to the early 1900's (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Now, almost everyone carries a device in their pocket to capture a digital image. This makes it easier to use photography for research. Photography captures activities and events as they happen that other sources of data collection cannot (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011). Documentary photography has been characterized as the social conscience presented in visual imagery (Wang & Burris, 1997). Many say that the participants' realities are reflected both individually and in groups to answer questions that are important through visual means (Brooks et al., 2008). Photographs often provide a means of remembering and studying detail that might be overlooked if the image was not available (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, cultural values and facial expressions might have been overlooked if the image was not captured.

The grounded theory method was used to analyze the collected data. Using this method, repeated ideas from the data became apparent and were tagged with codes (Leavy, 2017). As additional data was collected and reviewed, codes were grouped into categories, and then into

themes or concepts. According to Charmaz (2014), grounded theory is a flexible method to analyze data and construct themes or concepts from the data, which supports this research study.

The theoretical perspectives of feminist theory, documentary photography, and grounded theory were the foundation of the study and helped guide my research. These three theories were integrated throughout the research and supported my philosophical worldview that builds a picture of the issues being examined, the people being studied, and the changes that are needed.

Positionality

My positionality in life was shaped by early childhood experiences through family, friends, and community. Marshall Ganz (2007) states that, “Stories not only teach us how to act – they inspire us to act” (p. 1). Many people learn from reading and are often looking for good role models to follow. Ganz goes on to say when you do public work, you have a responsibility to offer a public account of who you are, why you do what you do, and where you hope to go. I agree with Ganz and want to tell my story in the best way possible. This is my personal, practical, and intellectual story that has influenced my research and supports my constructivist worldviews.

I was born in the remote town of Hemingford, Nebraska, where I lived in a sod house with my parents and grandparents (Figure 17). This is the same house that my mom grew up in after my grandparents, who immigrated from Czechoslovakia, started farming. This sod house, on the prairie, was hand built with mud and grass by my grandparents, and with very few amenities, is still standing today.

Figure 17

Remote Living in a Sod House



Note. Original sod house in Nebraska where I lived with my parents and grandparents.

My parents, wanting to improve their lifestyle and searching for opportunities, moved to Denver, Colorado and later settled in Albuquerque, New Mexico to start an antique business during my elementary school years. This set the stage for the rest of my life. It was a time of connecting with lifelong friends, a time of growing up, and a time for creating opportunities.

I always felt proud while growing up. I felt honored to be involved with school activities and to participate in community events. The moral values of respect, personal courage, integrity, and selfless service defined who I was as a child in the culture where I grew up. After graduating from high school in Albuquerque, I immediately joined the Army wanting to be part of something bigger than myself and to serve my country. While in the Army, I served as an Airborne Ranger, Deep-Sea Underwater Diver, Special Forces Green Beret Medical Sergeant (Figure 18) and finished my career as a Medical Plans and Operations Officer. My military assignments and career reinforced selfless service.

Figure 18

The Rewards of Military Service



Note. Conducting dental work as a Special Forces Medic in Honduras during the early 1990s.

The military taught me to work with others in a unified and cohesive manner to achieve goals. It also enforced traits that I learned growing up, such as integrity, honor, professionalism, discipline, dedication, and determination. An example of being proud to help others took place when I was facilitating the building of new schools for the DOD in remote areas of Central America. I saw first-hand the importance of the project and appreciation by the people from the community the school served.

In the Army, individuals are committed to the success of the group. It takes a group of highly trained individuals to complete complex missions around the world. Each team member was a specialist in their area of expertise and responsible for unique contributions to the team.

Part of my military profession was to match highly trained individuals to teams to make them more effective. I used this experience to put together individuals with specialized skills to create my international nonprofit organization, Global Aid Consultants.

Global Aid Consultants allows me to continue to serve by overseeing and contributing to international humanitarian projects as I did in the military. The nonprofit also allows me to continue to give back to others less fortunate (Figure 19). By combining my practical experience and what I have learned from UIW's International Education and Entrepreneurship doctoral program, I am better able to understand and address complex international problems, such as increasing educational opportunities for those in need, in underserved remote areas.

Figure 19

Providing Humanitarian Assistance



Note. Delivering school desks to a remote area in Guatemala (2019).

Global Aid Consultants' mission is to help children in remote underserved areas improve their educational opportunities by providing them the basic needs to go to school. One humanitarian project that my non-profit organization was deeply involved with was providing school infrastructure to newly built rural area schools that lack the resources (Figure 20). Some of the impoverished remote areas we work do not have a building for children to learn, or if they do have a building, they cannot afford school tables, chairs, or other school equipment. Some of the school classrooms were so overcrowded that children were not able to attend classes. Many times, in other areas, because the schools are so remote, they do not get adequate support from their local or national government. This lack of support leads to children not receiving any education.

Figure 20

Creating Educational Opportunities



Note. School desks provided by Global Aid Consultants to complete a newly built Belize school in 2017.

My research exposed me to new experiences and challenges promoting education in remote locations. The meaning and purpose of research is to create knowledge and share what you have learned. As a researcher, I see myself as a bridge between the research participants and knowledge generation. I am responsible for engaging the participant's *ways of knowing*, through different research methods. Our *ways of knowing* are who we are and reflected in the way we perceive life, communicate, and learn (Aragón & Macedo, 2015). Utilizing different research methods allowed me to capture data of participants from having a deep attentiveness and empathetic understanding (Miles et al., 2020).

During this research, I was able to apply my scholarly knowledge, with practical experiences, to work diligently with the local, national, and international leaders to influence increasing educational opportunities. My goal is to use my basic knowledge and experience to help with social changes that benefit local communities and to speak with global leaders to address social challenges (Figures 21 & 22).

Figure 21

Reaching National Stakeholders in Texas



Note. Todd Speer speaking on the benefit of global humanitarian programs in Latin America with the U.S. Representative Michael McCaul in Texas (2018).

Figure 22

Reaching National Stakeholders in Washington D.C.



Note. Todd Speer and Mark Alvarez in Washington D.C. speaking with congressional representatives promoting the importance of education from Global Aid Consultants humanitarian projects in Latin America (2019).

Chapter 3. Discovery Through Qualitative Action Research

Introduction

This study was designed to help community stakeholders in Corozal, Belize better understand the significance of building a school. Minimal or no research exists from the stakeholder's perspective on the impact of building a new school. This research study followed Global Aid Consultants through a new school building process in a remote area of Belize. The important lessons learned from this school building process were shared with local, national, and international stakeholders, and among others who were involved in doing similar work. Chapter 3 discusses why the qualitative research approach and action research design were chosen. Next, the research timeline, the questions and outcomes from Chapter 1 are restated. Subsequently, the data collection methods and sources of the data are defined. The chapter ends with research limitations and ethical considerations.

Qualitative Research Approach

The overall methodology used in this study was qualitative. Leavy (2017) and Stringer (2014) explained that qualitative methods are effective for understanding and describing individuals' experiences as they happen. Herr and Anderson (2015) agree that qualitative methods are suitable for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomena from personal experiences. These scholars recommend using qualitative methods to answer how and why questions (Stringer, 2014), such as those questions associated with this study. The overarching research question for this study was: How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school building process? To answer this research question, an examination of the phenomena of building a new school in Corozal, Belize from the stakeholders' point of view was conducted. As defined by Leavy (2017), the qualitative

research approach was appropriate for answering the research question from personal experiences.

The intent of this study was to explore how stakeholders' perceived building a new school in Belize. This study was exploratory and was not intended to measure variables; therefore, a quantitative method was not suitable (Leavy, 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that the quantitative approach of research is used to measure how often things happen, correlations between multiple factors, or establishing connections. The qualitative method allows the research to capture rich data from personal experiences and life details that the quantitative approach does not disclose (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stringer, 2014). The quantitative approach produces numbers, and the qualitative approach deals with meanings to capture insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2017). Therefore, the qualitative approach was appropriate for this study.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that qualitative research is often criticized as unscientific because of susceptibility to researcher bias. Other criticisms of qualitative research are its inability to be reproduced (Leavy, 2017). However, researchers can employ tactics to increase the legitimacy and rigor of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The caliber of a qualitative study can be judged by the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 2014). Actions were taken in this study to establish a higher degree of trustworthiness in the findings. For example, transcript and member checking was conducted where participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to confirm that their point of view was accurately represented. This helped minimize my personal bias in the collected data.

My research approach continued with merging practical experiences, critical thinking, and scholarly knowledge to examine the process of building an early education

school for the community. My goal was to find the truth from the local community's perspective and contribute it to the existing body of knowledge (Jacobs, 2008). I understood that the stakeholders I interacted with have different viewpoints and obtain knowledge differently.

My epistemological and ontological perspectives support the unique points of view and experiences of the stakeholders participating in this study. Specifically, my ontology (ideas about reality) is realism which suggests that each point of view has its own truth and there are multiple interpretations of an event. Maxwell (2013) defines realism as, "The belief that there is a real world that exists independently of our perception and theories" (p. 43). I respect the multiple realities of others and do my best to understand them with empathy. My epistemological (how we gain knowledge) view and the lens I use to interpret and understand the world is constructivism. The constructivist knowledge is based on construction of individual experiences (Egbert & Sanden, 2014). Since each person has different experiences, and therefore constructs their individual knowledge, it is likely that the knowledge between people is different even if they participated in the same experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, multiple truths exist, and I learned about the complexity and richness of the participants' experiences through these ontological and epistemological lenses.

Action Research Design

The research design was centered on action research. Action research is a qualitative research method that seeks to understand complex dynamics involved in social context (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Stringer (2014) explained that, "Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (p. 1). Action research is commonly used to reveal solutions to problems experienced in specific situations and localized settings and uses a continuous cycle

of investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The action research design supported the overarching research question I investigated of how to improve the school building process through the stakeholders' lenses.

Action research is characterized by being focused on a problem, implementing a systematic process of inquiry, and developing an explanation that leads to increased understanding (Stringer, 2014). My research design incorporated numerous cycles of planning the research, traveling to the research site, collecting data, processing data, and refining the research design. Herr and Anderson (2015) refer to this as a continuous cycle of plan, act, observation, and reflection that needs to be used throughout the research study. Stringer (2014) uses a slightly different continuous cycle model of look, think, and act. Both models represent a constant systematic process of inquiry. For this research, I chose the plan, act, observe, and reflect model. This cyclic model helped increase my understanding of the research problem and possible solutions.

On the surface action research appears to be a simple method, but in practice it becomes complex due to the constant process of inquiry and cyclic steps of plan, act, observe, and reflect. Adding to the complexity are the social, cultural, and emotional factors that impact human activity (Stringer, 2014) of the research setting. The primary purpose of action research is as a tool for developing solutions to problems experienced by stakeholders to create change.

The action research approach complemented the qualitative methodology of this study. The action research approach seeks to understand how participants interpret a problem in their workplace or community. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) practitioners engage in action research through organizations for community or social development and change.

Action research is a practitioner research where it engages the participants to solve a problem (Stringer, 2014). For example, in this study, the stakeholders were engaged to improve the school building process. Using the research process, I directly engaged the participants to come up with solutions to a problem. In action research, the participants are engaged as co-researchers to help determine the kinds of data that should be collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research is not done on participants but instead with them (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Action research was an appropriate design for this study because stakeholders were used to investigate solutions to a problem to improve a process.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants to better understand the school building process. Stringer (2014) states that one key to creating change in a community is to have active participation. Because of the importance of the new school project to the local community, there was strong, key stakeholder buy-in to participate in the study. Participants actively engaging in the study is a component of action research and appropriate for this design.

Elements of the action research design used in this study were conversations, semi-structured interviews, photographs, and documents to explore the significance of building a new school in a remote community in Belize. These research data collection methods facilitated participants better understanding their needs by sharing stories (Leavy, 2017). The methods supported the participants' multiple ways of knowing and enabled them to share their experiences building a new school. The data collection methods supported Mosse's (2013) belief that one person's truths or reality can be false to others, and this needs to be considered. Also, this research design supported my constructivism epistemological view and relativism ontological lenses by using the participants' personal stories of experiences (Brooks et al., 2008; Bukowski & Buetow, 2010). From personal stories and pictures, participants were

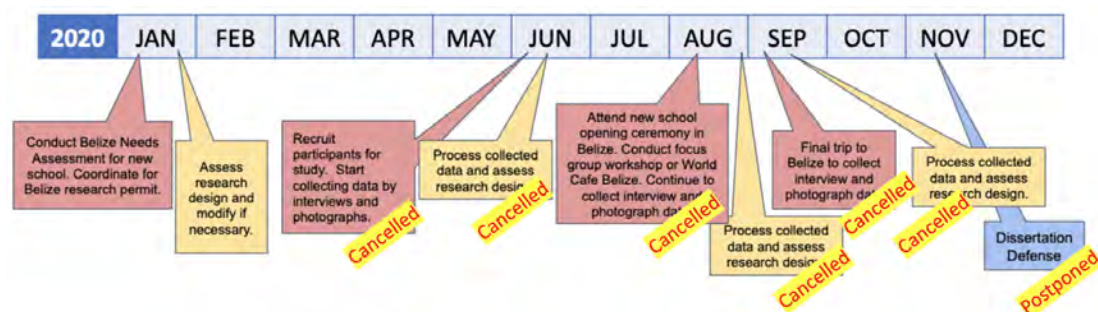
empowered to describe the school building process through the documentation of life experiences.

This research design methodology, supported by literature, rests upon three theoretical underpinnings that were used as a guide: feminist theory (Code, 2014), documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1997), and grounded theory for data analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, the research design supported methods that fostered critical consciousness among participants, made space for participants to document various aspects of their lives on their own terms, and reach policy makers with the project's findings to enact change (Latz et al., 2015; Wang & Burris, 1997).

Research Timeline

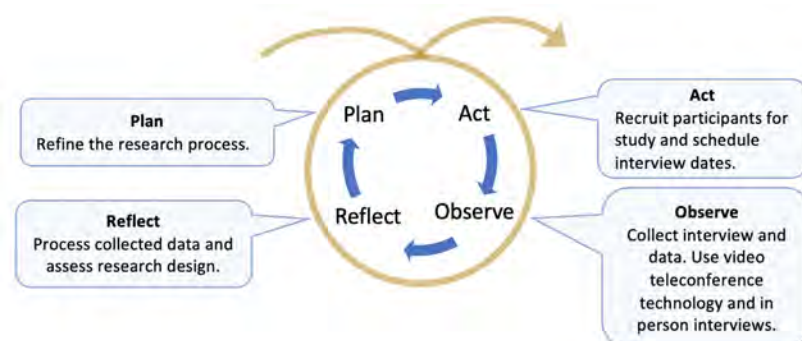
An aggressive research timeline had been established for this study at the beginning. The timeline included five trips to Belize in 2020, but only one trip was conducted due to COVID-19 (Figure 23). The worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 stopped all international travel to Belize starting in March 2020. The building process for the new school was stopped and the Belize international airport was closed. I reevaluated the original research design and developed a new timeline.

A new research timeline was constructed and modified to support COVID-19 requirements and international travel restrictions. The research started in January 2020 and due to COVID-19 extended into 2022. The extended research time frame gave me more time for continuous nonlinear cycles to plan (develop a course of action based on analysis), act (Implement the plan), observe (gather more data), and reflect (analyze what is happening) (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Stringer & Aragón, 2021) (Figure 24).

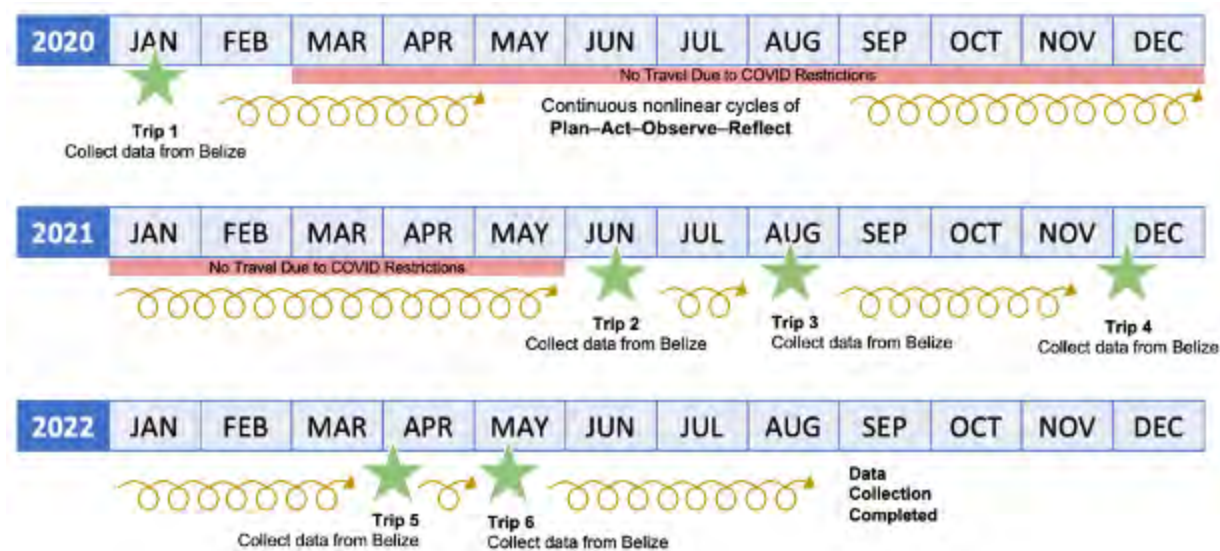
Figure 23*Original Research Timeline*

Note. The research timeline shows five research trips were projected to Belize in 2020, but due to COVID-19 and international travel restrictions, this timeline was not followed. Many of the site visits were canceled and the school completion date moved to 2022.

During these trips to Belize, I recruited participants, collected data through interviews, photographs, and documents of the new school building process. After each trip, I processed the collected data as I assessed the research design through cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect. The continuous cycle of plan-act observe-reflect supported the analytic framework of action research (Herr & Anderson, 2015) (Figure 24).

Figure 24*Continuous Cycles of Plan–Act–Observe–Reflect*

Note. The illustration shows a detailed continuous cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The cycle is nonlinear, and portions of the cycle do not need to occur in order. This systematic approach was a key component to action research.

Figure 25*Actual Research Timeline*

Note. The Research Design Timeline shows continuous cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2015) from 2020 to 2022 where six trips to Belize were conducted to collect data. Notice that travel was not possible from March 2020 to May 2021 due to COVID-19 international travel restrictions.

Research Questions (Restated and Refined From Chapter 1)

Herr and Anderson (2015) state the research question often addresses something that the researcher wants to do better or understand more clearly. I went into this research with an open mind on what was going to be investigated, but my priority research purpose was always to help improve the school building process. The continuous cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect helped shape the focus of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I refined research questions as the study progressed in collaboration with stakeholders. Table 1 illustrates a list of research inquiries that were used as a guide in this research.

Table 1*Refined Research Inquiries*

Research Question (RQ)	Supporting Questions
RQ1: How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?	1. Please tell me how you feel about the new school building process in your area? 2. Please share your most important experiences with the school building process.
RQ2: From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?	1. Please share an experience on how building the new school impacted the community? 2. In your opinion, what was the most difficult part of building the new school in your community? 3. Please share an experience where you felt uncomfortable during the process of building a new school?
RQ3: From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?	1. Please describe your position in building the new school. 2. What do you feel could be done better with the school building process? 3. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding building a new school?

Note. Research questions were continuously refined throughout the study to accurately reflect the phenomena.

Research Outcomes (Restated From Chapter 1)

The research facilitated the participants better understanding the impact of building a new school in their community. The community was better informed on the benefits and economic opportunities the new school created. The goal was to foster and nurture critical consciousness among participants; make space for participants to document various aspects of their lives on their own terms; and reach local, national, and international policy makers with the project's findings to enact change (Aragón, 2013). This was completed through the following research outcomes:

1. The research obtained a deeper insight on how the stakeholders understood the impact of the school building process.
2. The research was used to improve the school building process.
3. The research reached national and international policy makers with the project's findings to enact change.

Data Collection and Methods

As the researcher, it was my responsibility to know other available research methods and choose the best ones for the study. I chose different methods that helped best understand people's diverse ways of knowing (Aragón & Macedo, 2015). The data collection research methods included semi-structured interviews, photographs, and documents. These different methods helped me collect data more effectively. By using different methods, I was able to extract rich meaningful data from the participants (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Data was collected through interviews, photographs, and documents using cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2015). I conducted analysis immediately after each data collection event. This helped cycle between synthesizing the current data and creating

strategies for collecting new data (Miles et al., 2020). During this process it was important to leverage primary material such as quotes, observations, notes, and documents that helped to candidly hear the voices of stakeholders (Friedman et al., 2018).

I had participants answer questions through semi-structured interviews about their experiences with the new school building process. Charmaz (2014) says that interviewing research participants requires patience and understanding during the interview process. I was able to extract richer data from the participants by being careful not to speak too much and asking questions slowly. This gave participants time to reflect on their answers. Sometimes, researchers speak more than necessary and this causes the researcher to skew the interview. I was careful not to speak too much and asked open ended questions. Many times, asking open-ended short questions allowed the participants to integrate the research questions into their answers.

During the cycles of plan-act-observe-reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2015), I was able to gather a group of participants and share photographs of the school building process. The participants voiced their thoughts on what was important to them about the new school. The power of pictures was huge. It evoked emotional and visceral responses from people. Many say a picture is worth a thousand words (Leavy, 2015). Pictures are another way of keeping a diary and occupy an elevated place in memory because images are remembered easier and make longer impressions (Leavy, 2015).

A picture creates a perspective onto the world and records it. Saldaña (2016) states that no two people will interpret a visual image the same way. Each of us brings our unique lens of experiences, culture, values, and life experiences to the visual image processing. As a researcher it was important to allow the collected image to speak for itself without bias. I spent time sharing and discussing their thoughts about the photos. After completing the sharing and

discussing with participants, I put their thoughts into liked themed groups from my notes. I identified significant themes that were collected and analyzed later (Leavy, 2015).

Written notes, audio recordings, and video recordings were taken at the sessions. According to Saldaña (2016), field notes are the researcher's written documentation of participant observations. This may include the observer's personal and subjective responses to interpretations of the phenomena. I used field notes to document observations and insights in the study. Many of the field notes were later used to help refine the analytic memos and analytical reflections (Saldaña, 2016). I found the field notes to be a rich source of data that was used throughout the data analysis process. When taking field notes, I was diligent to keep a small notepad or my phone to use as a digital recorder nearby at all times to record any insights.

Proper protocols were used to control data. The interviews and field notes data was safeguarded in accordance to the agreements of the informed consent forms (Saldaña, 2016). The equipment used to control data was computer notebooks with fingerprint and password authentication for access and data encryption as the data custodian.

The Three Data Sources

Three data sources were used in this action research that related to the investigated problem. The sources of data were open-ended semi-structured interviews, photographs from the research area, and pertinent documents. Participants' interviews set the foundation for the study and I used their stories as data (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Photographs created a perspective of the research area and occupied an elevated place in our memory. Also, other pertinent information was collected from documents. These three different data sources were the bases for understanding the phenomenon being studied.

Interviews

Interviews are the primary ways of obtaining valid and authentic information in action research (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Twenty participants were interviewed for this qualitative study. Interviews helped me understand how others experience and interpret events in their lives. I used the participants' voices from interviews to understand how they experienced the school building process. Before the interview could be conducted the participant needed to be selected and recruited.

Participant Selection and Recruitment. A sampling of 20 adults from the stakeholders (that included parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGOs) were asked to share information about the new school construction process in Corozal, Belize. For a qualitative study, Strauss and Corbin (1998), suggest that a minimum of 10 participant interviews or observations with detailed coding are necessary when using the grounded theory method. Saldaña (2016) stated that he used 15 participants in a study that supported grounded theory. Enough data must be collected to support the core coding categories and their dimensions, and obtain research saturation (Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The final sample size was large enough to describe the impact of building a new school without collecting repetitive data. The goal of this qualitative research was to attain saturation. Saturation occurred when adding more participants to the study would not result in gaining additional information (Leavy, 2017).

Parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGO stakeholders were invited to participate in the research. The participants were each invited to participate in the research through meetings and introductions during trips to Belize while building the school. The participants were chosen because they were significant stakeholders in the project. Recruitment and retention of the participants was conducted throughout the project timeframe

over the phone, through email (Appendix E - Participant Recruitment Email), in-person networking, and via video conferences. Since 2016, Global Aid Consultants built personal and professional relationships between the stakeholders in Belize that facilitated obtaining research permission from the Belize Ministry of Education and the assembly of participants.

It was important to select participants who were primary stakeholders to the research question. Primary stakeholders are those who are directly affected by the research problem and all had a stake or an interest in the outcome of the project (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). This helped increase participation in the study because the school project directly impacted the stakeholders, and they had a vested interest in improving the process. The following stakeholders were chosen to participate in the study:

- Parents: Parents of children attending the new school were recruited through recommendations from the school faculty and community leaders. The parents bring the unique viewpoint of promoting the health and welfare of their children. They want their children to have opportunities and hope for the future. These in-person interviews were completed in Corozal, Belize.
- School Faculty and Community Leaders: School teachers, staff, and community leaders were recruited through Global Aid Consultants meetings during the school building process. School staff and community leaders have a direct interest in providing students with meaningful instruction. They also have a strong commitment supporting and enhancing the local community. School faculty in-person interviews were conducted in Corozal, Belize.
- Belize Government Officials: The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and other Belizean officials were recruited through relationships built from Global Aid Consultants. The vision of the Belizean Ministry of Education (n.d.) is to ensure that all Belizeans are

given an educational opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills required for their own personal development and to be an active contributor to their nation. The interviews were conducted over emails, video teleconference, and in-person meetings.

- U.S. Government: The DOD and DOS were recruited through relationships built over time from past humanitarian assistance projects where Global Aid Consultants participated. DOD and DOS have an interest in protecting the security and interest of the United States through foreign development. The U.S. government can provide considerable funding for these projects and is a major stakeholder. These interviews were conducted through emails, video teleconference, and in-person meetings.
- Global Aid Consultants: Staff members were recruited and volunteered to participate in the study. This nonprofit nongovernment organization promotes quality education by providing school furnishings, books, and supplies to newly built schools. This organization has direct interest in the study to improve the future process of building new schools. Interviews from Global Aid Consultants were conducted in-person at a place the staff members felt comfortable.

A sampling of 20 adult males and females from the local, national, and international community participated to share information about the new school construction process in Corozal, Belize. The sample size was large enough to describe the process of building a new school without collecting repetitive data. Table 2 shows the stakeholders who participated in the research.

Table 2*Research Participant List*

Participant	Title	Local/National/International Influence Sphere
P1	NGO Health Professional	International
P2	DOD SOUTHCOM	International
P3	DOD SOUTHCOM	International
P4	DOD SOUTHCOM	International
P5	Researcher and NGO Co-Founder	International
P6	DOD SOUTHCOM Colleague	International
P7	NGO Global Aid Consultants	National
P8	NGO Global Aid Consultants	National
P9	U.S. Embassy Military Group Commander	International
P10	Parent 1	Local
P11	Parent 2	Local
P12	Principal 1	Local
P13	Corozal Community Government Official	National
P14	Belize Ministry of Education 1	National
P15	Belize Ministry of Education 2	National
P16	Parent 3	Local
P17	Parent 4	Local
P18	Principal 2	Local
P19	Teacher 1	Local
P20	Teacher 2	Local

Note. Participant descriptions and stakeholder's role.

The stakeholders were personally invited to participate together or separate in research interviews and activities that allowed them to express their opinions and viewpoints. It was important for me to feel comfortable addressing difficult situations openly to include power and vulnerable issues (Friedman et al., 2018). Because of this, the school building project was positively perceived by the stakeholders and the experiences they shared were more authentic. I verbally addressed any issue immediately and stressed the stakeholders' support was needed to enhance the school building process in the future. This helped the participants feel comfortable and promoted voicing their opinions. Signed Informed consent forms were obtained before any interview and subjects were given a copy of the signed informed consent document immediately through a copy or email (Appendix F - Participant Consent Form).

Interview Process. In-person semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted at various locations that provide privacy and a place familiar to the participant (Appendix H - Sample Interview Transcripts). During COVID-19, I used video teleconference software when in-person face-to-face interviews were not possible due to travel restrictions. All interviews took place in areas that the participants felt comfortable and in a setting they trusted. General open-ended questions were asked at the start of each interview that triggered the participants' description and reflection on the research questions (Stringer & Aragón, 2021).

During the interviews, Mark, a fellow researcher, was present and asked questions for his dissertation. We each asked the participant different noncompeting questions. The goal of the interview was to gather and generate information from stakeholders that described their own experience of the phenomena being studied (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). I found the participant's ability to express meaningful data was increased due to both researchers asking similar subject matter questions from different perspectives. Working with Mark increased our legitimacy and trust in the study with the participants. The participants appeared to enjoy having both of us

listen carefully to what they were saying. Overall, I believe having Mark present during the interviews made the participants feel more comfortable with the interview process and because of this more meaningful data was collected.

