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How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Torres, I. (2017). Policy windows for school-based health education about nutrition in Ecuador. *Health Promotion International*, 32(2), 331-339. doi:10.1093/heapro/daw037

Publication metadata

Title:	Policy windows for school-based health education about nutrition in Ecuador
Author(s):	Irene Torres
Journal:	Health Promotion International
DOI/Link:	https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daw037
Document version:	Accepted manuscript (post-print)

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Policy windows for school-based health education about nutrition in Ecuador

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Summary

The aim of this study is to identify opportunities in policy framing for critical health education (CHE) about food and nutrition in Ecuadorian schools. The research engages in a dialogue between the perspectives of critical nutrition and political ecology, as it seeks to clarify and develop a critical perspective on health promotion and health education. Critical nutrition studies and political ecology highlight the need to consider and also act upon the broader connections of, and influences on, food and nutrition. In a CHE approach, students learn to address the wider determinants of health through critical, democratic and collaborative processes, anchored in and supported by the local community. Based on a textual analysis of health, food and education policy documents, the study finds that concrete norms endorse a bio-medical stance. Consequently, focus remains on prescribing individual behavior, and schools are regarded as intervention settings, rather than a site for generating change as would be the case of health promotion using a CHE viewpoint. However, the study finds the possibility for developing a CHE perspective in the overarching rationale of 'good living', which reaffirms a holistic understanding of health, the need for critical and plural participation and the importance of the community. It is possible that the notion of community participation could facilitate introducing a CHE approach in Ecuadorian schools.

Key words: health education, public policy, nutrition, school, community

INTRODUCTION

Ecuador's persistent malnutrition and increasing over-weight and obesity, and associated non-communicable diseases, are a source of concern (Waters, 2006; Popkin et al., 2012; Freire et al., 2013). Out of ~15 million Ecuadorians, 6.6 million are estimated to be overweight; that is, ~30% of schoolchildren, 26% of adolescents and >60% of adults (Freire et al., 2013). Meanwhile, 15% of schoolchildren and 19% of adolescents remain undernourished (Freire et al., 2013). According to Freire et al. (Freire et al., 2014), these statistics illustrate the state's failure to adequately tackle the challenge of improving nutritional status in Ecuador.

Scholars have emphasized the importance of addressing the influence of food and food-related practices at school, and their potential in terms of children's learning and development of competences related to healthy eating (Weaver-Hightower, 2011; Nelson and Breda, 2013; Benn and Carlsson, 2014). Studies of the Finnish school meal, for example, show how student knowledge and attitudes can be better improved by linking the national school meal program with students' nutritional and health education (Kannas et al., 2009; Sarlio-Lähteenkorva and Manninen, 2010). In contrast, Ecuadorian schools do not offer this type of institutional aims and support. The topics of health, nutrition and food are scarcely mentioned in the Ministry of Education's curriculum update (2009) and quality standards (2012). Fittingly, the stated purpose of Ecuador's School Feeding Program is to buttress student attendance while supplementing children's nutrition (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2012b).

The health promoting school model endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1998) provides a useful framework to examine school nutrition programs in terms of their educational potential. The health promoting school paradigm views the whole school environment and the everyday practices of the school as an arena for health promotion and health education (Clift and Jensen, 2005; Green and Tones, 2010; Simovska and McNamara, 2015). The paradigm highlights the importance of participation, and emphasizes collaboration between the school and the local community, including parents, as a means of improving both health and educational outcomes (Clift and Jensen, 2005; Simovska and Carlsson, 2012; Griebler et al., 2017). Studies conducted within the health promoting school model therefore emphasize the need to address the wider determinants influencing health, and to develop student competences to reflect, and eventually act upon, these determinants (Simovska and Carlsson, 2012).

Research has found positive effects of health promoting schools on students' development of competences to individually and collectively care for, and promote, health (Clift and Jensen, 2005; Simovska, 2007, 2008; Green and Tones, 2010; Simovska and McNamara, 2015). However, only a limited number of studies within the health promoting school paradigm focus on food-related education or on the participation of the wider community as a dimension of health promotion and education, particularly with regard to developing countries.

