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Belize-
How school can work in a multilingual and multiethnic country
Belize – Hur skolan kan fungera i ett mångspråkigt och månkulturellt land

Belize – How school can work in a multilingual and multiethnic country

Författare

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Sammanfattning

This essay is about schools in Belize and how they handle the variety of cultures and languages. The study is based on observations and interviews made in four different schools. We spent one week in each school and every school represent one specific ethnic group. These ethnic groups are Creole, Maya, Garifuna and Mestiso. The interviews treat the different ethnic groups, their view of school and their relationship to the other ethnic groups living in Belize. To give an understanding about Belize we also present some common facts about the country which we have got from various books.

Nyckelord

Belize, multilingual, multiethnic, school
SUMMARY

This examination work is about how schools in a multilingual and multiethnic country can handle the variety of languages and ethnicity. Belize is a country of immigrants and is now trying to unit itself to a country with one common national feeling. The Swedish society is also getting more and more mixtured, but does not have any experience of how to handle that. Swedish schools have therefor much to learn by looking at other countries with experience of this variety.

We spent eight weeks in Belize, in order to try to get a view of how they handle the situation. Our study is based on observations and interviews made in four different schools. Each school represents one specific ethnic group. These ethnic groups are Creole, Maya, Garifuna and Mestiso.

The interviews treat the different ethnic groups, their view of school and their relationship to the other ethnic groups living in Belize. To give an understanding about Belize, we also present some common facts about the country, which we have got from various books.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PREFACE

To carry through with a study in another country one need help from people living in that country. We were very privileged with this, considering all helpful persons who made it possible for us to do our study.

At first, we want to thank the principals, teachers and pupils who let us visit their schools. We could never have carried through with the interviews and the observations without their interest and co-operation. They welcomed us and invited us to their homes.

Most of all, we are grateful to the man who has done all the necessary arrangements for us, Mr Clement Wade, General Manager of Roman Catholic Schools in Belize. He has been interested in our study both before and during it. Not only did he help us with the connections to schools, but also with getting us in close contact with Belizian inhabitants. Mr Wade let us live at his mother’s house and there we got in very close contact with all the members of her family and their way of life, which differs a lot from life in Sweden. It was very common that the friendly Belizians welcomed us in their homes and treated us as one of their own. The way we lived together with the people in Belize was really an experience for life.

Last, but not least, we want to say that we are very happy about the scholarship we got from SIDA, that made our Minor Field Study possible in an economic way. Also we want to thank Fredrik Johansson, Director of Studies at the University of Linköping. He has been a good support to us as our tutor here in Sweden.
1.2 BACKGROUND

Already in the first weeks of our education we got information about the possibility to do parts of our practice and examination work abroad. We felt already then that we wanted to deeper our education with an international perspective. It is an experience to live, teach and work with people from other cultures and with a different kind of schoolsystem. We knew that this was invaluable knowledge for our future professions as teachers, especially today when international understanding is of great importance.

We thought and made research of places to go to, in order to do our study in a country as interesting as possible. We wanted to go somewhere unlike Sweden, with a total different culture from the one we know here and somewhere people have not made so much research about already. We decided on Belize early in our research because it is the kind of country we were interested in and wanted to know more about.

The fact that Sweden does not have almost any contacts with Belize made it very difficult to get information about the country. Furthermore, relevant books were not easy to find. This fact made us more curious and interested in the country.

By having the privilege to get a scholarship, Minor Field Studies, we were able to carry through with our plans.

1.3 PURPOSE

Belize is a fascinating country with many different cultures and an interesting history and nature. What is most important for us though, is that it is very unique, being a multiethnic and multilingual nation. Belize is now trying to unit itself to a country with one common national feeling. In comparison, the Swedish society is getting more and more mixtured with different cultures. Teachers, as well as anyone else, have much to learn by looking at other countries with experience of this variety, like Belize has. The knowledge and understanding of other cultures is also being strongly emphasised in the Swedish curriculum, *LPO –94*. 
1.4 PROBLEM

- How does the Belizian school handle the variety of cultures and languages?
- How do teachers and principals from different ethnic groups look upon equality, solidarity, education and each other?
- What can teachers in Sweden learn from teachers in Belize about the way they treat the variety of cultures and languages?
2. FACTS ABOUT BELIZE

2.1 HISTORY

The original inhabitants of the now called country Belize, were Maya Indians. Maya Indians developed the first major civilisation in Belize, which reached its height in AD 300-900, before an unexplained collapse brought most of the people from the area.

The people of Belize today have different places of origin, periods of arrival and various reasons for their arrival. Some came to make money, some because they were forced to, some because of wars and oppression and others came as labourers on contract.

In the mid 16-th century, Spanish colonists came and tried to colonise the area. About one hundred years later, also British pirates came and soon got control over the territory. 1862, Belize was declared as a British colony and was given the name British Honduras.

During the colonisation, the original inhabitants were either killed, driven out of the territory or had fallen victim to epidemic diseases the Europeans brought. The European pirates brought slaves from Africa. These two groups soon inter-married and they became the descendants to one of Belize main ethnic groups, the Creoles (UNICEF, 1997).

In the beginning of the 18-th century, Garifunas arrived in Belize from the islands of the Honduras coast, fleeing a civil war. They are a mixture of African slaves, Carib Indians and a sprinkling of Europeans. Another group arriving this time were Mestiso and Yucatec Maya, seeking refuge from Mexico, during a war called the War of the Castes. Later in the 18-th century, a small group of Mopan and Kekchi Maya came over the border from Guatemala.

During all this time and until recent years, small populations of people from China, India, Lebanon, El Salvador, Honduras, America, Europe and a religious sect of German-Swiss farmers called Mennonites arrived in Belize.
This is the background to why Belize is a country of immigrants and why the society is ethically and culturally diverse. Belizean people have ancestors in nearly every continent.

Our study will be based on the four main ethnic groups Creole, Maya, Garifuna and Mestiso.

Belize got independent from England in 1981, although it is still a member of the British Commonwealth. During the liberation from Britain, British Honduras changed its name to Belize (Belizian Studies; Module 7, 1994).

Belize is a democratic country and has not, unlike most of its Central American neighbours, been into any violent conflicts. The country is poor, but the people are proud over its history and its heritage and have a good hope for the future. At the moment, Belize keeps a very small population of about 250,000 persons, of which 50 per cent are below the age of 20 (Barry, 1995).

2.2 GEOGRAPHY

Belize is situated on the East Coast of Central America, facing the western Caribbean. The country is slightly larger than Wales and has about 250,000 inhabitants. It is bordered on the north and north-west by Mexico and on the west and south by Guatemala.

