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Problems with Education

Educational Reform in the Dominican Republic

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Poverty Capstone

An in-depth look at the issues plaguing the educational system within the Dominican Republic. The paper focuses on primary and secondary education with an emphasis in both the problems and reforms of currently in place.

The Dominican Republic is a nation at a turning point that could be the beginning of new economic growth and development, or the continuation of half-hearted attempts that result in major economic devastation. That turning point concerns education and educational reform. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines education as “1 **a**: the action or process of educating or of being educated ; *also* : a stage of such a process **b**: the knowledge and development resulting from an educational process <a person of little *education*>2: the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools. This definition of education embodies the heart of this paper. The purpose of education is to enhance the lives of those who participate in the classroom setting and enable them to begin the process of translating those experiences into success outside of the classroom.

According to the Reviews of National Policies for Education Dominican Republic, education is a problem that has made great reforms during the island nation’s history, but still continues to require further change and careful thought. A familiarity of the Dominican educational system, changes, and legislation is needed to fully understand and analyze the current situation that faces the nation today.

Within the Dominican, “according to the World Bank Report on Economic Growth...42% of the population were poor, of which between 12% and 15% were living in absolute poverty, (earning incomes too insignificant to cover the minimum calorie intake).”¹ These figures, from a 2004 assessment, measure the Dominican’s poverty rate in terms of nutrition. Most of these poor are located throughout the island; however, the highest amounts of

¹ The Reviews of National Policies for Education (OECD Report 2008), 24.

impoverished households were found living in urban areas. There are no sources in the current document.

Who Works and Why it Matters

The Review goes on to state that the “economically active population in the Dominican Republic is mostly composed of unqualified workers in the services and factory sectors.”² The labor force of the Dominican is not only unqualified, but also undereducated. About 8% have no schooling whatsoever while more than 70% has some primary and secondary education; even fewer have completed higher education. Of the 70% that has some level of education, the highest-level of unemployment consisted of those who only had primary school educations; the average was 46.1% for men and 42.5% for women.

Before further discussing education directly, one must understand how the economy of the Dominican works, or better yet, how Dominicans work within their economy. Understanding the breakdown of professions by sex and location (urban, rural) helps to understand why education is so important.

During 2000-2004, about 83.9% of men employed were working in various jobs. The breakdown of that group appeared as follows: “factory workers and artisans (20.7%), non-qualified workers (19.1%), qualified agricultural workers and farmers (14.9%), machine operators (14.8%), and service providers (14.4%).³ Women on the other hand were employed at about 64.6%, with the breakdown occurring as follows: services sector (27.9%), nonqualified workers (23.1%), or office clerks (13.6%).⁴ A “nonqualified worker” is one that has no or little

² Reviews, 20

³ Reviews, 21

⁴ Ibid, 21

training and/or qualifications for their position. The women working in the service sector were employed as sales personnel, beauticians, waitresses, and domestic personnel. From such a percentage and breakdown of the work force, it is obvious that women continue to enter fields that are regarded as “women’s work,” while the men are take jobs that are seen as “tougher jobs.” Nonetheless, the number of women working in managerial positions and professional jobs has increased from 2.6% to 2.8% for the former and from 8.6% to 9.9% for the latter. For their male counterparts, the change has been a negative one with men decreasing from 3% to 2.8% in managerial and administrative posts and from 4.6% to 4.7% for professional positions.

To better understand the potential for each sector, it is important to realize that during 2000-2004, that 69.5% of all male workers were in agriculture and cattle-breeding—15.3% of that number were in “other services,” while 78.6% of all female employees worked in these “other services.”⁵ These services consisted of work in manufacturing, wholesale, and retail trade.

Such numbers imply that a large level of work takes place in sectors where education, at least that past secondary education, could be seen as unnecessary (especially for men). It comes as no surprise that such a large portion of the Dominican’s labor force has only primary and some secondary education (70%). The Reviews of National Policies for Education explains that, for the period 2000-2004, the majority of workers had completed their primary education, 51.8% of men and 38.2% of women to be exact. Unsurprisingly, the highest levels of unemployment are to be found among both males and females with primary schooling only, standing at 46.1% and 42.5% respectively. A comparison by gender reveals that the number of educated females is higher than that of males, both at secondary and tertiary levels.⁶ It would seem that despite

⁵ Ibid, 21

⁶ Ibid, 22

initially being less educated than their male counterparts, women have made gains in education and the work force and our moving towards more professional mobility.

This could be a result of the Dominican's desire to create more service-oriented jobs—such a goal allows more opportunities for women. However, the Dominican government must exercise a hint of caution and beware of taking such a risk. While these women are most likely trained for their professions, they may not be formally educated enough to move up the ladder and may not be able to take another job after securing their first. With a four percent difference between men and women who only have a primary education, the newly created jobs would go to men. Such practices limit the scope of all of its citizens, but especially the women who when undereducated, have lower educational levels than their male counterparts.

In order to offset such a situation, INFOTEP (Instituto Nacional de Formación Técnico Profesional OR The National Institute for Technical-Vocational Training) sustains affirmative action policies that create equal opportunities for women. Their aim is to help, “especially women trained in non-traditional fields. INFOTEP also promotes agreements of technical cooperation with several national and international institutions – such as the IBD, World Mission, Kellogg Foundation, etc. – in the implementation of projects that generate self-employment, in particular for women.⁷ INFOTEP's dedication to the women of the Dominican is vital since they are the regulating agency for technical training in the country. INFOTEP leads the way for which other national programs should follow, and there have undoubtedly been positive results. As of 2004, there has been a 21.3% increase of female participation in their programs from 31.2% in 1982 to 52.5% in 2004. These programs focus on specific job skill training, as well as technology training, occupational certification, and other complementary

⁷ Reviews, 80

programs. Such upward progression shows that women are taking advantage of such initiatives and seeking education (non-formal) in order to better their lives.

