

Beyond the Sugar Fields:

A Case Study of a Batey School in the Dominican Republic

Sabrina Grille

Teachers College, Columbia University

Executive Summary

Haitian migrant workers have crossed the border, both legally and illegally, into the Dominican Republic since the early 20th century; thousands of them seeking work in the numerous sugar plantations. Though originally hired as seasonal workers, many Haitians chose to settle permanently; consequently, many brought their wives and children from Haiti or married into Dominican families. The migrant laborers and their families settled in the *bateyes*, company barracks that had been built to house the temporary workers. Therefore, although *bateyes* were not intended to house workers (much less families) year round, “*bateyes* changed in nature and became permanent communities [...] home to families of first, second, and even third generations of Dominicans of Haitian descent” (Amnesty International, 2007, p. 4). Today, there are an estimated 339 *bateyes* throughout the country with a total population of 250,000 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).

The near-collapse of the sugar industry in the 1980s brought about a series of reforms that stipulated, among other things, that private companies were not required to provide social services in their *bateyes* (Tejada Yangüela, 2001). Consequently, living conditions in the nation’s *bateyes* are now considered among the worst in the country. The *bateyes*’ residents, or *bateyanos*, often have to deal with lack of healthcare, running water, electricity, and education, widespread disease, and overcrowded, deplorable housing conditions. Thus, although *bateyes* have evolved throughout the years they remain isolated, vulnerable communities suffering from extreme poverty, high rates of disease, poor infrastructure, and lack of access to public services (Amnesty International, 2007; CESDEM, 2008; UNHCR, 2008). Though all of the previously-mentioned issues are of critical significance, this study, however, focused solely on access to education for *batey* children.

Discriminatory policies often prevent Haitian parents from registering their children's birth, effectively barring them from accessing public services including education (Amnesty International, 2007). Studies demonstrate that about 48% of batey children ages 0 to 4 do not possess a birth certificate (CESDEM, 2008). Thus, access to education is particularly precarious in the bateyes. Only 60% of bateyes offer any form of formal education (UNDP, 2005); a particularly alarming statistic since 41% of the batey population is under the age of 15 (CESDEM, 2008). Additionally, it is estimated that 38% of children ages 6 to 19 are not enrolled in school (ADOPLAFAM, 2007) and that 30% of the population is illiterate, three times the national average (CESDEM, 2008). As bateyes began to attract international attention in the 1980s following reports of slave-like conditions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) began to serve an increasingly important role in the provision of goods and services to the batey communities. Many of the schooling opportunities available to the bateyes' youth are provided by NGOs. As an increasing number of NGOs are becoming the de facto provider, research that will bring awareness to the issue of education in the batey communities is vital. Thus, this paper provided a case study of one such NGO-sponsored school, *Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría*, located in Batey Lecheria near Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Using qualitative methods, this study provided insights into the history, mission, and programs of the school while underscoring the challenges. The leading research question was: What challenges, if any, does the school's staff face in meeting the educational needs of the students? Secondary research questions included: What were the conditions that brought about the school's establishment? How does the socioeconomic context of the batey affect school dynamics? The qualitative study was based on in-depth interviews with four staff, either current or past, from the school *Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría*. Due to time constraints, travel

to the Dominican Republic for in-person interviews in the batey was not possible therefore three interviews were conducted via Skype while one interview was conducted in-person in New York City. Three of the four participants participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews that lasted between 17 and 50 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and later transcribed into computer files by the author. The fourth participant completed a brief eight-question questionnaire via email. The four participants were: Maria,¹ the former school director who has been working in the batey since 1997; Hannah, a former volunteer; Anita, the administrator of the Fe y Alegría Center; and, Alma, the school's current director.

The case study was approached from the framework of resistance theory, having its foundations in conflict theory. Within the realm of education, conflict theorists view schools as a medium through which social inequality is reproduced (Wilson, 2011). Therefore, adapting a conflict theory perspective allows for a critical analysis of schooling experiences in the Dominican Republic. Specifically, resistance theorists argue that “teachers and students are not passive participants in the school process, and that they do not always follow the expectations that result in social reproduction” (Ballantine & Spade, 2007, p. 16). Within this case study, such theoretical framework helped highlight instances of “resistance,” as the strategies used by the school's staff to help alleviate or overcome challenges were also identified.

The school *Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría* is located in Batey Lecheria. The batey is located in Los Alcarrizos, a sector of Santo Domingo, the nation's capital. Almost all of the families are of Haitian descent, some having been in the batey for five generations. Many of the batey's residents are “illiterate, completely, can't read, write their name,” while everyone speaks Spanish and/or Creole (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Currently,

¹ The names of all participants were changed.

there are 250 students enrolled, and around 37 staff members including teachers, assistant teachers, and volunteers. When asked to describe the school's mission many responses stemmed from the idea of "to educate the children" (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Nevertheless, they regarded "education" as something more than literacy and numeracy that extends far beyond the classroom. For example, Alma (personal communication, November 15, 2013) stated that the "the school was established with the priority of teaching boys and girls about the importance of an education" but that it is also important for the children to "develop the ability to think, analyze, [and] widen their view of the world" (own translation).

The transcriptions were closely analyzed in order to identify the variety of challenges that the participants had discussed. The challenges were divided in two broad categories: internal and external. Internal referred to challenges stemming from the educational context and/or the school's working; those, which to a certain degree, are at the staff's discretion. The latter are identified as challenges beyond the scope of the school's working, deriving primarily from the socioeconomic and political conditions of the batey community. The participants addressed two key internal challenges: funding and teacher training. The school relies entirely on donations and sponsorships from individuals and private organizations. Each additional service that the school offers is sponsored by an outside entity because the school receives very little financial support from the Dominican government. Alma made clear that the school is unable to have a long-term budget because the donations they receive in a given year only last for that year. Therefore, the school has "no sustainability" (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Second, teacher training was identified as a possible impediment to a quality education. Maria explained that "teachers are not educated and therefore they don't even know that they are not educating correctly" (personal communication, October 1, 2013). While Fe y Alegría offers many trainings

and workshops for its teachers, Maria highlighted that “as well as running the school and educating the children [they] are trying to educate the teachers.”