The climate is tropical. Most of the country is hot and humid, day and night, most of the year. Northern Belize is tropical lowland and very swampy along the shore. In the western and southern parts, the Maya Mountains rise to almost 1,000 m. The shore is characterised by swampy mangroves and many lagoons. Belize also has the second largest barrier reef in the world (Barry, 1995; Höglund, Bjärvall, 1994).

Some 93 per cent of the country is still classified as forest and 35.5 per cent of the national territory is held by the government under Forest Reserves and Protected Area status (UNICEF, 1997).
2.3 THE CULTURAL DIVERSE

Belize is divided into six districts. In the northern parts the majority of the people are Mestisos. They have Spanish as their mother tongue. A little bit further south, mostly in Belize district, the Creoles live. They speak Creole. Along the southern parts of the coast the Garifunas, who speak its own language in addition to English, are settled. The western and southern parts of the inland are occupied mostly by Mayas. There are three main kinds of Mayas, and each speaks their own language, along with English.

(Barry, 1995)

The official language is English, but 90 per cent of the population have another mother tongue. Most people speak the mixed language Belizian Creole, which is based on English. Spanish is the first language of about 40 per cent of the population. Other languages are Garifuna, Chinese, Hindi, German and Arabic.
The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and Belize’s mixture of religions follows its heritage, even though most people are Catholics. Besides that, there are Anglicans, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Mennonite communities as well as those who still observe some traditional religious rites (Barry, 1995; Höglund, Bjärvall, 1994).

Belize has a two-party political system. The two parties are the United Democratic Party and the People’s United Party. Politics in Belize have always been more a matter of personalities and emphasises than ideological positions. Elections take place every five year, the last election was in 1998 and then the PUP won (Barry, 1995).

2.4 SCHOOLING

In Belize, Primary School education is free and compulsory for all children to the age of 14. They start school on the autumn the year they will be five years old. The two youngest classes at the school, those which contains five- respective six-year-olds, are called Infant I and Infant II. Here basic schemes like reading, writing and counting are taught. After Infant II, the year the pupils will be seven, the pupils go on to Standard I. There are Standard classes up to Standard VI. If the pupils would like to continue studying after Primary School, the next stage is High School, Secondary School.

At the end of Standard VI, the pupils have to do the Belizian National Selection Exam (BNSE). This exam is very important, especially for those who want to continue to High School. Rural children only achieve just over half the success rates of their urban counterparts in the exam. There is a big problem in recruiting teachers to work in the rural areas and this is supposed to be one important factor to the low success at the BNSE exam.

In comparison to other Central American countries, Belize keeps high standards on schools. This can be seen as a heritage from the British, and people are ready to fight for it to continue this way. In many ways the Belizian schoolsystem is very similar to the British. Not only in the structure, but also in the great importance they attach on the subjects maths and science. English is also the language which is used in teaching (Barry, 1995).
With most schools partly financed by churches, only about 10 per cent of the 280 primary school in the country (1996/97 school year) are runned by state alone. Of schools partly runned by churches, the Roman Catholic Church administers about 60 per cent. All of the schools we visited were partly runned by Roman Catholic Church. When a school is partly runned by state and partly by church, they split up the responsibility in a certain way. The Government establishes education objectives, provides funds to pay teachers’ salaries, contributes half the cost of facilities and their maintenance, develops curricula and administrative standards, trains teachers and administers examinations. The church is responsible for management and maintenance of their schools and personnel matters, and also for the teaching of religion (Educational Statistical Digest, 1996-97). Schools in Belize get very little support from the state to buy materials. The schools earn their own money through fund raising and arranging bazaars, barbecueparties etc. The principal in the Mayan school we visited, told us that last year 32 schools had to share about 3 000 Belizian dollars (about 12 000 Swedish krona) for materials. This money was given from the Government.

A new curriculum is going to be presented and followed by the start of autumn 1999. There are some pilot schools spread out in the country that are already testing it. The main difference between the old and the new one is that the new includes more practical subjects and personal development. The old curriculum was concentrating more on theoretical subjects and did not consider the individual that much (Woman responsible for the new curriculum at Teachers Collage). The old curriculum is from 1968 and was a British innovation. It was revisioned 1978, to adapt more to the Caribbean nations. The curriculum has been updated every four or five year since then. The new curriculum will be adjusted to the Belizean way of life (General manager of Catholic Schools).

With crimes increasing heavily, the Government feels that something has to be done to the attitudes and the values among people, to affect the pupils in a positive way of life. The woman we interviewed, responsible for the new curriculum, compared pupils schooling to house building. One have to build all the parts, if it is going to be stable. Before finishing the curriculum, the public’s opinion was considered. Therefore, it is the result of the majority.
More attention is also paid to the needs of the different cultures in the new curriculum. Some time is left open for the schools to decide what they want to do and teach their pupils.

With the introduction of the new curriculum, Spanish is going to be a compulsory subject. There are a lot of different opinions about this, because the teachers are not trained in the language. They are supposed to teach it anyway. It is up to each school to handle the situation (Woman responsible for the new curriculum).
3. SUMMARY OF OUR RESEARCH

3.1 METHOD

During our study in Belize, we visited four different schools. One ethnic group dominated each school and we spent one week at each school. The ethnic groups we concentrated on is the four most common in Belize; Creole, Maya, Garifuna and Mestiso.

We chose to visit schools where one ethnic group dominated, because we wanted to get the best view of each culture, their routines, way of life etc. We were also privileged to live among them in a natural way. It is very common in Belize that the different ethnic groups live in different parts of the country. This depends on when and how they came to Belize and also their traditional way of life. This has made that most schools have one ethnic group that dominates.

The four different schools are located in different parts of the country. One of the schools is located in an urban area and three of them in rural areas. The common thing for these schools is that they are all partly run by the Roman Catholic Church.

We interviewed one principal and four or five teachers on each school. The number of teachers depended on how much they had to say to our questions and how much they wanted to share their thoughts with us. We wanted to have about the same amount of material from each school. Our intentions were to interview teachers that taught in the same grades, in order to make the interviews as comparable as possible. However, all teachers did not want to let us in to their classrooms. We had to interview teachers that welcomed us. We do not think this effected our study in a negative way.

The subject for our study and the questions we asked may have felt sensible for some of the teachers and principals we interviewed. But we think that most of them answered our questions openly and truthfully.

We chose not to ask the principals and the teachers the same questions. Some of the questions are same but the principals got more common and general questions, to be able to give a view of their specific school. The teachers got more personal ones.
The interviews of the principals is presented by their own, separated from the interviews of the teachers. The interviews of the teachers are summoned for each school, to make it easier to read and follow.

We did not use taperecorder to record the interviews, because we wanted the persons we interviewed to relax and to make the interviews as natural as possible. Instead, we found it to be easiest that one of us interviewed and the other one made notes. We interviewed one person at a time. After the interviews, we made the compilation together, to make sure that we did not miss out anything important.