This study is part of a broader research project that explores the opportunities for school-based health promotion and health education in Ecuador, particularly in connection with the School Feeding Program (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2012b). The aim of the study is to identify how existing policy framings support or hinder the integration of food, nutrition and school meals with a socio-ecological and critical health education (CHE) approach (e.g. Green and Tones, 2010). In line with Kingdon (Kingdon, 1995), the assumption is that the possibility of plural readings opens a policy 'window' or opportunity for change. Such windows of opportunity might emerge in the stated aims and means of education, as well as in conceptualizations of health, nutrition and food articulated in policy documents. Additionally, the study examines the opportunities provided in the policy framings for the participation of the wider community as an important element of school-based health promotion and health education.

The main research questions are:

- (i) What are the aims and means of education, in general, and health education and food-related education, in particular, in Ecuadorian schools according to relevant policy documents?
- (ii) How are student, parent and community participation conceptualized in these policy documents?
- (iii) What are the, sometimes tacit, assumptions about health, food and nutrition in these policy documents?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The WHO (WHO, 2014) views health as holistic and contextual, and health promotion and education as a means for people to gain control over the social determinants of health and health-related lifestyle. As an element of health promotion, school feeding or school meal programs can help provide the necessary nutrition to students, but can also establish content and context for them to learn about the complexities related to diet and nourishment. Food practices depend on a variety of socioeconomic, cultural, psychological and environmental factors (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013). In consequence, to understand the educational potential of school nutrition, it is necessary to examine how food is conceptualized in relation to health and nutrition, but also with respect to learning and competence development.

Conceptually, this study engages in a dialogue with critical nutrition (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; Scrinis, 2013) and political ecology (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008; Vanhulst and Beling, 2014), as it seeks to clarify and further develop a critical approach to health promotion and health education in schools (Nutbeam, 2000; Tones, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2014). These three frames of reference share an understanding of nutrition and health as holistic and contextual which transcends a biomedical focus on disease. They also highlight the need to tackle the wider determinants of nutrition and health, rather than controlling or imposing health norms. Furthermore, the three frameworks emphasize the value for health promotion and education of calling into question expert-led advice, and of striving for participation, political transformation and social justice.

From a critical nutrition perspective, Hayes-Conroy A and Hayes-Conroy J (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013) and Scrinis (Scrinis, 2013) argue that health education should challenge the standardization and engineering of food based on isolated, measurable elements such as nutrients. This perspective demands more significant consideration of food's social, economic, cultural, historical, environmental and even emotional and sensory connections. Further, it shifts the emphasis toward the political action needed to improve nutrition through efforts such as moderating the power of the food industry through government regulation.

Political ecologists Morgan and Sonnino (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008), in turn, contend that healthier school nutrition requires that the fields of food production and procurement respond more ethically to the needs of both humans and the environment. For this, the school, parents and the wider community must work collectively to transform school meals or feeding programs that aim simply to fulfill recommended

dietary guidelines. As the community engages alongside the school, children are able to experience and participate in the actions that are necessary to enable and promote healthy nutrition. This is how students learn where their food comes from, and learn to reflect critically on issues related to food, nutrition and health.

Critical nutrition and political ecology advocates have not always been clear about the specific aims and methods of the health education ideas they propose. The WHO's health promoting school paradigm (WHO, 1998) addresses these questions. The aim of health promoting schools that embrace a CHE approach is to help children develop the capacities and the will to reflect and act upon the wider social determinants of health (Clift and Jensen,

2005; IUHPE, 2009; Simovska and McNamara, 2015). In a CHE perspective, focus is not only on individual life skills for making daily decisions, but also on the knowledge, attitudes and skills that are useful to generate health-promoting change, even at a micro level—in the classroom, the school environment or the community surrounding the school (Tones, 2005; Simovska and Carlsson, 2012).