How Education Works in the Dominican

The Dominican Republic claims that “Education is free, universal, and compulsory for all minors through the eighth grade, but legal mechanisms provide only for primary schooling, which was interpreted as extending through the fourth grade. Although the Ministry of Education reported a 92 percent enrollment rate in grades one through eight, a government study estimated that the average grade level achieved by children in public schools was the fifth grade in rural areas and the sixth grade in urban areas.”⁸ To make matters worse, the current illiteracy rate, according to ENDESA-2002, of Dominicans 15 years old or older happens to be about 12.7%, despite the nation having a 10.8% average for the entire country. Accordingly, rural areas have almost double that percentage of illiteracy, with the highest level of illiteracy being amongst women.⁹ These numbers do support the claim that illiteracy, on average, is decreasing for the population. However, one cannot ignore the numbers for the rural dwellers, which are exceedingly worse.

Nonetheless, women are currently more present in the educational system than their male counterparts; girls have higher attendance rates than boys, especially for secondary education (during the 2001-2002 year, 40% of women opposed to 29% of men), In addition, men have

⁸ U.S. Department of State “Dominican Republic” Country Reports on Human Rights Practices > Western Hemisphere, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100637.htm>, Accessed 24 March 2009.

⁹ Reviews, 101

higher repetition rates, especially in rural areas.¹⁰ Clearly, the female population of the Dominican Republic is attempting to improve their educational levels.

Break down of Educational System

In the Dominican Republic, the educational system is comprised of pre-primary, primary, secondary and university levels.¹¹ Until the university level, children go to school for four hours a day.

The pre-primary level is not mandatory and is for children younger than 6 years old. The last year of pre-primary education is the only time when schooling is compulsory and free. Pre-primary education breaks down into three cycles for children 0 to 2, then 2 to 4, then lastly 4 to 6.

The primary level, aimed at ages 6 to 14 years old, lasts for eight years. This part of the educational process is said to be “compulsory and universal, and therefore the State has the constitutional responsibility to ensure that all children have access to eight years of primary education. There are two cycles: the first covers grades 1 to 4 and is intended for 6-10 year-old pupils, while the second covers grades 5 to 8 and is intended for 10-14 year-olds. Within these cycles, the learning process is organised by grade, each grade lasting one year and providing 10 months of teaching.”¹²

The secondary level is the last one before university level and consists of four years of education intended for children between the ages of 14 to 18. A prerequisite of the secondary level is completion of the primary level; however, if a student meets that requirement, secondary

¹⁰ Ibid, 101

¹¹ Reviews, 28

¹² Reviews, 29

education is free but not mandatory. Primary level education seeks to impart the pupils with “the tools to strengthen and deepen the knowledge, values, attitudes and vocational interests acquired in primary education, and provides access to higher learning as well as to further training for the labour market.”¹³ Secondary education then splinters off into vocational/technical education and the arts. The different paths offer “flexible curriculum that facilitates transition from one mode to another.”¹⁴

Vocational/technical education attempts to prepare students for “qualified professions at the secondary level or for social or productive activities” and focuses on the main sectors of the Dominican economy, -which consists of industry, agriculture, and services. The focus on vocations and technical professions greatly helps the economy, which is based in the service sector. By offering training and education to bolster specific jobs, the Dominican people can enhance their pool of workers and focus on attracting investors and jobs that their people are prepared for. According to the National Survey of Demand and Training (ENDECA 2003), The Free Zone sector (industrial raw materials, capital goods, and foodstuffs shows the greatest needs, with 38.6% of the total workers.¹⁵ Next follows wholesale and retail trade, with 17%; the manufacturing industries with 13.6%; the hotel management sector with 10.5%; other services with 9.6%. Financial mediation and insurance had 7%; transport and communications 3%, and the area with the least amount of training is the construction industry, with just 0.5%.¹⁶ Truck drivers are the largest group of individuals trained for their professions with 37% needing or

¹³ Reviews, 30

¹⁴ Ibid, 30

¹⁵ State Dept.

¹⁶ Reviews, 89-90

receiving training, while 16% of service workers, 13% of craftsmen, 12% of office workers and 9% of intermediate level technicians are trained.¹⁷

Such percentages of trained individuals appears to signal that a large portion of students that go to school follow the vocational/technical education path and require further training in the labor market in order to be successful. In order to actively learn what they are trained to do, these individuals need a strong background from their respective educational programs. By coming into the training with the skill of absorbing information and discipline, they can be taught to work in any specific area. However, for those with a lackluster educational background, training programs could prove to be difficult, resulting in their inability to complete such programs and finding good jobs.

Nonetheless, there also appears to be a significant number of individuals with professional degrees who do not obtain jobs in their professional training. For instance, while in the Dominican, I spoke to a trained engineer who was working as a bank manager. He explained that many of his friends were not doing what they were trained to do in college. A few days later, I met a young woman who held a law degree but was working as a non-profit employee. These two interactions, along with affirmations from a handful of Dominicans concerning the state of the work force made me believe that despite any type of training or education, jobs are hard to find. Data concerning the Island shows that the second most affected group of unemployed consists of those between the ages of 20 and 39 years old. Their unemployment rate of 18.5% serves as an alarming reminder that there are far too many Dominicans out of work.