We do not mention any names of persons or schools in this study. When we refer to the different school, we only mention the specific ethnic group that dominates on each school.

The observations and conclusions we have made and the materials we have got from each school and ethnic group do not mean that it is the same in every school in Belize, where the specific ethnic group dominates. We are fully aware of the short time we spent on each school and that we can not make too many own conclusions from that. Therefore, our main point will be the interviews of the teachers and the principals, and also from the experience and impression we got from living among Belizeans for two months.

We will now present the observations and interviews we made at each school. Each school is presented by its own. Each presentation start with some fact about the specific culture followed by our observations, the interview of the principal and last the interviews of the teachers. When all four ethnic groups have been presented, we complete this study with a discussion, including our own conclusions.

3.1.1 Our questions to the principals

1. How do schools handle the variety of cultures and languages? Do they mix or separate the pupils? Does your school do in a different way than schools in general?
2. How do you handle the situation when a child starts school and can not speak English?
3. Do pupils with another mother tongue than English get any help in continuing this?
4. Do you think the ethnic group that dominates in this school, feel equal to the other ethnic groups living in Belize?
5. Do you think they have another view of school and education than the other ethnic groups in Belize?

3.1.2 Our questions to the teachers

1. How many in your class are not from the ethnic group in majority?
2. How do you handle the situation when a pupil does not speak English?
3. Are there any difficulties to teach children from different ethnic groups?
4. Do pupils from different ethnic groups feel solidarity to each other?
5. Do you think that the ethnic group you belong to has a different view of school than other ethnic groups in Belize?
6. Do you feel equal to other ethnic groups?

3.2 CREOLE

3.2.1 Facts

Creole is a mixture of African slaves and British pirates. Generally, to be Creole means to have some African ancestry. But all racial combinations today, between Europeans or North Americans with the local population, becomes also a part of the Creole group.

Creole also has a cultural connotation. It is said that Creole is expressed more as a social and cultural phenomenon, than a biological. Their social values are as mixed as their heritage. Because they lost most of their origin culture during the colonisation, they had to more or less build an own cultural identity based mostly on the British, but with local adaptation. Creole makes up 30 per cent of the Belizian population, with two thirds of them living in Belize District.

During the British colonisation in the 17th and 18th century, the Europeans brought slaves from Africa, to work mainly with cutting and shipping Logwood and Mahogany trees to London. The British pirates soon inter-
married these slaves and they came to be the ancestors to Creoles (Barry, 1995).

### 3.2.2 Observation

We chose to do our study about Creoles in a town in eastern Belize. The school is a Primary School and is located in a depressed area of the town. The teachers and pupils were dominantly Creoles. Except from Creoles one could also see ethnic groups like Garifunas, Chinese, Mestizos and West Indians. The school was run by a principal, had 670 pupils and 20 full time staff members. Each class contented about 30-35 pupils. All of the pupils used schooluniforms.

The first thing we thought of when we came to the Creole school was the fascinating blending of people, which they are a mixture of. Everybody looks different from the other one, each person mixed up by different aptitude in an own, unique way. Another thing that also will bring thoughts to you is the way children play with each other. On the schoolyard one can not see any separation between children from different ethnic groups. They mix with each other and together they make up one common identity. This identity is also strengthen by their own language, Creole, which sometimes is very difficult to understand for a non-native-speaker.

### 3.2.3 Interview of the principal

1. All Roman Catholic Schools in the country mix children from different ethnic groups. They all teach in English. The principal can not see any problems in mixing the pupils, because they all feel Belizian. They respect the other groups that also live in the country.

   To contain the unique features of the ethnic groups, the school has a special week when children from the same ethnic group meet in groups and talk about their specific culture. At the end of the week, they present their culture to the other children, for example by a dance.

   The ethnic groups want to preserve their own heritage and culture, but that do not mean they want to segregate themselves from other groups.
2. Children who can not speak English, or have difficulties in learning the language, can get extra help after ordinary schoolday. This is unusual though, because children learn very quickly from each other and soon they will know the language.

Workshops are also given to the teachers by the Education Office on how to handle the situation when pupils have different mother tongues.

3. The pupils do not get any help with maintaining their mother tongue in school. It is up to the parents to do so.

4. Creoles were said to have most opportunities before. Nowadays they are a bit disadvantaged because of Chinese and Garifunas. Chinese people come to Belize and start business and Garifunas often have high positions in society. Both these groups are often very purposeful, disciplined and hardworking, while Creoles take a day at a time and more and more of them do not continue studying after Primary School.

5. There are some differences in how the different cultures look upon school and education. Both Creoles and Garifunas think that education is very important. Within the Mestiso culture the opinions varies depending on where they live. Education is thought to be of more important for people living in cities, than for those who live in more rural areas. Sometimes parents in rural areas keep their children at home to work on the fields instead of letting them go to school, even though schooling is compulsory in Belize. Not many Mayas continue so High School. Like Mestisos, many Mayas think that working in the fields is more important than education. The new curriculum will take more respect to the differences between the cultures so that they do not have to choose between education and their way of living. Instead, these two aspects can be integrated.

### 3.2.4 Interview of the teachers

We interviewed four teachers in the Creole school. They were teachers for Infant I, Standard II, Standard III and Standard VI. Two of the teachers were Creoles, one was Mestiso and one Garifuna.
1. Most pupils in this school are Creoles. There are often a few in each class that are Garifunas, Mestisos or West Indians. West Indians are not very common, though.

2. Those who do not understand English are offered extra help on evenings by their class teachers. In Infant this problem is more noticeable than in higher levels. The teacher from Infant I said she taught in English but explained in Creole. There are some pupils that come to Infant and can not speak English or Creole, but often they know some words. What their mother tongues are differs a bit, but often they speak Spanish or Garifuna at home. In Standard classes it is very unusual if not all of the pupils can speak and understand English.

   The teacher from Infant I was also Spanish speaking. She thought this was of great advantage when meeting children who speak only Spanish. If she does not understand the mother tongue, she uses her body to express herself to the child. Another teacher (Std II) let the children work much in small groups. In this way the child who can not speak English has to listen much to the friends in the group. After a while the child learns to understand the spoken language and also talk by its own. At the same time the teacher tries to teach the Creole children some words in the language that the child speaks.

3. If every child understands English well, there are no problems in teaching pupils from different ethnic groups (Std II). One teacher (Inf I) discuss a lot with the pupils to make them appreciate the variety they have. It is an advantage if the school has teachers with different heritage. This makes it easier for the pupils to understand other people. The teacher also uses parents from different cultures as an extra help in classroom. Communication can otherwise be a problem. Another teacher (Std III) mentioned that there can be a difference between Mestiso and Creole pupils. Mestisos, she thought, are very intelligent. They are curious, calm and learn a lot in school. Creoles are more playful and do not take everything as seriously as Mestisos do.