In terms of external challenges the participants identified a variety of key issues stemming from the political and socioeconomic conditions of the batey. These challenges included: community marginalization, lack of documentation, violence and abuse, lack of parental supervision, malnutrition, unemployment, and poverty. Although external to the school, these problems transcended into the classroom and resulted in disturbances to the learning environment (i.e. inability for the students to focus). Nevertheless, the school is actively trying to disrupt the cycle of marginalization by implementing a variety of programs and providing, to the best of their ability, a quality education. As a result, the staff has actively responded to such challenges in order to better meet the needs of the community. Such adaptations include: the implementation of a Montessori curriculum, counseling services for parents and students, the provision of snacks, working alongside the community to complete specified projects, increasing parental involvement, and providing access to healthcare services. Most importantly, however, the school seeks to empower the community.

Though limited by concerns of generalizability and minimal triangulation of data, this study helped shed light on the challenges faced by batey schools and their subsequent responses to such challenges. Simultaneously, it highlighted the enormous impact that the school has had on Batey Lecheria (particularly in terms of education and health), and its desire to empower the community “so *they* can fight for their rights in the future” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Thus, by hoping to disrupt the cycle of marginality and give a voice to an invisible community, Escuela Santo Niño Jesús exemplifies the idea that regardless of the challenges a school may face it can bring about positive social change.

Introduction

Haitian migrant workers have crossed the border, both legally and illegally, into the Dominican Republic since the early 20th century. Traditionally, thousands of Haitians sought employment in sugar plantations working as cane-cutters. Though originally hired to work only during the *zafra*, harvest season, many Haitians chose to settle permanently; consequently, many brought their wives and children from Haiti or married into Dominican families. The migrant laborers and their families settled in the *bateyes*, company barracks that had been built to house the temporary workers. The *bateyes* have evolved throughout the years but have remained isolated, vulnerable communities suffering from extreme poverty, high rates of disease, poor infrastructure, and lack of access to public services (Amnesty International, 2007; CESDEM, 2008; UNHCR, 2008). Perhaps one of the most detrimental of these conditions is the lack of access to education. Discriminatory policies often prevent Haitian parents from registering their children's birth, effectively barring them from accessing public services including education (Amnesty International, 2007). Over 30% of *bateyes* do not have any schools, and educational attainments within *batey* communities are among the worst in the country. While the average years of schooling at the national level is 7.2 (UNDP, 2013) it is a mere 2.4 in the *bateyes* (CESDEM, 2008). Additionally, one must highlight that many of the schooling opportunities available to the *bateyes'* youth are provided by international nongovernmental organizations. Nevertheless, those opportunities do not compensate for the quality education that should be provided by the Dominican government at the national level.

As an increasing number of NGOs are becoming the de facto provider of an otherwise mandatory State service, research that will bring awareness to the issue of education in the *batey* communities is key. While the Dominican state is relieved of its responsibility, it is important to

identify and analyze the available alternatives to the schooling experience. Thus, this paper will provide a case study of one such NGO-sponsored school, *Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría*, located in Batey Lecheria near Santo Domingo. Using qualitative methods, this study will provide insights into the history, mission, and programs of the school while underscoring the challenges. Thus, the leading research question is: What challenges, if any, does the school's staff face in meeting the educational needs of the students? Secondary research questions include: What were the conditions that brought about the school's establishment? How does the socioeconomic context of the batey affect school dynamics? The use of qualitative methods (i.e. interviews) will allow for these questions to be answered from a unique yet central perspective, that of administrators and staff. Based on information obtained from interviews with school staff and volunteers, the case study will not only shed light on the workings of *Escuela Santo Niño Jesús* but also on how the unique socioeconomic dynamics of the bateyes affect the schooling experiences of Dominico-Haitian children in the bateyes. Simultaneously, it will serve to further our understanding of batey communities while complementing past studies on educational opportunities in bateyes.

This study will begin by providing an overview of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic and of the batey communities, with a focus on their educational attainments and schooling opportunities. The subsequent section will provide the methodology which includes a description of the participants as well as a summary of the data collection process. In addition, it will include a brief description of the study's limitations. This will be followed by an overview of the school. The third section will provide the data analysis, followed by conclusions, implications, and possible areas of further study. Overall, this study hopes to provide a school-

level analysis that will present insights into the challenges faced by administrators and staff from a school in a marginalized community.

The Sugar Boom and the Nation's Bateyes

During the early 20th century, the sugar industry boomed in the Dominican Republic; by 1950, it was estimated that sugar accounted for over 50% of the country's exports and 27% of GDP (Cassá (1982) in Tejada Yangüela, 2001). The country's sugar industry came to rely heavily on a foreign labor force, specifically one consisting of Haitian migrant workers (CESDEM, 2008). During the Trujillo dictatorship (1930-1961), bilateral agreements between the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic established a *bracero* program that regulated the remuneration and repatriation of the workers (Amnesty International, 2007). Additionally, the *braceros* were joined by undocumented workers recruited by the sugar plantations and brought to the Dominican Republic "with promises of good pay" (Ferguson, 2003, p. 11). Initially hired to only work during the harvest season, many of the Haitian migrant workers, however, chose to permanently relocate. Over time, they settled, with their families, in the bateyes, quarters built to house workers within or near the sugar plantation (Ferguson, 2003). Therefore, although bateyes were not intended to house workers (much less families) year round, "bateyes changed in nature and became permanent communities [...] home to families of first, second, and even third generations of Dominicans of Haitian descent" (Amnesty International, 2007, p. 4).

Today, there are an estimated 339 bateyes throughout the country with a total population of 250,000 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008). The near-collapse of the sugar industry in the 1980s brought about a series of reforms that stipulated, among other things, that private companies were not required to provide social services in their bateyes (Tejada Yangüela, 2001).

Consequently, living conditions in the nation's bateyes are now considered among the worst in the country. A report presented by the UNHCR (2008) states:

Workers in bateys [...] live in pitiable conditions with no access to running water, sanitation or electricity. They live far from healthcare facilities or schools and lack transportation of any kind. They live in informally constructed shelters with dirt floors. They can find work only in dirty, dangerous and degrading jobs for substandard pay and without contracts. All social and legal forces, private and public, converge to lock them in a status of inescapable illegality which generates extreme vulnerability and social exclusion. (p. 24).