¹⁷ Reviews, 80

The Arts education aims to hone the creative skills of students and tries to channel that knowledge into “practical skills acquired into a variety of arts-related profession and occupations,” which are visual, performing, and applied arts, as well as music.¹⁸

After each level, examinations must be taken to move onto the next level, or secure a diploma. Those seeking a graduate diploma from secondary school must first pass the national examinations with at least a 70, as well as the same average, if not better, for all of their class subjects and also complete the Servicio Social Edstudiantil (community service).¹⁹

What’s Happening in Education in the Dominican

According to census data from 2003, the rates of student enrollment have increased in the Dominican. They also had impressive student participation, boasting one of the highest attendance rates in Latin America. Nonetheless, education for children growing up in rural areas is limited, especially at the primary level, and they lack resources, teachers, and other vital tools needed to procure an adequate education. It could be inferred that the percentage of Dominicans who do not have more than primary level education or no education at all are mostly rural dwellers. The discrepancy between urban and rural education is one of the biggest deficits for the Dominican Republic’s educational system. Despite boasting a 95.9% literacy rate for people between the ages of 15 to 24 as well as a 91.3% enrolment rate for children ages 6 to 13, a third of this population does not continue its education. Over sixty percent of 15 to 19 year olds completed the primary level or more.²⁰

¹⁸ Reviews, 30

¹⁹ Ibid, 30

²⁰ Reviews, 40

Carola Álvarez claims that the increase of student enrolment between 1992 and 2002 should be an indication of the Dominican's goals in the educational realm. He claims,

...the gross enrolment rate for the first cycle, that is, the ration of enrolment in the first four grades of primary education to the 6-to-9-year-old population, increased from 91% to 135%, which definitely indicates an increase in educational coverage. As to the second cycle (grades 5-8), in the 10-13 year cohort, the gross enrolment rate went from 42% in 1992 to 90% in 2002.²¹

Álvarez states that those living in rural areas within the Dominican Republic are disadvantaged because of a lack of resources, such as classrooms, smaller schools, and other “instructional deficiencies.”²²

Besides these “instructional deficiencies” that Álvarez mentions, the UNDP Report on Human Development from 2005 assesses that the nation's educational system remains incredibly poor in some respects. “At 18 years of age, Dominican students have spent on average 11.8 years in school. However, in terms of efficiency, repetition and dropout rates remain high throughout the system, which in turn leads to low rates of survival.”²³ The UNDP report explains, “After 11.8 years of school *attendance*, a student would have had only 8.3 years of actual schooling.”²⁴ Such a statement better illuminates the significance of the enrolment rates presented before.

Regardless of how many children actually attend school, the education they get once there is of the utmost importance. With low test scores, inefficient and inexperienced teachers, along with poor learning conditions, and a lack of resources, it comes as no surprise that the quality of public education in the Dominican leaves much to be desired.

²¹ Reviews, 38

²² Ibid, 38

²³ Reviews, 39

²⁴ Reviews, 40

The differentiation of tracks happens in the tenth grade. Students can then decide if they wish to pursue the simplest degree, which is the *tecnico basico*. The degree would require the student to only have one additional year of schooling. The two and three year technical programs are “business training (for the *bachillerato comercial* certification), agricultural training (for the *Perito agronomo*, or 13th grade agricultural diploma), and industrial training certifications. These schools offer a curriculum distribution of 30 percent academic subjects and 70 percent specialized subjects.”²⁵ There are currently 62,286 individuals on the technical-professional track. Yet, the level of participation in secondary education is still very poor. For every 1000 students ~~who~~ enters first grade, 219 make it to ninth grade. From these 219, only 62 percent will complete secondary school and receive their certificates. In 2000, there was a total of 432,793 students in secondary level, and an increase of 100 percent since 1993. Consequently, secondary schooling is the fastest growing sector of education, followed by pre-school (48.6%) and elementary school (24%).²⁶

Late entrance, grade repetition, and temporary drop outs has resulted in a large portion of students in certain grades being over-age, which means that a student is older than what the average is for other children in her respective grade. The percentages paint a picture that the aforementioned statistics cannot make up for: “over-age remains very high, representing 20.1% at the primary level in 2004, and 38% in 2005 in secondary education; the percentage was 51.2% in 2002. According to a cohort analysis, of 100 children entering formal education, only 75

²⁵ U.S. University Directory. “Dominican Republic Summary.” <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/390/Dominican-Republic-SECONDARY-EDUCATION.html>, Accessed 24 March 2009.

²⁶ U.S. University Directory

complete grade 4, 63 complete grade 6, and only 52 complete the 8-year primary level. This situation is even worse in rural areas where most schools stop at grade 5.”²⁷

The issue of academic achievement is vital to the Dominican since the average figures for the subjects of Spanish, math, and the social sciences were significantly below what constitutes a passing grade of 70 percent. The scores, in 2005, were 53.7, 50.1, and 52.1 respectively for all three subjects.²⁸ This means that even with schooling, Dominicans who desire to continue on from the primary level of education cannot go and must repeat grade 8 in order to continue on to secondary education. Even prior to grade 8, the average score of fourth graders in Spanish competency was 31.72 during the 2000-2001 school year.²⁹

While in the Dominican last summer, I witnessed these depressing statistics first hand. In the barrio of El Café in the small section of La Mina, we worked with children who were barely able to read or write in Spanish and had poor recognition of letters and animals. These children were located in a three-walled room directly beside a private pre-primary education school that had six--year--old children. The six year olds were able to do everything better than the ten year old students. We also discovered that on average, our students were at least two grade levels behind what their ages would indicate according to Dominican standards, which almost emulate American standards. Just as we start first grade at six or seven years old, so do Dominicans; however, due to pre-primary education not being mandatory until the last year and school attendance not being regulated by the law, these children start at a deficit, whenever they begin school. We even met a first grader who was 9 and unable to write his name. The scene within

²⁷ Reviews, 40

²⁸ Reviews, 49

²⁹ Reviews, 51

that summer program was heartbreaking but indicative of a greater trend that we saw throughout Santo Domingo.