4. The teachers we interviewed all agreed that children play well together and that they feel solidarity to each other. They do not care if their friends have a different heritage. But there can be a problem when children speak different languages (Std II).
There have been a lot of prejudices against Garifuna people, much because people had a hard time understanding the Garifuna language. Garifunas were also ashamed of their language. This can sometimes be noticed in classroom when Garifuna pupils are quiet in the beginning and do not want to talk. Today most of the prejudices are gone, maybe because more and more Garifunas living in a Creole area talk Creole at home instead of Garifuna. Nowadays, Belizian people appreciate each other, whatever their heritages are (Std II).

The teacher in Std III mentioned one reason why children feel solidarity to each other. Belize has been a multicultural country for such a long time. People in the country are used to the fact that new ethnic groups come to Belize and mixture with them. She was not afraid that the different ethnic groups would segregate the people. Instead, money could do so. Depending on where one live and how much money one have, segregates more.

5. There were some different opinions among the teachers how they think the different cultures look upon school. Two of the teachers (Inf I; Std II) thought that most people think education is important. It is not depending on what heritage one have. The teacher in Std VI, thought Garifuna people are those who give education most priority. Another (Std III) said that Creoles and Garifunas are more positive to education than most Mestisos and Mayas. Many Mayan families think that marriage and family life is more important than education. Most of them do not continue school after Primary School. Mestisos living in smaller villages are often farmers and sometimes the children must stay home from school in order to help the parents on the fields. Agriculture is of great importance to them.

6. The teacher in Std II, thought Creoles were the privileged group in Belize. The Inf I teachers’ opinion was that Mestisos are disadvantaged. Creoles think of themselves as better people than Mestisos. This is not a problem at school, but it is in society. Garifunas often have high positions in society and they rather give employment to a Garifuna, than to persons from other ethnic groups. Two of the teachers (Std III; Std VI) did not have anything to this question.
3.3 MAYA

3.3.1 Facts

Mayan communities are found in the northern, west central and southern Belize. Most part of the Mayas living in Belize today are not descendant from the natives living in Belize when the Spanish arrived, but from immigrants who left Guatemala and Mexico. There are three kinds of Mayas living in Belize today; Yucatec Maya living in northern Belize, Mopan Maya living in west central and southern Belize and Kekchi Maya living in southern Belize. We are going to concentrate on Kekchi Maya, because we visited a school where they dominated.

Kekchi Mayas migrated to Belize in the 1870s and 1880s from Guatemala to escape the slavery of German coffee growers. This Mayan group is spread out in about thirty communities in southern Belize. They practise slash-and-burn agriculture and cultivates rice, citrus and cacao and are well known for their co-operation on the farms and in the villages.

Kekchi Mayas are said to be the poorest and most neglected ethnic group in Belize. In many Mayan communities there are growing interest in preserving Mayan identity from dominant ethnic groups like Creoles and Mestisos, who often consider the Mayan culture as "inferior and backwards". Kekchi Mayas also maintain contact with their ancestral communities in Guatemala.

Mayas make up about 11 per cent of the total population, Kekchi Maya about 4.3 per cent (Barry, 1995).

3.3.2 Observation

We made our study about Kekchi Mayas in a village with about 1 000 inhabitants in southern Belize, located rather accessible in the rainforest (comparing to many other Mayan villages). The school we visited was the only Primary School in the village. Most of the pupils were Kekchi Maya, but there were also some Mestiso and West Indians. The teachers were from many different cultures, but no one was pure Kekchi Maya. There were Mopan Maya, Mestiso and Garifuna teachers. The school had about 410 pupils and 14 full time staff members, including the principal. The size
of the classes varied, from 25 to 44 pupils. Not all of the pupils used school uniforms.

When we first got to the Kekchi Maya school, our main impression was that the pupils seemed so calm and harmonious. They looked very happy with their existence and with the strong bounds they seemed to feel to their own people. The pupils also acted very shyly and quietly, especially in the classroom. The teachers often tried to make the pupils participate in an active way. Sometimes we got the feeling that the Kekchi Mayan pupils were not motivated for school. Maybe this has something to do with their old tradition as farmers and when education was not seen as very important.

3.3.3 Interview of the principal

1. Like every school in the country this school mix pupils from different cultures and languages. English is the language used in classroom. The principal think it is an advantage to have teachers from different ethnic groups teaching in a multiethnic school. Teachers and pupils from the same ethnic group feel more open and familiar to each other, while teachers and pupils from different ethnic groups get positive effects like respect and curiousness. A bad thing when a Kekchi teacher has a Kekchi class is that they sometimes speak Kekchi with each other in class. This school also has a week once a year when the different ethnic groups gather themselves and emphasise their own unique features. Then they go together again and explain to each other about their culture.

2. Children who come to this school always have some idea of English, at least of Creole. There are no special teaching for those who are not that good at it. This is a problem deeper in the rainforest, among small villages that are not so developed, but not here.

3. It is impossible to teach anything in the native language in class, because the school is so lingually mixed. The only way the children keep up with their mother tongues is what is being spoken at home. There has been a small Kekchi dictionary published, and the principal thinks this is a step in a direction to preserve the Kekchi language.
4. The principal had grown up with Mayas and lived among Garifunas. His father was a Mestiso and mother a Mopan Maya. He appreciated the different cultures and felt that they lived side by side. It is important, though, that teachers are very careful in the situation when pupils from different ethnic groups meet each other. It is not good to stress cultures too much which can lead to patriotism. Sometimes, he said, Garifunas are not so open-minded to other cultures as they should. They sometimes try a little too much to contain their own, unique features.

5. Mayas nowadays are getting more and more aware of how important education is, to be able to understand their own situation and themselves. Most educated Mayas leave the village and start working in town. The principal hoped and thought that the new curricula would take more care of the different cultures and their specific features. This would probably lead to more Mayas getting interested in education. Problems like few bus connections to town and the poverty of Mayas still keep them from equal education. It is said that education is free, but it costs much anyway, considering costs of materials, lack of income etc.

Garifunas put big importance to education, and so do Creoles. Both these groups often get a good education and leave for the United States. Mestisos do not put that much weight in education. They think they can live on their farming. There are not many from Mestisos who leave for the United States.

There are some prejudices against Mayas that they do not put so much weight in education and especially that girls are taken out of school in an early age to enter family life. This is disappearing more and more. Nowadays, 20-25 per cent of the girls go on to Secondary School. About 5-10 per cent of the girls are taken out of school before ending Primary level, in order to get them married. The rest often get married soon after Primary School and become mothers in an early age.