This study highlights how the bateyes' residents, or *bateyanos*, often have to deal with lack of healthcare, running water, electricity, and education, widespread disease, and overcrowded, deplorable housing conditions. A CESDEM (2008) report found that 75% of the population belongs to the two lowest socioeconomic quintiles. Additionally, current legislation regarding migration and citizenship serves as another obstacle to the fulfillment of human rights in the batey communities. A report by Amnesty International (2007) states:

Current legislation and its discriminatory application are effectively denying thousands of Dominican children of Haitian descent their right to a range of economic, civil and political rights, including their right to acquire a nationality, to education, to security of the person and to freedom from discrimination. (p. 2).

Though all these issues are of critical significance, because this paper focuses solely on access to education a brief overview of educational attainments in bateyes follows.

Schooling Opportunities in the Bateyes

Migration Law 285-04 of 2004 stipulates that children of non-legal resident mothers must be registered as foreigners. Therefore, Dominican-born children of Haitian descent are unable to obtain a birth certificate and thus cannot enroll in school. Studies demonstrate that about 48% of batey children ages 0 to 4 do not possess a birth certificate (CESDEM, 2008). Thus, access to education is particularly precarious in the bateyes. Only 60% of bateyes offer any form of formal education (UNDP, 2005); a particularly alarming statistic since 41% of the batey population is under the age of 15 (CESDEM, 2008). The study by CESDEM (2008) found that 25% of *bateyanos* above the age of six have no formal instruction while the average years of schooling is 2.4. Additionally, it is estimated that 38% of children ages 6 to 19 are not enrolled in school (ADOPLAFAM, 2007) and that 30% of the population is illiterate, three times the national average (CESDEM, 2008). Nevertheless, net enrollment at the primary and secondary level is 85% and 21%, respectively (CESDEM, 2008). It is important to note that a large percentage of children who live in bateyes attend schools run by non-profit organizations or churches. For example, of children ages 10 to 12, 29.41% attend such schools while the percentage increases to about 44% in the 13 to 17 age group (ADOPLAFAM, 2007). In the 1980s, bateyes began to attract international attention following reports “[exposing] the systematic abuse of Haitian workers’ rights [...] and conditions resembling imprisonment” (Ferguson, 2003, p. 11). As a result, nongovernmental organizations began to serve an increasingly important role in the provision of goods and services to the batey communities.

A previous study by Bzomowski (2011) highlights various NGOs that are working on behalf of the poor communities in the Dominican Republic, particularly in the bateyes. He specifically addresses each organization’s mission and their role in providing educational services, either inside or outside the batey. This case study, while also focusing on educational

opportunities provided to an underserved population, will provide an analysis at the school-level rather than at the broader organization-level. Thus, this study seeks to provide an in-depth, holistic approach to understanding the varied dynamics at the batey's school.

Methodology

The following section provides a description of the process of participant selection, data collection and analysis, as well as the study's methodological limitations.

Participant Selection

The qualitative study is based on in-depth interviews with four staff, either current or past, from the school Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría. Each participant was selected based on their position at the school—positions that allow for insider knowledge regarding the school's workings and impact—and their time spent working in the batey. I had previously met all four of the participants. Three of the four participants are Americans; two have lived in the Dominican Republic since the late 1990s while one lived in the batey for two years as a volunteer. The other participant is Dominican-born and has been working at the school, under different capacities, for the last eleven years. Due to time constraints, travel to the Dominican Republic for in-person interviews in the batey was not possible therefore three interviews were conducted online while one interview was conducted in-person in New York City.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Three of the four participants participated in semi-structured, in-depth interviews that lasted between 17 and 50 minutes. The school's former director, Maria,² was interviewed via Skype for 50 minutes. The interview was video-recorded with the participant's permission. The second participant, Hannah, a former volunteer at the school, was interviewed in person for about 30 minutes. She agreed to be audio-recorded as long as her full name was omitted from the

² The names of all participants have been changed.

write up. The third participant, Alma, is the school's current director. With her permission, the interview (conducted via Skype), which lasted about 35 minutes, was video-recorded. This was the only interview conducted in Spanish. All of these interviews were transcribed (see Appendix A) into computer files by the author. Upon completion of transcription, each interview was read thoroughly and coded for recurrent themes and/or key terms, followed by a close cross-case analysis. All of the video and audio recordings will be deleted upon completion of the study's write up. The fourth participant, Anita, the administrator for the Batey's Fe y Alegría center, completed a brief eight-question questionnaire via email. The interviews and questionnaire were all completed within a two-month period. The interviews and questionnaire were used to enable an in-depth description of the school's programs and the challenges, if any, that the school's personnel face in day-to-day interactions. The topics guiding the interviews, which sought to elicit the participants' opinions on the school and community, included: 1) the school's history and current programs; 2) the residents and living conditions of Batey Lechería; and, 3) challenges and obstacles to the school's functioning.

Theoretical Framework

The case study presented here will be approached from the framework of resistance theory, having its foundations in conflict theory. The basic criterion for conflict theory was established by Karl Marx and Max Weber (Ballantine & Spade, 2007; Collins, 1971). Conflict theorists argue that society is in constant tension or struggle because of competing interests between groups (Ballantine & Spade, 2007). These status groups are the basic units of society, composed of persons "sharing common cultures," for example that of "differences in life situation deriving directly from cultural conditions or institutions, such as geographical origin, ethnicity, religion, education, or intellectual or aesthetic cultures" (Collins, 1971, p. 1009).

Inequality is thus a result of one's membership in a given status group and, subsequently, that group's relative position in society (Ballantine & Spade, 2007).

Within the realm of education, conflict theorists view schools as a medium through which social inequality is reproduced (Wilson, 2011). As Ballantine & Spade (2007) state:

Power relationships and the conflicting interests of individuals and groups in society influence educational systems, for it is the interests and purposes of the dominant groups in society that shape the schools. [...] Education is used by individuals and society as a means to attain desired ends. (p. 13).

Therefore, adapting a conflict theory perspective allows for a critical analysis of schooling experiences in the Dominican Republic. One can describe Haitians and their descendants as a status group with perhaps limited social capital, wealth, and power as a result of discriminatory policies and spatial segregation. Their access to education is greatly hindered by nationality and migration laws. Thus, unequal access to education relative to the 'national' population (i.e. Dominicans of non-Haitian descent) serves as a tool to further suppress the *bateyanos'* rights and mobility. Within this context, education serves to maintain the status quo: a literal and figurative separation between the majority and an ethnic minority. Collins (1971) provides the example that when "a particular status group controls education it may use it to foster control within work organizations" (pp. 1010-1011). In the Dominican Republic, however, the dominant status group controls the system entirely by dictating who is able, and has a right, to access public education. Consequently, a conflict theory approach instigates the question: Do Dominican schools and policies regulating their access serve to reproduce social inequalities?