Students in health-promoting schools develop their competences through their participation in processes of critical reflection and empowerment, which are both collaborative and democratic (Simovska, 2007, 2008). This form of participation recognizes that knowledge is not pre-determined and the same process may result in divergent learning outcomes (Hart, 1997, 2008; Simovska, 2008). The local community constitutes an important site and support for student learning about health. This entails that the school needs to work closely with members of the extended community (Clift and Jensen, 2005; Simovska, 2007, 2008; Hart, 2008; Sormunen et al., 2013a, b).

This study assumes that insight into the explicit and implicit barriers or possibilities that policy frameworks pose for school-based CHE can be obtained by drawing on the synergies between critical nutrition studies, political ecology and a CHE perspective. The study views school nutrition as a site for providing education regarding nutritional and health issues. Additionally, the study considers that student, parent and community participation at school are key elements of a CHE approach.

METHODS

The method of study is textual analysis of national-level policy documents (Codd, 2007). Documents were selected if they explicitly addressed educational practices related to health and food procurement and consumption, or if they established the overall legislative framework within one or more of these fields. All documents have been translated from the original Spanish by the author, except for the National Plan for Good Living which is available in English. The documents selected for the analysis are the following:

- (i) National Assembly
 - (a) Organic Law of Health (2006).
 - (b) Organic Law of the Food Sovereignty Regime (2009).
 - (c) Organic Law of Intercultural Education (2011).

- (ii) National Secretariat for Planning and Development

(a) National Plan for Good Living 2013–2017 (2013).

(iii) Ministry of Education

(a) Updating and Strengthening the Curriculum for Basic Education (2009).

(b) Education Quality Standards (2012). (c) School Feeding Program (2012).

(iv) Ministry of Public Health

(a) School Cafeteria Guidelines (2011).

(v) Ministry of Education and Ministry of Public Health

(a) School Cafeteria Regulations (2014).

Following Codd (Codd, 2007), this study assumes that a critical examination of policies can make evident their embodied 'incoherencies, distortions, structured omissions and negations' (p. 181). Expanding on this notion, the study draws on Hajer and Laws (Hajer and Laws, 2006) and their contention that such ambivalences or ambiguities enable interpretations to be reframed within an explicit set of goals and values. Hence, the analysis applies the conceptual framework to identify the opportunities, or windows, for change. Finally, the study adopts van Hulst and Yanow's (van Hulst and Yanow's, 2014) notion of 'framing', instead of 'frames', in recognition that policy design is dynamic, lacking a single, fixed understanding of a situation.

The method of analysis consists of three, mutually interwoven, steps:

1. Document identification and data extraction: policy documents and data were identified and selected as relevant if they provided information on the aims and means of education in general, and of health- and food-related education in particular; on student and parent participation as references for understanding community participation in school-based health education or on school nutrition. Extracted data, in the form of excerpts from the documents, were coded and stored as data records.
2. Data condensation: guided by the research questions, recurring themes and categories were identified with a focus on how documents conceptualized health, food and nutrition, and student, parent and community participation. The analysis focused on the implications of these conceptualizations for health- or food-related education.
3. Synthesis: barriers and possibilities for food-related CHE were identified in the policy framing based on whether a text appeared to be instructive and prescriptive or allowed for critical deliberation and adjustment.

The analysis was verified through peer feedback on key analytical points within a university-based research group, and also at an international conference where preliminary findings were presented and discussed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis centers on the aims and means of education in general and health education in particular, the conceptualizations of student, parent and community participation, and the different understandings of food, nutrition and health which can be found in the relevant policy documents. The explicit descriptions are compared and contrasted with the apparent underlying logic of the policy documents and the conceptual framework outlined above.

Framing of the aims and means of education

Two policy documents explicitly formulate the general and specific aims and means of education in Ecuador: the Organic Law of Education (Ecuadorian Government, 2011; hereafter Education Law) and the National Plan for Good Living (Senplades, 2013; hereafter National Plan). Two contrasting sets of values emerge in the texts: a first set of values that is comprised in the concept of 'good living' (buen vivir), and a second in the concept of a knowledge society.