3.3.4 Interview of the teachers

We interviewed five teachers in the Mayan school; Infant I, Standard II, Standard IV (male), Standard IV (female) and Standard VI. Two of the
teachers were Mestisos, one was Garifuna, one East Indian and one Mopan Maya.

1. Most pupils are Kekchi, but there are some Mopan Mayas, Mestisos and West Indians in some of the classes.

2. When the pupils start in Infant I they know very little English. They are familiar and/or understand Creole, even though they may have another mother tongue than Creole.

If the pupils do not understand English, teachers use their body to express what they mean (Inf I). One teacher thought that it is necessary to know the language pupils use and understand, to be able to help them (Std IV, male). Furthermore, he thought that many pupils are afraid of talking English because then they may say something wrong. They rather do not say anything during the lessons. After school they do not have any problem talking because then it is permitted to talk other languages than English.

3. Only one of the teachers (Std IV, male) did not think there were any problems when teacher and pupil come from different cultures. The other ones pointed out some problems that could arise. If the pupils do not understand English fully and the teacher not is able to translate to the language the pupils know, they have to find other ways to communicate (Inf I; Std IV, female). Especially the combination of Garifuna or Creole teacher and Maya pupils could give problems (Std II; Std VI). One reason could be that the pupils do not feel close to the teacher, because the teacher has a different skin colour than they have (Std II). Another reason could be that the elderly people in the village have prejudices against Garifunas or Creoles, which the pupils bring to school (Std VI).

If the teacher and the pupils come from different ethnic groups, it could result in that the pupils do not learn as much as they would have done if they came from the same group. Maybe because they do not trust the teacher that much. On the other hand, the pupils may respect the teacher more, if he or she come from a different group. Most of those teachers are not usually from the same village as the pupils and the pupils do not know him or her that much (Std VI).
4. All except one, agreed that pupils played well together and felt solidarity to each other. As a proof of that, one teacher (Std II) mentioned that there are more and more inter-marriages between the ethnic groups.

The teacher who did not agree (Std VI) thought that Kekchi pupils played different with children from another ethnic group. It can be difficult for a non-Kekchi family to come and live in a Kekchi village and be a part of their community.

5. The teachers had various opinions on how the different ethnic groups look upon school. Two of them did not think that there were any differences. They all think it is important because they all have to be able to support themselves (Inf I; Std VI).

There used to be differences, especially Mayas did not have any tradition in schooling. Today, as there go busses every day between many Mayan villages and bigger towns where there is a Secondary School, also people from villages have the opportunity to continue school. Most of them do so. But the busses do not go to very rural areas. Today’s different opinions in education is not due to cultures, but more if you live in rural or urban areas (Std VI). Also another teacher (Std II) pointed out that it depends on where you live. It was common before, that parents in Mayan villages did not let their children continue after Primary School. Instead they married away their children at the age of 14. This usually do not happen in bigger Mayan villages today, but can do so in more rural areas. Many of the younger Mayas move to town or to the cayes to get a job.

One teacher with an opposite opinion (Std IV, male), said that Mayan people do not take education very seriously. He thought that it sometimes was difficult to show the importance of education to Kekchi pupils. It is like they do not think they will make a better living if they get more educated. They seem to think that whether they learn or not, they will survive on their farming. Many of them also seem to think that if you get an education, you have to live in a bigger town and most times you end up without a job anyway.

Another teacher (Std IV, female), said that it is hard to get a job, even if you are well educated. Many elderly people think that it is safer to work
on the farm. Not only because you surely will have a job, but also considering that the younger ones will learn many bad things and habits, if they continue their education in bigger towns. This teacher had also felt much envy from other people in her village, when she got a good education and a nice job. Even though these people do not want to get educated and they do not want other people in the village to get an education. It is like everyone in the village should be equal and no one should have a better life than the others.

6. Four of the teachers said that many Mayas seem to feel that they are thought of less than Creoles and Garifunas, much because it is mostly the last two mentioned that runs the country. One teacher (Std VI) with a different opinion, thought that it used to be like that. Today everyone look at each other as Belizians, no matter what heritage one has.

3.4 GARIFUNA

3.4.1 Facts

Garifuna people are a mixture of African slaves, Carib Indians and a sprinkling of Europeans. In the 17th century Spanish slavers carried enslaved Africans to the Caribbean. Later they inter-married with indigenous Caribs of the island. These island Caribs were originally from South America. Their offspring came to be known as Black Caribs or Garifunas. This mix is called a "voluntary assimilation" and the members resisted becoming slaves. In the late 18th century they were brought under English control and removed to an island off the Honduras coast. Some time after this, they started migrating to the mainland of Belize by the Atlantic coast (Belizian studies; Module 7, 1994).

Garifunas have worked hard to maintain their place in Belizian society. Under the colonial time in the 19th century, Garifunas were neglected to own the land they had farmed for a long time. They were forced to serve as cheap and available labour force, but they resisted this enforcement. Today, Garifunas still try to maintain the unique features of their heritage. For example the unique language is important to Garifunas. There has been much talk of bringing this language into teaching.
Fishing and agricultural work have always been important income among Garifunas. They are also known as brilliant and hardworking students and they often work as teachers or as civil servants.

Garifunas make up almost 7 per cent of the population and are found along the southern coastline, in small towns and villages. There are also concentrations of Garifunas in bigger cities like Belize City and Belmopan (Barry, 1995).

### 3.4.2 Observation

The school we entered during our week in a Garifuna school was situated in a village with about 1 100 inhabitants in south-eastern Belize. About 95 per cent of the 313 pupils were Garifunas. Other ethnic groups were Mestisos and Creoles. All of the 10 teachers and the principal were Garifunas. The number of pupils in the classes varied from 25 to 35. All of the pupils used schooluniforms.

On the schoolyard the children played in a very lively way. In class they seemed very interested and hardworking. The teachers seemed very professional and aware of what they were doing, maybe because Garifunas have a long history and experience in teaching.

The school and also the village seemed to enjoy good solidarity and unity. We got the feeling that Garifunas try very hard to remain their traditions and unique features and they seem very proud of them. Yet, this does not mean that they try to segregate themselves from other ethnic groups.

### 3.4.3 Interview of the principal

The week we visited the Garifuna school, the ordinary principal had vacation. One of the teachers working in the school was deputy principal, so we interviewed him instead.

1. They mix pupils from different ethnic groups. In this school there are no problems, because 95 per cent of the pupils are Garifunas.
2. Before Garifunas start school they are often quite unfamiliar to the English language, because the language used at home is Garifuna. In Infant I the teacher explains in Garifuna and translates into English. In Infant II the pupils know the English language very well. There can be some troubles when a Mestiso child enters a class and the teacher is not able to speak Spanish. This year the school has one Mestiso who cannot understand English, but the teacher knows some basic Spanish. This child goes in Std VI and has real troubles expressing himself in English.