In later years, the conceptualization of conflict theory was expanded to include resistance theories. Integral to this theory were the notions of cultural capital and social capital introduced

by Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman, respectively (Ballantine & Spade, 2007). While social capital is defined as “the social resources students bring to their education and future engagement in school or community [...] cultural capital refers to cultural practices, including language patterns and experiences [...] that provide knowledge of middle- and upper-class culture” (Ballantine & Spade, 2007, p. 15). As the authors state, every single individual possesses cultural capital which, subsequently, defines one’s status. A resistance theory approach allows, therefore, an analysis of the cultural capital at Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría. Through an analysis of the interview transcripts, key cultural capital that the teachers and staff bring to the school, for example, can be acknowledged. Additionally, this can be placed within the context of the research question by identifying how, and if, the staff’s cultural capital can exacerbate the challenges or help alleviate them. It is important to note, therefore, that “teachers also bring varying degrees of cultural capital to schools and classrooms [...] both in their own training and in how they teach others” (Ballantine & Spade, 2007, p. 15). Similarly, a resistance theory approach can help identify the social capital of the batey community and its families.

Most importantly, resistance theorists argue that “teachers and students are not passive participants in the school process, and that they do not always follow the expectations that result in social reproduction” (Ballantine & Spade, 2007, p. 16). For example, Ballantine & Spade (2007) state that “teachers may work with all students to give them more equal chances in the system” (p. 16). Therefore, such analytical lens implies that there is hope for changing the education system. Within the context of this case study, the resistance theory framework can help highlight instances of “resistance” as described during the interviews. Specific data coding may facilitate the identification of strategies used by the school’s staff to help alleviate or overcome stated challenges or to better meet the needs of the community. It also allows for the examination

of the role teachers, staff, and schools play in the development of not only the students but of society as a whole (Wilson, 2013). Overall, a conflict theoretical framework allows for a deeper understanding of the role of the school, as an institution, in the social system.

Batey Lecheria and the School

The school *Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, Fe y Alegría* is located in Batey Lecheria. The batey is located in Los Alcarrizos, a sector of Santo Domingo, the nation's capital. From the 1930s to the mid-1990s, the batey was a producer of government sugar cane. Currently, the land still belongs to the CEA (State Sugar Council); therefore, land can only be leased from the government. Nevertheless, like most of the nation's bateyes, Batey Lecheria suffered greatly from the sugar industry's collapse which led to unemployment and poverty. Alma describes how "in the batey there is a lot of poverty, and it is a poverty not so much of material goods but [...] of spirit, of pushing oneself to do things" (personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). Similarly, Maria comments: "they are very lethargic, they're not well, they're weak, they're underfed so they don't have the *ánimo*³ [...] it's very much like a depressed situation" (personal communication, October 1, 2013). Almost all of the families are of Haitian descent, some having been in the batey for five generations. The batey's official population is unknown because residents "move constantly, they come in constantly and leave" thus, in the past it has been difficult to complete a census (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Nevertheless, it has been estimated that at any given moment there are about 700 to 4,000 individuals. Many of the batey's residents are "illiterate, completely, can't read, write their name," while everyone speaks Spanish and/or Creole (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

³ Spirit, energy

Informal education in the batey began in 1995, but the Fe y Alegría Center, which includes the school and a dispensary, was not built until a few years later with the support of a Catholic parish in the United States. Escuela Santo Niño Jesús, established by Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus, is one of forty-two accredited Fe y Alegría schools in Dominican Republic. Currently, there are 250 students enrolled, and around 37 staff members including teachers, assistant teachers, and volunteers. It is important to note, that many of the head teachers are still in the process of getting their teacher certification. The school, which offers a Montessori-method education, runs from 8am to 5pm and includes two sessions. The morning session consists of a public school preschool and kindergarten that includes 4- and 5-year-olds. The afternoon session is for students ages 6 and up who attend the local public school during the morning but need extra help or support in literacy and numeracy. In January of 2014, the school will be expanding to include classes for 2- and 3-year-olds. The school “plays a very central role in the batey” (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013), and was described by the participants as contributing positively to the batey’s development. Hannah describes how she believes the students “saw the school as an oasis because it’s like a pretty, clean bubble where [...] they are just really loved and cared for” and how the “children really enjoy the school [because] it’s a very safe place for them” (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

The participants were asked to describe what they believe is the school’s mission or purpose, particularly given the context of the batey. Their responses stemmed from the idea of “to educate the children” (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Nevertheless, they regarded an “education” as something more than literacy and numeracy that extends far beyond the classroom. Anita (personal communication, October 8, 2013) states:

The school's mission is to provide a well-rounded education to the children of the Batey, to exemplify care for others and for the earth, to train the students to think and work independently, to help them develop good habits and self-discipline, and to offset or compensate for the negative example that many of the children receive at home.

Thus, the participant sees education as allowing for the inculcation of values that will be of benefit to the students and the greater community while providing necessary skills such as critical thinking. Similarly, the former director's perspective on the school's mission arises from a holistic approach to education:

We believe [...] very strongly that education is the key to human development [...] we are not only giving them [...] the ability to read and write and do sums and everything, we are trying to teach them peace, how to interact, relationships, spirituality. (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Alma (personal communication, November 15, 2013) complements this message by stating that the "the school was established with the priority of teaching boys and girls about the importance of an education" but that it is also important for the children to "develop the ability to think, analyze, [and] widen their view of the world" (own translation). Education, however, extends beyond the classroom and the students; the school also hopes to have an impact on the parents. For example, the staff encourages the parents to value their children's education and to cooperate with the school in order to insure that learning extends into the home (i.e. creating a study habit).

In addition, the former director alludes that one of the school's mission is to disrupt the status quo that has, for so long, marginalized the Dominico-Haitian community. Maria(personal communication, October 1, 2013) explains:

We teach them to read and write because we hope that if they learn their rights and can have enough [...] self-esteem [...] they can stand up a little bit, if everyone does it, against the government and through that we'll be able to fight against the prejudice and the [...] use.