The overarching principle of good living in the National Plan stresses the importance of critical thinking and actively challenging the status quo through democratic, collaborative processes; it also underscores the values of social protection and harmonic co-existence with the environment (Gudynas, 2011; Villalba, 2013; Vanhulst and Beling, 2014). Correspondingly, three aims of the Education Law endorse plural participation and the value of sharing responsibilities; critical and empowered action to promote greater equity; and a holistic understanding of health (p. 11):

Plural participation and shared responsibilities

a. Full development of the student's personality, contributing to the knowledge and exercise of rights, fulfilment of obligations [. . .], the development of a culture of peace and of non-violence [. . .], and a social, intercultural, plurinational, democratic and solidary co-existence.

Critical and empowered action in favor of social equity

d. Development of the capacity to analyze and be critically conscious in order to enter the world as active subjects with a vocation to transform and build a just, equitable and free society.

Holistic promotion of health and sustainability

f. Promotion and development of a citizen and planetary consciousness for the conservation, defense and improvement of the environment; in order to achieve a healthy life, and the rational, maintainable and sustainable use of natural resources.

In this excerpt, the Education Law's call for a 'vocation to transform' society is seemingly aligned with the shared position of critical nutrition, political ecology and CHE

on the relevance of acting upon the broader health determinants. Especially in consonance with a CHE approach within the health promoting school paradigm, the Education Law appears to favor collective processes of critical and plural deliberation.

In contrast, a second set of values sidesteps the good living framing by conferring science and technology a superior authority, as illustrated in the National Plan (p. 18):

The Knowledge Revolution proposes innovation, science and technology, as the foundations for changing the productive structure in order to design a different way to produce and consume. This transition will bring the country from a phase of dependence on limited resources to one of unlimited resources, such as science, technology and knowledge.

Here, the emphasis is on the need for the country to transcend current forms of knowledge (social and cultural, presumably) and thrust itself into a state of progress grounded on science and technology. From the health promoting schools perspective, this can be seen as a framing which hinders democratic deliberation and participation by devaluing local systems of knowledge and meaning.

Additionally, the National Plan explicitly endorses state-led cultural change and links education to this ethos of transformation as a means to building a science-based knowledge society (Senplades, 2013, p. 49). This could imply that the Ministry of Education needs to distance itself from the more holistic concept of good living which emphasizes a deliberative, plural process.

Framing of student, parent and community participation

While the Education Law explicitly establishes the participation of students and parents, it does not define forms of participation for the extended school community. In this policy document, the school community is mentioned only briefly; thus, the concept remains vague, without an indication as to whether or not members of the wider local community are considered a part of it.

With regard to students, the Education Law carefully specifies the purpose, form and spheres of their involvement, limiting the possibilities for what within CHE has been conceptualized as a genuine participation embracing democratic values and diversity (Simovska, 2007, 2008). This is illustrated in the roles and obligations of students assigned in the Education Law (p. 13–14).

In this set of rights and responsibilities, student opinion and free expression are protected; however, the Education Law also determines that students must express themselves with 'respect', and justify their opinions 'adequately'. The law also establishes that the 'competent authorities and institutions' have the last word on student rights violations. It could be claimed that these constraints give the school power over the students to interpret the content and form of their participation (Table 1).