Matter of Resources

One of the biggest issues that face the educational system in the Dominican has to do with resources. Of the 97,474 teaching posts available during the 2004-2005 school year, 14.2% of these teachers were unqualified.³⁰ Such a significant number of teachers ~~that~~ who are not trained should be worrisome for anyone who hears that statistic. This slight difference could account for a large discrepancy in teacher training, classroom management, and overall lowered levels of educational quality.

There is a lack of classrooms and school facilities around the island. As a result of this need, the Dominican has created, renovated, or rebuilt 10,000 more classrooms over the duration of eight years (this was by 2004). Many foreign nations, NGOs, as well as other notable institutions have invested time, effort, and money to increase the number of schools and classrooms on the island. With money coming in from such a variety of sources and financial backers, there seems to be an active interest in meeting the educational needs of the Dominican Republic. Nonetheless, the Dominican Republic must rebuild, renovate, and replace 14,000 schools and “provide an additional 10,000 classrooms in the short term. If it is to comply with the official plan to reduce the number of daily shifts in schools to a maximum of two, “this will cost the incredibly large sum of about “USD 1,446 million”³¹ Luckily for the Dominican government, it does not have to accumulate such a large sum alone. The question is how does the Dominican Republic find enough money to overhaul its educational infrastructure, hire qualified

³⁰ Reviews, 42

³¹ Reviews, 46

teachers, and provide enough resources in each school for the youngest Dominicans to access enough education to contribute to their society as an adult.

Gendered Aspects of Education

The relationship between gender and education, or the role of gender in educational success continues to be seen in the Dominican Republic.

According to the State Secretariat for Education (SEE) along with INFOTEP, 91.7% of young Dominicans between the ages of 6 to 13 years old are enrolled in school; however, that is comprised of 90.9% of the eligible males and 92.6% of the eligible females. For the older cohort, ages 14 to 17 years old, there is only a 36.5% enrolment rate. Such a low rate consists of 31.5% of the males and 41.7% of the females in that age group being enrolled.³²

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Funding Education

Currently, the Dominican Republic funds its educational system through families, the government, external loans, donations, and contributions of private companies.³³ However, 52 percent of the money comes from the government and 39 percent comes from families. Due to recent economic issues, funding from those two primary supporters of the Dominican educational system has fluctuated and continues to do so. The allotment of money that the government makes for education in the Dominican has ranged anywhere from 1.9percent to 2.9 percent of the GDP since 1996.³⁴ This number is seemingly low when compared to nations such as Honduras which spends 7.8 percent of their GDP on education;³⁵ Haiti spends 1.1 percent,

³² Reviews,38

³³ Reviews, 81

³⁴ Reviews, 85

³⁵ Spainards. "Education in Latin America."

while Brazil spends 4.4 percent and Mexico 5.3 percent.³⁶ It is important to note that El Salvador (2.9%), Peru (3%), and Bolivia (6.3%)³⁷ have lower GDPs and still spend more on education than the Dominican.³⁸ Such a low percentage being dedicated to education makes it difficult to achieve any educational goals that have been set for the nation.

The Dominican had a goal of dedicating 7 percent of GDP to education, or so it stated in 1980 along with other Latin American countries during a UNESCO project for education in the region.³⁹ Sadly, the Dominican has fallen short, as a result of economic hardships, and when the project was reassessed in 2000, few Latin American countries could make such a large financial commitment to education.

Despite the Dominican's lack of resources with which to fund education, it must do so. Investing in education is investing in the future success of the Dominican. Those nations in the Caribbean that have dedicated more to education have benefited greatly and continue to do so. In *Learning to Educate*, Ernesto Schiefelbein and Noel F. McGinn assert that educational investments must be made in order for a nation to be successful and a true competitor in the global market.⁴⁰ When discussing how to fund education, they recommend everything from taxing the richest citizens within a nation to increasing the percentage of GDP allocated to education. However, Schiefelbein and McGinn worry that if tax revenue goes towards education

http://www.5spaniards.com/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=274&Itemid=102 Accessed 24 March 2009.

³⁶ Tiscali. Encyclopedia. "Dominican Republic."

<http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/encyclopaedia/countryfacts/dominicanrepublic.html> Accessed 24 March 2009.

³⁷ Tiscali

³⁸ Reviews, 87

³⁹ Reviews, 86

⁴⁰ Ernesto Schiefelbein and Noel F. McGinn, *Learning to Educate: Proposals for the Reconstruction of Education in Latin America*. (Paris: France, 2008), 291-300.

and regions or provinces are charged with improving their respective educational systems, areas with impoverished individuals will continue to suffer.⁴¹

Goals & Reforms

Nonetheless, the Dominican created the Plan Decenal, which was a ten--year plan that hoped to address many of the islands issues, some being illiteracy, teacher training, curriculum, and standardized testing. “The plan set a goal of eliminating illiteracy in the under-30 age group and ensuring that 9 out of every 10 children attend school.”⁴² Solutions must be presented that can actually make a difference in the Dominican. As of now, the government has lofty goals and changes for the educational system.