During the interviews, participants answered questions through semi-structured interview questions relating to how they perceived the impact of the new school building process. I asked open ended short questions. This helped to produce compelling stories that capture both the participants' voice and the data I needed as a researcher. The qualitative research interview attempted to understand the world from the participant's point of view and unpack the meaning of their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Interviewing participants across cultures was required for the study. When conducting cross-cultural interviews, it was important to be aware of specific cultural factors such as habits, practices, and many other verbal and nonverbal factors (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). As the researcher, I attempted to become familiar with the culture and learn some of the many verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Due to cultural differences, I took additional time with each interview. Charmaz (2014) states that interviewing research participants requires patience. I asked questions slowly, giving the participants time to reflect on their answers and because of this, I was able to extract richer data.

Due to COVID-19, it was necessary to conduct some interviews through video conferencing. While conducting virtual interviews during the COVID-19 outbreak, I was mindful that not every participant was able to access virtual interview technology. I sometimes needed to reschedule or determine an alternate method for interviewing. Following my dissertation interview protocols (Appendix D - Interview Protocol) was important during interviews along with keeping focused on the research study questions. I asked the same questions as I would have in an in-person interview. I scheduled the video interview in advance with the participant to

make sure I allowed them time to prepare to be on camera and recorded.

I tested my technology prior to the scheduled interview to make sure it was operating, and software was updated to prevent compatibility issues. It was important to double check all technology to confirm that the microphone and camera were working properly, the camera was positioned so I was looking directly at the video camera. It was important to make sure all other programs on my computer were shut down, so no alerts, notifications, or other disruptions interrupted the interview. I also made sure that my computer was fully charged and learned to accommodate for potential audio and video delays.

During the start of the interview, I created a comfortable atmosphere by welcoming the participant in a friendly manner. Confirming the participant can see and hear me was important. I introduced myself, acknowledged the unusual circumstance, and thanked the participant for being flexible. This simple acknowledgement appeared to help the participant feel more comfortable. A few administrative notes were covered during the beginning of the interview that included the length of the projected interview and explaining that taking notes will help ensure I remember responses accurately. Sometimes note taking would limit eye contact and this should not be interpreted as a lack of interest.

All face-to-face interviews were video or audio recorded. Each interview lasted between 10 to 60 min and the video or audio recordings were transcribed by an online service. I reviewed each transcript for accuracy and completeness. Table 3 illustrates the interview dates and type of interviews.

Table 3*Interview Statistics*

Participant Code	Title	Interview Date	Type of Interview
P1	NGO Health Professional	July 23, 2020	Video Conference
P2	DOD SOUTHCOM	December 4, 2020	Video Conference
P3	DOD SOUTHCOM	December 4, 2020	Video Conference
P4	DOD SOUTHCOM	December 4, 2020	Video Conference
P5	Researcher and NGO	December 4, 2020	Video Conference
P6	DOD SOUTHCOM Colleague	December 4, 2020	Video Conference
P7	NGO Global Aid Consultants	January 14, 2021	In-Person
P8	NGO Global Aid Consultants	January 14, 2021	In-Person
P9	U.S. Embassy Military Group	January 16, 2021	In-Person
P10	Parent 1	June 5, 2021	In-Person
P11	Parent 2	June 5, 2021	In-Person
P12	Principal 1	June 5, 2021	In-Person
P13	Corozal Community Official	June 5, 2021	In-Person
P14	Belize Ministry of Education 1	June 7, 2021	In-Person
P15	Belize Ministry of Education 2	June 7, 2021	In-Person
P16	Parent 3	June 6, 2021	In-Person
P17	Parent 4	June 6, 2021	In-Person
P18	Principal 2	May 18, 2022	In-Person
P19	Teacher 1	May 18, 2022	In-Person
P20	Teacher 2	May 18, 2022	In-Person

Note. Interview statistics that were used in the research study.

Photographs

Images can be remembered easier and make longer impressions in our memory (Leavy, 2015). Photographs were used to better understand the environment of the study and help answer the research question. I spent time sharing and discussing the participants' thoughts about photographs relating to the school building process. After completing the sharing and discussing with participants I considered their thoughts during the data analysis process. I uploaded images into MAXQDA for coding. To code images, I drew multiple frames with the mouse around important parts of the image. The frames allowed the image to be coded with descriptive text segments. MAXQDA treats the codes from images the same as from other documents. Table 4 displays the photographs used in the study.

Documents

During the research process I collected meaningful documents based on their quality and pertinence to the research questions. Documents were a good source of information for the study. Unlike interviews, documents cannot be altered by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Many documents used in this study were easily accessed and contained information that would otherwise be time consuming to obtain (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For example, I found documents that dealt directly with Central America from the stakeholders' organization. I reviewed documents from DOS, DOD, USAID, SOUTHCOM, U.S. Global Leaders Coalition, Belize Government, the U.S. President's Office, and other sources. Table 5 depicts the name, source, type, and length of document used in the study.

Table 4*Photograph Statistics*

Photograph Code	Description	Location
Photo 1	Hope for the Future Photograph of Classroom Chairs	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 2	Using What I Have Photograph of Local Resident	Corozal, Belize
Photo 3	Proud History Photograph of Mayan Temple	Santa Rita Mayan Site, Corozal, Belize
Photo 4	It Takes a Team Photograph of School Members	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 5	New School Furnishings Photograph of Classroom with Teacher	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 6	Old Learning Environment Photograph of the Old School	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 7	New Learning Environment Photograph of New School	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 8	Creates Opportunities Photograph of Classroom Chairs and Teacher Desk	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 9	It Takes a Community Photograph of Village Welcome Sign	San Antonio Village, Corozal, Belize
Photo 10	A Variety of Partners are Needed Photograph of the Project Stakeholders	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 11	Schools Cost Money Photograph of School Construction	San Antonio School, Corozal, Belize
Photo 12	Communication Among Stakeholders Photograph of Meal with Key Stakeholder	Restaurant, Corozal, Belize

Note. Photographs were used in the research study to help answer the research question.

Table 5*Document Statistics*

Document Code	Document Titled	Document Source	Document Type
Document 1	National Security Strategy of the United States of America	National Security Strategy of the United States of America (2017)	Sets the priorities of the United States Government
Document 2	United States Southern Command Strategy “Enduring Promise for the Americas”	Southern Command Strategy [SOUTHCOM Strategy] (2019)	Strategy in Latin America and the Caribbean
Document 3	United States Southern Command Work with US Public Cooperation	Southern Command Strategy Public / Private Cooperation [SOUTHCOM Public / Private Cooperation] (2022)	Build partnerships with public agencies and private sectors
Document 4	Belize Ministry of Education Vision, Mission, and Organization Structure	Belizean Ministry of Education (n.d.)	Belizean Government

Note. The documents that were used in the research study to help answer the research questions were collected from various government organizations.

Data Saturation

One of the ultimate goals of qualitative data-gathering is to achieve saturation.

Saturation occurs when adding more participants or data sources to the study would not result in gaining additional information (Leavy, 2017). Twenty stakeholders from various positions participated in the study. Throughout the interview process probing questions were used to ascertain more information from the participants. After 15 out of 20 interviews the participants' responses reached saturations due to recurrence of responses in participants' answers to the

questions. Five more additional participants were interviewed to ensure that saturation was reached.

The assessment of saturation during interviews focused on the absence of new pertinent information to answer the research questions (Leavy, 2017). During the coding phase of the study, explained in Chapter 4, I coded and recoded the data until no new codes were observed in the data that pertained to the research question. Data saturation occurred when no new codes were found through the analysis, ensuring the study's trustworthiness.

Limitations of the Research

This section identifies potential weaknesses of the study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained that, "Limitations are external conditions that restrict or constrain the study's scope or may affect its outcome" (p. 13). Limitations can influence the findings' interpretations of the research and can be used to strengthen or weaken the study. Qualitative research is a human activity that is complex and almost always incomplete with mistakes (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Most research has limitations and I have given careful thought to the limitations and ways to minimize their impact. I also acknowledge this research's limitations with the decisions I have chosen.

COVID-19 International Pandemic

COVID-19, a world-wide pandemic, infected people and had a wide range of impacts (World Health Organization, 2022). Some impacts for this research project were the DOS and Belize travel restrictions due to increased pandemic security concerns. The school building process was rescheduled many times. Due to COVID-19, many of the trips and interviews were constantly rescheduled. Six trips to Belize were conducted over a 3 year period for the study (Figure 26, Research Timeline, earlier in this chapter).

Funding

Money is a limiting factor to conducting research. Financials are an important part of any plan and almost everything we do has a cost (Hisrich, 2016). For this study the passport requirements, meals, lodging, and transportation were budgeted for \$2,500 dollars for each six to 10 day research trip. All aspects of this research were personally funded.

Communications

Other limitations and constraints consisted of communication and knowledge transfer due to cultural and language nuances between the researcher and stakeholders. Collecting rich honest data depended on creating authentic relationships with the community. It was possible that participants did not give honest answers in the interviews and conversations (Herr & Anderson, 2015). To increase collecting honest answers, I attempted to understand the culture as much as possible from reading scholarly articles, visiting cultural sites that include ancient Mayan ruins and Mennonite villages, and having conversations with as many local people as time would allow.

Relationships

Building trust with community members through a collaborative relationship was important. Many times, relationships can strengthen a project but, in some circumstances, they cause projects to move in other unintended directions (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). This was mitigated by building relationships between community leaders, families, and organizations to encourage voicing honest opinions from the participants during the school building process. Global Aid Consultants has been building personal and professional relationships in Belize since 2016 and continues to improve them.

Other Limitations

The influence of criminal organizations on the local area was a limitation on the process. The international drug trade has grown, and Mexican drug trafficking groups have also established a presence. Community members often spoke of criminal activities. Belize has a high homicide rate and the main sources of violence are domestic gangs, drug trafficking, and robberies. Because of the remote area and possible criminal activities, I was in fear of my team's personal safety. To increase safety, I established a safety protocol that we would only travel during daylight hours and all our movements were coordinated with U.S. Embassy, Ministry of Education, or Ministry of Health personnel. Every meeting was well coordinated in advance and with local, national, or international stakeholders of the school building project. During this study, I personally did not witness any criminal events.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical concerns associated with this qualitative action research were minimum. Some ethical considerations for this research included protection of the research participants, informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection (Rowan & Zinaich, 2003). I applied the learnings from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course to ensure the research was ethical and moral (Appendix C - Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certification). I followed Belize's National Institute of Cultural and History (n.d.) (Figure 26) protocols and obtained approval from the Belize Ministry of Education (Appendix B - Belize Ministry of Education Approval Letter), and the UIW's Institutional Review Board (IRB) directives. I also followed appropriate ethical practices protocols to include: (a) obtaining UIW's IRB approval (Appendix A - Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval), (b) properly established informed consent forms, explaining risks, benefits, and rights of participants (Appendix F - Participant Consent Form), (c) relational ethics of respect, power-sharing, and collaboration, (d)

accurate representation of findings, and (e) closing out the IRB research protocol (Appendix I - Institutional Review Board (IRB) Research Closure Report). I followed the protocols for respecting human rights, conflicts of interest, individual safety, maintaining health standards, and compliance with international and domestic laws (Leavy, 2017).

My moral values of respect, personal courage, integrity, selfless service, and honor define who I am today and shaped this study. I engaged the community in a responsible way and considered the ethics of doing no harm to the participants. Paying attention to cultural characteristics in the environment of the study was extremely important (Henderson, 2014). Even with these considerations, it was still possible to unintentionally harm the participants due to language and cultural differences. I perceive the world based on what I have learned, seen, heard, and experienced and maintained an awareness of our cultural differences as much as possible (Williams, 2001). I took all these considerations into account during the study.

Figure 26

Belize's National Institute of Cultural and History



Note. Researchers Todd Speer and Mark Alvarez coordinated with the Belize National Institute of Cultural and History and Ministry of Education for Belize to follow proper protocols to conduct research in Belize.

Trustworthiness of the Research

The quality of a qualitative research can be judged by the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 2014). Throughout this study, steps were taken to establish a high degree of confidence in the study's findings. Anney (2014) identified four key criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. This section describes the approaches that were employed to ensure that these criteria were met to enhance the research accuracy.

This section expands on (a) how data triangulation was used to deduct which themes intersected, (b) transcript checking was conducted to ensure participants interview responses were accurately reflected, (c) member checking was employed to verify the findings accuracy, and (d) thick descriptions (providing rich detail) were used to describe the problem as interpreted by the stakeholders, and (e) awareness of my research biases was considered.

Data Triangulation

To improve the credibility of the study I converged my data and findings through triangulation. Triangulation relates multiple sources of data to establish their consistency from each other. It is important to note that triangulation does not mean that three sources of data were used but more than one source of data was used (Mertler, 2020). Triangulation uses findings to deduct which themes intersect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews, photographs, and document data sources converged on like codes and categories in triangulation. For example, I collected data through firsthand video and voice recorded interviews, photographs, and pertinent documents. Triangulating involved examining these data sources to determine if the participants' comments were consistent with the visual representation from the photographs and the subject from the documents collected.

In this study, a convergence of findings strategy was used in the triangulation of the data through codes, categories, and themes from interviews, photographs, and documents. By gathering evidence from the triangulation using three data sources, I increased the confidence and credibility of the study. The convergence of findings from multiple sources of evidence guarded against misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the participants' experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The convergence of several codes from each of the data sources also added to the validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Transcript Checking

Most participants were given a copy of their interview transcripts to verify that the transcript reflected their responses. The participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of their responses and to recommend any changes. Verifying their views with them served as a measure of trustworthiness in the study. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and remoteness of the research site some participants were not able to verify their interview transcripts.

Member Checking

I employed member checking to verify the accuracy of the study findings (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Findings from the face-to-face and video interviews were reported back to the participants to ensure their concepts and perspectives were accurately represented (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that member checking can reduce misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the participants' experience.

Participants were sent a narrative summary of the themes that emerged from the analyzed data and were asked to validate the findings and respond back with comments or suggestions. I received mostly verbal feedback from the participants and no feedback from other participants. When I received no feedback, the findings were assumed to be accurate and reflective of the participants' experiences.

Thick Descriptions

Thick description requires more than just recording and describing the data. It involves providing the background information needed for understanding the relevance, meanings, and intentions of the research setting. I conducted a detailed Belize research setting study to better understand culture and nuances of the research area. Using detailed descriptions of the setting and many perspectives about the themes found in data analysis helped the research become richer and more realistic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I also used many photographs to help illustrate the research setting and understand perspectives of the stakeholders. This helped increase validity of the findings.

Research Bias

At the beginning of this study, in Chapter 2, my research bias and perspective were disclosed in writing under the "Philosophical Worldview" section. My worldview was developed over time from mentors, friends, formal and informal schooling, and life experiences. I did everything possible to reduce my research bias by understanding the research setting. Miles et al. (2020) explained that to prevent the source bias, spread out the participants' hierarchy status to include participants from different status levels. I specifically avoided the hierarchy status bias by selecting participants from the local, national, and international levels. This helped me to hear different points of view from the participants and not skew the research data or influence certain outcomes due to the status of the participants.

Possible Sources of Errors

Possible errors were minimized as much as possible throughout the research, although no research can be completely free of errors. Errors in the omission or misinterpretation of participant's accounts could undermine the trustworthiness of the study (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). To mitigate errors, an interview protocol was used to guide the participants' interviews.

Audio and video recordings captured all interviews of the participants' experiences. Afterwards, transcripts of audio and video recorded interviews were generated through a professional transcription service company called TEMI. TEMI helped ensure accuracy and completeness of the interview transcripts.

Another possible source of error in the data collection process was participant sample size and profiles. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that a minimum of 10 participant interviews with detailed coding are necessary when using the grounded theory method. A purposeful sampling of 20 participant stakeholders was used in this study. A mix of parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGO stakeholders participated that represented the local, national, and international communities. The sample size was large enough to answer the research questions and reach saturation without collecting repetitive data (Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2016). However, the mix of participant profiles could have been too random or too broad of a local, national, and international mixture.

Data Collection With a Research Colleague Disclosure

This research study was conducted concurrently with the school building process in Belize through Global Aid Consultants. I believe that in a complex world, it is important to work with others to help find solutions to complex problem sets that cannot be done alone. Mark Alvarez, a co-founder of Global Aid Consultants, is also pursuing a Ph.D. from UIW and is my research colleague. Working together with Mark Alvarez increased my research scope, breadth and depth, and took in a bigger part of the puzzle through a different lens. Mark and I both bring years of practitioner experience collaborating and enhancing each of our research projects. I was able to leverage collaborative data collection to generate deep meaning and find answers to real problems in the complex world of educational processes in remote areas of Belize.

Both Mark and I are professional practitioners who worked collaboratively on complex projects for many years and pursuing a PhD is no different. Each of us worked on unique individual dissertations simultaneously. We focused on separate research questions and outcomes. Data was collected together, as the new school was being built, but processed and analyzed separately. Our analysis was individually unique because we used different personal conceptual framework lenses. Each of the dissertation chapters were unique to support our specific theories, conceptual framework, and lenses. Mark had one set of findings based on his research questions and I had another set of questions.

Learning how to work together and create equity is no easy task. As a result of our co-data collection and working together on humanitarian assistance projects, past negative events were let go in conversation over a glass of rum. Admitting weaknesses is respect for the work ahead and our strengths set the expectations. We had to create a sense of fairness in the data collection. For example, we involved our reflections of working together over the past 5 years. Subsequently, we defined fairness by the weight of work equity measured in hours to have awareness and understanding.

Apart from agreeing on fairness, we crafted a goal to stay committed to trust, respect, and transparency. We flattened annoyance by establishing a climate of teamwork and communication during the data collection process. For example, someone has to organize the daily logistics of transportation, life support, someone has to send the emails, make the phone calls, and send the WhatsApp messages to sync the meetings. The synchronization of different tasks over time and distance requires planning skills by the same token of an expedition. Deciding who will do what and when is a daily occurrence. Even so some tasks are separated and sharing of tasks does occur.

Predominance of role in shared tasks is alternated due to many reasons such as,

stamina, uncontrollable changing conditions, and or loss of expertise. For example, sometimes we discover one needs bifocals to read the small print, so task lead switches. Claiming a higher-level of expertise without being disrespectful is done by not hovering, micromanaging. Disempowerment was avoided because of the committed goal to maintain trust, respect, and transparency.

Transparency allows for open communication and to ask for help with tasks that have started small but became larger. We agreed to ask for help when one met mental overload, expertise was maxed out, or feelings of being overwhelmed by unrealistic standards for one person. In this case, we communicated the issue and separated the bulk of the labor into smaller tasks. By doing so, we collectively work together to complete the task. Without a doubt, we created a co-authorship action-research tactic called ask-for-help.

With the asking-for-help tactic in mind, we were able to defeat the unspoken rule of perfectionism. Perfectionism is an invisible weight that can create resentment. For example, much planning was put into each day to ensure nothing goes wrong but our intuition knows no plan stays intact after the first unplanned variable appears on the scene, such as making a wrong turn and not getting upset. We understood that our mistakes don't define us. By letting go of perfectionism we were able to stay committed to maintaining trust, respect, and transparency.

For the above-mentioned reason, we were able to free ourselves from being perfectionist, fixated on the past, and stay in the present. Choosing our thoughts keeps us in the present and allows us to extend our understanding of ourselves and of the world around us. For example, by choosing our thoughts we were able to adjust our expectations and maintain a unified co-data collection process. Managing our expectations kept the world in perspective and from becoming an imaginary world in our heads. Such as, when we review each other's work

thinking this should happen or that should not happen. Our work is in the real world and this is where our action-research study takes place.

Chapter 4. Mining Data for Meaningful Information

Introduction

Due to the growing criminal influence in Central America, Belize was selected in 2020 by DOS and DOD for a humanitarian school building project that continued through 2022 due to COVID-19. The stakeholders conducting this project worked in a complex criminal and social-economic environment. Global Aid Consultants was essential in this research study by giving me access to the overall picture of the project and helped develop relationships with stakeholders who worked collaboratively towards a common goal of building and completing a school.

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to explore the impact of a new school building process from the stakeholders' perceptions in Belize to improve future projects. This study was exploratory in nature and therefore the qualitative methodology was best suited. The qualitative method was necessary to obtain an in-depth understanding of the problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research method centered on action research using semi-structured interviews, photographs, and other documents that explored the process of building a new school in a remote community from the stakeholders' lens. These methods supported the participants' ways of knowing and enabled them to share their firsthand experiences of building a new school. This helped me to better understand their point of view through sharing stories (Leavy, 2017).

The study explored the impact of building a new school in Belize that filled a gap in the literature and added to the body of knowledge. Stringer and Aragón (2021) suggest that qualitative action research's primary purpose is to assist people in finding solutions to real life problems and its secondary purpose is to add to the body of knowledge. This study supported both purposes. Important lessons learned from this study were shared with local, national, and

international stakeholders, and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations doing similar work.

Prior to this study, it was not understood how the stakeholders perceived the impact of their school building process. No one from the school building team has researched the stakeholders' perception on the process of building a new school. Action research was the best research design to help identify the problem and collect data on the problem from the stakeholders perspective (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Understanding the stakeholder perception generated the data necessary to better understand the impact and recommend improvements to the process.

The research design supported creating epistemological knowledge by using the participants' personal stories and experiences (Brooks et al., 2008; Bukowski & Buetow, 2010). From the research, I found that one person's truths or reality can be false to others and needs to be considered (Mosse, 2013). The constructivist paradigm and my worldview, where knowledge is acquired through experiences and prior knowledge, supported this study (Stringer & Aragón, 2021).

The research questions that guided this qualitative study were intended to address the problem statement that it is not known how stakeholders perceive the school impact in Belize.

This study included the research questions below:

- How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?
- From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?
- From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?

To answer each research question, I gathered data from three different sources. The first data source was from semi-structured interviews of 20 stakeholders who were involved with

the school building process. The second data source was from photographs taken at the research site and the third data source was from documents relating to the school building process. The three sources permitted the triangulation of data that improved the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 2014). The triangulation of data from these three sources were compared and contrasted.

Chapter 4 presents the complete detailed explanation of the findings of this qualitative action research study. This chapter starts with preparing the data, identifying codes from the interviews, photographs, and documents. Next, assembling the categories of related codes are explained. The next section explains how the thematic analysis method was used to emerge the findings. Finally, this chapter delivers a detailed explanation of each of the seven findings. Last, the trustworthiness and credibility of the research is discussed.

Creating Meaningful Information

Being an instrument in the study, I was in constant interaction with the data, involving line by line coding process of the participants' own words (Leavy, 2017). A grounded theory thematic approach was my lens to understand the data. Grounded theory is a tool to extract meaningful information from data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This theory is mostly regarded as one of the best methodologically systematic approaches to qualitative research (Saldaña, 2016). Qualitative data analysis is an exciting and rewarding process that challenges researchers to explore their material in depth (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019). The study focused on understanding the stakeholder's point of view on the impact of building a new school. Data gathered through interviews, photographs, and documents provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the study.

All the data collected in the study was organized, prepared, and analyzed to answer the research questions. A thematic analysis approach from Saldaña (2016) was used as a guide to

analyze the collected data. Data was transcribed and coded from interviews, photographs, and other documents (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). The data was organized utilizing MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2022), which is a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software.

MAXQDA computer software has the capacity for organizing large amounts of data that facilitates analysis by organizing and categorizing the data. Voice recordings were transcribed into text using Temi speech to text recognition software (Temi, 2022). After Temi transcribed the speech to text the data was imported into MAXQDA. Processing and analyzing the data included participants' interview transcripts, documents, and photographs.

The most important part of the data analysis process was to identify information that accurately represented the perspective of the participant (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Saldaña's (2016) thematic analysis approach technique supported this data analysis. I chose the thematic analysis process as my approach to discover themes from the data related to the stakeholders' experiences, descriptions, and perceptions of the phenomena under inquiry. The data analysis procedures were framed in four steps designed to explore and understand the research questions. The four-steps were (a) identifying codes in the data, (b) creating categories of codes, (c) reviewing the categories and synthesizing them to generate themes through analytic memoing, and (d) applying the emerging themes to the study. An adapted illustration of Saldaña's thematic analysis approach in Figure 27.

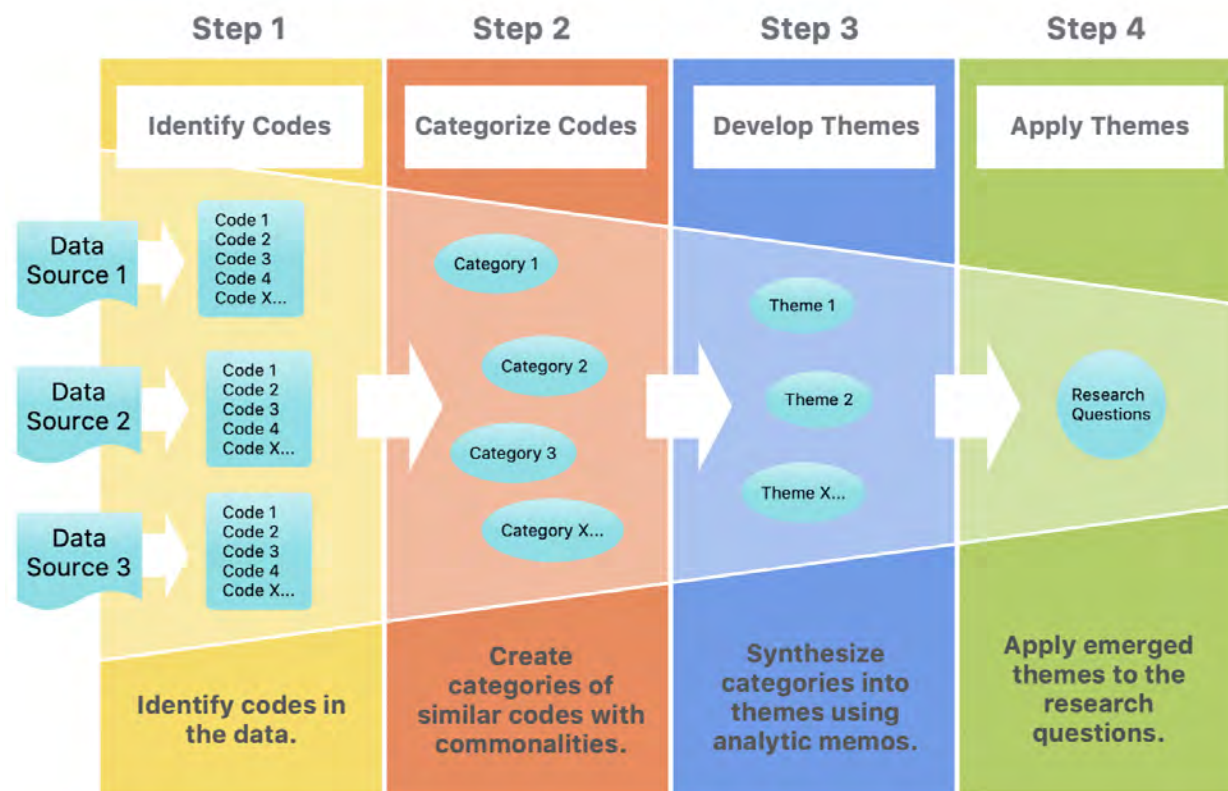
Preparing the Data

Preparing the data took time. I spent approximately eight hr preparing the data for every one hr of interviewing. Photographs and documents were not as time consuming as interviews to prepare. I used a professional transcription service called Temi (2022) to obtain text transcripts from audio and video recorded interviews of stakeholders. I carefully listened to the audio recordings and reviewed the transcripts to ensure accuracy and thoroughness. After

transcription, the transcript was downloaded from Temi and imported into a Google document.

Figure 27

Thematic Data Analysis Four Step Process Procedure



Note. An adapted illustration of Saldaña's four step thematic analysis approach for analyzing qualitative data (Saldaña, 2016, Figure 1.1). In Step 1 the raw data sources were prepared and organized from interview transcripts, photographs, and documents where codes were identified. Step 2 categorized similar codes, and Step 3 shows categories were synthesized into themes through analytic memoing. Finally, in Step 4, the developed themes were applied to the research question.

Google documents were chosen because it allowed me to upload, review the transcript, and clean up the data. The transcript was searched for typos, repeated words, incomplete words, missing words, and punctuation issues. For example, words such as "Hmm", "Mm", etc. were edited out because they could not be coded. No attempt was made to enrich the data with my own views or ideas. Once the data was cleaned up in the Google document, I listened to the recording again while reading the transcript to identify any errors in the transcribed data. Next,

the document was converted to a Microsoft Word document and imported into MAXQDA software for data analysis.

Analyzing the Data

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying and reporting patterns or themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It involves the organized exploration of data for patterns that illuminate the phenomenon of the study (Saldaña, 2016). This was completed by analysis through coding data from each source separately using descriptive and in vivo coding with MAXQDA. Descriptive coding summarizes a passage of qualitative data in a word or phrase and in vivo coding uses a word or a phrase contained in the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Data from interviews, photographs, and other documents were each coded separately. Later, codes from the three data sources were combined, categorized, and analyzed across all data to generate themes, which conveyed meaning from the data relating to the research questions. This process transcribed, coded, and turned data into information (Saldaña, 2016). Thematic data analysis was used to discover themes in the data from the participants' experiences and perceptions related to building a new school in Belize.