Table 1: Student rights and responsibilities in the Education Law

Student Rights (<i>emphasis added</i>)	Student Responsibilities (<i>emphasis added</i>)
<p>c. “To be treated with justice, dignity, without discrimination; to have their individual, cultural, sexual and linguistic diversity, ideological, political and religious convictions respected, and their rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed...”</p> <p>e. “To actively exercise the freedom to organize and express themselves [...], to be heard, that <i>their opinion be considered in the decisions made; to express freely and respectfully</i> their opinion and to use conscientious objection on a well-grounded basis”.</p> <p>h. “To participate in the election processes of class committees or councils, student council and other organs of participation in the education community, under democratic principles and ensuring parity representation of women and men; and, in case of being elected, to perform duties in a responsible and active way”.</p>	<p>c. “To pursue educational excellence and show academic integrity and honesty while fulfilling tasks and obligations”.</p> <p>e. “To treat members of the educational community with <i>absolute dignity, respect and non-discrimination</i>”.</p> <p>g. “To <i>adequately justify their opinions</i> and respect those of others”.</p> <p>h. “To respect and comply with the codes of harmonic co-existence and promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts”.</p> <p>j. “To respect and comply with the Constitution, laws, regulations and other norms pertaining to the National Education System in general and educational institutions in particular”.</p> <p>l. “To report to competent authorities and institutions any act of violation of their rights and acts of corruption, undertaken by and against a member of the educational community”.</p>

Additionally, involvement of students in decision-making processes is restricted to formal representation on the school council and to ‘any decision which does not implicate civil, administrative or criminal responsibility’ (p. 13). These limits may potentially preclude most forms of influence. From Simovska’s and Hart’s (Simovska’s 2007, 2008; Hart’s, 2008) perspective, this framing enables policy documents to be placed along a continuum between genuine, or consequential, and token, or symbolic, participation of students. While the Education Law protects the voices of pupils and their rights, allowing for their genuine participation, the law also calls on students to comply with their duties as requested.

As members of the extended community, parents are able to participate in the school; however, the Education Law again reveals a dichotomic pattern of privileges and restrictions. Although parents have the right to participate and monitor, authorities maintain some degree of leverage, as exemplified in the following excerpts regarding parental rights in the Education Law (p. 16, emphasis added):

- d. Elect and be elected as members of parent associations and other organs of participation.
- f. To be heard, and that their opinion on educational management and processes be analyzed by *educational authorities* and answered in a timely manner.
- g. To participate in the accountability processes of school *authorities*, teachers and staff...
- h. To participate in the appropriate organs of planning, construction and monitoring of educational policy, at the local, regional, and national levels.
- i. To monitor respect for their children's rights in educational institutions, and report their violation to the *competent authorities*.
- j. To receive from authorities, teachers and other members of the education community a respectful treatment, free of any form of violence or discrimination.
- k. To request and access information which they consider relevant and that is in the possession of the educational institution.

In this section, the Education Law acknowledges that, similar to students, the parents have the right to be heard without being discriminated against. However, the law also states that the parents' suggestions will only be 'analyzed' and 'answered' by the authorities, who seem to have the last word. In a CHE approach, genuine participation involves an open, ongoing democratic dialogue and the possibility for the participation to be effective. Whereas parental participation is formally upheld in the Education Law, it can be characterized as symbolic because the document does not state whether or how the contributions of parents should be taken into account, and what is the level of their influence over school practices.

Framing of nutrition, health, and health education

Once again, two contrasting sets of values permeate the underlying logic of policy framing of nutrition, health and health education in the documents. On the one hand, the policies reaffirm a conception of health and nutrition as holistic, contextual, co-constructed; on the other, one finds a biomedical stance aimed at regulating behavior through the transmission of expert knowledge.

The Organic Law of Health (Ecuadorian Government, 2006; hereafter Health Law) begins with a holistic conception of health, exemplified in the use of the WHO definition (1946, 2014): 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (Health Law, p. 2). Immediately after, the law reveals a prescriptive biomedical approach to nutrition and health, concerned with disease prevention. Out of the 34 responsibilities of the Ministry of Health, 16 pertain to 'regulating', in frequent combination with 'controlling' or 'monitoring' the factors that affect physical health (Health Law, p. 3–4). This dichotomy is also present in the chapter of the Health Law concerning food and nutrition, as illustrated in the following excerpt (p. 6):

Of nourishment and nutrition

Article 16: The State will establish an inter-sector policy for nourishment and nutrition security, focused on eliminating bad eating habits, which respects and promotes traditional food knowledge and practices, and the use and consumption of regional products and foods, and will guarantee people's access to healthy, varied, nutritional, innocuous and sufficient foods.