The first goal is to improve Pre-Primary education. The aim of this initiative is to expand the availability of educational programs for children between the ages of 0 and 5, with a strong emphasis on educational quality, expansion and strengthening of pre-primary education, as well as proper program management. This is an extremely important measure because it starts children off on the right path. There have been numerous studies that stress the importance of pre-primary education and how it better prepares children for primary education. By providing quality education early on, low test scores could be improved. Nonetheless, to make this goal a reality, the Dominican government would have to increase free and compulsory education to two or even three years, in order to guarantee long--term success.

The second goal involves the Multi-phase Programme for Equity in Primary Education and focuses on the overall equality and quality of primary education. The improvements in this phase would involve equalizing education at the primary level, improving the learning outcomes

⁴¹ *Learning to Educate*, 301

⁴² U.S. University Directory

of rural students and marginalized urban areas; improve educational centers, and to promote initiatives based on the assessments in the Education Development Plan (PDE). This would include creating more schools in rural areas and supplying better trained teachers. The issue of teacher quality and educational reform will be further addressed. These improvements also involve facilities and the lack thereof of places for children to learn. While in the Dominican, not only did my students lack sufficient papers and tools to learn with, but they also lacked sanitation and space. The class-room had three stationary walls and one that could be moved in order to let the children play outside. Their toilet was a shed inside of what appeared to be a poorly lit closet with a bucket inside. There was no running water or sink to wash your hands ~~with~~. I could see the classroom being an environment in which learning was difficult, unclean, and of no benefit to the students.

The third goal consists of a Multi-phase Programme for the Modernisation of Secondary Education. This phase serves “to improve access to, and quality of, secondary education” by reformatting the way in which education is delivered; fixing the current infrastructure; facilitating proper and efficient school management; “ensure the availability of instructional inputs;” and update policies for human resources, while reducing academic failure amongst those in school. The program’s three components focus on “i) access to, and internal efficiency of, secondary education; ii) three quality-related axes (education management, curriculum development and human resources training); iii) enhanced equity and risk reduction among young people.” All three phases of this program build upon the prior goals, but also have a strong emphasis on administrative reforms within schools as well as after school initiatives that can better serve students. I see such an extensive plan as necessary and imperative. By concentrating on not only the classroom, but also the entire society, these initiatives may work.

The Multi-Phase Programme's focus on "equity and risk reduction among young people" is the most striking axes. By recognizing that the only way to make an impact in the lives of Dominicans is to teach life lessons, as well as academic lessons is a smart move. The problems with education in the Dominican require more attention and solutions than just more schoolrooms and better teachers.

Yet, the issue of quality teaching is vital in overhauling the educational system. In order for Dominican children to have a chance, it must begin with their teachers. The task of training teachers and increasing the ranks of qualified teachers is sometimes problematic because the best teachers have a tendency of working in urban areas due to better economic benefits.⁴³ The problem of teacher shortages and lack of qualifications could be solved in a number of ways. In order to attract trained teachers, the Dominican government could start recruitment early, as soon as 8th grade, or even earlier. From there, they target individuals who show interest through training programs, scholarship offers, and eventually paying for college. If a teacher begins her/his training early, she has enough time to properly accept the position and be trained to handle classrooms and students, while imparting knowledge.⁴⁴ Once hired, teaching incentives such as raises and time off could be offered for those who are exceptional at their post. Some may criticize teacher pay raises based on student success, but there is undoubtedly research that it serves as motivation for many teachers. Nonetheless, in order to encourage good work, teachers would be evaluated regularly and those with classes that continued to fail may be fired or put on a probationary period. Regardless of what the exact game plan becomes the model, teacher training is vital. Especially since many Dominican teachers either have limited or no access to teaching tools, or were not properly trained.

⁴³ Reviews, 94

⁴⁴ *Learning to Educate*, 138-42

While in La Café, a barrio in Santo Domingo, the teacher in the school I volunteered in repeatedly would ask Christine Robinson and me where we got the handouts that we gave out to the children. We explained how we had created our own writing tablets and made copies at our IDDI office and that we searched online for fun teaching games and other lessons. The teacher was shocked and asked if she could keep all of our leftover handouts. She explained that she rarely had access to the internet and was not familiar with such sites. I was saddened by her lack of resources and lack of knowledge about what resources were available to her. That situation, coupled with her lack of classroom control and management made me realize that she had been poorly trained in her teacher's college.

One day, we even had the grandmother of a student in the area come in and comment on the state of Dominican education. She lamented that even poverty-stricken and violence-inflicted Haiti had a better education system than the Dominican and that the government did not care about those living in the barrios. I was surprised that the woman was so complimentary of Haitian education, but found that many shared her views. Despite being wealthier than Haiti and more stable, the educational system lies in ruins. Many see this as a result of a government that talks a big talk, but cannot walk the walk. Politicians are infamous for saying what the people want to hear, then not carrying through with their reform changes once in power. That is why the Dominican has so many great educational laws and programs that remain non-existent for the population that needs them.

The fourth reform, the TV Centres Program, deals with technology and its usefulness in education. This portion of the program actively targets rural children or those who live in remote areas and lack the access to education centres. The initiative creates facilities, instructor training, and the proper TV and video equipment, “along with the reception and production of adequate

video programmes as educational support material.”⁴⁵ While teaching in the Dominican, I never taught technology, but the classroom I taught in was a TV Center style program that focused on IT literacy and basic computer usage. When I asked the students if they enjoyed the IT class, they all exclaimed that it helped prepare them for further education and taught them a new skill set. I could see such programs as being very useful in learning, but I think that the majority of reforms should focus on teaching children the basics, such as reading and writing. As wonderful as technology can be, it is ineffective if students cannot read what is on the screen.