Thus, analyzed from a resistance theory perspective, the school hopes to provide the skills necessary for the community to “resist” and challenge the current government policies which place Haitians and their descendants in a subordinate position. Nevertheless, the school and its staff face several challenges and difficulties to their daily operations. The following section will provide an overview of the most pressing challenges, as discussed by the interview participants.

Schooling in a Batey: The Challenges

Throughout the interviews, the participants identified and discussed a variety of challenges; I have divided these challenges in two broad categories: internal and external. The first of these refers to challenges stemming from the educational context and/or the school's working; those, which to a certain degree, are at the staff's discretion. The latter are identified as challenges beyond the scope of the school's working, deriving primarily from the socioeconomic and political conditions of the batey community. Despite this distinction, internal and external challenges must be understood as intrinsically linked and equally relevant to a discussion on the school's challenges and subsequent adaptations.

Internal Challenges

When discussing everyday challenges, the participants addressed two key issues pertaining directly to the school: funds and teachers. Perhaps the major limitation is funding. Escuela Santo Niño Jesús relies entirely on donations and sponsorships from individuals and private organizations. Each additional service that the school offers is sponsored by an outside

entity because the school receives very little financial support from the Dominican government. Maria explains how “most of [their] money comes from personal donations, [her] family, people that [go] down [there] to visit [them], friends of friends” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). A small portion comes from the Sisters’ congregation in the U.S. and the Dominican government, which pays the salaries of only three teachers (those already accredited). It is important to note that Maria is responsible for fundraising about \$70,000 of the school’s yearly budget of \$75,000. Thus, she is “always looking for money [...] and weighing the amount of money [they] have” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Alma makes clear that the school is unable to have a long-term budget because the donations they receive in a given year only last for that year. Therefore, the school has “no sustainability” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Consequently, Alma hopes to secure long-term sponsorships so that they don’t have to live “year by year” because that doesn’t provide “security” and “impedes growth”(personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation).

The participants also identified teacher training as a possible impediment to a quality education. Maria explains that “teachers are not educated and therefore they don’t even know that they are not educating correctly” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). While Fe y Alegría offers many trainings and workshops for its teachers, Maria highlights that “as well as running the school and educating the children [they] are trying to educate the teachers.” The pedagogical trainings teachers receive may also impact the school. For example, while there are “many children with special needs” the teachers receive Montessori training that is not “necessarily catered towards special needs kids” (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Teacher preparation is also a challenge during recruitment. Maria states:

If a person is really trained all the way through as a teacher in the Dominican system to have them adapt to the Montessori method is next door to impossible [...] the normal training for a normal public school teacher is ‘I stand up there, I tell you what you’re going to do, I discipline, I have the one book and you copy [...] that doesn’t go with us, our kids can’t stand that, they go crazy. (personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Nevertheless, the participants did acknowledge the teachers’ deep commitment to the school and its students. Hannah stated, “I did feel like all the teachers genuinely care for the students” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). Alma adds: “I think that our teachers [...] see the work in the batey more like a mission than a job [...] to do something more than teach and that is to protect, care for, and foment values” (personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). Unfortunately, the staff must also confront a variety of community challenges.

External Challenges

The community in which a school is located can greatly impact the learning environment; thus, for this study it is imperative that one understands the batey context. As stated earlier, bateyes have been historically marginalized communities with little or no access to social services. Maria explained that when she first arrived to the batey in 1997, the Haitian workers weren’t being paid by the government and “they were hungry[...] sleeping on bunk beds, packed eight in a room without sanitation, without food, without water” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). The director describes how upon the collapse of the sugar industry the batey “became a completely unprotected community [...] a forgotten community, [and] very excluded” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation).

Such marginalization directly affects the school during the hiring process: “there are many people, Dominicans, who do not want to work in a batey” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

The exclusion of the batey community is perhaps augmented by the lack of documentation that many *bateyanos* must confront. As stated earlier, Dominican law stipulates that children born in the Dominican Republic to Haitian parents are ineligible for citizenship; thus, “they are people without a country” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). All of the participants discuss how many of the residents “have problems with their documents and are not really ‘legal’” (Anita, personal communication, October 8, 2013). Specifically, Maria explains how “nobody has papers, nobody has passports, *actas de nacimientos*⁴, none of that, *cédulas*⁵, nothing” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). The lack of documentation “excludes them from the rights that they should have as citizens” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). In addition, it hinders school enrollment, particularly after 8th grade, and can, therefore, alter a student’s outlook on his or her academic future. Maria explains how “you have to take the national exam [...] after 8th grade and if you don’t have a *cédula* you can’t take it, and if you can’t take it you can’t go to high school” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). Therefore, as Hannah further details, “their legal status [...] really deters from anything happening in the future just because [...] unless they spend a lot of money to get some false documents it’s just not realistic” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). The current director stated that if they are unable to get documentation for their students “their lives have reached an end point” and that “unfortunately that is going to be the hardest thing with the recent reform to the migration code” (Alma,

⁴ Birth certificates

⁵ Identification cards

personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). It is clear, therefore, that the irregular migratory status of many of the residents of Batey Lecheria greatly impacts their schooling and employment opportunities and, consequently, perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

The participants also identified a variety of challenges that result from the batey's socioeconomic conditions. One participant stated: "there's just a lot of things going on in the batey that I don't even know about [...] that I'm sure affected the way [the children] would come into the classroom" (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Perhaps at the forefront is the issue of abuse and violence, both that the students are a victim of and/or that they witness. Many of the students suffer abuse and neglect at the hands of their relatives. Often, it takes the form of physical or emotional abuse but also includes the parents' lack of supervision. The participants described that from the moment a child is able to walk he or she roams freely throughout the batey with little or no supervision. Thus, they are rarely exposed to structure. This greatly affects the school environment because the children have a hard time focusing, cooperating, and following rules. A volunteer explains:

The children [are] wild especially because when they enter preschool for example they've been like 3 or 4 years completely on their own, like they've been running free as soon as they can walk so like for them to enter the school and have routines and have to follow orders is just completely out of [...] what they've always known. (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Similarly, the former director adds:

[When] the child can walk [...] at that point the child runs wild so when we get them at age four they've had no discipline and to get them to listen, focus, sit still, cooperate, is the work of the world [...] each kid is damaged emotionally and physically and

everybody is so starved for any kind of attention at all. (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Thus, the discipline at home deeply affects the children's behavior at school. In addition, Hannah described how many of the children suffer from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. She explains how she "would see beatings in front of the school" (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Alma discusses how many parents do not understand how to "educate their son or daughter without violence" for they simply follow the pattern of violence they were raised in (personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). In terms of neglect, many parents are not "concerned that their child has the necessary diet [or] the necessary clothes" (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). As a result, many of the students "need help in how to control their anger" (Anita, personal communication, October 8, 2013). Alma explains that "their sometimes aggressive behavior, their lack of control" is because of the "maltreatment and the poor nutrition" (personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). Due to the extreme poverty that permeates throughout the batey, many of the students are malnourished. This results in behavioral problems at school because when the children arrive to school hungry they are unable to focus, and disrupt the learning environment. The problems at home are clearly transcending into the classroom.