This policy will be especially directed to prevent illness due to micro-nutrient deficiencies or alterations due to eating disorders.

Article 16 of Ecuador's Health Law thereby recognizes the significance of local foods and traditional knowledge and practices, in line with a critical nutrition framework embracing the social, cultural and historical connections of food (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, 2013; Scrinis, 2013). However, this same article also emphasizes a biomedical approach focused on prevention or reduction of maladies and disease.

A similar contradiction arises in the following article of the Health Law (p. 6):

Article 11: At all [educational] levels and modalities, the curriculum [. . .] will include contents promoting knowledge of the rights and duties regarding health, healthy habits and lifestyles; self-care; gender equality; and individual, family and community co-responsibility to protect health and the environment, and discourage and prevent harmful conducts.

In this excerpt, the framing of health echoes the political ecology perspective of Morgan and Sonnino (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008) by associating health with environmental protection and describing it as a collaborative endeavor. At the same time, it could be argued that Article 11 contradicts the principles of CHE by implying that there are habits and lifestyles that can be identified as healthy a priori the educational process, and, therefore, that the content to be learned through health education can be defined in advance.

Similarly, the Organic Law of the Food Sovereignty Regime (Ecuadorian Government, 2009; hereafter Food Law) underscores principles that are essential to critical nutrition and political ecology, such as the need for 'culturally appropriate foods' (p. 4), and the importance to strive for 'equity, solidarity, inclusion and social and

environmental sustainability' (p. 4). At the same time, the Food Law emulates the Health Law's prescriptive stance by stipulating in Article 28 that: 'In the basic education curriculum, the State will include matters related to nutritional quality in order to promote a balanced consumption of healthy and nutritional foods' (p. 15).

In comparison, more concrete norms such as the Education Quality Standards (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2012a) and Curriculum Update (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2010) ultimately seem to yield to the biomedical, reductionist viewpoint, reliant on the transmission of expert-based knowledge. At the primary school level, the only education standard related to nutrition and health refers to the students' competence 'to undertake actions ensuring the eating of nutritious foods, personal care and basic safety norms' (Ecuadorian Ministry of Education, 2012a, p. 42). In the same manner, the Curriculum Update establishes 'the correct development of students' health' (p. 22) as a cross-curricular topic.

Inattention to the broader determinants of health, and the contention that there is one correct form to promote health, distances the education standards and curriculum from a CHE understanding of health as holistic and of health education as participatory, resulting in diverse learning outcomes and developing competence to make health-related choices critical of the dominant discourse. As a consequence, and similar to the Health and Food Laws, it could be argued that the Education Standards and Curriculum Update relegate education to information transmission and behavior regulation.

Educational potentials and limitations of school nutrition

This section analyzes the School Feeding Program, School Cafeteria Regulations (Ecuadorian Ministries of Public Health and Education, 2014; hereafter Regulations) and School Cafeteria Guidelines (Ecuadorian Ministry of Public Health, 2011; hereafter Guidelines). To identify the windows within these policy documents, once again it is necessary to first reveal their underlying logic. As in the case of the health education norms and standards, it could be argued that the aims of school nutrition policy appear to be closely aligned with a biomedical rationale of control and regulation.

To begin with, the framing of the Ecuadorian school feeding policy seems to reaffirm a functional view of food, as illustrated in the following excerpt (p. 9):

The purpose of the School Feeding Program is to provide school feeding services without cost, [in order to] bridge the gap in access to universal education and improve the quality and efficiency of basic education, and to concurrently improve the nutritional status of students in public institutions of the country at the early childhood and basic education levels.

According to the stated goal of the School Feeding Program, foodstuffs are a means to improve educational efficiency and nutrition outcomes, and nutrition is something that can be provided, even imposed, rather than negotiated and co-constructed.