Repeated ideas and concepts were tagged with codes. Codes are labels that assign representative meaning to the descriptive data collected from the research (Miles et al., 2020). Writing down the most expressive codes and responses from the data was essential. Being open to the data and keeping the codes simple and specific was key. This was a critical link because it is the first step into the deep interpretation of the data's meaning (Miles et al., 2020). During this process, I was careful not to add my bias into the interpretation of the data by keeping an open mind to the emerging codes.

After coding, the next step was to summarize the segments of data by looking for patterns. The codes were grouped and summarized into a smaller number of categories. This

focused coding or pattern coding helped identify the bigger picture of the data into a more meaningful analysis (Miles et al., 2020). This step helped condense the codes into a smaller number of categories. The smaller number of categories helped me focus on key aspects of the data and expanded the understanding of the data. A thematic analysis using grounded theory was conducted to identify common themes that emerged (Saldaña, 2016). This part of the process spearheaded the groundwork for themes to surface (Miles et al., 2020).

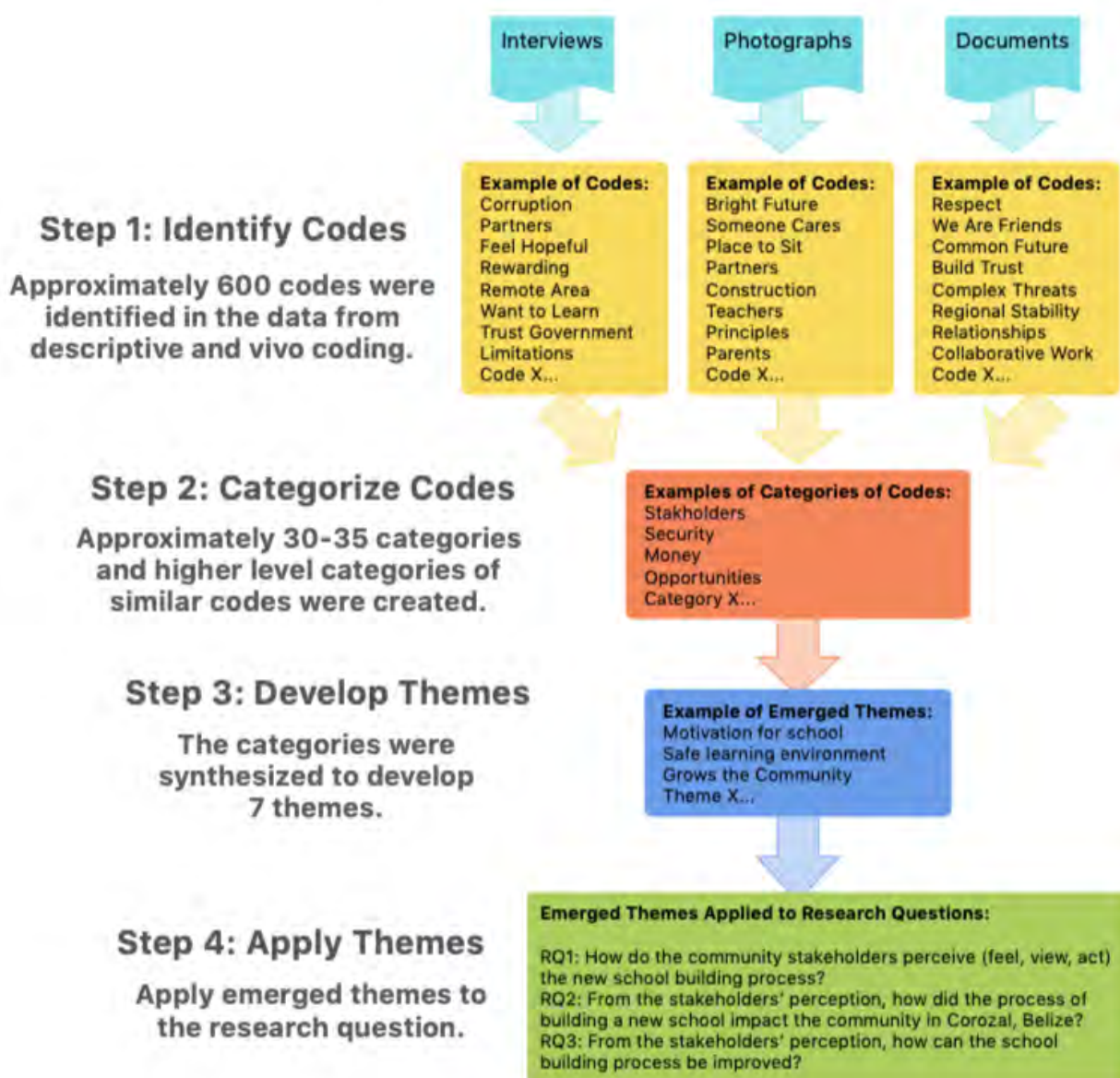
The next step was to reflect on the categories with analytic memos. Analytic memos helped synthesize the significance of the codes and categories (Saldaña, 2016). The memos were also a way to reflect on the codes. This created a higher analytic understanding of the data that created clarity and helped develop themes. The memos helped me understand the storyline of the data and reflect on the thinking process associated with tying together different pieces of the data (Miles et al., 2020).

The essential focus of the thematic data analysis was to learn themes that transferred significance from the data related to the research questions.

Saldaña's (2016) four step thematic analysis process was followed. The steps include (a) identifying codes in the data, (b) creating categories of codes, (c) synthesizing categories to generate themes, and (d) applying the emerging themes to the study research questions that is explained in Chapter 5. This four-step process was used with the three data sources as illustrated in Figure 28.

Figure 28

The Four-Step Thematic Analysis Process Applied



Note: An illustration of the four-step thematic analysis process with sample codes used in the research. The research organized about 600 different data codes into 30 to 35 categories. These categories were later grouped into seven major themes.

Identifying Codes From the Interviews, Photographs, and Documents

Coding is a method of discovering repeated ideas and concepts from the data (Saldaña, 2016). Codes are labels that assign representative meaning or summarize the descriptive data collected from the research (Miles et al., 2020). Saldaña (2016) explained that codes are words or short phrases that summarizes and captures a portion of the data. Codes drive the retrieval of the data (Miles et al., 2020) and were used to give descriptive labels to chunks of data that identify ideas and concepts from the data (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Writing down the most expressive codes and responses to the feelings from the data was essential. Being open to the data and keeping the codes simple and specific was key. This was a critical step because it is the first part into a deep interpretation of the data's meaning (Miles et al., 2020).

When something significant about the coding analysis came up, I stopped what I was doing and wrote a memo about it immediately. Saldaña (2016) states the goal of the memos are not to summarize the data but reflect and expand on the codes. The collection, coding, and analytic memo writing of data was not a distinct linear process but a continuous cycle of refining until the research was completed (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016).

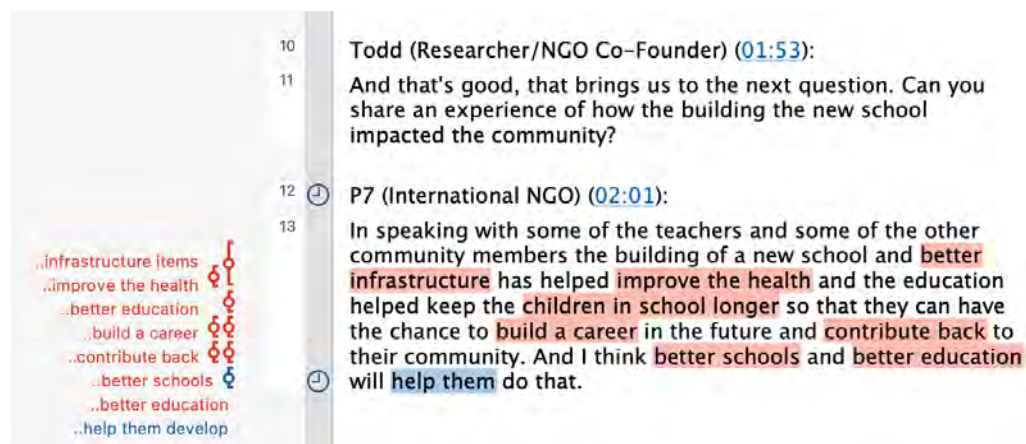
Coding Interviews. Participants in this study responded to questions in face-to-face or video teleconference interviews. The recordings were converted to text using an online software called Temi. Once the transcript document was proofread and edited for typos it was imported into MAXQDA for coding. Before importing the document into MAXQDA, I read the transcript multiple times to better understand the content. Once in MAXQDA I explored the data line-by-line applying descriptive codes to key phrases that stood out. Identified codes from the transcript were created and organized in MAXQDA. MAXQDA displays the codes in the margins of coded passages and helps facilitate the organization of the coding process.

I used data-driven descriptive and in vivo coding during the coding process. Descriptive coding encapsulates a passage in the transcript and in vivo coding uses a word or phrase directly from the text (Saldaña, 2016). For example, text data from transcript P7 read, "That we want the best for them. We want the best for their children. We want to see them succeed for generations to come and education is the key to improving life economically and culturally..." Through descriptive coding I labeled the passage as, "hope for a better future." This label was applied to the text data and identified as a code because it summarized that portion of the text.

In another example, text from the data read, "...understanding of the importance of education, the importance in terms not only of making productive citizens, but helping kids stay out of crime." Using in vivo coding, the words "importance of education" was selected from the text and identified as a code because it was the actual word used by the participant that best summarized the meaning of the data. Figure 29 illustrates an example of an interview transcript coded section.

Figure 29

Example of Coded Transcript Section

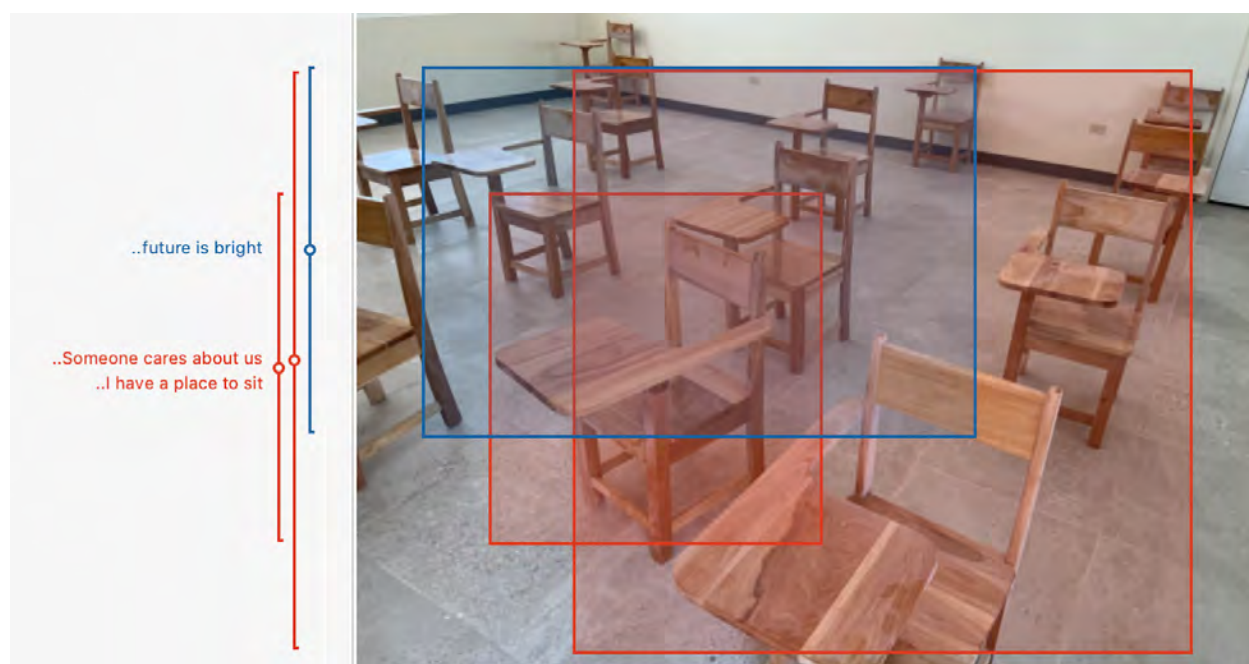


Note. The above figure was an example of transcript P7 with coded segments in MAXQDA. The identified codes are labeled in red and blue. All the codes were initially coded in red. If a code became a category or higher-level category it was turned blue. I only coded units of meaning that were relevant to the research questions. Therefore, not every portion of the interviews' transcript was coded.

Coding Photographs. Similarly, to the interview transcripts, photographs were organized and imported into MAXQDA for coding and analysis. After viewing the photographs multiple times, I identified codes from specific areas of the photographs. Saldaña (2016) recommends using dynamic words that represent the rich reflection of photographs. Photographs usually do not have words or phrases and therefore in vivo coding was not used. Descriptive coding was used in the identification of codes from photographs. For example, a photograph with new classroom chairs in the school titled “Hope for the Future” was coded with the following codes, “the future is bright,” “someone cares about me,” and “I have a place to sit” (Figure 30). These codes represented the meaning of the photograph as related to the research questions.

Figure 30

Hope for the Future



Note. The above photograph shows an example of the coding process. The identified codes are labeled in blue and red text next to the photo.

In another photograph, “It Takes a Team,” a photograph taken outside the school with stakeholders (Figure 31). Using descriptive coding, the words “international partners,” “host nation construction,” “teachers,” “principals,” “students,” and “parents” were selected from areas in the photograph and identified as codes because they best summarize the meaning of the data from the photograph.

Figure 31

It Takes a Team



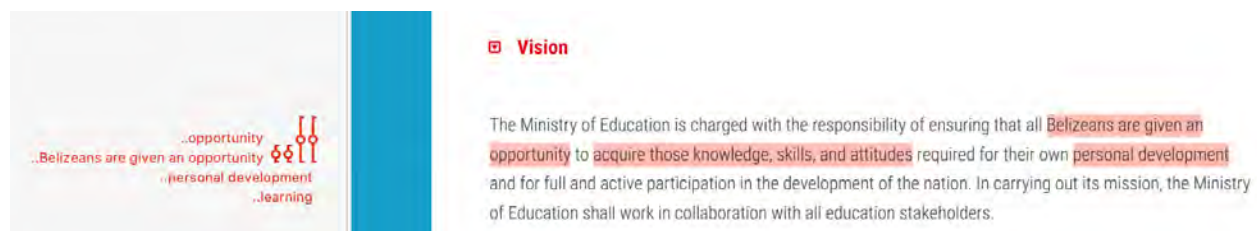
Note. The above photograph shows the different stakeholders it takes to build a stronger future for the community. Coded areas are the red boxes throughout the photograph and the identified codes are labeled in red text on the left of the photo.

Coding Documents. Documents from various sources pertaining to the research questions were imported into MAXQDA for coding and analysis. Identifying codes in the documents was similar to the interview and photograph process. When the document contained text, I was able to go through the data line-by-line highlighting key phrases and concepts. For example, a United States Southern Command Strategy “Enduring Promise for the Americas” document read, “Most relationships between neighbors in this hemisphere are based on respect, cooperation, and mutual understanding (SOUTHCOM, 2019, p. 2).” This passage was assigned a code “respect is needed” because the code summarized the meaning of the text in

the document. Documents with text could be coded using descriptive or in vivo coding and documents containing no text could only be coded with descriptive coding. Documents that did not contain text were coded similar to photographs. Figure 32 illustrates an example of document coding.

Figure 32

Example of a Coded Document



Note. The above figure is an example of the Belizean Ministry of Education (n.d.) document that was coded in MAXQDA. The identified codes were labeled in red text on the left of the document.

Identifying Codes Completion. After codes were identified in each of the three data sources, the codes were combined, reviewed, and revised. Saldaña (2016) states that coding is a process of discovery and interacting with the data is key. As recommended by Saldaña (2016), some codes were removed, and others were renamed during the process. For example, the code "provide help and to make the world a better place" was replaced with "progress." This was done because "progress" captured the essence of the data better. The codes were merged into a code table in MAXQDA.

Assembling Categories of Related Codes

After coding, the next step was to summarize the segments of data by looking for patterns. Similar codes from three data sources were combined to create categories. Categories are like threads that tie bits of data together (Miles et al., 2020). A category groups and organizes similar codes based on a shared characteristic. They share something in common

and can be a single word or phrase (Saldaña, 2016). The codes were grouped and summarized into a smaller number of categories.

Units of similar significance were organized into related groups or categories (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). The process of creating categories of codes focused on grouping codes with similar content, grouping codes that appeared to belong together, and grouping codes with shared meaning relating to the research questions. For example, the codes "teaching children," "better education," "improve opportunities for the kids," and "stay out of crime" belong together because they are similar. These codes were grouped together and assigned the category "education importance" because the text the codes refer to were related to the importance of education for the community. A category label was also created for each set of similar codes.

This step helped organize similar codes based on shared characteristics where categories were the foundation for detecting patterns and identifying themes from the data. Creating categories helped identify a bigger picture of the data into a more meaningful analysis (Miles et al., 2020). This step helped condense the codes into a smaller number of categories, helped me focus on key aspects of the data, expanded the understanding of the data, and laid the groundwork for themes to surface (Miles et al., 2020).

After all the codes were categorized, the categories were revised and examined for similarities. If similarities were found the categories were combined to form one higher-level category. For example, the categories "face-to-face discussions" and "messaging on email" were combined to form a higher-level category of "communication" because this helped group similar categories. This consolidation of similar categories resulted in a smaller number of categories. The categories were organized using a creative coding tool in MAXQDA (Figure 33).

Figure 33***Creating Categories and Higher-Level Categories***

Note. The figure illustrates the MAXQDA creative coding process where similar codes from the data were combined to create categories and higher-level categories.

Grouping Categories to Generate Themes

Next, similar categories were grouped together to create themes (Saldaña, 2016).

Themes are usually a phrase or sentence that defines the piece of data (Miles et al., 2020). I identified sets of categories that might be meaningfully associated in an overarching theme (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Themes provided insightful description of the data and contributed to answering the research question.

Grouping of the categories was assisted through analytic memo writing. As emphasized by Saldaña (2016) “It is memo-writing that is the engine of grounded theory, not coding” (p. 55). The analytic memo helped expand the synthesizing significance of the codes and categories (Saldaña, 2016). This created a higher analytic understating of the data with clarity that helped develop themes. Analytic memo-writing was a process of grounded theory methodology of coding and interpretation that moved raw data into findings. The summaries and themes from

the interviews, photos, and other documents reflected the stakeholders' data. The memos helped me understand the storyline of the data and reflected on the thinking process associated with tying together different data pieces (Miles et al., 2020).

A table of higher-level categories with memos was written alongside each category and created in MAXQDA. Through my understanding of the research questions and deep reflection on the concepts observed in the data, I combined categories to create themes. Table 6 illustrates the themes identified through the combination of categories. Once the themes were identified the next step was to apply the themes to the research questions in Chapter 5.

Table 6

Emerged Findings With Related Higher-Level Categories

Findings/Themes	Higher-Level Categories
Motivation for School	New pride; I want to learn; Motivates us; Child feels positive in the classroom; Priority for everybody; Future is bright; Feeling rewarded
Safe Learning Environment	Enhances stability; Do not have to worry as much; Complex environment; Crime; Criminal element; Security; Central America
Creates Opportunities	Maximum impact; Increases education; For the kids; Educational opportunities; Improves environment; Preparing us for the future; Investment in the children is an investment in the community
Grows the Community	Community is growing; Increases stakeholders; Community contributes; Collaborative work; Business and community connection; Community growth
Partners are Needed	Help them develop; Humanitarian assistance; Not every organization can do everything; Donor groups complete the school; Government assistance; Helping partners; Project paused
Schools Cost Money	Funding; School got little help from parents; Education is expensive; Education takes money
Communication is Key	Communication; Communication piece; changes to improve business processes

Note. The above table illustrates themes that were generated from categories and higher-level categories.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the analysis of data collected through interviews, photographs, and documents. Participants were assigned codes, P1 to P20, and were referred to as such in all documentation of the study. Photographs used in the study were labeled Photo 1 to Photo 4 and documents were labeled Document 1 to Document 4.

Finding 1: “Motivation for School” Theme

This emerged theme pertained to the way the participants felt about the new school building process. A strong consensus emerged among participants that the new school building created motivation for school attendance and pride among individuals and the community. Participants wanted to be part of something new and successful. Figure 34 demonstrated the ways the new school increased the stakeholders’ motivation for school.

Figure 34

“Motivation for School” Theme and Supporting Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Motivation for School” theme.

P19 (Teacher) stated how the children have a new found pride for the school:

For me, it means that the children will feel more prestigious in a more modernized building. It's new, and it encourages them to be more present at school, to be more involved, and they will feel that they belong to a better environment other than the one [school] they have been having before.

Participants indicated that many factors influence how the new school building is viewed. Some said it made them feel happy to be in the new classroom, and because of this, the children are more likely to attend class. P15 (Ministry of Education 2) explained:

So, when they're here in this newly constructed building, they feel happy. That means they're able to learn and accept more of what the teacher is saying. It reduces the stress for the teachers. So, they are able to impact the students a little bit more because they feel happy. They'll be within these four walls and then, they come to school more regularly.

Participants also identified that the new school had classrooms that were furnished to accommodate age-appropriate learning that motivated them to go to school. P13 (Community Leader) explained that education leaders should be motivational examples:

I think what educational leaders should know is that they are there to enhance the capabilities of students; to give them more than just day-to-day teaching, you know? They should be examples, they should be motivation, and they should be the example for the students.

Another participant stated the importance of motivation to do your best to improve the community. P20 (Teacher) said:

For me, it's a sign of hope, hope of new enrollment, hope of higher attendance, hope of better achievement. Not only for students but for us as teachers. Maybe being in a modernized classroom will motivate us to do our best and to build that extra mile as the sponsors of this project have done.

Being motivated to attend school was evident. Due to the new school, the students wanted to be part of something new in their community and had a new drive for learning (Figure 35).

Figure 35*New School Furnishings*

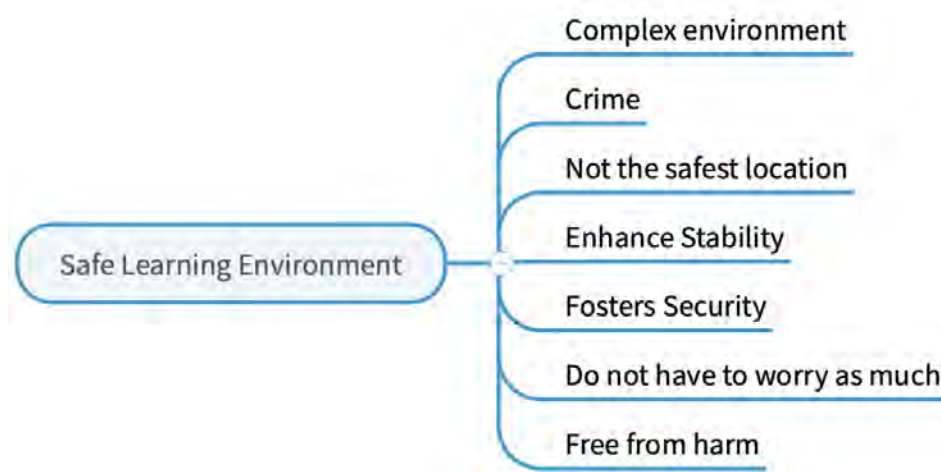
Note. The teachers stated they were excited and look forward to using the new school furnishings.

Finding 2: “Safe Learning Environment” Theme

Many of the participants stated that the new school process made them feel safer. P9 (U.S. Embassy) stated that, “Some of the locations they build these places [schools] are not the safest locations. There are times you’re in areas where you drive through that are questionable.” Another participant, P1 (NGO Health Professional) noted, “I mean, there are some areas in Central America, in particular, that are fairly dangerous because of the narco trafficking and crime and criminal gang activities...” Figure 36 shows the different areas that stakeholders felt increased a safe learning environment.

Figure 36

The “Safe Learning Environment” Theme and Supporting Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Safe Learning Environment” theme.

Crime has an immense economic and social cost to society. Participants know they live in a dangerous area, but many have said the school created a safer environment for learning. P1 (NGO Health Professional) supported how the school contributes to the community feeling safer by explaining, “They can own businesses, they can go to work, they have a set income, they don't have, and by sort of creating that secure environment within the community, you develop a sort of a sense of community. P15 (Ministry of Education 2) notes how the school creates an environment where children do not have to worry as much:

But the thing is, when the military comes in, normally they do [only] the structure. It doesn't come with all the chairs and everything that is required for a classroom. So I was happy afterwards to be assisted by donor groups, that they were going to come in and donate the furniture that was also needed at this school, you know, for us to have full classrooms of complete bathrooms, not only a building, in reality, we have children going to be able to come in and do work without having to worry.

The school created an environment for learning. P11 (Parent) described the created learning environment by stating, “And they're getting educated, they're learning to speak proper

English. They're learning to write; they're learning to read. You know, it's a lot of things that my daughter is learning." P13 (Community Leader) uses a metaphor that supports the safe learning environment theme by explaining it is a shelter against ignorance, "[The school is] like a shelter. Yeah. Like a shelter, but more than anything else, it's a shelter against ignorance."

Having a safe learning environment was mentioned in many of the participant interviews. Many mentioned that they feel safer because of the new school building (Figure 37 and 38). P14 (Ministry of Education 1) stated that parents feel that their children are safer now by stating, "Pride and ownership that appreciation you find... Well, when you come into the classroom as a parent and we welcome them in here, and they see, wow, this is where my child is so well."

Figure 37

Old Learning Environment



Note. The old school in Corozal, Belize that was replaced by the new three classroom school.

Figure 38*New Learning Environment*

Note. The newly built school in Corozal, Belize. Stakeholders stated they feel much safer in this new building.

Building a safer community is in the best interest for all stakeholders. Numerous participants stated that we are friends and neighbors, bound together by shared values and a shared stake in our common future. P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM) expands on increasing safety by stating:

The overall goal is to foster security, enhance stability, and enable prosperity in the region. And that's important because it's a different mission than what USAID has, which is more focused on development in the region. So, this is a DOD mission that we share with our NFE [Non-Federal Entity] partners for security, stability, and prosperity.

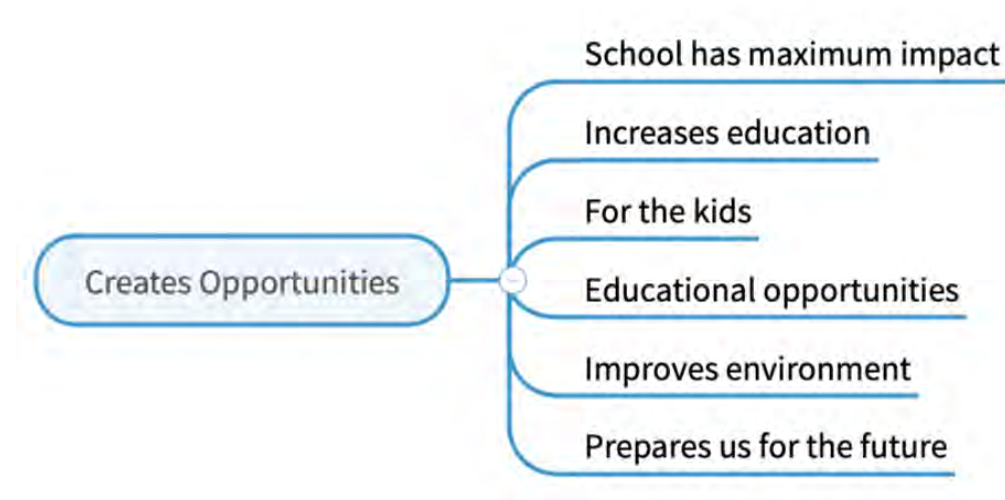
Finding 3: “Creates Opportunities” Theme

Many say that those who learn to think can create rewards and opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities (Crawford, 2012). Educational systems help create opportunities, while at the same time role models, teachers, and peers introduce

students to new opportunities. Figure 39 illustrates the stakeholders feelings on how the new school created opportunities.

Figure 39

The “Creates Opportunities” Theme and Supporting Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Creates Opportunities” theme.

Those in positions of influence, such as role models and teachers, can introduce fresh opportunities that contribute to personal development, social cohesion, and economic growth (Bray et al., 2014). Participant P1 (NGO Health Professional) explained that many local people feel they do not have opportunities:

I heard it a lot from the locals that they don't want to live in fear of criminals. They don't want to feel the need to pack up and leave because there's no opportunities or because crime is so bad, where they have to travel somewhere or even worse yet, feel that they need to get into a caravan and travel thousands of miles to get stopped at the U.S. border. And then, held up, and all of the danger that goes in that travel, from the people who take advantage of the travelers, either through other criminal activities or through assaults and stuff like that.

Participant P1 (NGO Health Professional) continued to state the importance of education and how it helped people realize the opportunities they have:

Having spent a lot of time in Central America, South America, and Latin America, talking with their leaders and stuff, you sense their understanding of the importance of education, the importance in terms not only of making productive citizens, but in helping kids stay out of crime, stay out of drugs. And as they become productive citizens, it's the idea of them being invested in their communities and wanting to stay there and better their communities, as opposed to wanting to go somewhere else because of lack of opportunity and stuff like that. So, I think that building schools is really an important step in helping some of these local populations in sort of becoming self-sufficient and sort of realizing their opportunities.