3. The school do not teach in Garifuna, even though they would like to. The national Garifuna Council has published a book in order to keep up with the language, culture and dances. In November they have a week when they concentrate on the different cultures. There are many activities then.

4. There are some disputes between Creoles and Garifunas from the past that still colour the relationship between these two ethnic groups. However, neither conflicts over land nor fistfighting have ever taken place. This smaller conflict has its roots in the 40’s and 50’s when Garifuna often made their living on fishing and farming. They went to bigger towns to sell their products, but they did not feel welcomed there. For example, they were not allowed to be in the city for more than eight hours. Still Creoles often consider themselves as ”higher” than the other ethnic groups living in Belize. Also Mayas and Mestisos feel this ranking order. Within this order, Mestisos consider themselves higher than Mayas. Government is now working hard to unite the different ethnic groups in the country to one common national feeling. Schools tries to do so too. Nowadays, inter-marriages are getting more common and this is a sign in the right direction.

5. History tells about Garifunas as interested in education, often working as teachers in Mayan and Mestiso communities. Nowadays also Mayas and Mestisos are getting more and more into education. Still, the problem in Belize is lack of economical possibilities to go on to higher education. To get a good degree (education) one need to study abroad and the scholarship that makes this possible are few and hard to get.
3.4.4 Interview of the teachers

We interviewed five teachers at the Garifuna school; Infant I, Standard I, Standard II, Standard IV and Standard V. All of them were Garifunas.

1. Most of the pupils are Garifunas, but there are some Creoles, Mestisos and Americans in the classes.

2. The situation when a pupil does not speak English only occurs in the lower classes, but it is not a big problem even in Infant I. Children learn fast and if they do not understand, the teacher explains in Garifuna (Inf I; Std I). Even though a pupil may have another mother tongue than Garifuna, they also know the Garifuna language. The teachers, who all speaks Garifuna can therefore easily help them, if they do not know the English language (Std II; Std IV; Std V). One teacher once had a pupil from Honduras, who only spoke Spanish. Fortunately the teacher could speak Spanish and therefore could help the pupil (Std IV).

3. There are no difficulties in teaching pupils from different ethnic groups, because all pupils have to learn and use the same language in school (Inf I; Std I; Std IV). Pupils that are not Garifunas, blend easily in the Garifuna culture and identify themselves with them (Std V). One teacher (Std II) earlier worked in a school with a rich mixture of cultures. He said that teaching can be very difficult in those situations. He had to show much with his body. He did not really see it as a problem, more as a challenge. They all learn from each other.

4. Pupils mix easily with each other and there is no discrimination between them. They are neighbours, so they do not feel inferior to each other. In Infant language barrier can be a problem (Std IV). Sometimes pupils unconsciously gather themselves with their own kind. In these situations the teacher has to rearrange the groupconstilations (Std II).

5. There used to be different views of school, depending on traditions the specific ethnic groups have. Nowadays, people in general think education is important.

Today the differences are depending on what socio- and economic background pupils have. It has much to do with family traditions and if parents support their children or not (Std I; Std V). One teacher (Std II)
mentioned the history of teachers, when most teachers were Garifunas. They travelled and taught in areas where other ethnic groups dominated. Today it is common with teachers from every ethnic group, which shows that they all value education.

6. The teachers all feel equal to other ethnic groups living in Belize. They think that all Belizians think so, whatever ethnic group they belong to. They mix with each other and work towards the same goal. It has to be like that in a multicultural country like Belize (Std IV). There are both good and bad aspects of every culture, but the point is to respect everyone and their way of life (Std I; Std II). Although every one of the teachers said that they felt equal, some of them also mentioned that it has not always been like that. One thought that if a black child starts in a Mestiso school, no one would play with him or her (Inf I). Another sometimes felt that Creoles think they are superior to Garifunas (Std I). A third mentioned a Mayan school that get much international help. He sometimes felt this to be unfair (Std V). This specific school he was thinking of is located in a reserve and the help comes mainly to the Mayas living there in order to keep the reserve going.

3.5 MESTISO

3.5.1 Facts

The Mestiso population lives in the north of Belize and is the largest ethnic group in the country. They make up about 44 per cent of the population. Their first language is Spanish and this fact makes Spanish the most used first language in Belize.

Due to the bloody War of the Castes in the mid 1800s, Mestisos, a blend of Yucatec Mayas and Spaniards, migrated from Yucatan in Mexico to Belize. The British saw them as cheap wage labour for the timber industry and as good farmers. As a result, Mestisos are now the backbone for the nation’s agricultural economy. For example sugar industry, Belize’s main income earner, is dominated by Mestisos (Barry, 1995).
3.5.2 Observation

We did our study about Mestisos in northern Belize. The school was situated in a rural area, in a village of about 1 000 inhabitants. The school kept 266 pupils and 10 teachers, including the principal who also taught. The number of pupils in the classes varied between 25 and 40. There were another Primary School in the village, but that school did not have so many pupils. The pupils were almost exclusively Mestisos. The language being spoken on the schoolyard and at home, was Spanish. Not all of the pupils used schooluniforms.

On the schoolyard children played with each other in a calm, harmonic way. Also in class they seemed hardworking and not afraid of speaking. This may have something to do with the fact that they worked much with oral expression. We got a feeling of cosiness among the pupils and teachers at this school. The teachers, who all were Mestisos, were very open-minded and acted professional. The fact that rural areas do not get so high percentage of professional teachers as their urban counterparts, did not agree here. Accessibility through good, paved roads and frequent bus-communications makes it easy to commute.

The teachers used the Spanish language much in their teaching, even in higher classes, to explain difficult things. They always said it in English too.

3.5.3 Interview of the principal

1. All schools in Belize mix pupils, because they are all integrated in the same society. In this school most pupils are Mestisos. That means that they all have Spanish as their mother tongue and it is the only language they know when they start school. English therefore becomes their second language but they do not get any teaching in English as a second language. This fact and the fact that teaching is in English, can give the pupils problems in school. This is mostly noticeable during tests. The questions are in English, which can lead to many misunderstandings.

2. None of the pupils in Infant I know a word in English when they start school. All the teachers know the Spanish language. They handle the situation by teaching in Spanish and about 25 per cent of it is translated
into English. They start by counting in English and by naming things in the classroom. It can be more difficult for the teachers if for example a Chinese child start school and do not know either Spanish or English.

In rural areas in northern Belize, where the population mostly is Mestiso, pupils can express themselves in short sentences in English in Standard VI. They have a hard time expressing themselves good or having a long conversation in English. This contributes to poor performances in BNSE. They do well in reading, but not so good in comprehension. Anyway, they do as the average pupil in the country.