The fifth reform concerns adult education, which is known as distance education, or Primary and Secondary Levels for Adults (PREPARA). This educational practice concentrates mostly on adults of young people who have not yet completed primary or secondary education, and even contains an accelerated program for secondary education completion. I believe this program is vital, especially for those who were not able to receive proper education as youths. Such a program may be the best way in which to rectify prior educational standards and problems. This aspect of the Dominican educational reform shows that they realize the significance of education and wish to offer an invaluable opportunity to those whose time has “passed.” By making education, in various forms, available to adults, the Dominican is heading in the right direction for economic success. Nonetheless, one must ask how accessible is such a program and to whom is it targeted?² I feel secure in assessing that such a program does not reach those that need it the most, especially in rural areas, or isolated urban sections. Even if it does reach the people that it should, the document offers no indication of adult tutoring programs, and other initiatives that would guarantee the success of the adult participants in such programs. The irony lies in the fact that those are the areas with the highest concentrations of people with either poor quality, or low levels of education. If this reform cannot be guaranteed to

⁴⁵ Reviews, 47-8. The entire section concerning reforms comes from these two pages.

reach poor Dominicans, especially those in rural and marginalized urban areas, then it should be accomplished after the problems with elementary and secondary education are addressed.

The final reform deals with compensation programmes and initiatives. Such initiatives aim to elevate marginalized and disadvantaged groups by “ensuring educational access and survival” to girls and boys from these groups. I believe compensation and health programs to be the most important of all the reforms.

In order to combat the problems facing the educational sector, the Dominican government is creating a multipronged approach to help eliminate the problems facing education today. The majority of the programs focus on creating in-school equity, strengthening pre-education programs, expanding pre-education programming to those who need it, improving the quality of education for those in rural areas, and marginalized urban sectors, revamping secondary education, promoting more efficient school management, creating the appropriately challenging curriculum, modernizing programs, supplementing traditional learning with video and interactive components, teacher and personnel training, creating programs that allow adults to finish primary and secondary education, and compensations programs. A few of the compensation programs are as follows:

The most important points of reform are the ones dealing with decreasing differences in rural and urban areas, and compensation programs. The most visible compensation initiatives are The Conditional Cash Transfer (Programma de Incentivo a la Asistencia Escuela (ILAE) through which mothers living in conditions of poverty or dire poverty are granted DOP 300, contingent on sending their children to school.

ILAE proves to be a vital program that allows children who would otherwise be working the opportunity to go to school and be paid for attendance. This allows them to still contribute to

their families and not have to sacrifice an education. Because such a program is contingent on attendance and not actual academic success, program participants do not have the added and unrealistic pressure of doing exceedingly well in class in order to be paid. If a student feels that she must make above a B average in order to maintain the conditional cash transfer to her family, she may opt to drop out of school altogether and focus on working to earn money for the family. By paying the students based solely on attendance, they can go to school and enjoy it, maybe even excelling in some subjects and classes, without fear of substantial losses.

Conditional cash transfers, also serve as motivation for the parents to insure their children's participation in school and routine attendance. If parents know that they can help support their child by making them go to school, they will do so. In 2004, the unemployed population was around 18.4%. The survey results of a survey given by the Central Bank on employment showed that the group most affected by unemployment was 10-19 year olds.⁴⁶ This increased percentage of unemployed children reached 38.6%, an increase from 2000's 24.9%.

However, it grew once again in 2004 to about 26.6%. It can be assumed that this decrease of young people working was a good thing and a direct result of the conditional cash transfer program that focused on education. Nonetheless, with such a large percentage of the population having to do without and living below the poverty line, it can be concluded that many of these families who might take a financial blow when their youngest family members no longer work found it more valuable to keep their kids in the workforce instead of the classroom. This discovery may have occurred sometime between 2000 and 2004, but the question is why the rate of unemployment decreased. It could be for one of two reasons—children completing secondary school went straight to the workforce after the completion of the 8th grade, or even younger Dominicans, such as primary students joined the workforce. Either way, the increase of children

⁴⁶ Reviews, 20

working should be duly noted. However, as a result of conditional cash transfers, some children may still be working around the school schedule, consequently providing a dual income for their families.

The next compensation program supplies food and is called the School Meal Programme (PAE). The program is being developed in disadvantaged urban areas, and is also provided in other sectors (distribution of solid and liquid food), intended for children of both sexes at the primary level in urban and rural areas (PAE Real). In 2005, 1,412,577 portions were distributed daily in 3,944 schools in disadvantaged urban areas, amounting to 239,549,080 portions; PAE Real catered for 79,120 pupils in 589 schools, delivering 3,667,799 portions of food each month. PAE appears to model itself much like American school feeding programs and initiatives that provide much needed food for children who qualify. However, the program seems to provide nutrition for children who live in impoverished areas and does not require an income assessment like their American counterparts. The process of acquiring tax information, family size, and assessing a parent(s) ability to pay for school food is probably unnecessary in the poor barrios and towns of the Dominican Republic. From what I have seen, those living in impoverished communities are almost always poor. Unlike the U.S. where some individuals may live in low-priced housing and be able to provide for the children's daily meals at schools, such a situation is rarely the case in the Dominican. The following excerpt from my journal while there explains how hunger and education have a strong relationship:

Christine and I noticed that the children at La Mina were usually unwashed and hungry when we would see them. There was an incident where one of our favorite pupils informed Christine that he couldn't concentrate on his work because he was so hungry. The next time we returned to teach, Christine and I were sure to bring a few granola bars for him and the other students.