Many children from lower socio-economic backgrounds from Central America are prevented from having the opportunities to attend school due to the cost of education (August, 2012). This was seen first-hand during the research. P1 (NGO Health Professional) supported how lack of opportunities, before the new school, contributed to possible crime, "...because right now the only opportunities you have are through crime. We see it in some of our inner cities too. When you don't have job opportunities, you're going to look where you can make easy money. And criminal enterprises are usually a way to make easy money."

Many participants at the local level stated that they had difficulty affording school, possibly limiting opportunities. P11 (Parent) explained:

The best thing you could give the students, the children, or a country like ours, if education could have been free. I think that would have been better because see, since education is so expensive, parents can't afford to send their children to school. Parents have to go to work and these teenagers stay at home. What will they do at home alone? They will go out in the streets and then start hanging out with different people and then getting into trouble and all that stuff. And if school is free, then you will go to school. You know, maybe, maybe you would, maybe you wouldn't pay too much attention in school if you don't want to be educated, but at least you will learn something by just being sent to school.

The same participant P11 (Parent) continued to state how the new school created opportunities:

It will benefit them because they'll have a better job when they grow up, you know, they won't have a temporary job like us, that don't have an education. You know, we have to be like doing our job is hard. I won't say that chopping a yard or building a house is hard work. It's just a job. But then they would probably, if you get into [advance schooling], you will have a full-time job, you know?

Another parent said that education would be much better with appropriate classrooms that are furnished. P16 (Parent) stated:

That would be awesome because you know, [you] can be better, much better here. Education would be much better, if we get chairs, tables, to the school for them, more children can be in the classroom, you can have more children going to school.

Education helps people achieve their dreams and goals and is an essential part of understanding the world in which we live (Crawford, 2012). Many of the participants agree that the new school brought increased opportunities to the community and voiced their opinions through the interviews. P11 (Parent) stated that school increased opportunities for his daughter, “I only went to primary school. She has 4 more years in school than I. So, she's definitely going there where I didn't go.” Education can be the foundation for greater opportunities, greater rewards, and a greater contribution to society. It is a vital platform to a fairer, more equitable world where children are empowered to achieve their full potential (Figure 40).

Figure 40

Creates Opportunities



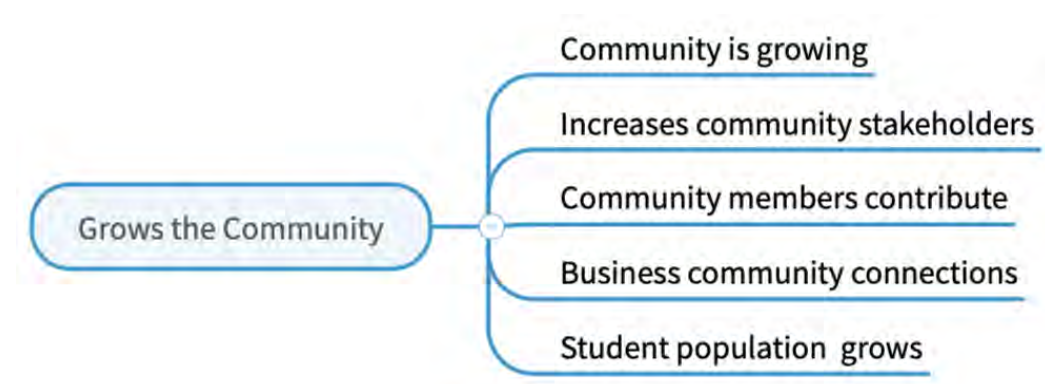
Note. Many stakeholders believe that the children sitting in these chairs and going to the new school will have more future opportunities.

Finding 4: “Grows the Community” Theme

Education can produce meaningful social benefits and those who have a better understanding of their community have more to give back. Education helps develop individuals to become productive members of society (Crawford, 2012). Figure 41 illustrates the many ways higher-level categories supported the “Grows the Community” theme.

Figure 41

The “Grows the Community” Theme and Supporting Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Grows the Community” theme.

Participants shared their experiences that the new school caused the community to grow and members of the community wanted to contribute more. This point of view was crystallized by P15 (Ministry of Education 2):

I think [this new school] positively impacted the community because when it was constructed, you could have regularly seen parents coming more to the school and things like that... I think it brought the community closer to the school. So, it impacted there. I think here in this school, the community school, where their actual children go. So, they have that positive way of looking at the school, which creates a positive impact between community and school. It brings that we're in this together.

Another participant, P14 (Ministry of Education 1), explained the importance of the community parents being involved with fundraising events and helping with improvements:

When we have fundraisers, when we are doing things to improve the school, when we are doing over time, based on different things, you see the parents want to participate. They want to take part in what improvements we're doing.

P18 (principal) also expressed how the school brought the community together:

I can also tell you that since I came here, what was said to me prior before really knowing the community and the people was that the school got little help from the parents to almost no help. And I spoke to my parents at the beginning on a one-to-one basis. Then on little groups, I did home visits and as recent as a month and a half, I had a meeting with the parents where almost three fourth of the parent population came out and they were very positive on the things we shared with them to the fact that now they are helping us with cleaning of the yard with for the vegetation, they're going full force, they are contributing towards a meal for us to provide to the visitors, to the guests, and the children.

Figure 42

It Takes a Community



Note. The new sign “Welcome to the Beautiful Village of San Antonio” is an example of the community's growth upon completion of the new school. The sign was refurbished by the community during the new school building process.

Organizations coming together for a common goal created synergy among local and international stakeholders that grew the community. P7 (International NGO), had this perspective on how the community grows with the new school (Figure 42):

It makes me feel satisfied. It makes me feel hopeful. Seeing all these different organizations come together for the common good. It's tremendously rewarding to be a part of and see the faces of these children who just want to be happy and learn and watch the effect that it can have on their local community. When the parents see that

other people care and we come from a different country, but we're showing them that we care about them.

Finding 5: “Partners are Needed” Theme

Many organizations provide a specific need and a project this complex takes a whole society approach to find solutions. In this project, it took local, national, and international governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and academia with a shared interest to complete the project. Figure 43 shows additional unique ways the stakeholders’ supported how partners were needed.

Figure 43

The “Partners are Needed” Theme and Supporting Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Partners are Needed” theme.

P7 (International NGO) explained how helping partners come together:

I find the process tremendously rewarding. So many people come together for the good of these children. It's a tremendous sight to see when the project gets completed and I think the way to improve it would be continued support from communities and partners.

Another participant stated that not every organization can do everything and the need for a wide variety of participants are required to complete the project. P8 (International NGO) said that many participants are required (Figure 44):

I think not every organization can do everything. So, when those buildings are built, there are many other needs. So, some other partner, if they can come and provide some other things, if they can meet other needs, I think it will be good.

Figure 44

A Variety of Partners are Needed



Note. Building and completing the school required numerous stakeholders from the local, national, and international community. The photograph above illustrates local builders, the Ministry of Education, and International NGO partners communicating on the project.

Participants said they understand it takes other stakeholders who provide specific resources to finish the project. For instance, P15 (Ministry of Education) stated that without other stakeholders, the project would not be fully finished:

When the military comes in, normally they don't do the infrastructure. It doesn't come with all the inside, the chairs and everything that is required for a classroom. So I was happy afterwards, to hear from the U.S. government that they were to be assisted by donor groups, that they were going to come in and donate the furniture that was needed at this school. For us to have full classrooms or complete classrooms, not only the building. We have children and teacher's going to be able to come in and do work without having to worry.

P18 (Principle) states that relationships with partners are vital to the project:

We could have only accomplished that through good relationships between our community partners, our helping partners, our staff, and our families, because our staff really goes beyond the call of duty. And, I know we were not united at the beginning, but now, I can see my staff is behind me in whatever I do.

Finding 6: “Schools Cost Money” Theme

In addition to necessary partnerships, a project of this magnitude undoubtedly requires considerable funding. It takes money to build and sustain schools, and without financial support this project would not be possible. Many scholars say that more money should be spent on education (Machin et al., 2011). Figure 45 displays how the data supported the “Schools Cost Money” theme.

It takes a team of parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGO stakeholders to construct and sustain a new school. At the local level, the parents say school is expensive. P17 (Parent) states, “... I would like them to provide the schoolbooks, the textbook, because some cannot afford that. It's very expensive. So, I would say to have them have their school books here so they can use them.” P11 (Parent) agreed by explaining:

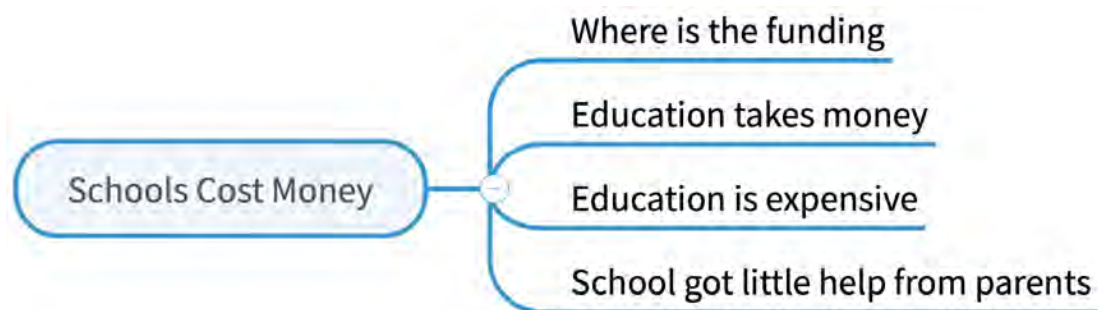
For example, education is very expensive, especially for my 15-year-old daughter... Just for registration for the year is BZ\$375. And then if you don't have a laptop, the school rents you one for BZ\$120 a year. But good thing, my daughter has one, so we don't have to rent, but the registration fee is like [expensive], and then the books you know.

It takes money to sustain a school and many times it is difficult to find support. Another participant, P18 (Principal) noted the importance of funding:

I encountered a school with little finance, a school that needed a lot of upkeep in the compound, in the buildings. But so far, with friends like you all, and family, and the community, we have been able to have the building as whole. The compound is really as we have it now.

Figure 45

The “Schools Cost Money” Theme and Supporting by Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Schools Cost Money” theme.

Another participant brings up the point that those who control the funding can control the outcomes. P15 (Ministry of Education) explained:

Well, one of the things that I noticed that they have started a little bit is the input from the local community, because at one time, when it was planned, this was planned, this was everything from outside. And a lot of the materials came from the U.S. making this case, but then little by little, now they're taking consideration of the local community things that can be gotten or sourced locally so that things can be replaced from within the country... The furniture you'll notice that these donations are actually made from within the country, so it can be repaired with our lumber. And those things allow for the school to be able to use it for longer, because then they can repair them as something starts getting loose, then they can repair them.

An international NGO participant stated finding money to get to the location where it is needed is challenging. P7 (International NGO) stated:

It's very challenging. Getting to the locations is a challenge; they're usually quite remote which is where the greatest need is. The fundraising challenges of having appropriate money to be able to complete the projects can be challenging. And this year with COVID, I think just completing the projects without the ability to travel internationally has been a tremendous difficulty.

Organizations who are making contributions to the project need to do their due diligence to make sure the proper funding goes to where it is needed most and waste is prevented

(Figure 46). Through proper funding the success rate of the project increases. P1 (NGO Health Professional) agreed and noted:

What could leaders do to improve the process again? I think it's having transparency and clarity, understanding that when we make a certain donation or when we provide a certain amount of money for a certain process to be done, for example, the building of the desks, making sure that that is used entirely for its purpose, that there's no little cuts being taken here and there.

Figure 46

Schools Cost Money



Note. Building and completing the school required numerous stakeholders from the local, national, and international community to provide resources directly or indirectly to complete the project.

Finding 7: “Communication is Key” Theme

Effective communication required all participants to engage in conversations that facilitated the development of relationships to meet an objective (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). The organizations involved in the school building process were from the local, national, and international levels from numerous countries with unique cultures. Many had their own jargon,

acronyms, and used words influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Figure 47 depicts some of the different points of view on communication from the stakeholders' voices.

Figure 47

The “Communication is Key” Theme and Supporting Higher-Level Categories



Note. Higher-level categories that emerged from the data analysis coding process. These categories support the “Communication is Key” theme.

Many of the participants agreed that communication plays a big part in the school building process. One participant was upset because he did not receive any communication on the status of the project that was moved or canceled due to COVID-19. P12 (Principal) needed to make decisions that cost money:

I say up to now, present day today, I have not gotten an email or any kind of information. We're going to do this or we're not going to do this. Yeah. Because you need to make decisions based on that.

When communication is not clear, miscommunication often happens. P12 (Principle) explained that when COVID-19 started almost all communication regarding the project stopped, creating confusion:

And I think, the communication stopped, should I start all over again, maybe it's too early to decide that, or maybe they might be waiting for a little longer. Right... I really don't have no idea. We don't know when we're going to find out and they cannot tell.

P1 (NGO Health Professional) gave an example of how effective communication was started with others during the project. He explained the importance of meeting face-to-face which provided a clearer message:

I'm a big believer in initial contact, either through phone or through email to get the base started. It's really important to sit down and meet with the people face-to-face, whether it's the ministry of health, the local ministry of health, the principals at the school. It's that ability to sit down with them and provide a face and talk to them and let them know that this is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it. This is what you can expect. And that allows us to reach back. And when we get asked questions. These are the expectations; this is what we want to provide.

One participant stated that his organization tried to put out as much communication as possible. His organization has a dedicated staff to help promote communication to a broader audience. P9 (U.S. Embassy) noted, "We get TV, [social] media involved, and get the newspapers, as a full approach to get the information out there nationally and regionally, because they're going to show the [project] in the paper..." P1 (NGO Health Professional) explained the importance of delivering messages clearly to prevent misunderstandings and decrease the potential for conflict:

We have a clear strategy of what we want to do, how we want to do it, what we need to do to get there and make sure that all of the stakeholders involved are read in on that process. It's a lot of verbal communication, a lot of messaging, or email, and through social media, but also personal face-to-face discussion with people to make sure that we're all understanding the process that we're coming up with, a unified expectation... We all have the same expectation of what we're going to get so that there isn't any miscommunication, so that there isn't any misunderstanding, so that there aren't any hurt feelings when somebody maybe was expecting something and didn't get it.

Communication is one of the most important aspects in building a new school. Good communication skills are essential (Figure 48):

Figure 48*Communication Among Various Stakeholders*

Note. Stakeholders communicating at lunch in-person to increase the accuracy of information. Communication at the local, national, and international levels are essential between stakeholders who are focused on a shared interest.

Findings Summary

This chapter reported on the findings of this qualitative action research study based on the analysis of interviews, photographs, and documents. To answer each research question, data was gathered from three different sources. The first data source was from semi-structured interviews of 20 stakeholders who were involved with the school building process. The second data source was from photographs taken at the research site. The third data source was from documents relating to the school building process. The triangulation of data from these three sources were compared and contrasted. The three sources permitted the triangulation of data that improved the trustworthiness of the research (Yin, 2014).

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data using the grounded theory method. The three data sources of interviews, photographs, and documents were analyzed, and codes emerged from the data. The data analysis procedures were framed in four steps to better understand the research questions. The four steps were (a) identifying codes in the data, (b) creating categories of codes, (c) reviewing the categories and synthesizing them to generate themes through analytic memoing, and (d) applying the emerging themes to the study. The analysis identified over 600 codes that were grouped into 30-35 categories that were supported from the data. The categories were synthesized to develop seven themes that emerged from the research data as the findings: (a) Motivation for School, (b) Safe Learning Environment, (c) Creates Opportunities, (d) Grows the Community, (e) Partners are Needed, (f) Schools Cost Money, and (g) Communication is Key. In Chapter 5, the seven themes are applied to the research questions and goes into detail interpreting and stating the significance of the findings.

Chapter 5. The Value of the Findings

Introduction

Schools are being built in remote areas throughout Latin America under a Department of Defense humanitarian program. This program builds schools to increase educational opportunities in remote areas. The humanitarian assistance program was an appropriate venue for an action research study. I followed my nonprofit organization to obtain a deeper insight on how stakeholders understood the significance of building a new school. The research participants included parents, school faculty, community leaders, and international stakeholders of the school building process. This action research study was designed to help stakeholders better understand and improve the school building process. The research data was collected from key stakeholders through interviews, documents, and photos (Leavy, 2017; Stringer, 2014). The collected data was analyzed using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2020).

This study addressed the problem that it was unknown how stakeholders involved in the building of a new school understood the significance of the project and to my knowledge, no similar study has been conducted. This research will help local, national, and international stakeholders better understand the significance of the new school to improve the process in the future and included the following research questions:

1. How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?
2. From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?
3. From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?

This chapter focused on the interpretation and significance of the emerging themes from Chapter 4 (Appendix G - Consistency Chart of Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions). The

themes were synthesized through literature, theories, and reflected on and expanded the interpretations of the findings. This chapter also elaborated on the practical application of the study and recommendations for future research are introduced.

Research Summary

The DOD humanitarian assistance program builds schools to increase educational opportunities in remote areas. However, no one is tracking the stakeholders' points of view on the significance of the new schools. The overall purpose of this study was designed to help local, national, and international stakeholders better understand the significance of building a new school. Specifically, this qualitative action research study was designed to help community and international stakeholders improve the process in Corozal, Belize. This study followed an international non-profit organization, Global Aid Consultants, and stakeholders through the new school building process. Data was collected through interviews, photographs, and documents. The collected data was analyzed based on grounded theory using a thematic approach (Charmaz, 2014; Miles et al., 2020).

The literature review in this study was used to better understand the importance of education, how education relates to crime, and how education promotes development. Literature suggests that education helps people achieve their dreams and goals, and is an essential part of understanding the world in which we live (Crawford, 2012). Education helps develop individuals to become productive members of society and those who learn from education can create rewards and opportunities for themselves, their families, and their communities. Moreover, education increases the individual's earning potential, and the person who earns more, can usually contribute more economically to society (Bickmore et al., 2017). Many scholars believe that schooling (a) produces a modern and productive citizen (for economic growth), (b) helps create a workforce for new industries (social development), and (c)

creates citizens who identify with the nation-state (political development) (Bickmore et al., 2017).

The idea that education decreases crime with the hope of increasing security in an area is the foremost reason DOD and DOS implement a humanitarian assistance project. As a result, crime and education are integral parts of this study. According to Machin et al. (2011), crime is significantly related to lack of education and opportunities. Hjalmarsson and Lochner (2012) stated that education is a human capital investment that increases future work opportunities. Reduction of crime can be related to an increase in available opportunities (Edwards & Gill, 2002). For example, if a child's available opportunities increase as a result of education, the chances of that child participating in criminal activities will likely decrease.

The overall methodology used to best support this research was qualitative.

Qualitative methods are useful for understanding and explaining individuals' experiences as they happen (Leavy, 2017; Stringer, 2014). Qualitative methods are appropriate for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomena from personal experiences (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The research design was centered on action research. Action research is qualitative research that seeks to understand complex social dynamics (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Stringer (2014) explained that, "Action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (p. 1).

The research data was collected from three different sources. The first data source was from semi-structured interviews of stakeholders who were involved with the school building process. The second data source was from photographs taken at the research site, and the third data source was from documents relating to the school building process. Saldaña's (2016) thematic analysis approach was used to discover themes from the data

related to the stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of the new school. The data analysis procedures were framed in four steps: (a) identifying codes in the data, (b) creating categories of codes, (c) reviewing the categories and synthesizing them to generate themes, and (d) applying the emerging themes to the study.

A sampling of 20 adults from the new school building stakeholders, including parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGOs, were asked to share their experiences about the new school. For a qualitative study, Saldaña (2016) stated that 15 participants could support a grounded theory method. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggested that a minimum of 10 participant interviews with detailed coding are necessary when using the grounded theory method. Enough data must be collected to support the core coding categories and obtain research saturation (Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2016). The final sample size in this research was large enough to describe the process of building a new school without collecting repetitive data.

Through in-person interviews and video interviews, stakeholders shared their experiences and thoughts about the new school. The interviews were conducted at various locations where the participants felt comfortable. When conducting interviews in Belize and due to cultural differences, I took additional time with each interview. An interview protocol process was used to keep focused on the research questions. During interviews, I asked questions slowly, giving the participants time to reflect on their answers. I was also careful not to speak more than necessary to prevent skewing the interview.

After the interview data was collected; the data was transcribed and coded (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Voice recordings were transcribed into text using Temi speech to text recognition software (Temi, 2022). After Temi transcribed the speech into text transcripts, the data was cleaned up and imported into MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2022). MAXQDA is a

computer assisted qualitative data analysis software that helps organize the data. A thematic four-step process that identified codes from the data, categorized related codes, developed themes from the categories, and applied the themes to the research question from Saldaña (2016) was used to analyze the interviews, photographs, and documents.

Repeated ideas and concepts were tagged with descriptive or in vivo codes. Codes are labels that assign representative meaning to the data collected from the research (Miles et al., 2020). Descriptive coding summarizes a passage of qualitative data in a word or phrase and in vivo coding uses a word or a phrase contained in the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Codes from the three data sources were combined and the next step was to look for patterns in the codes with common meanings. The codes were grouped into categories with similar meanings, which helped condense the codes. The smaller number of categories helped focus on key aspects of the data.

Similar categories were grouped together to create themes (Saldaña, 2016). Themes are usually a phrase or sentence that defines the piece of data (Miles et al., 2020). The grounded theory method helped identify common themes that emerged (Saldaña, 2016). I identified 30 to 35 sets of categories that might be meaningfully associated in an overarching theme. Themes provided insightful description of the data and contributed to answering the research questions. The following seven themes emerged as findings from the data: (a) Motivation for School, (b) Safe Learning Environment, (c) Creates Opportunities, (d) Grows the Community, (e) Partners are Needed, (f) Schools Cost Money, and (e) Communication is Key.

Throughout this research, steps were taken to establish a higher degree of confidence in the findings. Anney (2014) identified four key criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of a qualitative study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Trustworthiness was a constant focus throughout the study. To increase trustworthiness, I

converged my data and findings through triangulation. Interviews, photographs, and document data sources converged on common themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The triangulation of data from these three sources were compared and contrasted.

Another trustworthiness method used was transcript checking. Participants were given a copy of their interview transcripts to verify that the transcript accurately reflected their responses. Member checking was another technique used to support the study's trustworthiness. Member checking was conducted when findings from interviews were reported back to the participants to ensure they were accurately represented (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using thick descriptions was another method for checking trustworthiness. Thick descriptions involved using detailed descriptions of the setting and numerous perspectives about the themes found in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research bias was considered and mitigated as much as possible through the participant selection, understanding my worldviews, and understanding the research culture setting. The next step in my research process was to synthesize the findings with the research questions that they helped answer.

Synthesizing the Findings with the Research Questions

The purpose of this action research study was to help stakeholders better understand the significance of building a new school and improve the process. The rationale for this study was to gain a better understanding of the new school building process and impact on the local community, through the voices of the stakeholders. A total of 20 stakeholders participated in this study contributing data through interviews. Photographs were taken at the remote research site, and additional data was collected from documents containing pertinent information to help answer the research questions. After careful analysis of the data collected from three sources in this study, seven major themes emerged that addressed the three research questions. This

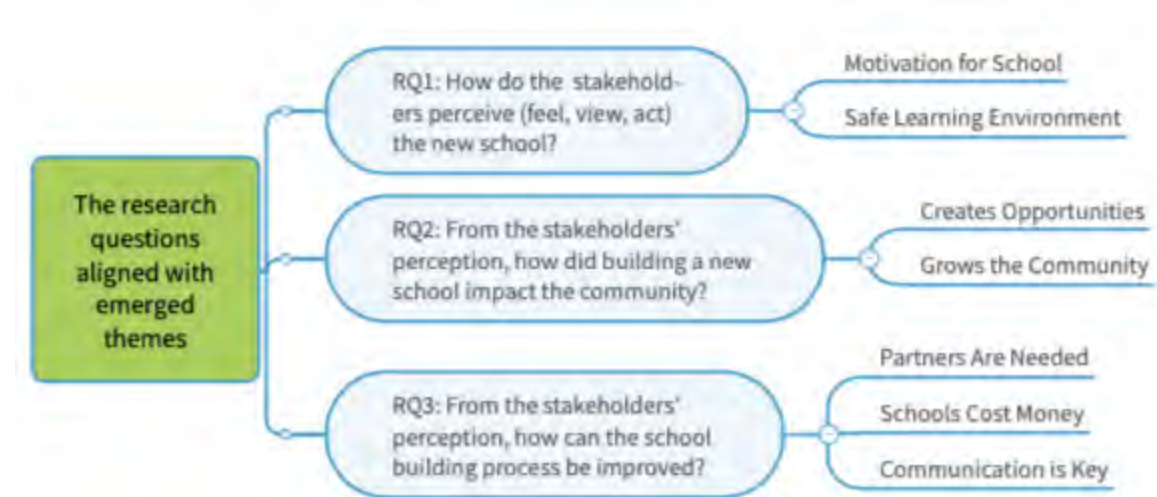
section reports the interpretation and significance of the findings by keeping the voice of the participants in the forefront of the study.

In this research, grounded theory was a valuable tool that helped extract meaningful information from data and helped me focus on the emerging themes and their significance to the study. In this step of the research process, I applied the emerged themes to the research questions that they answered. A thematic approach was used to construct meaning from the data and relate the findings to the research questions. Findings generated through themes and categories entrenched in the data answered the research questions. I sought commonalities among the themes relevant to the research question and a matrix was created in MAXQDA to reflect the themes. The emerging themes were applied to one of the three research questions they helped answer.

The themes of (a) “Motivation for School” and (b) “Safe Learning Environment” were found to be logically tied to the first research question: How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school? Next, the following themes emerged from the data: (a) “Creates Opportunities,” and (b) “Grows the Community.” These helped answer the second research question: From the stakeholders’ perception, how did building a new school impact the community? Three more themes emerged from the data to address the last research question: From the stakeholders’ perception, how can the school building process be improved? The themes were (a) “Partners are Needed,” (b) “Schools Cost Money,” and (c) “Communication is Key.” Figure 49 illustrates the seven emerging themes from the thematic data analysis applied to each research question of the study that they answered.

Figure 49

Emerged Themes Applied to the Research Questions



Note. The above figure illustrates the seven findings logically linked to one of the three research questions they helped answer.

Research Question 1 Discussion

The first research question of the study was: “How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?” This research question was necessary to explore how the stakeholders felt about the new school in their community. The data analysis revealed two major findings that helped answer this research question, which were “Motivation for School,” and “Safe Learning Environment.” The participants agreed that having “Motivation for School” develops new pride and creates a learning environment where the future is bright for the community. The “Safe Learning Environment” theme is focused on being physically safe in a new building, which fosters positive relationships between staff and students, and encourages community involvement. Table 7 illustrates the findings, interpretations, and significance of “Motivation for School” and “Safe Learning Environment” themes that are logically tied to each other and help answer Research Question 1.

Table 7*Research Question 1 Themes, Interpretations, and Significance Matrix*

How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?		
Findings/Themes	Interpretations	Significance
Motivation for School Many participants indicated that their motivation to be involved with the new school increased.	· People are motivated to be involved with something new. · People are proud to use the new school. · People want to be involved with something successful. · The new school creates “happiness” throughout the community.	The school is a beacon for the community that stretches beyond today's boundaries.
Safe Learning Environment The majority of participants indicated that the new school made them feel safer.	· The new school building created an environment where people felt safer. · The new school structure was stronger than the previous building.	Even though it was built as a school building, the structure provided many more avenues of safety from weather, storage security, bugs, and overall feeling of being safe.

Note. This table tracks how findings, interpretations, and significance are logically tied to support Research Question 1.

“Motivation for School” Interpretation and Significance

This emerged finding related to the motivation people have to be involved with the new school. Research participants indicated that community members felt positive about the new school and wanted to contribute to the project. This impacted the community positively through increased motivation to be involved.

Interpretation of the “Motivation for School” Theme. This theme related to the critical role motivation played when given the option to participate in school. As outlined in the literature review, education helps develop individuals to become productive members of society (Crawford, 2012). Many children in Central America, and especially in Belize, are not motivated to attend school because the school environment is not available. Additionally, attending school

may mean time spent away from the labor market. Parents need their children to work as soon as possible to help support the family. Furthermore, some families cannot afford school expenses or the economic burden of having their children attend school.

Families attempt to overcome these obstacles and having the motivation to go to school helps. P15 (Ministry of Education 2) explained, “Now, you know, they have that pride. They want to go now to see what is happening.” The new school created interest for many, but the community must have the motivation to use the school appropriately. In the “Motivation for School” theme, participants made statements about local residents being excited about the new school and looking forward to attending. The community was proud of the new school and wanted to be part of something successful. “I feel like the students really take ownership of the building, [and] that ownership takes care of the classrooms,” said P14 (Ministry of Education 1). This ownership creates motivation to be part of the new school. Moreover, the new school created a feeling of hope and a feeling of happiness throughout the community. P15 (Ministry of Education 2) expands on the impact of the school:

It impacts a little bit more, that community spirit, that it builds the achievement of our children. So, they're [children] feeling a lot better in school. So, the pride that they built is within us, the morale that it builds is within the staff, you can see that now.