3. Pupils with another mother tongue than English do not get any help in continuing this.

4. Today all ethnic groups are equal. The ethnic groups are geographically divided in Belize by historic reasons. When Creoles were the biggest ethnic group they used to have most high positions in society.

5. Every ethnic group have the same view of education. The principal is 100 per cent sure that all Belizians think that education is important, no matter what ethnic group they belong to. The difference in opinion is instead between rural and urban areas. People in urban areas see something valuable in education and prioritize it more than people in rural areas do. Parents’ opinions and attitudes about education are also decisive for the pupils.

3.5.4 Interview of the teachers

We interviewed four teachers on this school; Infant I, Standard I, Standard III and Standard VI. All of them were Mestisos.

1. Almost every pupil on this school is Mestiso. There are also some Mayas and some immigrants from Guatemala and El Salvador.

2. Most Mestiso children do not know a single word in English when they start school (Inf I). This can be a problem to the teachers that has to interpret everything that is taught from Spanish into English. What is used is not pure English, but a combination of many expressions and body language (Inf I; Std I). Also much work is spent on repetition. In
lower ages only the teacher speaks English and the pupils are allowed to answer in Spanish (Inf I). In the subject oral expression every child in the class is supposed to speak English. For example certain sentences are used during these lessons (Std I). One teacher (Inf I) recommend parents to speak some English with their children at home, but this is not practised very often. However, after the first year in Infant the children are able to understand quite a lot of English. The teacher’s opinion in Std I was that children start to understand English in a proper way from Standard II.

The teachers in the higher Standards did not think that language was a problem there. Though, there can be some difficulties for Spanish speaking refugees (Std III; Std VI). A pupil who comes to Standard III and not is able to speak English should start from Infant (Std III).

Sometimes there can be difficulties for pupils who can not speak English or Spanish to come to a Mestiso school, for example when the teacher explains something to the pupils in Spanish. However, children quickly adapt the Spanish language from their friends (Std III).

3. This school has almost exclusively Mestiso children. One teacher (Std I) had never taught in a class with a mixture of ethnicity. The other teachers thought that when this occurred, there were no problems (Inf I; Std III; Std VI), especially when the language is the same. Everyone who comes to live here learns Spanish no matter what his or her origin is (Std III).

4. Two teachers said there were no problems when pupils from different ethnic groups meet each other (Inf I; Std I), especially among younger children (Inf I). The teacher in Std III thought that there is a noticeable distinction between Mestisos and Creoles here in northern Belize. Both groups feel more comfortable with their own people, but there is no racism between them. Everyone accepts each other, but Creoles sometimes think they are better than Mestisos. Government claims that all Belizians are one united people, but that is not right. Another teacher (Std VI) thought that schools in rural areas are privileged, because here everyone is taught to love each other. In the city even economical factors can decide the way a pupil will be treated in school. Creoles who come here are very welcomed. On the other hand Creoles are
given priority in Belize City. That is because the teachers there are predominately Creoles.

5. Not many Mayas and Mestisos were interested in education before (Std I). Nowadays the different ethnic groups put the same importance into education. The view of school is depending more on whether one comes from urban or remote rural areas. In advantage are often children from town. They have well-educated teachers, good access to High Schools and so forth. Children living in remote areas do not often have these facilities (Std I; Std III). Mestisos are favoured by sugarcane industry and can afford to send their children to High School. Importance are also put into material things among Mestisos, and education is a way to earn much money later in life. Children living in a big city like Belize City often live with their grandparents because the parents have left them for a better life in the United States. These children are not often paid much attention and are not been taken care of emotionally. This, of course, affects their education in a negative way (Std III).

There were two opinions about the fact that Spanish is the mother tongue of Mestisos and how that affects schooling. One was that the English Mestisos learn at school is more pure than Creole-English and this benefits the correct understanding of written English (Std I). Another opinion (Std VI) was that Creoles are taking benefit of Creole-English, as it is their first language. Mestisos only have English as their second language and this makes their understanding of English not as good. This teacher also thought that Creoles consider education more important than Mestisos do. Mestisos living in town though, are better in English than Mestisos living in rural areas, because they live side by side with Creoles.

One teacher (Inf I) wanted parents to pay more attention into their children’s schooling in order to give the pupils a positive attitude to education. She had seen children dropping out of school at the age of 14 to marry. Garifunas often educate themselves and are hardworking.

6. One of the teachers (Std VI) felt totally equal, but sometimes she thought Mestiso teachers talked bad about Creoles. She had grown up among Creoles, but many Spanish speaking people who do not mix with Creoles call them "Negroes" and so on. Another teacher (Inf I)
thought that Mestisos are more hardworking than people from other ethnic groups, especially Creoles who she described as ”lazy”. Mestisos are also privileged by knowing two languages. The two other teachers (Std I; Std III) felt equal to certain extent. They pointed out the rareness of inter-marriages as a proof that Mestisos feel more comfortable with their own people. In a big city where a mixture of ethnicity is higher, of course there are many inter-marriages. Sometimes Creoles want to feel like they are better than the other ethnic groups.

Garifunas are hard working and not that proud of themselves (Std III). One teacher think that they feel inferior to other groups, maybe because of their colour (which is very dark). She does not think that they are left out but Garifunas themselves feels that way (Std I). Mayas from very remote areas usually stay where they are as a cause of bad communications and so on (Std III).

Mestisos sometimes are looked upon as ”the bushy people”. This mostly goes back to the past and was a cause of Mestisos living mostly on the countryside (Inf I).
4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Before our visit in Belize, during the time we were making preparations for our study, we thought that we would find out more differences between the cultures and more tendencies of segregation between them than we did. We were surprised of how good they handle the situation and how good they get along.

All Roman Catholic schools in Belize mix pupils from different ethnic groups. This fact seemed to be treated in a positive way among all the schools. Also the situation when teachers and pupils from different heritage meet is often considered as positive. Pupils from one ethnic group dominated every school we visited, but there were a few pupils with different heritage in all the schools. The fact that the schools were dominated by one ethnic group has maybe not so much to do with segregation, but with where the groups settled when they first arrived.

Most of the teachers and the principals in the Creole and the Mayan school, were not from the same ethnic group as the majority of the pupils. In the Creole school this is natural, because the city where the school was located is ethnically mixtured, even though the area is not. The Mayan school on the other hand was pretty inaccessible and the people living in the village was mostly Mayas, but still had teachers from other ethnic groups. This is, as we think, due to that it still is not that usual with Mayan teachers. The principal in the Mayan school thought this variety was good, because it gives a wider view of life outside school. The Belizian society is ethnically mixtured and so should schools be. The Garifuna and the Mestiso schools were also located in rural areas but all of the teachers and the principals were from the same ethnic group as the majority of the pupils. Especially Garifunas have a long history of teaching, but we also got the feeling that they only want Garifuna teachers teaching at the school.