The challenges of nutrition and parental abuse and neglect may be a result of a broader challenge: poverty. Several of the participants identify high rates of unemployment as a major cause of poverty. Alma explains how "the community is deeply affected by the fact that the parents lack employment[and] a fixed income" (personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). Unemployment gives rise to frustration which increases the use of violence when disciplining. It also leads to food scarcity and thus, malnutrition and poor pre-natal care.

Poverty also leads to other issues including “a high degree of prostitution and drug sales,” and teen pregnancy (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013); all of which do not “create a peaceful environment for children to grow up in” (Hannah, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Thus, Anita states that “the youth need to have wholesome activities that will diminish their need to become pregnant or enter the drug scene” (personal communication, October 8, 2013). Needless to say, there is clear cycle of marginalization that the school is actively trying to disrupt by implementing a variety of programs and providing, to the best of their ability, a quality education.

The School Responds to the Challenges

In order to better understand the school’s dynamics, it is important to analyze how the school has responded to the internal and external challenges it confronts on a daily basis. Throughout the years, the staff has adapted its curriculum and additional services. Alma explains how “the community has its particular needs and [the school tries] to give solutions alongside [those] needs” (personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). For example, the school has chosen a Montessori method of teaching over traditional forms because it better serves the needs of the students. Hannah stated that the Montessori curriculum “works for most [...] of the children [because] it was like smaller groups, a lot of one-on-one attention” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). It allows the students to be “actively involved doing things” which can perhaps help with their focus and behavior (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Secondly, the school has decided to expand its classes to include 2- and 3-year-olds. Since the staff saw many young children in the streets without any supervision they sought to provide an alternative, an early childhood education program. Hannah described how the kids in

the program “are just so much more open to learning, they just *want* to learn, and they have [...] more of a curious look on the world” (personal communication, October 1, 2013).

In order to help parents raise their children without violence, the school has hired two counselors to come in weekly to “simply hear the mothers and fathers” so that they can feel “valued” and learn how to “de-stress” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). The counselors lead talks that help the parents “grow and mature” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). Additionally, they have counseling for parents with difficult children and actively encourage teachers to go out and visit the families. They also provide counseling for the children; in December, there will be a clinical psychologist on staff to work with students with learning disabilities. To try and combat the children’s hunger, the school, under its budgetary constraints, does everything possible by providing “a cup of juice, milk, a piece of bread” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). Simultaneously, the school provides health services: “we provide help to[...] anemic and underweight [...] children, we pay for them to go over to the dispensary and see doctors, we give them *desparasitantes*.⁶” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

In more general terms, the school “works alongside the community to accomplish the development of certain projects” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). For example, they have worked with the community on a street-improvement project. Most importantly, however, the staff has “[learned] the culture” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). The former director explains:

We teach the parents the value of education, non-violent discipline, the importance of complying with the laws, the rules of the school, for instance come on time, be clean,

⁶ Anthelmintic; drug to expel parasitic worms

come every day [...] We have balanced giving to them and allowing them to become dependent on us. (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013).

Therefore, the school's adaptation to the community's needs has resulted in a philosophy of empowerment. The former director states how the staff "[has] learned to try to empower [the people] instead of giving handouts" (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Overall, the school tries to create independent thinkers with a well-rounded education. Thus, despite the challenges, the school aims to empower the community by teaching the students that they can begin to write a new history for the batey community.

Limitations

Through the use of qualitative methods of research, this case study sought to provide an in-depth analysis of a batey school. The case study approach was chosen because it results in a "holistic account of a phenomenon" as it "offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 50-51).

Nevertheless, this case study may be limited by concerns of generalizability since all conclusions are based off an analysis of a single element (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, there are slight issues regarding bias since the researcher/author alone determined what would be included in the final write up (Merriam, 2009). This study is also limited due to minimal triangulation of data. Due to time constraints and other factors, travel to the Dominican Republic was not possible, therefore, observations and gathering of documentation was not possible. Thus, the information given by the participants couldn't be verified by other sources. Similarly, the qualitative data collection is not consistent since three participants were interviewed while one completed a questionnaire. Nonetheless, this case study can help shed light on the challenges faced by batey schools throughout the country and serve as an orientation for further study.

Conclusions

Batey Lecheria, like many of the bateyes throughout the Dominican Republic, can be described as a marginalized community. The residents are confined to the batey and have thus, become invisible in the eyes of the government. “[The government] want[s] the people to stay there and pretend like they don’t exist. They are not counted in any census, they’re not acknowledged as being [...] [the government] pretends like [the batey] doesn’t exist,” explains Maria (personal communication, October 1, 2013). Furthermore, education is used as a tool to further exclude the *bateyanos* from Dominican socioeconomic and political life. Thus, throughout the interviews it became clear that Escuela Santo Niño Jesús received very little support (i.e. funding) from the government. In addition, the staff must learn to overcome or lessen the impact of many of the challenges in confronts on a daily basis. Funding and teacher training were identified as the primary internal challenges. Unemployment, malnutrition, violence, and lack of documentation are outside factors that nonetheless affect the school and learning environment. As a result, the school has tried to adapt in order to better meet the needs of its families; it is a school built *for* the community. It has become the de-facto provider of traditionally State-provided services (i.e. education and healthcare).