The parents, teachers, and other stakeholders are an important part of being motivated to attend school because they are often role models in the community. They decide if their children attend or how important attendance is to the community. Parents, practitioners, and policy makers play a key part in education (Bray et al., 2014). Many times, role models motivate students to go to school, especially if the role model enjoys what they are doing. P14 (Ministry of Education 1) said, “...I love what I do...” Role models and mentors help guide students into obtaining a formal education and many learn from mentors and leaders in the community.

Significance of the “Motivation for School” Theme. Being “Motivated for School” is significant because it is the catalyst for learning. Deci and Ryan's (2012) Self-determination Theory of Motivation suggests that behavior is positively impacted when a person possesses what they refer to as an autonomous motivation type. Guay et al. (2008) explain, "the more students endorse autonomous forms of motivation, the higher their grades are, the more they persist, the better they learn, and the more they are satisfied and experience positive emotions at school" (p. 237). For the new school to be successful, children need to be motivated to attend. Many of us grew up in different areas around the world and still find similarities in the motivation to participate in school. I grew up in an environment where the classrooms were furnished with educational materials and infrastructure to support education. Because of my environment, I was motivated to engage in education that made me proud.

Cultural factors influence many aspects of education. Culture can include shared values and meanings common to members of a group where actions and ideas are learned (Bray et al., 2014). My culture provided me with the motivation to continue and pursue education. Culture is complex and difficult to understand (Bray et al., 2014). It is not only important to have the motivation from culture to learn and grow, but one must have access to an environment that promotes learning. In my observation, the new school building created a feeling of happiness from pride in the community that motivated people to use the school.

Being motivated to pursue individual goals and believing in ourselves is essential. Having the motivation for education can produce meaningful social benefits, and those who have a better understanding of their community will have more to give back. Bickmore et al. (2017), supported this by stating that schooling produces a modern and productive citizen that is essential for economic growth.

“Safe Learning Environment” Interpretation and Significance

A person must be motivated to learn but the environment has to be available. It is important to have the infrastructure to support a safe learning environment. Many of the participants agreed that the new school made them feel safer. This safe learning environment is not only a physically safe building, but fosters learning and creates positive relationships between the school and community due to feeling safer.

Interpretation of the “Safe Learning Environment” Theme. Belize is a complex environment where crime has an immense economic and social cost to society. In addition, SOUTHCOM Strategy (2019) stated, “The strengths and opportunities of our hemisphere are set against a complex array of threats and challenges” (p. 2). This can be seen first-hand in remote areas, as P9 (U.S. Embassy) explained, “Some of the locations they build these [schools] are not the safest locations.” Another participant, P1 (NGO Health Professional) noted, “I mean, there are some areas in Central America in particular that are fairly dangerous because of the narcotrafficking and crime and criminal gang activities...” P7 (International NGO) expanded on the complex environment:

Some of the remote areas have been a little more unique culturally that may have made me feel a little uneasy, but I know that the folks that we work with always did their very best to make sure we were always safe.

Participants acknowledged that they work and live in a dangerous area due to remoteness and possible criminal activities, but many said that the school created a safe environment for the community.

In addition, stakeholders believe that building a school will create a safer environment, not only for the local community, but for the national and international communities. Improving education can produce meaningful social benefits and is a tool to increase prosperity and

security (Machin et al., 2011). “The overall goal [of the school project] is to foster security, enhance stability and enable prosperity in the region,” stated P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM). At the local community level, P1 (NGO Health Professional) explained how the school contributes to the community feeling safer: “They can own businesses, they can go to work, they have an income... and by creating that secure environment within the community, you develop a sense of community.” P12 (Principal) said, “Right now, a lot of parents are moving from [one] community to [another] community where they are more safe. And just today we received about five to six splitters [families] coming from a different community to our school.” P15 (Ministry of Education 2) notes how the school creates an environment where children do not have to worry as much:

So, when they're here in this newly constructed building, they feel happy. That means they're able to learn and accept more [of] what the teacher is saying. It reduces the stress from teachers. So, they [teachers] are able to impact the students more.

The schools provide more than formal education for the children in the community. Teaching is more than methods, facts, formulas, definitions, rules, and textbooks (Mundy et al., 2017). The new school building is one of the strongest buildings in the community and designed to withstand hurricanes. “They [new school buildings] are disaster resilient,” said P3 (DOD SOUTHCOM). Because of this, the community feels safer knowing that they have a place to meet for protection during a disaster. Another purpose for the well-constructed school building is to have a safe place to store property. “We will have three classrooms and have a safe place to store our property,” stated P12 (Principal). This was important due to the crime in the area and lack of available supplies. Even the simple things we do not think about can be important to others. For example, P20 (Teacher 2) explained, “The story [of] this place is much bigger. The commodities are greater. The environment is greater. It's free from pests [insects]. It's free from harm.”

Significance of the “Safe Learning Environment” Theme. I not only believe that a person has to be motivated to learn, but the environment has to be available. The international community has attempted to establish a learning environment that upholds the universal right to education. Access to universal education is a central part of national development (Bickmore et al., 2017). To access education, the environment needs to be safe, secure, and have the infrastructure to support education. This helps ensure every child receives an opportunity to go to school (Bickmore et al., 2017). Ultimately, the safe environment impacts the community positively and increases trust and interaction between community members.

Research Question 2 Discussion

I wanted to know from the stakeholder’s perception and experience how they viewed the impact of the new school. Understanding the impact of the new school on the community helped me and the stakeholders better articulate the advantages of the school building program to others. Data gathered through interviews, photographs, and documents related to the impact of the new school revealed two major themes that addressed the second research question.

The second research question, “From the stakeholders’ perception, how did building a new school impact the community?” was answered with the themes of “Creates Opportunities,” and “Grows the Community.” Schools create opportunities for many due to the education it provides and the appeal for role models, teachers, and peers. These influences introduce students to new opportunities. For example, schools can teach problem-solving skills that lead to creating better communication skills. The stakeholders believe that because of these opportunities fostered by schooling and education the students will have better employment opportunities and therefore be able to give back more to the community. The second theme that was logically tied to this research question was “Grows the Community.” The new school grew the relationships of partners because it took a whole community approach to complete complex

projects. Organizations came together for a common goal creating synergy among local to international stakeholders that grew the community. Also, the community experienced growth in population due to families wanting their children to attend the new school. Table 8 links the findings, interpretations, and significance of the “Creates Opportunities” and “Grows the Community” themes to Research Question 2.

Table 8

Research Question 2 Themes, Interpretations, and Significance Matrix

From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?		
Findings/Themes	Interpretations	Significance
Creates Opportunities The majority of participants expressed how the new school created opportunities.	· The new school is a community synergy for creating opportunities. · The school creates new opportunities for students and for community members.	Role models, teachers, and peers introduce students to new opportunities and ideas that otherwise would not be available. Opportunities can lead to greater economic wealth and prosperity for the community.
Grows the Community The majority of participants cited how the community relations grew due to the new school and families moved into the community.	· The new school increased community involvement. · Community members wanted to help with the new school. · The new school attracted many people to the community who otherwise would not have been involved.	Because of the new school, families from other areas moved into the new school's community. The new school expanded the community in size.

Note. This table tracks how findings, interpretations, and significance are logically tied to support Research Question 2.

“Creates Opportunities” Interpretation and Significance

Educational systems help create opportunities. Role models, teachers, and peers introduce students to new opportunities and ideas that otherwise would not be available. Sometimes we need strength and support from others to understand options and opportunities.

Teachers, peers, and others can introduce fresh opportunities that contribute to personal development, social cohesion, and economic growth (Bray et al., 2014). The combination of possibilities introduced through educational opportunities and aspirations brought upon by influential figures makes the new school an ideal synergy for creating opportunities.

Interpretation of the “Creates Opportunities” Theme. According to some scholars, an increase in available opportunities can be related to a reduction in crime (Edwards & Gill, 2002). For example, if a child has an increase in opportunities as a result of learning from school, the chances of that child participating in criminal activities will likely decrease. This new school can create synergy for opportunities that otherwise might not have been found. P1 (NGO Health Professional) explained the impact of creating opportunities:

... you sense their [local community's] understanding of the importance of education, the importance in terms not only of making productive citizens, but in helping kids stay out of crime, stay out of drugs, and as they become productive citizens, it's the idea of them being invested in their communities and wanting to stay there and better their communities, as opposed to wanting to go somewhere else because of lack of opportunity.

Education is a human capital investment that increases future work opportunities (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012). Furthermore, education helps develop individuals to become productive members of society (Crawford, 2012) and I believe education is an essential part of understanding the world in which we live. Likewise, P1 (NGO Health Professional) supported the importance of opportunities benefiting the community:

... by having people see that there are opportunities and that you can live in a better community and it makes the community safer, it stabilizes not only that community, but the region, and then potentially the nation as a whole. Because as people become more invested, they begin to trust their government. They begin to feel comfortable in their own environment, and they don't see the need to pack up and move, or they don't live in fear. I'm going to get killed walking home from work or something like that.

Increasing educational opportunities today will impact future generations, and the relation between crime and education may not be immediately obvious (Usher, 1993). The

impact from the new school might not be fully understood for years, but the perception that it is creating positive change is echoed by many participants at the local, national, and international levels. For example, P8 (International NGO) stated, “If those schools are built, the children can have a better opportunity for education and a better future for their lives.” Additionally, P11 (Parent 2) expands on better opportunities by stating, “Education is a future. We see it. I believe education is the future to live a better way, an easier life. You meet people from everywhere, from all over the place with the same goal as you...”

Education involves a socialization process that helps individuals become productive members of society while achieving their dreams and economic goals. P13 (Community Leader) explained, “... [Education] you know, it's like getting a little bit of wisdom in you, so that you can distinguish what you need to do in life.” Education contributes to the production of knowledge and skill bearing citizens (Crawford, 2012). For instance, growing up, I had a close group of school friends with similar interests and mentors who introduced me to new opportunities. I was fortunate that my role models stressed the importance of always learning. These role models helped nurture my interests and introduced opportunities I would not have known existed. Lochner and Moretti (2004) asserted that education increases an individual's earning potential, and the person who earns more has more to lose, thereby, increasing the cost of crime for educated individuals. Those who are educated can create significant rewards and opportunities for themselves and others. Many of the participants agreed that rewards can come from education which is supported by P16 (Parent 1) who said, “School is very important. So, we keep on learning. That's good for us because we need to learn more about different things. School is very important.”

Significance of the “Creates Opportunities” Theme. Crime is the largest contributor to instability in the region, especially in Belize. The prevalence of crime creates a threatening

environment that must be reduced. According to Machin, Marie, and Vujic (2011), crime is significantly related to lack of education and opportunities. The new school building serves as a means to create new opportunities that otherwise would not have been available. Additionally, the new school will prove effective in decreasing potential crime, as the community now says it can focus more on new positive opportunities.

Opportunities are often introduced through role models and the new school is an attraction to these community leaders. Often, those in positions of influence, such as community leaders or teachers, help introduce new opportunities to the community. These fresh opportunities contribute to personal development, social cohesion, and economic growth (Bray et al., 2014). The authors Lochner and Moretti (2004) believe that increasing educational opportunities can decrease crime and improve the economic opportunities for the local community. Similarly, my role models contributed to my personal development and economic growth by introducing rewards and opportunities that education can provide. I listened to their advice and achieved a vision for the future. Additionally, many participants stated that the new school will create many new unforeseen opportunities for the future.

“Grows the Community” Interpretation and Significance

Education can produce meaningful social benefits and those who have a better understanding of their community have more to give back. Moreover, education helps develop individuals to become productive members of society (Crawford, 2012). Participants shared the view that the new school caused the community to grow physically, and members of the community grew relationships with each other and the stakeholders.

Interpretation of the “Grows the Community” Theme. The building of the new school was the primary effort for the local village for over 2 years. Because of this, stakeholders from the local, national, and international communities came together with a common vision to build

the school. Crawford (2012) believes that education helps achieve effects with a common vision. P9 (U.S. Embassy) supported coming together with a common vision by stating, "... this is a whole government approach when building a school project. You want to make sure that we involve all levels..." The DOD stakeholder promoted partners coming together through relationships. "We are friends and neighbors, bound together by shared values and a shared stake in our common future" (SOUTHCOM Strategy, 2019, p. 1).

The new school contributed to strengthening relationships in the community. P7 (International NGO) explained, "So many people come together for the good of these children. It's a tremendous sight to see when the project gets completed and I think the way to improve it would be continued support from communities and partners." P12 (Principle) supported the "Grows the Community" theme:

So, we are looking at the growth of the community, because if the community and the population of students grow, then we'll definitely need more rooms [classrooms] for them [students] as well. And having them [new classrooms] available at the moment, already, is preparing us for the future.

Many stakeholders saw the community physically growing over the past 2 years due to the promise of a new school that will accommodate more students. In addition to physical growth, the new school brought the community together. P15 (Ministry of Education 2) explained:

I think it brought the community closer to the school. So, it impacted there. I think here in this school, the community school, where their children go. So, they have that positive way of looking at the school, which creates a positive impact between community and school. It brings that we're in this together.

Equally important to expanding the community, the new school also increased and bolstered relationships. P14 (Ministry of Education 1) stated, "I found that the community is growing in such a way that you're able to see more, and understand more, and that they [children] can be more." The school project brought together parents, teachers, students, and many other community members who wanted to help. As a result, this growing community of stakeholders

and role models can continue to help and guide others towards maintaining positivity while expanding.

Significance of the “Grows the Community” Theme. Education helps achieve effects with a common vision (Crawford, 2012), and the new school is a good example of creating something through a common vision. Those who participate more in their community will have a better understanding of their community and will have more to give back. This can already be seen in the community with the new school. For instance, the community has grown both physically and intellectually from the school building process. Moreover, community members have developed a deeper understanding of their community and have become more aware of their own goals, due to their relations and interactions with others.

Research Question 3 Discussion

Three themes emerged from the data that helped answer and were logically tied to the last research question: “From the stakeholders’ perception, how can the school building process be improved?” Through a thorough review and analysis of data gathered from interviews, photographs, and documents, three major findings emerged that helped answer Research Question 3. The themes were “Partners are Needed,” “Schools Cost Money,” and “Communication is Key.” This was one of the most important questions for future projects and was designed to gain insight on how to improve the school building process. Table 9 illustrates the themes, interpretations and significance of the “Partners are Needed,” “Schools Cost Money,” and “Communication is Key” themes and how these themes are logically tied to help answer Research Question 3.

Table 9*Research Question 3 Themes, Interpretations, and Significance Matrix*

From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?		
Findings/Themes	Interpretations	Significance
Partners are Needed Many participants explained how important partners are for creation of the new school.	· The new school could not have been built alone. · Partners working together contributed to the success of the new school. · It takes many people and organizations with specific skills and resources to complete a complex project.	The new school building process requires many stakeholders with unique skills and assets to complete the project. Partners help foster relationships that grow the community.
Schools Cost Money Most participants cited that money was a key issue with schools.	· It takes money to build the school. · It takes money to go to school. · Without money the new school would not have been possible.	Money is needed to construct and sustain a new school. Without proper financing from partners the project would not be possible.
Communication is Key The majority of participants expressed the importance of communication with each other during the school building process.	· Communication was essential for the school building process. · Communication is challenging among stakeholders who come from different cultural environments. · Effective communication is difficult to conduct. · It is hard to know if you are effectively communicating.	It is important to build trust among communities and stakeholders through communication. Creating trust is key to good collaboration and encourages voices that are often not heard to be heard.

Note. This table tracks how findings, interpretations, and significance are logically tied to support Research Question 3.

In order to build a new school, it took local, national and international government agencies, NGOs, and other partners with a shared goal. Without the stakeholders working together this project would not have been possible. Capital in the form of money and other means was necessary to build and sustain the school. Moreover, additional funding from parents, communities, governments, NGOs, and other entities was required to successfully complete the school. Communication was also a key aspect in building the new school. Clear communication allowed stakeholders to pass information faster and more accurately, versus misinformation that led to misunderstandings and problems with the project.

“Partners are Needed” Interpretation and Significance

The importance of having partners who work together cannot be stressed enough, especially with a large complex construction project like building this school in a remote area of Belize. Significantly, local, national, and international partnerships were essential for a project of this magnitude to succeed. It also takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to maintain these partnerships; however, the rewards were worth the effort.

Interpretation of the “Partners are Needed” Theme. Building partnerships with organizations enhanced the success of the project for all stakeholders. Partnerships help connect resources to needs and can create trusting relationships between people and organizations. This was essential when working with governmental and nongovernmental organizations. According to Kroeger et al. (2015), “Partnership development is defined by essential qualities such as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone” (p. 355). This statement resonated with me, because I have seen first-hand how effective an organization can be with partners. DOD understood the importance of partnerships and used

a whole society approach to integrate partners. P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM) explained this approach:

USSOUTHCOM comes with an overall mission to bring in a whole society's approach to what we do. So, it's basically not just DOD and military forces that go in and run a project and then just leave. We try to integrate other organizations. We call them NFEs [non-federal entities] on which you are already familiar. That can be anything from NGO businesses to academia, to think-tanks. There are different ways in which we will integrate organizations.

P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM) continued to explain more about the success of integrating partners into projects, "And it's because of our relationship with the hemisphere you know, it's a partnership base, and we've benefited from building those relationships with society." P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM) expanded by stating, "NGOs will be integrated in a different way than businesses or academia. NGOs for the most part are integrated via exercises [new school building projects], as you already are aware." Each relationship is specific and unique. On the local level, the school principal, P18 (Principal) explained how partners contributed to her school over the last 2 years:

First of all, let me thank you [Global Aid Consultants] all for coming to our school and helping our school with the furniture. And let me begin by saying that I'm the new principal here at San Antonio Government [school]. This is my first year as a principal. My first experience when I came to this school... I encountered a school with little finance, a school that needed a lot of upkeep in the compound, [and] in the buildings. But so far, with friends like you all, and family, and the community, we have been able to have the [new school] building as we have it now. One of the things that I want to thank [Global Aid Consultants], for our school, our staff, our children, and parents for really appreciating is that we are getting new furniture, something that this community has not seen for a very long time.

Partners can play many different roles in development. Lewis (2014) stated that NGOs play the roles of implementers, catalysts, and partners in development work. The role of implementer was defined as when the NGO mobilizes resources to promote a project or program. Lewis states, "The role of catalyst is defined as an NGO's ability to inspire, facilitate or contribute toward developmental change..." (p. 111). This role empowers the organization and

people to solve problems. The role as partner is when NGOs partner with other groups on joint activities.

The challenge with having partners is that no one is in charge and a hierarchical structure usually does not exist between partners. Almost all decisions must be agreed upon through a group consensus; however, there are no repercussions if they do not follow through on a commitment. This is challenging because to complete a project of this scale, numerous partners with specific skills are required. Moreover, a commitment from each stakeholder is necessary to achieve a common goal since they are essential in roles integral to the project.

Significance of the “Partners are Needed” Theme. Partnerships are paramount to the success of complex projects. For example, sound collaboration among parents, practitioners, policy makers, and international agencies was needed to undertake an international project like building a new school in a remote area. Essentially, it takes different actors with different purposes, various resources, and assistance from others to make education successful (Bray et. al., 2014). Specific organizations’ contributions can be easily seen during the new school building process because every stakeholder brought a unique skill set and distinctive organization personalities to the project. Each contribution was needed to complete a part of building a school; therefore, personalities from each partner needed to be accommodated or accepted by the rest of the partner team. Sometimes this was difficult due to different cultural values, language barriers, or vocabulary used. Nevertheless, the goal of completing the new school was at the forefront, and all involved parties worked together towards the objective.

“Schools Cost Money” Interpretation and Significance

Congenial and helpful partners can be the best at specific tasks and have the right intentions; however, if the parties involved lack the capital or resources to participate or support the project, the efforts will be of little value. The project is only possible with proper financial

support from many partners. Financial support is one of the key components of the project because almost everything revolves around money. Money is needed to purchase building supplies such as concrete and wood, fuel for delivery trucks, pay employee salaries, build school desks, and other project materials. In fact, as a researcher, I witnessed firsthand how teams of parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGO stakeholders contributed their financial resources to constructing and sustaining the school.

Interpretation of the “Schools Cost Money” Theme. The reason for building a school in this remote area of Belize is to impede the rising crime rate. Decreasing crime through alternative means, such as encouraging positive aspirations through education was the goal of most stakeholders. Many countries spend 60% of their crime budget on supporting police and border security measures instead of investing in education and health (McKinless, 2017). Scholars recommend that more money be spent on education because this is a strategy to address the challenge of crime (Manchin et al., 2011). Improving education can produce meaningful benefits and be a tool to decrease crime (Machin et al., 2011). Because of this, DOD supported decreasing crime through funding education programs and specifically the building of a new school in this project. P3 (DOD SOUTHCOM) stated, “One of our lines of effort is to counter threats and within that obviously countering malign influence...” P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM) expanded on funding the school building project:

How does SOUTHCOM impact the school building process? Well, first through the HAP [Humanitarian Assistance Program] program where they provide the funds to build the school with the request and implemented by the HAP managers and the SCOs [Security Cooperation Officer at a U.S. Embassy] down range [in the host nation]. The second part of that would be through the PPC [Private Partner Cooperation] division where we integrate the whole of society approach, where people like, Global Aid Consultants, you've helped in the past with filling the schools [with desks and chalk boards].

“The overall goal is to foster security, enhance stability and enable prosperity in the region,” said P2 (DOD SOUTHCOM). DOD is a major financial contributor to enhancing stability in the region

that starts the school building project momentum. P1 (NGO Health Professional) supported DOD commitments by explaining:

Having spent a lot of time in Central America, South America, and Latin America; talking with their leaders and stuff, you sense their understanding of the importance of education, the importance in terms not only of making productive citizens, but in helping kids stay out of crime, stay out of drugs. As they become productive citizens, it's the idea of them being invested in their communities and wanting to stay there and better their communities, as opposed to wanting to go somewhere else because of lack of opportunities and stuff like that. So, I think that building schools is really an important step in helping some of these local populations in becoming self-sufficient and realizing their opportunities.

The concept that education decreases crime with the hope of increasing security in the area is the foremost reason DOD and DOS implement a humanitarian assistance project to build a school. This concept is also the reason why crime and education are integral parts of this study.

Building a school requires an investment in both money and time from the stakeholders. Many organizations, NGOs, parents, and teachers do not have a lot of money or time, but still invest what they have. Sometimes, organizations might appear to have a large amount of funding but in reality, they do not. P1 (NGO Health Professional) explained:

I think we need to make it clear that we're not a bottomless pit, we're just not going to be there to do everything for everybody. It's understanding that we have limitations both in funding and in manpower and other things. And while they can shoot for the stars and wish for everything, they are going to get what they need.

Some organizations stated they had difficulty raising money to contribute to the school project.

P8 (International NGO) described the challenges of raising funds for the project:

We have been trying to talk to more people to raise funds, to do this work more, but it has not been easy to raise funds, and everybody says, when they hear about this work, they say, "Oh, it's great," but nobody really contributes. So, it has been difficult.

According to families and parents, attending school in Belize required money and was expensive. P11 (Parent 2) stated, "Yeah, like for example, education is very expensive, especially for my 15-year-old daughter..." P17 (Parent) also said how school was expensive, "I

would like them to provide the schoolbooks, the textbook, because some cannot afford that. It's very expensive." P11 (Parent 2) expanded on the school costs:

The best thing you could give the students, the children, or a country like ours, if education could have been free. I think that would have been better because, since education is so expensive, parents can't afford to send their children to school. Parents have to go to work, and these teenagers stay at home. What will they do at home alone? They will go out in the streets and then start hanging out with different people and then getting into trouble and all of that stuff.

Opposite to school being expensive was when participants stated that COVID-19 and the shutting down of schools helped with expenses. P11 (Parent 2) explained how COVID-19 helped the family with decreased school expenses:

Right now, it's [COVID-19 lockdown] helping in one way that they are doing online classes because we have less expenses. You know, we have less expenses because we don't have to send her to school with lunch money. She has lunch at home. We don't have to spend on uniforms, school bags, and many little things that cost.

Overall, through all the financial difficulties of the school building process, the stakeholders came together and completed the school project. P15 (Ministry of Education 2) explained how numerous stakeholders came together to complete the project:

They [DOD] do the [school] structure. It doesn't come with all the insides. Like the chairs and everything that is required for a classroom. So, I was happy afterwards, when I heard from the government that they were to be assisted by donor groups, that they were going to come in and donate the furniture that was also needed at this school for us to have full classrooms, and complete bathrooms, not only a building.

As a result of providing support to build this school, the stakeholders were hopeful that the community will improve, and crime will decrease. This logical thought process was in agreement with other authors that suggest increasing education and improving school quality can reduce crime rates (Hjalmarsson & Lochner, 2012).

Significance of the "School Costs Money" Theme. As demonstrated, it takes a team consisting of parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, and NGO

stakeholders with financial support to construct and sustain a new school. Moreover, education is an investment in human capital. According to Bickmore et al. (2017), education influences the investment in human capital to produce high social rates of return and benefits to the economy. The school building project stakeholders made a tremendous investment of their time and money to increase education. From the stakeholders' point of view, the money invested in the new school will have a positive social return on investment.

“Communication is Key” Interpretation and Significance

Communication is essential to the process of building a new school. It is fundamental that participants and stakeholders effectively transfer information between each other. Information about key dates, ordering construction materials, building and delivering furniture, and the grand opening of the school must be communicated from one stakeholder to another to keep the process flowing smoothly. Effective communication requires all participants to engage in discussions that facilitate the development of relationships to meet an objective (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Sometimes due to cultural barriers, technological compatibility, and language barriers this can be more difficult than expected.

Interpretation of the “Communication is Key” Theme. The participants agreed that communication played a major part in the school building process. Organizations from the local, national, and international levels were involved in the process and each had their own jargon, acronyms, and used words influenced by their professional and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, some participants experienced communication technology compatibility difficulties. For example, mobile phone use in Belize was expensive and coverage is limited. To overcome the expensive cell phone fees, many used a phone app called WhatsApp. The challenge many found with using WhatsApp, was internet access is required, and many do not have access to the internet. Different types of technology were used throughout this study to support

communications with the stakeholders. DOD SOUTHCOM is an example of how change was required to communicate and P4 (DOD SOUTHCOM) explained how they modified their technology protocols to support communicating with others:

Well, as the result of this [research interview] call, what we're doing right now, six or eight months ago would have been unheard of. There was no way you could talk to us from your homes to us in our homes, offices, within the [SOUTHCOM] command headquarters. But as a result of necessity, we've opened up our architecture. Now we have the ability to talk with our partners in a way that we never did before, which hopefully results in more efficient identification of opportunities to work and enhance the various capabilities of our partners within the region.

Communication took place through different means during the study. Communication interactions can be planned visits, telephone calls, or informal social engagements, such as meeting for coffee or lunch (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). P9 (U.S. Embassy) illuminated the way numerous communication methods were used with the project:

We get TV, [social] media involved, and get the newspapers as a full approach to get the information out there nationally, [and] regionally, because they're [government] going to show the [project] in the local paper and what we're doing along the border region.

Sometimes, when working with different cultures it is challenging to know if the intended message was received as planned. This is especially difficult if conversations are happening over email, text, or voice calls. Different styles of writing and the cultural context of communication need to be considered. P1 (NGO Health Professional) described the importance of constantly using various methods of communication to help prevent misunderstandings:

It's a lot of verbal communication, a lot of messaging on email, and through social media, but also that personal face-to-face discussion with people to make sure that we're all understanding the process that we're coming up with an expectation that's a unified expectation, where we all have the same [expectation] when we're all done.

Even with using various methods of communication, miscommunications still occurred. One participant was upset because he did not receive effective communication on the status of the project being moved to a later date due to COVID-19.

Language and culture influence communications and who we speak with comfortably; it is easier speaking with someone who speaks the same language. English speakers are likely to interact with English-speaking countries and Spanish speakers are likely to associate with Spanish-speaking countries (Bray et al., 2014). For instance, in Belize, I interacted with three major cultural groups: Mestizos (mixed Spanish and Indian), Mayan (Indigenous Indian), and Creoles (Black), each with their specific speaking style and vocabulary. Because of this, it was important to articulate, use words wisely, speak slowly, and keep thoughts as clear as possible to increase understanding. Although English is the official language of Belize, different ethnic groups tend to speak their own version of Spanish or broken English. Because of this, misunderstandings and conflicting perceptions could occur. P1 (NGO Health Professional) explained:

I think social media and media colors everybody and their perceptions of culture and perceptions. I have been in the environment of Latin America long enough, and being of partial Latin descent, I understand the Latin culture. I understand how it works. But for those, when all they have, [there] only understanding of American culture is what they see in movies and on television, and some of those don't portray us in a very good light. We're portrayed as sort of arrogant and, and some of these portrayals are not without a basis in reality. We're not arrogant, that we're actually there to help, we're caring human individuals that have a culture. We do have more people who are caring and who want to help and who want to do things. And it helps to bring a better light, not only to us as individuals, but it helps to put sort of the United States and who we are into a better culture around the world and sort of dispel some of the myths to get brought out through movies and through popular television and through popular media sites.