At the school we taught, there was a snack time during the day, but it consisted of soda and artificially sweetened crackers. I did not understand why the "meal" that the children received

was so ~~un~~nutritious and meager, when a plate of rice and beans was only double that of a soda, and water half the price of a soda. If such meal programs are going to work, they must guarantee healthy food and not just provide sweets for the children to eat.

The final compensation program provides basic health care. These health programs cover the distribution of vermifuge, along with iron and vitamin supplements as well as dental and eye-care.

The health initiatives currently in the Dominican are much needed for many of those living in poverty. Because of such poor living conditions and lack of adequate health care, many Dominicans are susceptible to disease and health issues that fortunately do not plague those in more developed nations. For instance, vermifuge is a medicine or substance that is used to expel worms from humans and animals.⁴⁷ Such medications are not as needed in the States, but are vital in places like the Dominican. An initiative aimed at issuing birth certificates (in cases of late registration), to students under 16 years of age. To date, 12, 262 students of both sexes have benefited from this program. A program that focuses on supplying birth certificates for Dominican children is extremely important, because without documentation, these children face difficulties in accessing primary education. The biggest problem is that many children in the Dominican are not registered at birth and remain undocumented until a late declaration, which must be validated.⁴⁸

Health care is also very important because a large number of children in rural areas cannot afford healthcare, or live in areas with poor healthcare facilities, if any at all. As of 2006, 69% of EPI vaccinations were funded by the government, and over 93% of 1 year olds were

⁴⁷ Online Medical Dictionary. "Vermifuge."
<http://www.mondofacto.com/facts/dictionary?query=vermifuge&action=look+it+up>, Accessed 29 March 2009.

⁴⁸ State Dept.

immunized against TB and DPT (diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus), 85% against Polio and 99% against Measles.⁴⁹ The list of vaccination percentages at the UNICEF site appears impressive, but is not indicative of the work that is left to undertake. By being able to provide healthcare, even if it requires commuting, these children are given the chance to have a better life than what they currently experience. Because of the lack of facilities, the government programs that provide healthcare must do more than that. They must offer comprehensive sexual assault awareness, psychological treatments, and a way for their targeted clients to access these opportunities. It must not go unstated that there have been major improvements in the realm of childhood healthcare.

The following excerpt from my journal express my frustrations with health care inadequacy while in the Dominican Republic:

There was a young woman covered in scabs and scars all over her body. When we asked about being able to test these kids for everything from hearing impairments to colorblindness, which we thought a few students had, we were informed that that wasn't their job. Also, they said that if the teachers suspected something, they could tell the parents who were then responsible for getting medical help for their children. Christine and I were completely floored. Here in the U.S., schools do free screenings for kids that young and then supply assistance if the parents can't afford to have their child cared for or anything like that.

Health care must be offered for a number of reasons, such as maintaining routine checkups, in order to catch illnesses and diseases before they become dangerous, and in order to offer services to abused children. According to The National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI), there are a significant number of children who are being sexually abused. "CONANI reported 215 cases of sexual abuse, 224 cases of physical abuse, and 251 cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children under the age of 18. Few such cases reached

⁴⁹ UNICEF. Info by Country. "At a Glance: Dominican Republic." http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/domrepublic_statistics.html, Accessed 24 March 2009.

the courts, due to fear of family embarrassment, lack of economic resources, or lack of knowledge regarding available legal assistance.”⁵⁰ Many believe that sexual assault is underreported because of the stigmas attached to such an issue and familial desire to keep it in the family and deal with it as such. Free access to health care, although it does not guarantee the safety of abused children, does allow for these children to receive the treatment they most likely need.

The last compensation program deals with other ancillary services and includes the provision of backpacks, uniforms, scholarships and other school-related co-operative services. I know that such a program is must be upheld. While in Santo Domingo, especially in the barrio of La Cafe, at a place named La Mina, Christine and I noticed that many of the children had only a handful of tattered clothing that they wore repeatedly. Some of the children did not even have shoes. How could the children of such poor parents even afford school books, which are not provided by schools, notebooks, and even pencils? Such an initiative, if enforced, would give such children clothing and supplies for school; consequently, helping to increase their self esteem and pride and motivate them to attend.

Along with the cash transfer payment, the PAE and health programs fill a necessary burden in many of the impoverished lives. In order to succeed, these students need food, nutrition, and reasonable health in order to guarantee that they will be able to attend class, pay attention, and do well. The PAE program guarantees that these children will receive at least one decent meal a day while the health program provides much needed nutritional supplements and vitamins that can keep away illness and disease. That coupled with programs that assist young

⁵⁰ State Dept.

Dominicans in securing books and other tools for school are the most vital of the compensation programs.

The initiatives serve as attraction points for many pupils and families who would otherwise not be able to sufficiently provide for their families. The conditional cash transfers could serve as a real solution for the underage unemployment issues and serve as motivation for youngsters and teens to stay in school instead of turning to the job market in order to financially contribute to their families.