The framing of the School Cafeteria Guidelines and Regulations also appears to be aligned with a utilitarian approach to food. An example of this is how the Guidelines' definition of food (p. 7) restates the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius (FAO/WHO, 1963):

Any natural or processed food product which, previously prepared and once ingested, supplies the human organism with the nutrients and

energy it requires to perform the biological processes.

Further, the aim of the Guidelines is to address the 'overweight and obesity problem' (p. 5), mainly through the control of the measurable nutritional content of food sold at schools. The document describes the school snack as '15% of the daily caloric demands' (p. 17), and quantifies the amounts of protein, fat, and carbohydrates in a list of recipes equating to that 15% of the recommended daily intake (p. 29). Correspondingly, the Regulations establish the creation of school committees in charge of promoting 'correct eating and healthy living practices' (p. 26).

As these excerpts show, the policy documents are not much concerned with the broader connections of food and nutrition, such as cultural knowledges or traditions, or the implications of nourishment beyond the biomedical viewpoint. This reductionist approach is brought to its logical extreme in that the Guidelines include chewing gum in the list of permitted foods, provided that it does not exceed a specific amount of sugar per gram. These simplistic calculations of caloric and nutrient content therefore render hollow the recommendation in the Guidelines that food at schools should be 'natural, fresh, nutritional and healthy' (p. 5).

CONCLUSIONS

This study intended to examine whether there are opportunities in the policy framing for a school-based CHE in Ecuador, from a conceptual perspective combining the health promoting school framework with critical nutrition and political ecology. The analysis focused on the aims and means of education in general, and of health education and food-related education in particular, the conceptualization of participation and the assumptions about health, nutrition and food in key policy documents. The main premise is that a CHE approach can be better supported by policies which endorse critical deliberation and democratic participation in learning processes. From this perspective, health and health promotion cannot be fully prescribed, but co-constructed, and the policy framings need to allow space for participation and dialogue.

The findings show that, as the policies narrow their scope of action and concentrate more directly on schools, norms and regulations increasingly reaffirm a biomedical and behavior modification focus. Nutrition is ultimately reduced to quantifiable, material characteristics and good health is mostly construed as the product of an adequate intake of measurable calories and nutrients. The analysis points out that, with some exceptions, health is conceived as the absence of disease and as deriving from habits which can be pre-defined and transmitted to students. Schools are treated as intervention settings, rather than being considered a site for generating student-driven change, and active involvement of the local community including the parents, as it would be in the case of health promotion using a CHE approach.

From a CHE perspective, the policy framing in Ecuador can be viewed not only as limiting but perhaps even as having a negative impact on schoolchildren. First, the conceptual primacy of the biomedical rationale curtails the potential of education as a process of critical reflection and empowerment through collaboration and democratic exchange. Secondly, the reduction of food and nutrition to numerical values disavows the need to address the wider determinants influencing health. Thirdly, because school-community alliances are not explicitly promoted and guaranteed, this important

dimension of children's well-being and learning remains unacknowledged.

Concurrently, the analysis points to some policy windows for developing a CHE approach in Ecuadorian schools. First, when referring to health, social equity or democratic values in general, the policy documents stress the need to develop the capacities and the will to reflect and act upon the wider social determinants of health. Secondly, within the good living framing, both health and nutrition are viewed as holistic, contextual and a shared responsibility. Thirdly, the critical, democratic and transformative nature of the concept of good living (Vanhulst and Beling, 2014) seems to permeate the Education Law enough to argue in favor of the genuine participation of students at school.

In consequence, it is possible to view the School Feeding Program in alignment with a political ecology approach (Morgan and Sonnino, 2008); that is, as a health promoting initiative requiring the participation of the community. This would entail that, although community participation is not explicitly established in the policies, this concept could become a window of opportunity to introduce a CHE approach within the health promoting school paradigm in Ecuador.

FUNDING

This research was completed as part of a PhD study funded by the Ecuadorian Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (SENESCYT).

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