Effective communication is paramount in large scale projects, especially on an international level. Communicating effectively with multi-cultural participants is challenging but absolutely required for a complex project such as building a new school in a remote area.

Significance of the “Communication is Key” Theme. According to Hofstede (2001), Belize is an authority-ranking/vertical, collectivistic, paternalistic culture where social distance exists between superiors and subordinates. People are the primary focus of Belizean culture,

but authority figures are well respected. Because of this, authority figures' opinions are mostly heard at work and at home. For this research, it was important to hear voices from non-authority figures, such as parents and teachers, who spoke in front of the school principal. I was able to hear them speak more honestly due to building trust among community members and stakeholders. Establishing trust is key to good collaboration and encourages the voices of those who seldom speak to be heard.

Having awareness of feminist theory helped me, as a researcher, better understand the voices of those less heard to be captured during the study. Feminist theory helped highlight social roles and inequality seen in the community. This theory helped those who are marginalized to better understand their aspirations and be heard (Code, 2014). Due to different cultures involved in this research environment, it was important to hear the opinion from the stakeholders as equally as possible. From a feminist theory lens, I was able to better understand the nature of stakeholder inequality and examine their social roles during the school building process.

Conclusion of Research Questions

The themes of "Safe Learning Environment" and "Motivation for School," helped answer the research question: "How do the stakeholders perceive the new schools?" To increase the school's success, it was important for the community to develop motivation to utilize the school's full potential. Motivation is an integral part in education and a key component in learning; however, the environment must be available. Therefore, the community's involvement and investment in the process was necessary.

The participants agreed that being motivated for school and having a safe learning environment were aspects that improved education in the community. Increasing access to and improving educational opportunities can produce meaningful social benefits and decrease crime

(Machin et al., 2011). Being motivated to pursue individual goals and believing in yourself is important to becoming a productive citizen (Bickmore et al., 2017). This new school safe learning environment is focused on academic achievement, maintaining high standards, fostering positive relationships between staff and students, and encouraging parental and community involvement. Resolving conflict and preventing violence are other important factors in creating and maintaining a safe learning environment.

In Research Question 2, to determine how the school building impacted the community, the themes of “Creates Opportunities” and “Grows the Community” emerged from the codes and categories to answer the research question. A safe and secure environment in a community that has the infrastructure to support education will assist in the creation of new opportunities. It is important and challenging to create an education system that respects cultures and people, while supporting the national education plan. Belize is proud of its heritage and culture, and I believe the new school will help in the transfer of cultural knowledge and increase cultural preservation. The school can serve as a place where cultures and ideologies are preserved.

Schools and education create opportunities due to the presence of role models, teachers, and peers. These positive influences introduce students to new opportunities. The stakeholders stated that because of school, the students will have better jobs when they grow up. These positive influences associated with the new school brought community relationships together. The new school project brought together numerous organizations and partners from the local, national, and international levels that shared a common interest in neighbors helping neighbors improve their community. I think this participant, P20 (Teacher), sums up the “Grows the Community” theme best: “This story, this piece is much bigger. The communities are greater. The environment is great.”

Central to developing citizens and societies at the local and global levels are teachers and the knowledge they impart (Bickmore et al., 2017). Newfound opportunities can lead to economic growth and rewards for the person and community. Additionally, schooling produces a productive citizen that is essential for social and economic development (Bickmore et al., 2017). Moreover, education can be linked to greater national wealth from socioeconomic development by distributing wealth and opportunity equally (Bickmore et al., 2017). I believe that education increases an individual's earning potential and the person who earns more, can usually contribute more economically back to the community.

Finally, in answering Research Question 3, examining how the school process can be improved, the "Partners are Needed," "Schools Cost Money," and "Communication is Key" themes emerged from the research data. As discussed earlier, partnerships and collaborations are necessary for a project of this magnitude to be successful. Furthermore, most people or organizations specialize in one specific area and a project like this takes numerous skills to complete. In this project, a collaboration between national and international governments, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and academia with a common goal sought to complete the new school building. Without the stakeholders working together this would not have been possible.

Without sufficient funding, this project would not be possible. Financial support from parents, school faculty, community leaders, government officials, governments, and NGO stakeholders enabled the construction and sustaining of the new school. Parents, who say school is expensive, have to earn and save money to pay for uniforms, books, lunches and other school-related expenses. Funds from the community are used to provide upkeep and maintenance of the school. The nation of Belize contributes national funding for teacher and staff salaries. International and local NGOs provide money to purchase needed equipment, such

as school desks and chalk boards. Most importantly, the United States provides funding that pays for the school building and starts the whole process. This kind of funding cycle will be required for the long-term success of the new school.

Communication is also a key aspect in ensuring the successful building and completion of a new school. Effective communication skills are essential for others to understand information faster and more accurately, especially when working in a large and varied group. In contrast, poor communication skills can lead to frequent misunderstandings and discouragement. Likewise, communication interactions can include planned visits, telephone calls, or informal social engagements such as meeting for coffee or lunch (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Styles and the cultural context of communication need to be understood during interactions, notably during the formal transmission of information needed for the school building process. In Belize, I interacted with three major ethnic groups, Mestizos (mixed Spanish and Indian), Mayan (Indian), and Creoles (Black). Each of these cultural groups had their own specific speaking style and vernacular; therefore, it was important to articulate and clearly express ideas, while keeping thoughts as open as possible to increase understanding.

All the stakeholders contributed their time and monetary resources to the project. P7 (International NGO) explained why we help: “We want the best for them. We want the best for their children. We want to see them succeed for generations to come and education is the key to improving life economically and culturally.”

Qualitative data analysis is all about identifying themes, categories, patterns, or answers to your research question,” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 216). Table 10 reviews how the categories, themes, and research questions were logically linked to each other to support the conclusions of research questions.

Table 10*Research Questions with Related Themes and Categories*

Research Question	Findings/Themes	Higher-Level Categories
RQ1: How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?	Motivation for School	New pride; I want to learn; Motivates us; Child feels positive in the classroom; Priority for everybody; Future is bright; Feeling rewarded
	Safe Learning Environment	Enhances stability; Do not have to worry as much; Complex environment; Crime; Criminal element; Security; Central America
RQ2: From the stakeholders' perception, how did building a new school impact the community?	Creates Opportunities	School has maximum impact; Increases education; For the kids; Educational opportunities; Improves environment; Preparing us for the future; Investment in the children is an investment in the community
	Grows the Community	Community is growing; Increases stakeholders; Community contributes; Collaborative work; Business and community connection; Community growth
RQ3: From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school building process be improved?	Partners are Needed	Help them develop; Humanitarian assistance; Not every organization can do everything; Donor groups complete the school; Government assistance; Helping partners; Project paused
	Schools Cost Money	Funding; School got little help from parents; Education is expensive; Education takes money
	Communication is Key	Communication; Communication piece; changes to improve business processes

Note. This table illustrates how the research questions, findings/themes, and higher-level categories are logically tied to each other. The higher-level code categories were synthesized to generate themes. Next, the emerged themes were applied to the research questions that they helped answer.

Applying Judgment to the Findings' Interpretations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) explained that the interpretation is where an argument is built based on collected evidence. The qualitative research process uses inductive reasoning where conclusions are drawn by going from the specific to the general statements. This is unlike quantitative analysis, in this analysis a hypothesis is tested based on collected data that applies deductive reasoning which goes from a general to a specific statement. The interpretation occurs from evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing the research findings. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), "Your findings, in effect, tell the initial story of the research. Your interpretations then add another dimension, bringing the story to a deeper level of understanding. Your conclusions become the beginning of a new story" (p. 316). This section starts this story and interprets the findings by applying judgment to the synthesized research themes.

Key Concepts for Building a School Theoretical Model

After careful analysis, I found the research findings of "Partners are Needed," "Schools Cost Money," and "Communication is Key" to have interconnected relationships in a meaningful way. These themes were originally founded to support the research question, "From the stakeholders' perception, how can the school process be improved?" After careful reflection and analysis of these findings I found that they can logically support key concepts of building a school, with each having a supporting relationship to each other. I found that to build and complete a school it takes "partners" with "resources" who "communicate" together in an "environment" they support. Therefore, the words in quotation marks represent the research findings.

I used a Venn diagram to illustrate the development of a model from this research. Venn diagrams show how groups overlap to explain the logical reasoning of concepts. The Venn

diagram illustrates a model demonstrating how partnerships with resources and clear, effective communication are key components for successfully building and completing a new school. The research that supports these key concepts was based on grounded theory where the core categories emerged. Grounded theory is inductive in nature and because of this, I am in constant interaction with the research data (Charmaz, 2014).

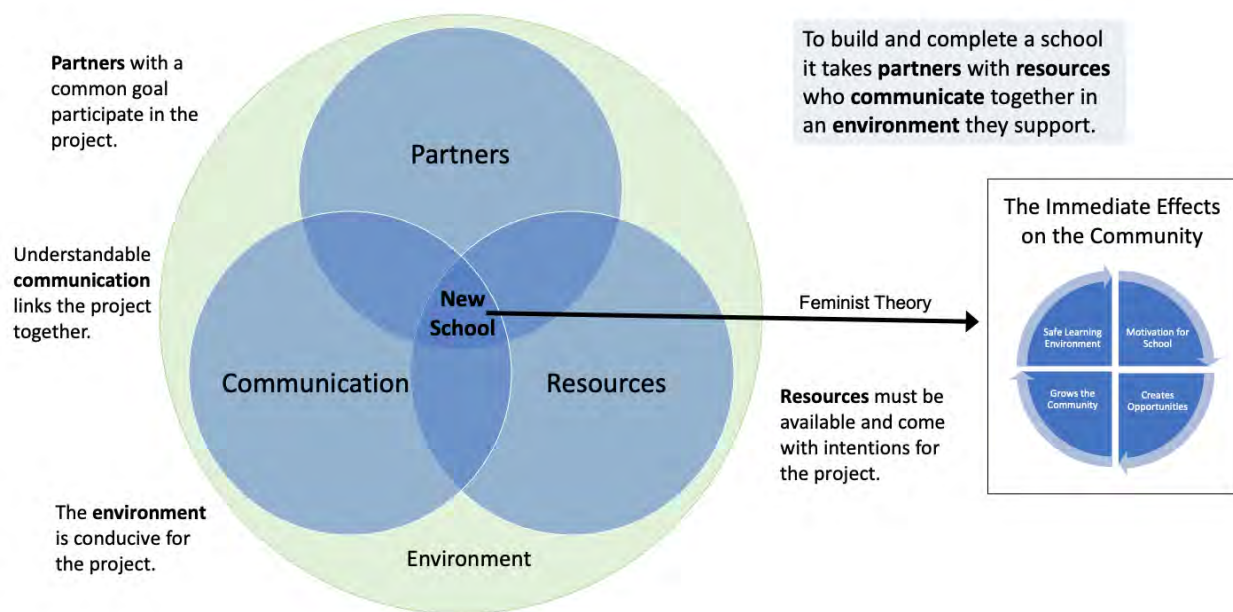
My theoretical model is grounded in the data collected during the research and was not developed or thought of before the study. Feminist theory helped illustrate the Venn diagram though giving voices to my participants that were often not heard. For example, it was challenging to have the parents voice their opinion of the school building process. I could tell they were not used to voicing their opinion or for someone to value their thoughts. This model illuminates the importance of the participants' voices. Action Research helped me develop an understanding of how the research data linked to improving the school building process. Through a continuous cycle of plan-act-observe-reflect (Herr & Anderson, 2015), I was constantly refining and improving the research study. I also used my own understanding, experience, intelligence, and judgment for this continued analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Maxwell (2013) explained that a theory is a set of concepts and ideas with proposed relationships that is intended to model something. I found this stage of the research analysis challenging because of my close relationship with the data and difficulty to see past the basic data sets. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that research theorizing "is a difficult task for most qualitative researchers because they are too close to the data, unable to articulate how the study is significant, and unable to shift into a speculative mode of thinking" (p. 216). This "analysis involves making inferences, developing models, and generating theory" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 215). A theory or model sheds light on relationships that otherwise might be unknown. I applied judgment to the interpretation and significance of the themes and reflected

on their interconnected relationships where a Venn diagram helped illustrate the connections. From the Venn diagram model, I drew inferences about future activities in the school building process (Figure 50). This Venn diagram can apply to most situations in international humanitarian development.

Figure 50

Key Concepts for Building a School Theoretical Model



Note. This theoretical model was constructed through Grounded Theory using real world data (Charmaz, 2014) and from feminist theory which helps those who are marginalized to be heard (Code, 2014). “Partners,” “Resources,” “Communication,” and “Environment” themes are interconnected and logically tied to each other to support building a new school. Once the new school is complete the effects on the community are found to be immediate.

From the “Key Concepts in Building a School” Venn diagram, the “Partners” theme represents organizations with a common goal or interest who participated in the project. To be viable, a partner needs to have money or resources available to contribute to the project.

Additionally, the "Partners" theme is also interconnected with "Resources" where money or other means must be available to support the intentions of the partner's organization. It costs money to pay workers, buy supplies, and funding is needed for many other items in a project. Moreover, "Resources" is linked to the "Communication" theme.

Partners must accurately communicate their needs and wants with others in order to gauge and obtain resources. Understandable communication links interested partners together. Also, multiple partnerships in a large-scale project must communicate clearly and decisively with each other to increase their effectiveness and contribution. The relationships partners build is based on the value of communication with other partners or organizations.

The "Communication" theme is interconnected with the "Resources" theme. The effectiveness of communication can be shaped with available resources. Resources can give communications more power or take power away between communicating partners. It appears that the more resources a partner has the more it increases their ability to communicate their plans and ideas to others. I found that organizations with more money to spend on the project carried more weight in meetings and their voices were listened to more intently. I also noticed that when partners came together, especially those who communicated effectively among each other and had resources, developmental change occurred.

Most notable is that the "Environment" theme is interconnected with the themes of "Partners," "Resources," and "Communication." This theme overlaps all others because the environment must be able to support the other themes. The environment needs to be a location and a project that the partners can support. Most importantly, the environment must be conducive to support the partner's resources and communication requirements. For example, a partner whose focus is on domestic issues only would not be able to support an international

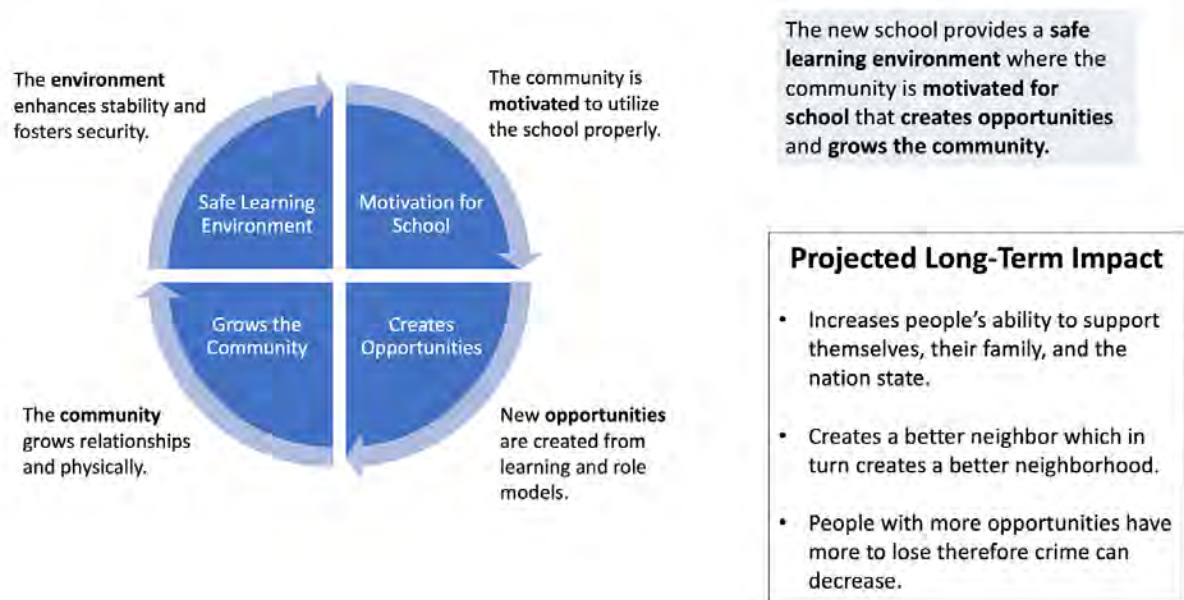
project. The international project does not meet their criteria and therefore the environment would not be appropriate for this organization.

The crucial part of the Venn diagram is where the "Partners," "Resources," "Communication," and "Environment" themes overlap together and interconnection between all four themes occurs. When the intersection of the themes occurs, a project transpires, and in this research study, a new school was built. This is a key component of this Venn diagram and the goal of the project. This intersection of themes also leads to the project's immediate effects on the community.

The New School's Immediate Effects on the Community Theoretical Model

The new school had an immediate effect on the community. The new school immediately impacted the community with four key research findings of "Safe Learning Environment," "Motivation for School," "Creates Opportunities," and "Grows the Community" themes. The new school provided a safe learning environment where the community is motivated for school that created opportunities and grew the community.

In "The School's Immediate Effects on the Community Theoretical Model" illustration, the four themes show a progression of events happening in a continuous circular flow throughout the community due to the school. The circular flow emphasizes the interconnectedness of the themes, but the order of the themes can vary. The effects on the community can be seen in Figure 51 and was a main focal point of the research.

Figure 51*The School's Immediate Effects on the Community Theoretical Model*

Note. The "Safe Learning Environment," "Motivation for School," "Creates Opportunities," and "Grows the Community" themes mutually support each other and are continuously cyclic in this theoretical model.

The new school promotes a "Safe Learning Environment" that enhances stability and fosters security in the community. The new school made the community feel safer physically. The building was one of the strongest structures in the area and can be used as a storm shelter for protection from disasters. It was also a safe place where the students can learn life skills, such as how to own a business or job placement from education. The school created an environment that can lead to increased prosperity and security for the community.

Due to the fact that a safer community was established, the residents have increased their "Motivation for School" by utilizing the new school for its intended purpose. This is significant, because being motivated for school is a catalyst for learning. The community needs

to utilize the school properly in order to gain the benefits it provides. Those who are motivated to learn will gain a better understanding of their community and have more to offer in return.

The new school "Creates Opportunities" for the students and community. This happens because the community is more involved with the school. New opportunities are created through education and role models merging together. Opportunities are introduced from role models that otherwise might not have been presented. These new opportunities can have a beneficial impact on the overall community.

Opportunities enhance the community and this in turn "Grows the Community." The community grows physically and grows in relationships. For instance, community members become more involved as a result of their relations and interactions with others. The community also grows larger in population due to the attraction of parents wanting their children to attend a new safer school. From this research, I agree with scholars that the long-term projected impact of the new school will (a) increase people's ability to support themselves, their family, and the nation state; (b) create a better neighbor, which in turn will create a better neighborhood; and (c) influence people with more opportunities will have more to lose, and therefore, crime will decrease (Bickmore et al., 2017).

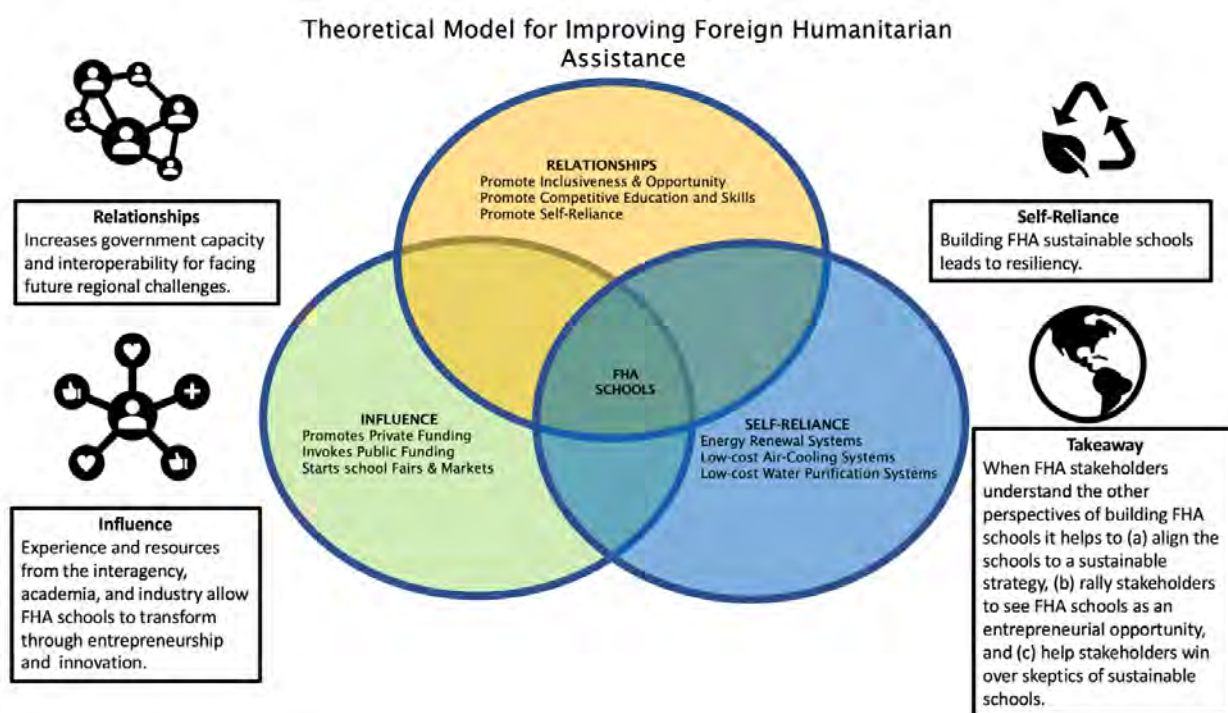
Enhancing the Meaning by Merging Two Researchers' Findings

The hallmark of action research is to work together with other stakeholders to solve a problem and share these results with others while contributing to the scholarly body of knowledge (Stringer & Aragon, 2021). This research was used to develop a theory that will help with best practices in development and understanding the school building process. Working with another researcher helped extract more meaningful information from the data. Mark, another researcher, who was conducting action research parallel to my study produced different findings illustrated in a Venn diagram theoretical model. This research was used to develop a theory that

will help with best practices in development and understanding the school building process. Moreover, it was most beneficial to collaborate with another researcher who was conducting an action research parallel to my study. For instance, Mark, the other researcher, produced different findings illustrated in a Venn diagram theoretical model (Figure 52).

Figure 52

Mark's Theoretical Mode for Improving Foreign Humanitarian Assistance



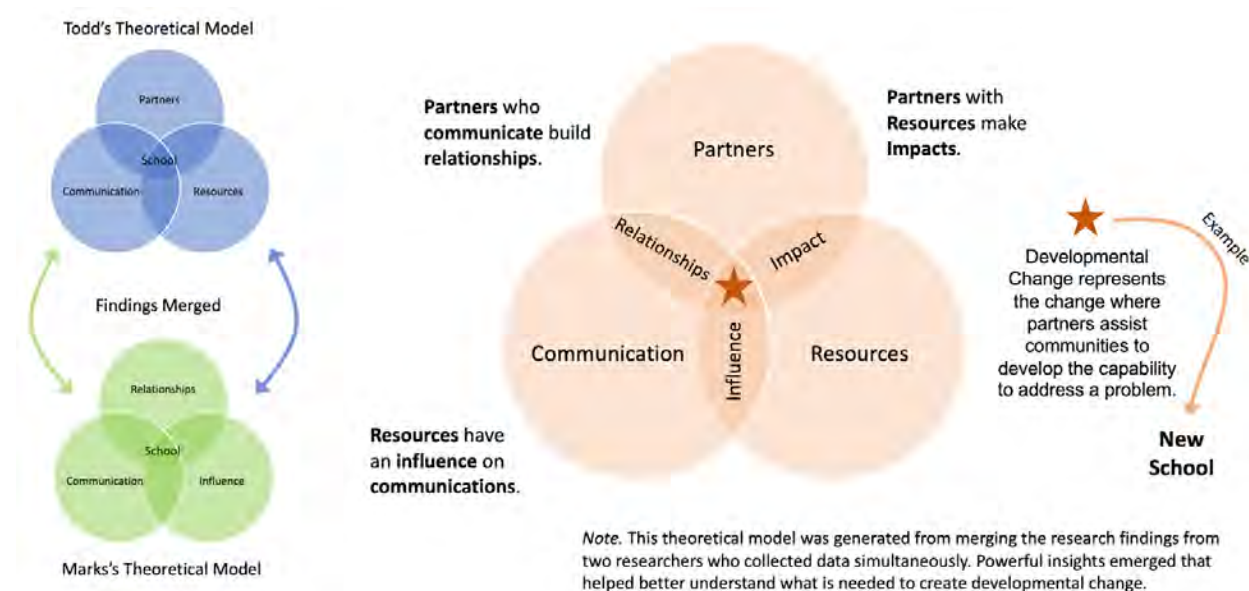
Note. Mark's Venn diagram illustrates that the hallmark of improving humanitarian assistance is (a) making good organizational decisions, for example trading one advantage for another, (b) understanding the problems of the community, and (c) assisting the roles of individuals to find a relation to action for their community, their society, and the power hierarchy.

In order to enhance each of our findings for meaning and stimulating deeper thinking, we merged our two theoretical models together. Through merging my "Key Concepts for Building a School Theoretical Model" (Figure 50) with Mark's "Theoretical Model for Improving Foreign Humanitarian Assistance" (Figure 52) another dimension was added to the research

interpretations. After analyzing, interpreting, and synthesizing, the two models were combined into one. We both found that this enhanced model contained more specific meaning. Merging the two models together helped increase understanding of the research findings but still honored the stakeholders' perspective in a new light.

Figure 53

Developmental Change Theoretical Model



Note. This model illustrates the merging of Todd's "Key Concepts for Building a School Theoretical Model" and Mark's "Improving Foreign Humanitarian Assistance Theoretical Model." The new model represents a higher level of thinking due to the combination of two research studies and what conditions are necessary to create developmental change.

Working with Mark to merge our theoretical models together increased my interpretation and conclusions of the findings. Likewise, Mark said this helped bring him closer to the research data. His findings were different from my interpretation of the data, but when the findings were merged, a very creditable theoretical model came to light in the form of a Venn diagram. This new Venn diagram (Figure 53) will help us share and reflect on our stakeholders' experiences

together. From this diagram we are able to better articulate the stakeholders' personal experiences (Stringer & Aragon, 2021).

The Developmental Change Model represents the requirements to create change. Development change involves partners to assist communities to develop the capability and capacity to address common concerns. The model provides theoretical means necessary to work through issues of concern that resolve problems. The model has three key components that impact developmental change: (a) Partners who communicate build relationships, (b) Partners with resources make impacts, and (c) Resources influence communications.

Partners who Communicate Build Relationships. Partners must accurately communicate their requirements to others and those who communicate more efficiently can usually build better relationships. Partners need to take into consideration culture, technology, and language during communications. Relationship building is a big part of development and those who work together can be more effective. Partners who build relationships are more likely to achieve more together than alone.

Partners with Resources Make Impacts. Partners help connect resources to where it is needed most. It takes different partners with unique skills and various resources to make development a success. Most projects are only possible with proper financial support from partners. Not all partners need to provide financial support but providing a needed resource could be equally important.

Resources Influence Communications. Communication plays a key part in development and can be influenced by resources. Resources can influence the type of media used for communications. For example, it can influence how much social media, newspapers, television advertisements are used or the quality of web sites, organizational videos, and other types of

messaging. Resources can also influence the amount of face-to-face discussions that are available due to the travel cost to have these discussions.

When Partners who Communicate Build Relationships, Partners with Resources Make Impacts, and Resources Influence Communications converge together, an interconnection between these three themes (Developmental Change) occurs. Developmental Change represents the change where partners assist communities to develop the capability and capacity to address a problem. For example, in this research study the three themes converged together, and a new school was built.

Integrating the Findings With the Kellogg Logic Model

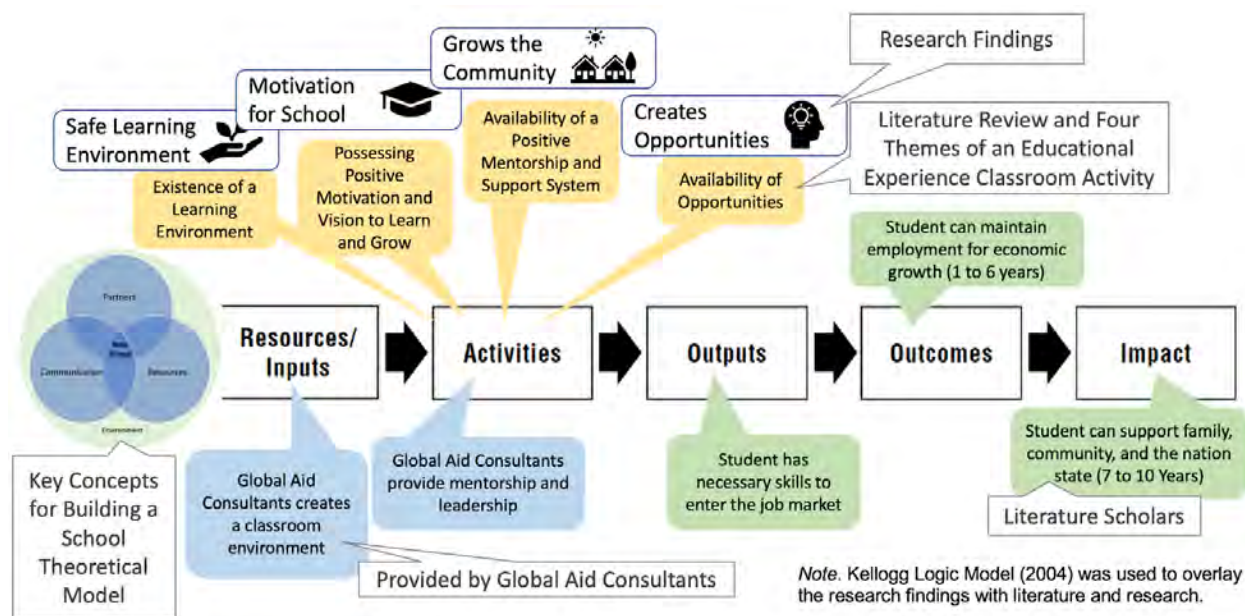
The new school is an example of creating something through a common vision and effective communication where the community has grown both physically and intellectually from the school building process. Education can produce meaningful social benefits, and those who have a better understanding of their community will have more to give back. Significantly, education systems can propel a society's efforts to achieve outcomes and impacts associated with a shared vision of the common good (Crawford, 2012).