These multi-faceted approaches demonstrate that the Dominican government knows what it must do to improve their educational situation, yet the reform has been slow in coming to fruition due to limited resources. In April of 2003, the Strategic Education Development Plan of the Dominican Republic for 2003-2012 was given to various stakeholders and emphasized the Dominican's desire to fix these following problems: i) access to, and internal efficiency of, secondary education; ii) three quality-related axes (education management, curriculum development and human resources training); iii) enhanced equity and risk reduction among young people. The aforementioned problems are the same target areas as in the Plan Decenal and addressed in the previous pages of this paper. The Millennium Development goals of the nation support the projects claim by the organization. For instance, the Dominican has taken the goal of the Millennium program, "to ensure universal primary-school enrolment" – stipulates that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling;" which has been changed to "ensure that, by 2015, all 15-year-old males and females will be able to complete nine years of quality primary education."⁵¹ By tweaking the goals of the Millennium project, it demonstrates that the Dominican government

⁵¹ Reviews, 53

realizes how vital it is guarantee the best future possible for the nation, through improved educational practices.

With these programs in place, schools can focus on increasing levels of achievement and attainment within Dominican public schools.

Achievement numbers are dismal and indicate that after providing for the basic needs of many Dominicans, educational reforms must occur in order to even make it worthwhile to accept a cash transfer and go to school. With more adequate educations, young Dominicans will be able to qualify for jobs, or even continue on to universities and enter into professional jobs and add-to the current Dominican economy as it tries to become more service oriented.

Yet, due to a growing national debt that by December 2004 was U.S. \$ 6,400 million, the Dominican's educational reform programs improve slowly and become less of a priority than diversifying and expanding the economy.⁵²

Conclusion:

The Dominican's most obvious problems in education are inequality within education and the overall quality of education. Repeatedly, the numbers indicate that individuals attending rural schools, as well as those in schools located in marginalized urban areas suffer the most due to inadequate education. Regardless of what initiatives, programs, and laws that the Dominican Republic formally creates, without widespread implementation, the nation will continue to do poorly. The focus must be to provide every Dominican child with the same educational experience in order to create fully productive Dominican citizens capable of adding to the country's economic promise.

⁵² Reviews,90

Concerning primary and secondary education, credit must be given to the government and NGOs for taking the time and having the initiative to properly assess the problem facing the Dominican in regards to education. As a result, some progress has definitely been made.

For instance, over-age in general secondary learning fell from 51.2% in 2002-2003 to 38.7% in 2005-2006, and in primary level it fell from 23% to 19% in the same period. Promotion or passing rates grew from 66.8% for the 1994-1995 school-year to 86.3% in 2004-2005. This means that there was a 29.3% increase in pass rates during that period? Repetition rates and drop-out tend to decrease. In the case of primary level, repetition fell from 15.5% to 7.3% between 1994-1995 and 2004-2005, and drop-out from 21.4% to 6.4% in the same period. Over-age reached 34.5% during the 1996-97 school year, shrinking to 19% in 2005-2006.⁵³

Nonetheless, as with most progress, there are problems along the way. The dropout rate remains high, with 50% of children who enter the first grade only completing four years of schooling and 22% completing only the primary level and only 10% finish secondary school.⁵⁴

But before the dropout rate can be properly tackled, the infrastructure that is currently in place must be assessed as well. New classrooms, proper facilities, and the creation of after school programs, meal programs, and educational extra-curriculars are also vital to the success of each and every student. It is not enough for there to be educational reform, when there is nowhere for the children to be taught; or, if there is no one to teach them.

As a result of an ever growing more technical world and global competition, the Dominican has begun to rebuild their educational system, a task that began in the 80s. Yet, due to a large national debt and lack of educational resources, the nation has fallen behind. As a result, there has been a resurgence of dedication to creating nation-wide educational reforms that actually work.

⁵³ Reviews, 107

⁵⁴ Ibid, 107

Prior to writing this paper, I believed that the problem with the Dominican system of education was that it lacked educational reform. However since doing research and investigating the educational setup, I see it as a political problem. Those in charge continue to neglect their constituents and fellow countrymen. In order to remedy this, governmental programs and initiatives should be entirely transparent and monitored by a governing world body, such as UNESCO. Through strict supervision, the government can be forced to uphold its current educational laws. The same also applies for educational funding. The Dominican already pledged 7% of its GDP to education, years ago, and must now follow through. If held to its promises, the Dominican government, in conjunction with foreign aid programs such as the Millennium Project, can match donations or even raise the money needed to overhaul the educational system, build more classrooms, educate more teachers, and provide more educational opportunities. The investment may be an expensive one, but it is one with high returns. By creating a larger and educated work force, investors will come and set up business in the Dominican that could result in revenue for the nation; however, with such low levels of people finishing secondary school, let alone graduating from college, there is no way that the current path of the Dominican Republic will lead to prosperity.

These reforms must include and recognize those living in rural areas. From the statistics and percentages offered throughout this paper, it becomes evident that the educational reforms, vocational and technical trainings, must target rural Dominicans. Over and over again, the individuals living outside of urban settings are repeatedly neglected and forgotten. Their high poverty rates and isolation makes it difficult for them to ever access proper education and other opportunities for success. It must also be noted that education is more than just going to school; it is about being healthy enough to go to school, being able to eat regularly, being able to wear

clean clothes to school, being able to afford a pencil to write with in school, and being able to even have a school.

The current legislations on the books prove that combating poverty with education requires a multi-pronged approach, but these beneficiary practices, such as conditional cash transfers, health care, etc, are not yet widespread enough. Every Dominican child deserves these programs and the government owes it to the youngest of citizens. I have seen some of the brightest children unable to learn because of hunger, hearing disabilities, rough home lives, and neglect. Whether or not the Dominican government actually cares for the well-being of their citizens worries me, but above all, it should improve economic opportunities by educating the people. Only in nations that can support business, technology, and competitive global markets does economic prosperity come. From an economic stand-point, it is to the Dominicans advantage to pour their resources and money into actually implementing educational reform.

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