When children who start school not are able to understand English they get extra help from their teachers. The teachers explain things in the pupil’s mother tongue and then translate it into English. This is especially common among the Garifunas and the Mestisos. Although there are no extra resources, this is not seen as a problem. The fact that most pupils do not understand English when they start school is a natural part of reality. They welcome all children, also those who do not understand neither English nor the language spoken by the majority. It can be a problem when pupils not
are able to understand each other. In this case different languages can be segregating, but children quickly adapt from each other and they learn language easier if they integrate with other pupils. On the other hand, teaching in Sweden is based on that everyone has to know quite a lot of Swedish before entering class. If they do not, they are often put into preparatory classes, and their contacts with Swedish children will be reduced. This can affect the learning of Swedish in a negative way and might only do the children a disservice. In Sweden we often look upon these kinds of situations as problems and something we have to solve. Maybe we should learn from the Belizian way and let everything take its time.

There can be some extensive troubles if the teachers not are able to understand the pupils’ mother tongue. Pupils with another mother tongue than English do not get any support from schools to continue this. It is up to parents to do so. In comparison, children in Sweden are offered teaching in their mother tongues.

In general, people in Belize seemed to consider themselves equal. The Belizians are now trying hard to find a common national feeling for the people. Still, there are some barriers left between the different groups which we think are due to their heritage. The ethnic groups have different history, different way of life and different way of looking upon things. The Mayan principal said what is important here is not to stress cultures too much. Sometimes, he thought, Garifunas stress their culture too much. This can lead to segregation. Garifunas seemed very proud over their history and language. In a way, we got the feeling that Garifuna is a group that not mix so much with other people living in the country. Still, this does not mean that they segregate themselves totally from others. Although the Garifuna teachers said that all ethnic groups in Belize work towards the same goal, they pointed out a lot of treatment against Garifunas that they thought of as unfair. The impression we got was that Garifunas felt inferior to other groups in Belize. The Creoles are by many described as a little too proud over themselves. Mayas, Garifunas and Mestisos sometimes feel inferior to Creoles. Also a teacher in the Creole school agreed with this fact. Still, these problems are disappearing and were more noticeable in the past.

The general feeling we got from the teachers was that people from different ethnic groups feel solidarity to each other. Though there were some exceptions, most teachers thought that if people speak the same language
there are no barriers between them. Even though they have different heritage, they have one thing in common and that is that they are all immigrants. Sweden is also a multiethnic country, but only a small part of the population is immigrants. This contributes to more differences in status where immigrants are the disadvantaged group. We did not see or feel any racism in Belize, only old prejudices against each other. Many of them were at the same time aware that it was prejudices and that it is a big difference how it used to be and how it is today.

In the past there was a big distinction between the cultures where Creoles and Garifunas considered education more valuable than Mestisos and Mayas. Nowadays there seems to be no distinction in the way the different ethnic groups look upon education. In the first place money is a very important factor in the choice whether a person continues studying or not. Secondly, the geographical access to, for example, Secondary Schools is decisive. Communications are important and it is often easier to continue studying if one live in an urban area than in a rural. Furthermore, the interest for education often varies depending on if one come from a rural or an urban area. Here people living in urban areas are more interested in education than the ones living in rural areas. This is because people living in rural areas can make a living on farming. More Mayas and Mestisos live in rural areas than Creoles and Garifunas. They will not get a better living if they move to a town and get educated. Finally, economic possibilities are deceptive. The Mayan principal thought that Mayas are putting more and more weight into education but their problem is that they often are poor. The Garifuna principal thought that the bad economy in Belize is very sad, because this obstruct the use of high education.

Three of the schools we visited was located in rural areas and one of them in an urban area. The one in the urban area, the Creole school, was also located in a depressed area of the town. Life in that area was not easy for many of the children. Unemployment rate was high among the adults with much crime and drugs. Even though the pupils were disciplined in classroom, we could see a big difference between these pupils and especially the pupils in the Mayan and the Mestiso school. While the Mayan and the Mestiso pupils were friendly and harmonic during breaks, many of the Creole pupils fought with each other and seemed to have needs to do so. The Mayan school was located most rural among the schools we visited. The whole village shared one telephone, had no newspapers or TV, as we could understand. Most of them lived a safe life, unconscious of the
surrounding world. The children in the Garifuna school seemed to have the same tendencies as in the Creole school, even though the school was located in a rural area. What that depends on is difficult to say. Somehow, the Garifuna pupils seemed to be influenced of a hard world, even though we think they should not be. This can also have something to do with their historic way of life. Mestisos and Mayas have long history of farming and they know that they can survive even if they do not continue schooling. Especially Creoles do not have anything like that to fall back on. They lost most of their origin culture during the colonisation. Unemployment rate is high among Creoles and for most of them, the only chance to get a good and well-paid job is to continue schooling. Garifunas seems to be in the same situation.

Considering the fact that 50 per cent of the population is below the age of 20, the population will soon increase heavily. The country has already many problems with crime and unemployment and the question is what will happen in the future considering the increase of people. Obvious is that school and the new curricula will be very important in developing the country for the future.

Education is considered important in Belize, and even though they have only small resources, most people want to get a good education. People do not take schooling for granted and this was noticeable among the pupils. In Sweden school is often taken for granted, and this can influence the schooling of a pupil in a negative way.

The English language unites the Belizian people and they are aware that they have to have one common language, to be able to communicate with each other. Many of them also want to have their own language in school, in order not to forget it. Another thing that also unites them is that roads are getting more and better, which makes travelling easier. They meet more people from other ethnic groups and inter-marriages are getting more common. Slowly but surely they mix with each other.

We think that Belize is a good model for multiethnic counties. They are working hard to unit the people and they succeed well. Sweden should also try harder to integrate immigrants more in society. Every culture has both good and bad aspects and the point is to respect and appreciate each other and their way of life. By integrating immigrants more, Sweden can learn from their knowledge and experience.
5. SOURCES


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Belize Teachers College, Belize City (1994). *Belizian Studies; Module 7 (immigration to Belize from 1800)*: Belize Primary Education Development Project.


Interview of General Manager of Catholic Schools

Interview of a woman responsible for the new curriculum, Teachers College, Belize City

Interviews of principals and teachers:

- Creole school: Principal
  Teachers in Infant I and Standard II, III and VI.

- Mayan school: Principal
  Teachers in Infant I and Standard II, IV, IV and VI.

- Garifuna school: Principal
  Teachers in Infant I and Standard I, II, IV and V.

- Mestiso school: Principal
  Teachers in Infant I and Standard I, III and VI.