The new school building process required many stakeholders with unique skills and monetary assets to complete the project. Most subscribe to the saying that it is better to teach a man to fish rather than give him fish. Through interviews participants communicated various ways to better understand and improve the school building process in Belize. I believe the stakeholders involved with this school were teaching the community to become better. The stakeholders came together to develop and implement a sustainable new school that is illustrated in the Kellogg Logic Model with the long-term impact of fishing for themselves.

The Logic Model is a visually structured way to present the relationships among the resources an organization uses to operate its program and projected changes (Kellogg

Foundation, 2004). I found that the “Key Concepts for Building a School Theoretical Model” begins the Kellogg Logic Model (logic model research/inputs box) by building a school to be logically tied to the Kellogg Logic Model illustrated in Chapter 2. The findings from Research Question 1, “How do the stakeholders perceive (feel, view, act) the new school?” and Research Question 2, “From the stakeholders’ perception, how did building a new school impact the community?” also support the Logic Model. Figure 54 validates how the research findings of “Safe Learning Environment,” “Motivation for School,” “Grows the Community,” and “Creates Opportunities” are logically tied to the literature review and four themes of an educational experience classroom activity from Chapter 2. The research findings support the connection of the resources that Global Aid Consultants provide to the project. Finally, the logic model illustrates that education contributes to economic growth, social development, and political development in their community (Bickmore et al., 2017).

I project the new school will meet Bickmore’s (2017) and other scholars’ belief that schooling: (a) produces necessary skills to enter the job market (logic model output box), (b) creates students who can maintain a job for economic growth (logic model outcomes box), and (c) creates citizens who can support family, community, and the nation (logic model impact box) of the Kellogg Logic Model.

Figure 54*The Kellogg Logic Model Integrated with Research Findings*

Note. Kellogg Foundation (2014) Logic Model modified from Figure 16 in Chapter 2 to illustrate the logical connection of research/inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts (white rectangle boxes) between the Key Concepts for Building a School Theoretical Model (left beginning of resources/inputs boxes), Research Findings (white tabs with icons at top), Literature Review and Four Themes of Education Experience (yellow callouts), Global Aid Consultants (blue callouts), and literature scholars that support education produces a productive citizen for economic growth, creates a workforce for industries, and creates citizens who identify with the nation-state (Bickmore et al., 2017) (green callouts).

Sharing the Results and Contributing to the Action Research Theory and Practice

Sharing the results formally and informally is the bridge that connects research to application. The primary purpose of action research is to help people find solutions to real-life problems that they are struggling with and the second purpose is to contribute to the general body of knowledge (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Frequently, there is a gap between what is learned by researchers and what is practiced. Action research can help prevent this gap by creating a two-way information flow between researchers and stakeholders (Mertler, 2020). In

an effort to reduce this gap, I will share the results to create change with the stakeholders and expand on this research to better the school building process. The purpose and rationale of the research was to gain a better understanding of the new school building process and its impact on the local community, through the voices of the stakeholders. The focus is to understand how things are happening and how stakeholders perceive and interpret the research events. Hearing the voices of the stakeholders provided the richest understanding on the impact of the school building process. By gaining insight into the stakeholder's perspectives from the research, I am better able to improve the school building process in the future as a practitioner.

Action research is commonly used to reveal solutions to problems experienced in specific situations and localized settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One of the most important components of action research is to keep all the stakeholder groups informed and ensure a report is presented (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). Sharing the results from this study is a significant part in conveying the research knowledge to others. Sharing shows the participants that their voices mattered and contributed to understanding their point of view. The overall goal of sharing is to foster and nurture awareness among participants and reach national and international policy makers with the project's findings to enact change (Aragón, 2013). Stringer and Aragón (2021) illuminated that, "One of the problems of traditional academic research is that researchers often produce a list of "recommendations" without any intent of actually engaging or facilitating the actions they recommend" (p. 58). To prevent this, I will use Global Aid Consultants as the host to reach local, national, and international stakeholders to enact change through written reports, presentations, and photographs with the research findings. Stakeholders will better understand the key components in the process of building a new school and its immediate impact on the community. I project to participate in local research venues,

professional conferences, and other academic research communities with these findings. This will become the bridge between research and application.

Through Global Aid Consultants, I will specifically share the findings of the “Key Concepts for Building a School” and the “Schools Immediate Effects of the Community” theoretical models to make a difference for the stakeholders. I found that in order to build and complete a school it takes "partners" with "resources" who "communicate" together in an "environment" they support. The words in the parenthesis represent the research findings. Furthermore, the new school impacts the community with four key effects. Primarily, the new school "provides a safe learning environment" where the community has "motivation for school" that "creates opportunities" and "grows the community." Again, the words in parenthesis are the research findings. See Figure 55 for how the theory and practice will be shared.

Figure 55

Sharing the Results and Contributing to Action Research Theory and Practice



Note. Global Aid Consultants will be used as a host to share the results of the study to the stakeholders and continue to contribute academically to theory and practice to create change.

Communicating the findings is key to making the most of the study. Through Global Aid Consultants, whose mission is to improve education throughout the world in remote areas, the research findings will reach many audiences. Communicating the findings will be through formal and informal communications at meetings, workshops, and professional conferences to better understand and enhance the school building process. Global Aid Consultants usually has a speaking part or break out session at many conferences, including the annual planning conferences for DOD school building projects. During these sessions, the research findings can be presented to the audiences, wherein focus will be on what it takes to build a new school and the immediate community benefits. Due to this knowledge the stakeholders can be more efficient in their work (Stringer & Aragón, 2021).

Global Aid Consultants works directly with the host nation's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health at the local and national levels. When conducting future site surveys for new school construction, I will have direct access to local and national leaders to speak about the research findings from this project both formally and informally. For example, when we traveled to Belize we met with stakeholders to discuss the plans for the new school and what infrastructure is required. During this time, I will inform the stakeholders of what we learned from the last project and how the findings from this research can help improve the current new school building process.

Global Aid Consultants attends the DOD's school building planning conferences. In the past, we scheduled a special breakout session for Global Aid Consultants. Now, with the findings from the research, I can contribute the data through presentations and handouts with key concepts to the breakout session members that reach all ranks of military and civilian leadership in DOD who are involved with the school building process. This will have a significant

impact, because this is the first time many of the DOD personnel are involved in this program working directly with host nation personnel building a new school.

Global Aid Consultants also contributes to an international organization that is dedicated to strengthening America's development and diplomacy international affairs programs. They have a coalition of over 500 businesses and nonprofits across the country. I have been invited to speak at several of their state conferences and attend national conventions. This research gives me a creditable voice to reach a broad audience across America and raise awareness of the importance new schools bring to the local community and work Global Aid Consultants is doing. Also, once a year we have the opportunity to meet with numerous congressmen in Washington D.C. to convey the work we are doing with the new schools. I will share written reports, brochures, and photographs of the work we have accomplished.

Most importantly, and the secondary purpose of action research, is to share the theory and practice (Stringer & Aragón, 2021). I project to share the research process and results with other academic stakeholders that include university research symposiums. Reaching the action research community is important, because that is a prime setting where I can discuss the research process and what I learned. Hopefully, this will create professional discussions among scholars (Mertler, 2020). Sharing the research process with others in the research community that share a similar vision and goals towards learning is significant. Conclusively, it is important to use this experience to coach, teach, and mentor others in the research field.

Recommendations are a springboard for this study and a way to use the findings to enhance the school building process and further research. Recommendations are the practical application of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). These recommendations are the actions that I propose to the stakeholders and others who are involved with the school building process.

Moreover, the following recommendations can enhance future research, expand on my research study, and contribute to the academic research field:

- As a result of my findings, I recommend that the data from this research study continue to be analyzed. This will help in furthering the understanding of the school building process and impact from the stakeholders' point of view.
- I recommend that further studies be conducted to develop a larger database of information to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the school building process and impact. This can help better understand the second and third order effects of the new school.
- In light of what I learned, a comparison and analysis of research should be conducted to assess the recent experiences of building a school in different countries.
- I recommend a 3 to 5 year and a 5 to 7 year post school construction study to better understand the long-term effects of the school on the community.
- Finally, I recommend that a quantitative research study be conducted on the new school, which can help give further clarity on the impact.

Reflection and Conclusion

Writing and revising this research study has been a long, at times demanding, and always fascinating journey. I now feel that I have authority in this field but the process was extensive. I have encountered numerous new and thoughtful situations that helped me better understand the qualitative research process and especially how action research is applied to help with everyday problem sets. The process of clarifying, synthesizing, and interpreting the data has enhanced and improved my thinking about the research process and methods. I now can think of myself not only as a consumer of research but as a researcher who can contribute back to the body of knowledge.

I have come to the conclusion that qualitative research is a science and an art. When collecting and analyzing real life-data it takes a knowledge of the science of the proven methods of qualitative research. It takes the researcher's personal and professional experience to implement the methods as an art form to analyze the data to determine what is believed. The science and art combined increased the effectiveness of the research.

The science of qualitative research is the technical ways of the historical methods used. I found that the steps of grounded theory analysis to be systemic and conceptual sensible. These methods and theories are a few of many strategies used to help answer questions to resolve problems where deductive reasoning is key. Deductive reasoning takes a general or a broad area and refines it to a more specific or narrow area. First, the data is collected and then a hypothesis is drawn about the data. This is opposite to quantitative research where inductive reasoning takes place and the data is used to validate a hypothesis.

I found the art portion of this research required creative thinking that involved coming up with new imaginative and innovative ways to use the research methods. Researchers often face problems that require new solutions. In this research, I found myself in situations involving extremely remote environments with unique culture aspects that required creative solutions to overcome to conduct the research. I looked at different options with innovative ideas to solve problems using my past experiences and knowledge. Creatively combining past and new experiences helped me successfully complete the research.

The meaning of the results is one of the most important parts of the research. This portion is extremely essential and the sole purpose of the study. Because of this, I look forward to sharing these results both informally and formally to as many stakeholders as possible. Sharing my study leads to increasing the credibility of the study and gives stakeholders a

stronger voice of understanding the school building process. Hopefully by sharing my action research I will encourage others to do the same.

Conducting this research has given me insight into understanding the process of building a new school in Belize and its immediate impact on the local community. The stakeholders will use this insight to improve the school building process. I now realize that it takes partners with resources who communicate together in an environment they support to create developmental change. I learned that developmental change represents change where stakeholders assist communities to develop the capability and capacity to address a problem. For example, in this research a new school was built that increased the outlook for the community.

One of the most important parts from the research I learned was the impact of the new school. This is one of the most frequent questions asked by others. I now know first-hand from local, national, and international stakeholders that the new school provides a safe learning environment where the community is motivated for school that creates opportunities and grows the community. I am excited and looking forward to passing this knowledge on to others where all the long hours and hard work on this research study will have its greatest rewards. Below is a short summary of this research study broken down by chapter:

Chapter 1 introduced the study and provided background information of the study, how education can impact crime, how building schools impacts education, and how an international non-profit organization enhances educational opportunities. The chapter explained the rationale for the study, the research questions that guided the study, and the overall significance of the research. Most importantly, the Belize research setting was introduced where cultural differences and different ethnic groups were discussed as related to the research study.

Chapter 2 covered the importance of education and how education is related to crime in a topic-specific literature review. A former graduate level classroom exercise was analyzed and

the outcomes were discussed. The Kellogg logic model was introduced and educational elements were logically tied together in support of each other. Finally, my philosophical worldview was disclosed where my conceptual and theoretical perspectives along with positionality were discussed.

Chapter 3 presented how the qualitative research approach and action research design methodology were used in conducting the study. The three data sources, including participant stakeholders, photographs, and documents were defined. Data collection methods were identified. Finally the importance of limitations, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness on the research study were covered.

Chapter 4 is where raw data was converted into meaningful information. The data was prepared and analyzed through a four-step process using grounded theory as a guide. Approximately 600 codes were identified from the interviews, photographs, and document data. Similar codes were grouped together to form 30-35 meaningful categories. Later the categories with like meanings were grouped together and themes or the findings emerged. The emerging seven findings uncovered important insights to the research questions.

Chapter 5 analyzed and synthesized the seven findings with the three research questions. Additional analyzing and synthesizing of literature, research, and personal practical experience was conducted to discover the true meaning of the findings. I looked at the differences and similarities of the findings. From this, I developed a model that explains the relationships of how the findings pertain to building a new school and the immediate effects. Finally and principally, actionable recommendations were put forth with the goal of benefitting similar future endeavors.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval



July 20, 2020

To: Mr Mark Alvarez

From: University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board, FWA00009201

Mark:

Your request to conduct the study titled Alvarez and Speer Co-Author Action Research: Helping Stakeholders Understand the Process of Building Schools in Belize was approved by expedited review on 07/20/2020. Your IRB approval number is 20-07-007. You have approval to conduct this study through 7/20/2021.

The stamped informed consent document is uploaded to the Correspondence section in the Research Ethics Review system. Please use only the stamped version of the informed consent document.

Please keep in mind the following responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Conducting the study only according to the protocol approved by the IRB.
2. Submitting any changes to the protocol and/or consent documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to the implementation of the changes. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
3. Ensuring that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
4. Reporting immediately to the IRB any severe adverse reaction or serious problem, whether anticipated or unanticipated.
5. Reporting immediately to the IRB the death of a subject, regardless of the cause.
6. Reporting promptly to the IRB any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of the subjects to participate in the study or, once enrolled, to continue to take part.
7. Timely submission of an annual status report (for exempt studies) or a request for continuing review (for expedited and full Board studies). Use either the **IRB Study Status Update** or **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
8. Completion and maintenance of an active (non-expired) CITI human subjects training certificate.
9. Timely notification of a project's completion. Use the **IRB Closure** form.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Bilicek
 Research Compliance Coordinator
 University of the Incarnate Word
 (210) 805-3565
bilicek@uiwtx.edu

Appendix A - Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval—Continued



July 14, 2021

PI: Mr Mark Alvarez

Protocol title: Alvarez and Speer Co-Authored Action Research: Helping Stakeholders Understand the Process of Building Schools in Belize

Mark:

Your request for continued review of Expedited protocol 20-07-007 titled "Alvarez and Speer Co-Authored Action Research: Helping Stakeholders Understand the Process of Building Schools in Belize " was approved. This approval will expire **one year** from 07/14/2021.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Bilicek
Research Compliance Coordinator
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3565
mbilicek@uiwtx.edu

Appendix A - Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval—Continued



July 29 2022

PI: Mr Mark Alvarez

Protocol Title: Alvarez and Speer Co-Authoring Action Research: Helping Stakeholders Understand the Process of Building Schools in Belize

IRB Reference: Alvarez - Exp- 4061 - 4 4061

Legacy Approval Number: 20-07-007

Project Link: <https://uiw.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/ProjectView/Index/847>

Hello,

The above protocol has been reactivated. The protocol expiration date is now 07/14/2023.

Please keep in mind the following responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Conducting the study only according to the protocol approved by the IRB.
2. Submitting a **Study Status Update** (for exempt studies) or **Continuing Review Request** (for expedited and Full Board studies) to the IRB annually, beginning one year from today's date (Today's Date).
3. Submitting any changes to the protocol and/or consent documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to the implementation of the changes. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
4. Ensuring that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
5. Reporting immediately to the IRB any severe adverse reaction or serious problem, whether anticipated or unanticipated, using the **Unanticipated Problem/Protocol Deviation Report**.
6. Reporting immediately to the IRB the death of a subject, regardless of the cause.
7. Reporting promptly to the IRB any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of the subjects to participate or continue to take part in the study.
8. Timely submission of an annual status report (for exempt studies) or a request for continuing review (for expedited and full Board studies). Use either the **IRB Study Status Update** or **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
9. Ensuring completion and maintenance of an active (non-expired) CITI human subjects training certificate for all individuals on the protocol.
10. Timely notification of a project's completion. Use the **IRB Closure** form.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

If you need any assistance, please contact the UTW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research and Graduate Studies.

Sincerely,

Office of Research and Sponsored Projects
Research Compliance
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3555
irb@uiwtx.edu

IRB #: 00005059 / FWA #: 00009201

Appendix B - Belize Ministry of Education Letter

From: Luis Carballo luis.carballo@moe.gov.bz
Subject: Re: Doctoral Study
Date: March 24, 2020 at 11:43 AM
To: Mark Alvarez - Global Aid Consultants mark@globalaid.us
Cc: TODD SPEER - Global Aid Consultants Todd@globalaid.us

LC

Good Morning Mark and Todd,

Sorry for the late response.

The Ministry of Education, Belize, is happy to support with the study. We approve your request to carry out the study and hope the study would assist us in future planning of BTH and other foreign projects.

We look forward to BTH 2020 and your participation.

Thanks,

On Thu, Mar 12, 2020 at 8:34 PM Mark Alvarez - Global Aid Consultants <mark@globalaid.us> wrote:

boxbe Mark Alvarez – Global Aid Consultants (mark@globalaid.us) is not on your Guest List |
[Approve sender](#) | [Approve domain](#)

Hi Luis,

I hope you are doing well. Todd and I will be in Corozal from May 5-11. I like to invite you for lunch in Corozal and show you our doctoral study for improving foreign humanitarian assistance. We're trying to make it a better process by understanding how the community feels when a school project is built between the Belizean and U.S. governments. The study and questions are basic and names of places and people are only revealed upon consent.

We're hopping for an approval response from you or someone to show our university committee that this study is okay from MoE.

Sincerely,

Mark

Mark Alvarez - Global Aid Consultants
mark@globalaid.us

--
Luis Carballo M.Ed.
 Principal Education Officer
 Officer In Charge
 School Resourcing Services
 Ministry of Education
 West Block, Belmopan
 Tel: 828-5973 Cell: 615-7365
 Email: luis.carballo@moe.gov.bz

Appendix C - Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certification



Completion Date 01-Apr-2018
Expiration Date 01-Apr-2021
Record ID 26666923

This is to certify that:

Stephen Todd Speer

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Human Subjects Research for Social & Behavioral Research Investigators - Basic/Refresher (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of the Incarnate Word

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w278777fe-4a89-4f9a-9e41-c4b36f0b7ac6-26666923



Completion Date 02-Apr-2021
Expiration Date 01-Apr-2024
Record ID 40152905

This is to certify that:

Stephen Todd Speer

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Human Subjects Research for Social & Behavioral Research Investigators - Basic/Refresher (Course Learner Group)
2 - Refresher Course (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Under requirements set by:

University of the Incarnate Word

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5c5279d1-f9b2-43f1-a7b4-b1746f937111-40152905



Appendix D - Interview Protocol

A Study on Understanding the School Building Process in Belize

Interviewer: _____

Participant: _____

Position of Participant: _____

Date and Time: _____

Location: _____

- 1) I will greet the participant and identify myself as Todd Speer, a doctoral candidate from the University of the Incarnate Word, conducting a study focused on understanding the process of building a new school in Belize from the participants point of view.
- 2) I will thank the participant for taking time to participate in the study and sharing their personal experiences and views.
- 3) The participant will be asked to verbally consent to recording the interview for future analysis. The recording device will be turned on and I will note the date, time, and location of the interview.
- 4) Next, I will ask my research questions. The questions are used as a guide for the interview. I will encourage participants to share their experiences pertaining to the phenomenon of building a new school in Belize. I will ask probing and follow up questions to assist with the discussions and thick descriptions.
- 5) After stating the question, I will give the participant time to answer the question fully with their thoughts and point of view. If needed, I will ask the participant to expand on their ideas through personal examples.
- 6) The interview is expected to last 30 minutes. Depending on the participants' answers this might require less or more time.
- 7) I will thank the participant at the end of the end of the interview. I will ask if they can be available to clarify their answers if required and would like to have a summary of the research findings.
- 8) Last, I will turn the recording device off.

Appendix E - Participant Recruitment Email

Dear <Participant's Name>,

I am a doctoral candidate from the University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A., conducting a qualitative action research study focused on understanding the process of building a new school in Belize from the stakeholder's point of view in order to improve the process. I am contacting you because you are a stakeholder and have direct knowledge of the school building process in Belize.

Corozal, Belize was selected in 2020 and 2021 by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense for the humanitarian assistance school building project. To my knowledge, no one from the humanitarian assistance school building team has documented the stakeholders' perception on the process of building a new school.

This study is exploratory in nature and therefore necessary to obtain an in-depth understanding of the process through the stakeholders' point of view. Important lessons learned from this study will be shared with national and international stakeholders, other governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

The Institutional Review Board from the University of the Incarnate Word and from the Belize Ministry of Education approved this study. As a key stakeholder in the school building project, who has direct knowledge on the process, I ask for approximately 30 minutes of your time to conduct a semi structured interview.

Your responses will be kept confidential and the results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used. I will use codes to represent your name through the study and all data will be stored on an encrypted drive to keep confidentiality of the research. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you for your support!

Todd Speer

Appendix F - Participant Consent Form



Belize School Building Project Study Participant Consent Form

Invitation: You have been selected and are invited to volunteer as a participant in a research study about how you view, act, and feel about the new school building process in Corozal, Belize. We sincerely appreciate your time and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us. Your participation will greatly help us understand what we can do better with future projects.

Purpose: The purpose of the research is to learn about the new school building process from the community stakeholders. Information from this study will help improve future projects that help children in Belize and around the world.

Participation: Participation in this research is voluntary. The study involves:

- Informal face-to-face conversations, interviews, and focus groups.
- This process will take approximately one hour.
- There are minimal risks associated with this study.
- You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer.
- You will not be paid for your participation.
- You are free to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Duration: The researchers will collect data for six months and will begin in the Summer 2020.

Researchers: *Todd Speer, speer@uiwtx.edu, Doctoral Candidate*
Mark A. Alvarez, maalvar7@uiwtx.edu, Doctoral Candidate
Dreeben School of Education, University of the Incarnate Word
San Antonio, Texas, 78209 USA

Questions: If you have a question regarding this study, you should contact one of the researchers listed on this consent form. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee that approves international research from the University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, Texas, will answer any questions about your rights in the study. Please contact Dr. Ana Hagendorf at +1-210-805-3036.

Appendix F - Participant Consent Form—Continued

Confidentiality: You will remain confidential in the study and we will mask all identifying information. All research records will be stored in a password protected hard drive, accessible only to the researchers.

Statement of Consent: Your signature indicates you consent to take part in this research study and you have read and understand the information given above.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Participant's Name _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Name _____

Appendix G - Consistency Chart of Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions

Findings	Interpretations	Conclusions
Motivation for School Many participants indicated that their motivation to be involved with the new school increased.	· People are motivated to be involved with something new. · People are proud to use the new school. · People want to be involved with something successful. · The new school creates “happiness” throughout the community.	The school is a beacon for the community that stretches beyond today's boundaries.
Safe Learning Environment Most participants indicated that the new school made them feel safer.	· The new school building created an environment where people felt safer. · The new school structure was stronger than the previous building.	Even though it was built as a school building, the structure provided many more avenues of safety from weather, storage security, bugs, and overall feeling of being safe.
Creates Opportunities The majority of participants expressed how the new school created opportunities.	· The new school is a community synergy for creating opportunities. · The school creates new opportunities for students and for community members. · Because more people attend school, more opportunities will be created.	Role models, teachers, and peers introduce students to new opportunities and ideas that otherwise would not be available. Opportunities can lead to greater economic wealth and prosperity for the community.
Grows the Community Most participants cited that the community relations grew due to the new school.	· The new school increased community involvement. · Community members wanted to help with the new school. · The new school attracted many people to the community who otherwise would not have been involved.	The new school expanded the community in size. Because of the new school, families from other areas moved into the new school's community.

Partners Are Needed Many participants explained how important partners are to the creation of the new school.	· It takes many people and organizations with specific skills and resources to complete a complex project. · The new school could not have been built alone. · Partners working together contributed to the success of the new school.	The new school building process requires many stakeholders with unique skills and monetary assets to complete the project.
Schools Cost Money Most participants cited that money was a key issue with schools.	· It takes money to build the school. · It takes money to go to school. · Without money the new school would not have been possible.	Money is needed to construct and sustain a new school. Without proper financing from partners the project would not be possible.
Communication is Key Most participants expressed the importance of communication with the school building process.	· Communication was essential for the school building process. · Communication is challenging among stakeholders who come from different cultural environments. · Effective communication is difficult to conduct. · It is hard to know if you are effectively communicating.	It is important to build trust among communities and stakeholders. Creating trust is key to good collaboration and encourages voices that are often not heard to be heard.

Appendix H - Sample Interview Transcripts

Interview P1 NGO Health Expert on July 23, 2020

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

I'd like to get you to a point where you take just kind of take deep breath and go back to go back to your experiences, go back to your perceptions, especially being a government leader, and go back to the point where you're looking at your perceptions of from a 36,000 foot viewpoint about how did you feel about the school being built in Corozal Belize?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

In general, I think it's, it's a very positive in having spent a lot of time in central America, South America and Latin America, talking with their leaders and stuff, you, you sense their understanding of the importance of education, the importance in terms not only of making productive citizens, but in, in helping kids stay out of crime, stay out of drugs. And as they become productive citizens, it's the idea of them being invested in their communities and wanting to stay there and better their communities, as opposed to wanting to go somewhere else because of lack of opportunity and stuff like that. So, I think that building schools is really an important step in helping some of these local populations in sort of becoming self-sufficient and sort of realizing their opportunities.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

We're there any examples?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

Even when we were down in Guatemala in particular, I heard it a lot from the locals that they don't want to live in fear of criminals. They don't want to feel the need to pack up and leave because there's no opportunities or because crime is so bad, where they have to travel somewhere or even worse yet, feel that they need to get into a caravan and travel thousands of miles to get stopped at the U S border. And then, hold up all of the danger that goes in that travel both from the means of travel to people who take advantage of the travelers, either through other criminal activities or through assaults and stuff like that.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

So, they all understand, and I've seen that they feel that if, if, if I can get educated, I can provide myself with opportunities. I can give myself a skill that I can use. And by using those skills, they can then become active members participating in their communities. They can own businesses, they can go to work, they have a set income, they don't have, and by sort of creating that secure environment within the community, you develop a sort of a sense of community. And that says a community helps to kind of weed out some of the crime, because right now the only opportunities you have are through crime. We see it in some of our inner cities too, that when you don't have job opportunities, you're going to look to where you can make easy money. And criminal enterprises are usually a way to make easy money.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

It could be very dangerous, but it's still an easy way to do it. So, by having people see that there are opportunities and that you can live in a better community and it makes the community safer, it makes it stabilize not only that community, but the region and then potentially the nation as a whole, because as people become more, more invested, they begin to trust their government. They begin to feel comfortable in their own environment and they don't see the need to, to, to pack up and move or, or they don't live in fear that, I'm not going to, I'm going to get killed walking home from work or something like that.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

How do you think the other side felt or seen our culture, or how do you think they saw the United States?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

I think the sort of social media and media in general kind of colors everybody and their perceptions of culture and perceptions, we can, we are at least I have been in the environment in the AI area, in Latin America long enough, and being a partial Latin descent, I understand the Latin culture. I understand how it works. But for those, when all they have is they're only understanding of American culture is what they saw, what they see on in movies and in television, and, and some of those don't portray us in a very good light, we're, we're portrayed as sort of arrogant and, and some of these portrayals are not without, without a basis in reality.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

We're not arrogant, that we're actually there to help, we're caring human individuals that have a culture. We do have more people who are caring and who want to help and who want to do things. And it helps to bring a better light, not only to us as individuals, but it helps to put sort of the United States and who we are into a better culture around the world and sort of dispel some of the myths to get brought out through movies and through popular television and through popular media sites. So, I think, I think this is important because it allows us to show the rest of the world who we are and who, I mean, who we really are at the core and that we really are out there to, to, to provide help and to make the world a better place, not just for us, but for everybody.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

How do you think we can improve our perception? I mean, their perception of us or, or in general? How do you think we could improve the perception of the United States building a new school?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

Once you get into Latin America, I think once we're there, the projects are underway. I think that that's a positive. I think the harder thing on that perception is on the United States side. Over the last few years, in particular with the current administration, we've become very isolationist and various sorts of self-centered, and we've sort of lost the vision of the importance of having that diplomatic and that outreach and that, that positive impact on populations. And I, I think it's important for us to advertise those points that I'm making over and over again and get them into the people who make the decisions and understand what this means. It's not just about building a building, and, and putting a bunch of

desks in there. There are some long term far-reaching second and third order effects from this building. So, Johnny gets to go to school tonight, but it's the fact that we can alter the future. We can alter the whole, the whole path the whole country is taking in terms of stability and security and, and prosperity with something simple like this.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

From your perspective as either a government leader or as an NGO leader involved in school building, what do you think could be done to better improve the school building process?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

I'm trying to think about the process itself. The department of defense's activities down there have been the actual process of putting together the building and doing that well. I think sometimes maybe we can do a better role in addressing the local leadership through their ministry of education, for example, and identifying the places that are in true need of cause, we've been some places where you're looking at one school that's falling apart, and then you're looking at another school that, trying to upgrade, that it's a disparity in how the schools, the funding and what the schools look like.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

So, I mean, if we could really sort of put the focus on the schools that really, really need it, and from that perspective, just kind of have that focus. I think that that might make the building process a little bit easier because it's one thing to sort of rebuild a school. And it's another thing to put a couple of classrooms on the backside of the school that are going to be just an addition to what's already a very nice building. So, I think we can measure in effect those communities within the smaller communities, within the bigger communities that really do need the help and do need the assistance.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Can you share an experience, or do you have one where you felt uncomfortable during the school building process?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

Generally? I think a few times is especially early on in the process, when we're down there is sort of the expectation management where I think we need or make it clear that we're not a bottomless pit, we're just going to be there to do everything for everybody. Is it understanding that we have limitations both in funding and in manpower and, and other things? And while they can shoot for the stars and wish for everything, they are going to get what they need. And I think that's really, a little uncomfortable. I'm from the other side of comfort, I really haven't had too much of an issue.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

I don't think, I think usually things are well coordinated. From a security standpoint, there are some places that we've gone into that by their very nature of being under-governed or, or because of the criminal element are somewhat dangerous. And I've never really been in a situation, felt uncomfortable. There've been times when my spidey senses have been up and I've been much more aware of my surroundings just because of the environment. But there is that possibility that there may be somebody

who, for reasons unknown to us, may not want this to succeed. Whether they want to make the U S look bad, whether they want to make their own government look bad, or because they want to sort of maintain power in an area, that they may purposely do things to, to hinder or to have a negative impact on, on the process.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

And so those are things that, that, that we have seen. I mean, there are some areas in Central America in particular that are fairly dangerous because of the narcotrafficking and crime and criminal gang activities, where it would be really easy for them to do something bad. And again, it's working with the government agencies to ensure and if possible, making sure that those locals understand that this is for the betterment of their community. I've heard stories from part of our group who were down in a heavy gang area where the gang was actually thanking us for being there, for helping improve the opportunities for their kids, so that they didn't have to live the same lives that they had to live in terms of criminal activity. So, like I said, I've never really felt myself could very quickly become dangerous or escalated if stuff is not done carefully.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Did you have a communication strategy?