With the implementation of its academic and health programs, the Fe y Alegría Center has been able to positively impact the lives of many of the batey’s residents. Maria, the former director, explained how “now in every house there’s somebody, usually a child, who can read enough that the school can communicate with the parents in writing. Never happened before; it took 15 years” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). Additionally, they have been able to send two youth from the batey to college which is “history making for [them]” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). Perhaps because of this the school has become central to the

batey, and parents are beginning to give “greater importance and value to education” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation). While the participants acknowledge that there is, on certain occasions, little parental involvement they described how the parents and community deeply care for the school. Leah explains: “I think [the people] really do care for the school and do really appreciate it” (personal communication, October 1, 2013). Alma further elaborates: “they give a lot of protection to the school because [...] the community feels like the school is part of them, something that belongs to them, something that gives them pride” (Alma, personal communication, November 15, 2013, own translation).

Unfortunately, the future of the school is unclear; its dependency on sponsorships leaves it in a vulnerable state. Additionally, it is greatly impacted by governmental policies regarding immigration, reforms to the education system, and government spending (i.e. cutbacks in healthcare indirectly affects the school). Nevertheless, the school is trying to empower the batey community. For example, parents are demanding teachers at the local public school to hold classes every day. The staff is “teaching them their rights so *they* can fight for their rights in the future” in hopes of “improving the lives of Haitians” (Maria, personal communication, October 1, 2013). The school is thus hoping to disrupt the cycle of marginality, and give visibility to a forgotten community. Thus, this case study has shown that regardless of the challenges a school may face it has the power to bring about change.

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Appendix A: Transcripts

I. Participant: Maria, October 1, 2013

If you could give me some background on the school. What year it started? How many students do you guys serve?

We started here in 1995 and we started in a school in Los Alcarrizos as assistants but it didn't work out because the classes were too big, the Americans couldn't handle the kids and all the rest of it. So, we then began to work in the batey. At first, we taught in the houses and then we got a little building that was originally used for the tools to cut cane and then we got a ship's container and then they built the dispensary and a room on the back and then we just kept adding rooms. So, we went from—we started with about 20 kids and we now have 250, and we will have more starting in January.

And when you say “they” built it, you are talking about Fe y Alegría?

No. Fe y Alegría does not give us any money. Donations from different parishes in the States.

Ok. So if Fe y Alegría isn't the one that sponsors the school what is the role in the school?

You should look up Fe y Alegría and read about it. It's a network of (...) schools, they give us many services but not money.

Ok.

Like we bought a piece of land the other day, a little piece behind the school their *abogado*⁷ lawyer came and did all paperwork and all I had to do was I give him a couple hundred pesos for the gas that's it. Fe y Alegría is a powerful well-known group. The Jesuits are—they are very smart, they know what they are doing and so they can deal with the government so we have—that's the kind of thing they do for us. They—and they have a lot of workshops and that kind of stuff they are trying to improve the education of the public school teachers in this country because that's the big problem. The teachers are not educated and therefore they don't even know that they are not educating correctly. So you know they have services and documentation—and you have read now I hope, that you must read as part of your paper the latest law that has just been—well, it's the judgment of the highest court in the Dominican Republic that Haitians cannot be citizens and that if they were given papers they are taking them back. So that's another blow for our people. I don't know if I got off the point or not but (laughter)

No, it's all interconnected. So, the official name of the school is Escuela Fe y Alegría?

No, the official name is Escuela Santo Niño Jesus, that's the name of our congregation, comma Fe y Alegría. So it's this school but it's—there is 42 Fe y Alegría schools in this country and every one of them is named something else comma Fe y Alegría. And they have gotten like they have gotten accords with the governments, for instance in a regular public school the government for political reasons can shift teachers from one school to another Fey y Alegría got *anacuerdo*⁸ with the government saying that they would not do that in any Fe y Alegría school which is a huge benefit because they just take the good

⁷ Lawyer

⁸ Accord

teachers and put in political appointees and stuff, it's nuts. So that's another thing that Fe y Alegría does for us.

So are all the Fe y Alegría schools accredited within DR?

Yes, I would say so.

So, if it's a high school and the student were to graduate he or she can go on to college?

If they have their documents, yes, certainly, yes. They are really public schools, the regular ones. You know church and State here is one so for instance in the street down the block for us there is a nun who is the head of the school but it's a public school all the funds come from the department of education and the teachers are all paid by the government. We have 3 teachers—of all the people working in the school which is about 37, we have three teachers who received their titles, their degrees in universities in the Dominican Republic and have been accredited by the government and so the government pays three salaries out of 37 in our school.

And who pays the rest?

Me. I beg money. That's what I'm doing right now that's why I'm home. I fundraise.

So of the 37 people who work at the school are they all teachers or are there other...?

No, we have 17 teenagers from the Haitian migrant worker camp, from the batey, who work for under 500 pesos let me see I don't know what 500 pesos is worth now, 42 is the exchange rate let me see. Well, the better ones get 500 pesos which is 11 dollars and 90 cents a month. So, they get hardly anything. We have about 10 teachers who among those are the ones with degrees who are the head teachers and then we have about 12 assistants who are not just adolescents from the batey but are assistants and among them we pay—but among them are a group of American volunteers who give service, they live with us, our congregation pays their room and board and gives them \$100 a month for spending money. So, it amounts to about, what did we say, I don't know I better check the funds—If you want to know numbers I better check it but its—it would be like 4,000 a year for their stipends and, I would imagine, it's about the same for their room and board. So figure 10,000 dollars a year.

And what sort of programs does the school offer?

Ok, the major program that we offer is a Montessori-method education that's a whole world in itself. The children need to be actively involved doing things, they don't sit in classes they explore. And we offer to them—well, let's see, they have sports, we feed them, we give them medical attention, we pay for them to go over to the dispensary and see doctors we give them *desparasitantes*⁹ and all that kind of stuff. We pay for their medicines, I take them on field trips, we work in documentation to see if we can get their papers especially with the (...) who are working with us to see if they can get into high school because you have to take the national exam, *pruebanacional*¹⁰, after 8th grade and if you don't have *acédula*¹¹ you can't take it, and if you can't take it you can't go to high school. So we offer services in that. Now, we are connected

⁹ Anthelmintic, drug to expel parasitic worms

¹⁰ National exams

¹¹ Identification card

with the dispensary so they offer health care for little kids. We give them food, we give them counseling we have a psychologist.

And kids are there from the morning until the afternoon?

Yes, right now they are there from 4 years old up they are either there in the morning or in the afternoon because that is the way the Dominican government has school. Now, you may have heard that the recent, current office of education has decided to have school all day for everybody.

