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Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala (Series in Critical Narrative)

Clark Taylor

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Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala (Series in Critical Narrative) Clark Taylor *Seeds of Freedom* is a remarkable case study of liberating education in the remote Guatemalan Maya indigenous village of Santa María Tzejá in the four decades since it was first settled in 1970. Readers will find the theory and practice of liberating education spelled out in Chapter 2, illustrated from the experience of Santa María. The next four chapters describe the founding, early history, destruction, and dispersion of the village, and lay the foundation for the remaining chapters that narrate the virtual explosion of education following the reuniting of the village in 1994. What makes this account so significant is that the village founders were land-poor, or landless, *campesinos*, peasant farmers who were nearly all illiterate and trapped in a kind of slavery to the country's huge plantations during the harvesting season. Yet within their own lifetimes they would see what had been previously unimaginable for them in their wildest dreams?nearly all of their children educated, with many of them reaching university studies. By 2010 the village's emerging professionals were filling increasingly important social change roles at the local, regional, and national levels. Adding to the story's significance is that Santa María came to exemplify the theory and practice of liberating education, even taking into account all the inevitable ups and downs that are part of every human community's endeavors. The story is compelling on its own terms. With the help of a Catholic priest, the village's founding pioneers were granted land, settled the village, established a school for their children, and began to prosper. Too soon, however, the village came in the path of a scorched-earth campaign in the country's then-raging civil war and was destroyed. For the next twelve years the survivors carried on, roughly half of them as refugees in Mexico. Back together in 1994, the village launched, with the support of allies, a dramatic renewal of its primary school and founded a middle school. By a stroke of good fortune, an in-country ally, the Catholic agency PRODESSA, offered to educate village teachers, drawing on the liberating educating theory and practice of Paulo Freire. The story widened and deepened from there, as exemplified by the social justice efforts of the village's emerging professionals, noted above. Santa María has thus become an example of dynamic liberating education, with much to offer educators, students, the general public, and solidarity activists throughout the world.

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