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

What strategies did you use, or your team use to communicate the school building process?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

I'm a big believer that while you may do initial context, either through phone or through email to get that the base started, it's really important to sit down and meet with the people face-to-face, whether it's the ministry of health, the local minister of health, the principals at the school, it's that ability to sit down with them and provide a face and talk to them and let them know that this is where, what we're doing. This is why we're doing it. This is what you can expect. And then we, that allows us to reach back. And when we get asked questions. These are the expectations; this is what we want to provide.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

So, we have a clear set out sort of strategy of what we want to do, how we want to do it, what we need to do to get there and just have that set out and make sure that all of the stakeholders involved are read in on that process. It's a lot of verbal communication, a lot of messaging on email and through social media, but also that, that, that personal face-to-face discussion with people to make sure that, that we're all, that we're all understanding the process that we're all coming up with, sort of an expectation that's sort of a unified expectation where we all sort of have that same when we're all done. We all sort of have the same expectation of what we're going to get so that there isn't any miscommunication so that there isn't any misunderstanding so that there aren't any hurt feelings when somebody maybe was expecting something and didn't get it. I think those are the keys for that direct communication is the commonality of messaging and the commonality of expectations.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

What would the one thing that leaders can do to improve the school building process? This can be a leader at any level, in the government or non-government.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

What could leaders do to improve the process again? I think it's having transparency and clarity, understanding that when we make a certain donation or when we provide a certain amount of money for a certain process to be done, for example, the building of the desks, making sure that that is used entirely for its purpose, that there's no little cuts being taken here and there. And if we're donating some supplies or donating something that there's not a process where someone along the line where there's some low

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

We're still dealing in areas where there's a lot of corruption whether it's at the federal government or at the local government level. And those little bits of corruption, even if they're small, can sort of add onto the operating costs and really make the efforts that we put forward, be less effective. I think that that's one of those things for leaders at all levels to sort of ensure that there's transparency and openness to the process so that everybody's expectations and everybody knows what's happening with money that has been donated, what things have been donated, et cetera.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

What was your role that connects all this experience that you just gave us over the years?

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

When I was on active duty, I was the senior medical advisor for the U S Army component of Southern Command who has responsibility for all of Central America, South America, and a large part of the Caribbean. As the health advisor, I engaged with countries in the region from a health perspective and understanding the importance of health in instability and insecurity. If people are healthy, they can work.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

It's that whole snowball effect. We understood the roles of education and agriculture and all of those things that go into security. There's a lot of different components to go into it. And from the medical perspective, there's an educational piece to it as well. In terms of educating the locals, because it's about giving them capacity or viewing them with capacity, giving them the ability to, to take care of themselves, to do the things that they need to do on their own.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

It's about teaching, mentoring and training of the locals, helping them to improve their ability to take care of their populations. It's not about me going down and handing out a bunch of pills for 10 days and then leaving. It's about me providing training to improve the skills and the competence of the people who are there. Who is going to stay there after I leave to provide that clinical care for people? And it's sort of all the same things, what we do with the education, it's about providing them with those tools and assets that they need to continue to move forward and progress. And I think that's how I used to focus my engagements as an Army leader. That's how we continue to focus our engagements through

the NGO. And I think that's probably one of the most effective things that I've seen in engaging, it's not about me doing, it's about me teaching you how to do it for yourself.

P1 (NGO Health Professional)

And I think that's an important lesson that a lot of people don't seem to get at times, they want to go down and they want to build a house, or they want to provide medical treatment, but you're only there for a short period of time, and if you don't train them or you don't help them, when a problem arises later, they don't have the ability to deal with it. Whereas what we do is we go down there, and we give them that ability. We help them develop it, we also give them the ability to manage and to deal with any issues that pop up after we've left.

Interview P7 International NGO on January 14, 2021

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Good morning. This is Todd. I'm here today with Mark and we're doing our co-research dissertation where we're doing interviews this morning. We're going to interview P7, who is part of a nonprofit international non-government organization that has helped with building schools and health throughout the world. And lately we've been, especially working in Corozal beliefs in central America, and she's here today. That's going to help answer some of the questions for our research that we're using in our dissertation. So good morning, P7. Thank you for being here today. Thank you. So, I'm just going to start this out. I'm going to start out with a few questions and then the co-researcher Mark is going to follow up with his questions at the end. So, let's just dive right into this P7 so we can get right to these answers that we need. I'm going to ask you this first question here, please. Please tell me how you feel about the school building process in Corozal beliefs.

P7 (International NGO)

I think the process is a well-coordinated effort between multiple organizations including the host nation, the department of defense and folks like the NGOs that support different parts of the process. But it's a very well-coordinated effort.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And can you share one or two of your most important experiences with the school building process?

P7 (International NGO)

I think getting to see that children are the same everywhere and they just want to be happy. They want to learn by meeting the teachers and the community members. It's been very rewarding to see the efforts and, and what the impact can be.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And that's good, that brings us to the next question here. Can you share an experience of how the building, the new school impacted the community?

P7 (International NGO)

In speaking with some of the teachers and some of the other community members, the building of a new school and better infrastructure has helped improve the health and the education helped keep the children in school longer so that they can have the chance to build a career in the future and contribute back to their community. And I think better schools and better education will help them do that.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And from your perspective, and in your opinion, what's the most difficult part about building the new schools? Do you think

P7 (International NGO)

It's very challenging. Getting to the locations is a challenge; they're usually quite remote which is where the greatest need is. The fundraising challenges of having appropriate money to be able to complete the projects can be challenging. And this year with COVID, I think just completing the projects without the ability to travel internationally has been a tremendous difficulty.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And during this school, this difficulty time, is there a time where you felt uncomfortable during this process or in the past,

P7 (International NGO)

In the past, some of the remote areas have been a little more unique culturally that may have made me feel a little ill, but I know that the folks that we work with always did their very best to make sure we were always safe.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And from your position can you describe, what is your part or what is your non-profits part in the school building process?

P7 (International NGO)

Global Aid Consultants has partnered with the other participants. Once the building has been built, we would locally source infrastructure items like school desks, chalkboards, teacher desks, et cetera procure them with money that stays in the local community to help them economically and then put that infrastructure into the classrooms. So, it can be immediately used to start teaching the children.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Okay. And then, so when we're doing that, what, what, w what's one thing that you would like to communicate to the community about the school building process? What would you like them to know?

P7 (International NGO)

Do we want the best for them? We want the best for their children. We want to see them succeed for generations to come and education is the key to improving life economically and culturally,

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And this is the last question I have before I turn it over to Mark. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding the school building process or how can we improve the process in the future?

P7 (International NGO)

I find the process tremendously rewarding. So many people come together for the good of these children. It's a tremendous sight to see when the project gets completed and I think the way to improve it would be continued support from communities and partners. Especially on the fundraising side with more funds, we could do better.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Okay. Well, thank you so much for your time and Mark with the questions you have for P7 this morning. Just one question and that is what is your perception of the school building process overall within the department of defense and a country as Corozal, Belize? How does it, how do you see things? How does it make you feel?

P7 (International NGO)

It makes me feel satisfied. It makes me feel hopeful. Seeing all of these different organizations come together for the common good it's tremendously rewarding to be a part of and see the faces of these children who just want to be happy and learn and watch the effect that it can have on their local community. When the parents see that other people care and here, we come from a different country, but we're showing them that we care about them.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

There was one thing to improve the overall process to have the United States government department of defense build schools in countries in central America. What would it be?

P7 (International NGO)

I think they do a very good job. I think through years and years of completing projects like this, that they, I don't want to say, have perfected the process, but have made it very well coordinated. So, I don't think I could think of a thing right now that would improve the process because they do get completed. I think they do a very good job.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Thank you. That's all my questions.

Interview P8 International NGO on January 14, 2021

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Good morning. Thank you for being here with Todd and myself Mark, co-researchers for a project that's occurring and beliefs in the past, you have been an NGO participant with globally consultants in the projects and beliefs. And for schools, we have a few questions we're asking you, what are your perceptions? Okay. First question is what is your perception of the school building process by the department of defense in Corazon beliefs?

P8 (International NGO)

I think it's great. For those schools built by DOD, probably local people, they should do it, but when they cannot do it, some runners come and do it. I think it's great.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

How do you think an NGO impacts the school building process?

P8 (International NGO)

I think not every organization can do everything. So, when those buildings are built, there are many other needs. So, some other end-use can, if they can come and provide some other things, if they can meet other needs, I think it will be good.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Okay. And NGOs and the department of defense or an organization improve the humanitarian assistance building schools in Corazon beliefs?

P8 (International NGO)

I think they are already doing a good job. I don't know if there is anything I can think of, they can improve. Thank you. You're welcome.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Let me ask P8. Thank you for joining us today. We really appreciate your time and your, and your dedication to helping out us with our research project and also helping out Global Aid Consultants with the missions they do with education and health around the world. But let me ask you this question here, please share your most important experience with the school building process.

P8 (International NGO)

For me being Korean to travel to Central America and see those countries and to see there are, it was a very special experience, I think.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Okay. That's good. And how do you feel, how do you think the new schools will impact the community or what have you seen schools do to communities in the past?

P8 (International NGO)

Like we hear about these children they have opportunities for education. So, if those crews are built, the children can have a better opportunity for education and then either bring a better future for their lives.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And from your perspective, what do you think is the most important part or what is the most difficult part of building that school?

P8 (International NGO)

We have been trying to talk to more people to raise funds, to do this work more, but it has not been easy to raise funds, and everybody says, when they hear about this work, they say, Oh, it's great, but nobody really contributed. So, it has been difficult.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Yeah. That's good. And then can you share an experience where you felt maybe uncomfortable or I don't know, just uncomfortable or maybe not safe?

P8 (International NGO)

I never, I never felt unsafe. Like people say in some countries in Central America, it's very dangerous, but I never felt it's dangerous or unsafe. I always felt very safe traveling there.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

And what do you feel about your nonprofit, that, that you belong to? What, what do they, what's the most important thing that they communicate to the community about building the schools? Oh, okay.

P8 (International NGO)

I don't know. If we need to communicate more to the local people because when we come and when you explain what we try to do, they always understand and they appreciate, so I don't know if there is anything we need to communicate more

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Well. That's good. And one last question, would you like to share anything else about your involvement in building new schools?

P8 (International NGO)

Me being a Korean, I think about Korean history a little bit, and we understand the importance and the power of education. So, when Korea was so poor after the Korean war in my parents' generation, they

focused on educating their children and many of them sacrificed and that's how Korea became a more advanced country now. So, if we like, when we are helping these children for their education it will help these children. Also, we are helping the countries as well. I think

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

That's good. Thank you, P8. Okay. Thank you.

Interview P9 U.S. Embassy on January 16, 2021

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Hey, good morning, everyone. We're here today with P9. P9 has lots of experience working in Central America and helping out with humanitarian assistance programs and especially building the schools in Guatemala. He also has experience with building schools in countries that surround Guatemala, like Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras. He's here today to help us answer a few questions in my dissertation. So good morning, P9. Thank you for being here.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

I would like to add a little background on P9. P9 is a Foreign Area Officer for the United States Army Department of Defense for Central American countries. And the experience he has is going to bring more meaning and value to our study as a participant. Thank you for participating in our study.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Can you please describe your position with building the new schools, but also a little history about yourself and how you impacted the school building process?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

In my case, I was the Security Defense Official Attaché in Guatemala, the DAT in Nicaragua, deputy in El Salvador, the Deputy in Panama, some of the recent experience working with HAP projects with SOUTHCOM. So, in Guatemala I was in charge of both the MILGROUP as well as the attaché and had oversight of all programs and teams coming into the country, particularly with HAP. All HAP projects in Guatemala, had to be verified through my office. In Guatemala we had one of the larger programs at the time. I want to say \$9 million projects spread all over the fear that was there, to include clinics, schools, different projects. Some of those are improvements of existing structures, coordinated through the host station and SOUTHCOM.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

How do you feel about the school building process? How did you or how do you feel about it?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

There was a process that does a pretty decent job, making sure that the T's are crossed, guys are auditing, in regard to the process. Working for the MILGPS, the SCOs are making sure that everything is correct for the host nation. We're talking about ownership of the land. Was a big part. Some of the issues we have is that sometimes it's not as identified, it's not really had a clear title. It does not have a clear title. We will identify the ownership to make sure the government does own that piece of land, or there's not some civilian or organization laying claim. Once it's a clear title in the process we can move forward and get involved and identify the location. So, what are the hard problems identifying where to go to improve the wellbeing of the population, win hearts and minds. So, you don't want to go to a very populated area. You want to go to the places that aren't really, you see a lot of support from the host

nation. It might be just the fact that lack of funding or just in the middle of nowhere is hard to reach. The next phase is to identify all these locations.

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

The host nation comes back to us with a whole list with everything they want in the projects. We have to go back and make sure that these projects make sense from a standpoint of optics for SOUTHCOM and the MC.

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

As you can imagine, sometimes this gets tied into politics, right? So, the host nation tries to push, or an individual has to push, a location because it might better support his constituents as opposed to the local population. So, we get involved a lot in that, and we make suggestions. The hard part here is that it's not our decision. It's the host nation's decision where it has to go. It involves the minister of health, the minister of education, a lot of different organizations get involved. We agree on a location of possible projects and that's a part of the process I think works well. The hard part of the process is sometimes getting the whole station to follow through. Once you identify a location, have the documentation for the land, everything is correct. And so, moving forward, the hard part that I found is to follow through. You guys provide a desk which is great. The hard part after the school is built is to provide the electricity or the plumbing. Once the building is set up and even the desks are in place there's no electricity. Sometimes these projects go over an election year. So now a new person is in charge and not the same type of emphasis on a location or completing the project.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

What are your most important experiences with the school building process?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

I'll talk about a problem and it goes back to the way the system is set up because you started planning over the years and the problems are identified and the projects are moving forward and you come into the country, it's already moving forward and not going to stop. So, you come in and you sit in a new position, you're stuck with what the previous individual has coordinated and you're in execution mode. One of the problems we faced, in one of the places we built, in this case it wasn't a school but a warehouse. Now, one of the things that SOUTHCOM does well is they would identify different structures that were dual use. That was key, dual use, they were mostly gyms or cafeterias. They were used during natural disasters; they were in a location that the population would fall back. Gyms and cafeterias were key because they were large areas that could bring in people, have cots, and they can stay there.

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

They have the facilities for cooking as well as water and showers. So, gyms and cafeterias worked well. There was an issue as it was a warehouse that was meant to be used to store supplies in case of emergencies. For some reason, it was built on a military installation, understanding that the departments that required supplies had access to those buildings. It was a fight. One mission you had to

ask permission from departments, to get access to the base. It wasn't easy for that to get, to get access to the supplies. One of the first things I had to do in Guatemala was address these issues at the administrative level.

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

This was supposed to be taken care of before construction started, somewhere in the process that never happened during construction and the building was completed. Because of the step being missed or falling through the cracks, it created an issue that we had to address. It took, I think, over a year. Again, that's one issue, one problem, but the same issues affect schools. And again, maybe a fraud wastes abuse, because somebody failed to do all the checks and balances.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

How do you think the local culture was represented during the school building process? Can you state an example where maybe it was represented or maybe it wasn't?

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Okay. And that's good. Think about this here. This isn't our next question here. How do you think the local culture was represented during the school building process? So, can you make an example where maybe it was represented or maybe it wasn't?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

The actual location? I can't remember if he felt my head when you did belay, he wasn't at school. We fought when we built classrooms from my memory, I know they brought in the local population at all, some as part of the groundbreaking and they also made attempts. And if I could verify this, if people actually got this, but attempt to hire locals to help them build the schools I don't believe there was pain. Bob was more the alternative, how bout like a volunteer basis to have land and set stuff up and just help them show ownership in the school. It wasn't a donation of all the equipment and the building and the building of the school itself. What promises were made by the ministry of education to provide teachers, as well as some of you in the school's dash books, whatever it was here to attrition, but they also brought in the local population kind of help out there to kind of show their involvement. But this is your school who would like you to participate here in this.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Our next question. Can you share an experience on how the new school impacted the local community?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

All I can say is the school was built, and they had the grand opening, and all the kids and some of the parents showed up. You know, they make a big deal about this. It's a great news story for SOUTHCOM as well for the host nation and for the embassy. When you see some of the kids' parents come out there, I always say, it's not a sense of pride. It's more of respect from us. It's really trying to push it off on the leaders that provided them something. You actually do see some of the kids and the parents and some

of the teachers, they're impressed. You see what they have to deal with, the situation, those locations. They have to teach in that village with no electricity and no AC for sure. Now you've got a metal roof [building] with a fan. We come in there and we change that. Now there's insulation underneath that metal roof and a better fan. It's something as simple as that. And it's amazing how something that doesn't really cost us that much can do so much.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

In your opinion, what is the most difficult part of building a new school? What do you find as the most challenging part?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

It goes back to part of the conversation we had earlier. If you first start off getting everything in place, and a lot of homework, it's good. It [setting the stage] gets done before the ground is broken. You gotta have that [land] title, you got to show proof that you own the land, the host nation owns the property. Everything has been corrected and double checked. The problem sometimes is, based on my experience, in an election year. A new minister of education is there, and the school is being built. He doesn't like the location. He wants to move it somewhere else. They slowly grow some of this stuff because they go to use their influence to prevent the project moving forward because they're not in compliance or supportive of the location. They want to place it or move it to a better location that supports their voters. It's not that easy to change locations. Try to explain that to an individual, that it will take another year to move the location, everything's set. To include support from the host nation, our guys coming in to build at a certain place, it supports a larger project.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Is there an experience or a time when you felt uncomfortable during this process of building the new schools?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

Some of the locations they build these places are not the safest locations. There are times you're in areas where you drive through areas that are questionable. We'll make sure that wherever we go with our troops that they're safe. Once the masses show up it's highly unlikely that anything will happen to our soldiers or anyone supporting this. You are in areas that it's recommended that U.S. People don't stay in. And again, it's not because being an American, it's just the fact that the area is hot [dangerous]. So, in our case, we did have a situation where there was a threat, not towards the Americans, but against a Guatemalan. A protest could likely take place close to the areas where we had Americans going on a regular basis. There was more of a chance of an accidental injury as a result of whatever action is taking place between two groups. You want to make sure that not only are the U.S. Personnel taken care of, but any host nation personnel, or civilians that might be the scenario. You pick places that are kind of rough because you want to be in those situations because they need help. So, you want to be able to make an impact and sometimes pick those locations.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

What would you like to communicate more to the community about the school building process?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

It's a joint effort, literally {we, DoD} go down to do the surveys. They're supposed to be looking at the host nation and talking to people who are getting {meeting} with civil affairs guys. I think what's good about the {host nation} classes with the different levels of {government} and our different skill sets of the military {working together}. And it's really worked with {USSOUTHCOM} involved as well as the embassy into identifying the locations. So, you have to go on the ground talking to the local population, talking to local leaders and observing first hand as to what can best support the community.

Todd (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Yeah. What would you like to communicate more to the community about the school building process?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

Along with that is that they're {Host nation} involved in the process. So, they would actually, and again, you don't have the capability to talk to every civilian personnel, but there is a relation with the host nation. {The host nation sees}, as we were trying to do and {that,} they're involved in the process. It's a great idea because they know a lot of what's going on. When you start talking {to the locals, they know more} about {the area, than} you {like} changes in the weather. The politician might not know certain things, but looking at that local guy, you know, the father, the one kid who's been here his whole life, he understands that what you want to do is not going to work for the following reasons {for example, the local will question} why even bring trucks. And this is actually true, {bringing trucks} up {on unimproved roads} with heavy equipment, up to a certain [sic] plate at some point to build something. But three months into the year it's flooded. So, for three months, you have to go just to build, because it's just inaccessible {during the rainy season}. So, it's that type of involvement we're looking at their expertise and taking the comments to heart. So, they have ownership of the project. That's good. Mark, do you have a

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

P9, these questions are to take a strategic viewpoint, the host nations government leaders, perceptions, when they have a department of defense schools being built in their country. What are the perceptions at the strategic level of the ministries?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

It seems like hearts and minds at the political level. It shows effort, like our politicians love that you say stuff you want to be able to provide. One of the things with the strategic level we provide is funding. So, it sounds simple, but for a lot of these countries' money isn't in place for schools nor improvements. So, for the ministry of health, which [have] medications [for the schools] will work hand in hand with the schools, and with the ability to move in front of the camera and say that you are planning to support the United States or whatever organization [that is going to] provide something and then actually do it, is huge [influence]. And this where the individual [needs to] understand [how] the budget works and [if] it

didn't work in our cycle, as well is another issue. If you would come into our office and say that you are going to support a local community by providing X and it contributes to the infrastructure and then actually do that is huge. So now that minister along with whatever other individual or politician or local mayor, will go out there and cut the ribbon is huge.

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

So strategically you started looking at the location that we put some of these schools, well strategically, it's not that important. We were looking at the more populated areas of the country. Again, we see a lot of influence, but we talked about those strategically for him [local politician or minister] to be able to show [results], because this [project] will come out on the local papers and also the local news. So, if we're able [DoD/USG] to show that minister X actually will provide something for that part of the town. It provides him that win. He's not going to build a school in the middle of the Capitol where there's more money. [That being said], for whatever reason on how the budget works the funds are very minimal [for] building, [therefore], to show that they've done something in an area and for them to visit, but more so provides clout which is what they were trying to do. And for us, a lot of these ministers, I said a lot, most, or I would say some are very pro-American. It [clout from a completed project] goes far for us [DoD/USG] too [byway] of maintaining a relationship with an individual who at one point might be more than a minister. A vice-president or president, strategically these are the additional benefits.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

The next question that leads into this is what social economic geopolitical strategies do you use to communicate the DOD schooling process to the host nation?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

Where you're looking for a

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

A lot of the information you mentioned already answered this question, which was the politics, the funding, and the optics. But the question still stands, are there other strategies that you have designed when you approach projects for the host nation? Do you have a set of talking points as an example?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

Well, please stop me if I'm not answering correctly. So, for us, it goes not really to [influence] hearts and minds but that the [idea] is a whole of government approach when building a school project. You want to make sure that we involve all levels of leadership and that we can't do as much with the host nation as we can to make one unified front and a plague with the host nation and USSOUTHCOM [that says we are maintaining a relationship]. But the clause is from my experience, to make sure that the host nation receives all the credit as much as possible and they fully understand that when they need [something] that we [DoD/USG] are there to fully support them. So, for whatever reason, highlight the fact that how does that benefit us [DoD/USG], we bring forces to work on their skill set [such as] engineers. So, what's the benefit for us [DoD/USG] when we have soldiers from overseas coming to a country, [they have to]

mobilize, go to a location, do the wartime mission and re-mobilize [back to home station]. So, we try to paint a picture where this is a result of your leadership responding to your requests and needs. So, we bring in Public Affairs guys coming in here from USSOUTHCOM.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

They represent our national interests. They do,

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

But at the same time, Public Affairs want to work with those nations. We get TV, [social] media involved, and get the newspapers as a full approach to get the information out there nationally, regionally, because they're going to show the [project] in the voter's paper and what you 're doing along the border region. But [we are] always behind or side by side of the politician. Sometimes we'll make sure that we'll step back and be to the right of [individual]. So that we can show that individual[being successful]. So, we [do look] at the geopolitical situation of that individual and the items [variables] of the local population, and other countries.

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Last question, what could the U. S., host nation, and the embassy team do to improve the school building process?

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

I think one of the failures that we have, especially coming from the schools, is individuals whose kids are stuck in an economic situation where they cannot get back [out of]. So, we provide the education, the teachers at the lower level schools, elementary schools, small schools from the first grade to high school or secondary, as they refer to it. But the problem is that economically it's hard to get out of that system [low-pay, no work, no money for higher education]. So, what I'm trying to get to be [even if] an individual completed the whole school experience [elementary and high school], and it was first rate, it's [still] hard to get to that next level of education, [to include] trade schools. So, a lot of times you'll see an individual at a regional school for a couple years, and now they're on the streets or doing some type of manual labor with the family. It would be nice to see, maybe some type of program, like a scholarship program for individuals that have had that ability to meet that next level of education.

P9 (U.S. Embassy)

You know how you do it? I don't know, but maybe something to invite the incentive that you go to school and work hard. It would get you to that next level that is a college degree, get paid, to be a lawyer or a doctor or the technical side, but could we get that individual? Or if it'd be easier for him to be a tractor operator, provide the opportunity to go there [technical trade school] and [receive] job placement. You know, so you'll hear about his program, but you never see them. At least from my experience, the end result of this program [high school to trade school]. You know, this is John Smith. He started off in his school and went to your school program, then went to the technical program. And now he is the supervisor in this company, you know, the end result. And that's where I think we need a better ability to

show the end result. Because these [thousand] kids go to school [built by DoD] and you say a thousand [completed elementary school but not high school] and [so you ask] those thousands where are they? [does] anybody benefit from the school[built by DoD], and then you find out, it's like, well, I mean the, the success rate is the same and we invested a million dollars into [building] the schools [but] we have not impacted the end result [the community] and I think we're failing. We get to the point where a certain amount of a percent is actually moving forward or the quality of life in the community is improved, because those kids are a little better educated. But that's where I think we're failing; how do we value the end result? How do we judge that? How do we [know], how do we conduct an assessment to show that we are actually improving?

Mark (Researcher/NGO Co-Founder)

Thank you very much. Those are very insightful responses. I have no further questions.

Appendix I - Institutional Review Board (IRB) Research Closure Report



August 23, 2022

PI: Mr. Mark Alvarez

Protocol Title: Alvarez and Speer Co-Authoring Action Research: Helping Stakeholders Understand the Process of Building Schools in Belize

IRB Reference: 2022-0847-EX

Project Link: <https://uiw.forms.ethicalreviewmanager.com/ProjectView/Index/847>

Hello,

The IRB protocol listed above has been closed. Please keep this letter with your records. If you need any assistance, please contact us.

Sincerely,

Office of Research and Graduate Studies

Research Compliance

University of the Incarnate Word

(210) 805-3565

irb@uiwtx.edu

IRB #: 00005059 / FWA #: 00009201