Right, that's why they were doing a lunch program at schools?

It means for every school they have they have to build another school because they manage with one school because they have one school in the morning and then a whole other bunch of kids come in the afternoon. Like these kids over here next to us they have 1000 kids in the morning they go home, they have another 1000 in the afternoon completely different so it's really two schools that's what we do also. We have four and fives in the morning and we have six and up in the afternoon more or less. Now, I don't know what's going to happen in the future. So—it's all up in the air.

Regarding like the new law or just...

Well, yea. Let's say—there's two big things. The kids who come to us in the afternoon have gone supposedly to the public school in the morning and they come to us to for extra help in the afternoon so if they're in school the whole day that cancels that programs because they will be in the public school all day. As well, all the young people the 17 helpers are in school half the day and if they're in school the whole day that cancels that program. As well, as the kids we have in the morning would be with us all day so we'd have them in the afternoon. Now, just between you and me it will be much easier because the kids we have in the afternoon have lost their discipline they do terrible. The kids in the public schools are awful, they stand on the desks, I mean it's just horrific and so—and the teachers are overworked and underpaid and they don't have any materials and they're not educated, it's a mess. So—but they are trying to improve it. What should I say? Because they go to the public school in the morning and they come to us in the afternoon they are off the wall and we spend a good part of our time having to calm down and discipline them so they can learn something because they don't learn anything in the public school at this point. So, maybe if they have them all day they can improve, I don't know.

So, you guys have the morning session with the 4 and 5-years olds who their only schooling is what they receive with you guys and then the kids who come in the afternoon, for the most part, went to school in the morning and go to Fe y Alegría to reinforce what was already learned?

Yes, that's exactly correct.

And you have been working at the school since 1995?

1997 I came; the first Sister came in 95 I arrived in 97.

And what's your official role within the school?

Well, I suppose you can say I'm the director but I have turned that over to Luz more or less.

[Interview is interrupted by a phone call the participant receives; conversation lasts about 20 seconds]

Ok, *sigue*.¹²

Oh, no you were explaining that you were the director but that...

I'm the director but I've been training a young woman, a Dominican to be the director and she's wonderful. So she says she's the director and certainly I say she's the director and I say I'm the director, I don't know what I am.

Wait, is this Luz the one that I met that gave me the tour of the batey?

Yes, and I sent your letter to Luz asking her to make an appointment with you so you could interview her.

I think that's a good background on the school. So I guess we can start with why you think the school was created in the first place and what you see the school's mission is within the context.

Ok, *muy bien*.¹³ You—when you are writing your paper you are going to have to explain the context and the history of a batey. But basically the mission of our congregation is to help people to see that God lives and acts in their world and in themselves and to be happy about that. So, that's what we try to do wherever we are.

[Interview is interrupted by a phone call the participant receives; conversation lasts about 2 minutes]

Welcome to the Dominican Republic, where were we?

The mission of the school...

Alright, we believe, I believe, very strongly that education is the key to human development and my life has been trying to educate the whole person that's to say that, specifically applied to our school, we are not only giving them, you know, the ability to read and write and do sums and everything we are trying to teach them peace, how to interact, relationships, spirituality that is not to say religion but a spiritual sense of the world, that there is a higher power, that there is a God that God is good that God is not a judge that God is not a—you know like someone said a part-time torture chamber operator, you know it's like do this do that God loves you but if you don't you end up burning in hell forever forget it, we don't go that way at all. We have tried to make them happy, healthy, fed a bit, and loved. So, on the side we teach them to read and write because we hope that if they learn their rights and can have enough—big thing we give them, try, is self-esteem, if they know their rights and they have some self-esteem they can stand up a little bit, if everyone does it against the government and through that we'll be able to fight against the prejudice and the—really, the use—you know the government really uses these people, uses the very poor, it's really sad.

And I would assume that most of the families you work with are of Haitian descent?

Almost all of them. They are illiterate, completely, can't read, write their name or read a (...). Most of them, I would say $\frac{3}{4}$ of them can speak a little Spanish, everyone speaks Creole as well. Nobody has

¹² Continue

¹³ Very well

papers, nobody has passports, *actas de nacimiento*,¹⁴ none of that, *cédulas*, nothing. They are people without a country now because the last law that was passed, just last week, says they can't be Dominicans. They aren't Haitian, they can't speak Creole, they have no documentation in Haiti, they're fourth generation born here in the Dominican Republic so effectively they have no country.

And this law that was just passed does it have a name...a number?

I'm sure it does. If I can get—somebody sent me—if I can get it I'll send it to you. Just look up Haitian documentation in the Dominican Republic, New York Times, you'll get it.

Since you already talked a little bit of what makes up the community, how do you think the school is built or structured to help meet the needs that this particular community has?

Ok. We have adapted to the needs of the community which is to say that we teach the parents the value of education, non-violent discipline, the importance of complying with the laws the rules of the school, for instance come on time, be clean, come every day, stuff like that. We have balanced giving to them and allowing them to become dependent on us because if we give, give, give and feed everyone and give everything for free the people forget how to struggle for themselves and we can't—I mean there's no way (...) and they end up angry at us because they always want more so we have learned to try to empower them instead of giving handouts. The ways in which we have adapted are really very subtle. Learning the culture and fitting into the culture is a big part of what the school has to offer. We have counseling for the parents who have difficult children and that's all I can say about how we have—all the teachers go out and visit the people, they know what the kid's background is what the family's like, what kind of problems the mother has that kind of thing. And we work with the parents, we invite the parents into the school to observe and work with the children. A huge impact has been that now in every house there's somebody usually a child who can read enough so that the school can communicate with the parents in writing. Never happened before; took 15 years. So there is somebody there who can read. Now, all of that has incentivized the people to want to continue to have their children educated. We have improved the health for sure. You know the AIDS program crashed but TB, vaccinations, help for anemic and underweight babies, children all of that. So we have done everything to improve that.

As director of the school what sort of challenges, if any, do you face on a day-to-day basis?

One huge problem that we have is that we need a community activator a community, how do they call those, a community animator, somebody who can work with the community to get them in any way to move them from me and my family to this is a group, they are not there. That's a huge problem they don't cooperate in anything it's just give me. We have water problems in the street, we have all kinds of stuff, when you want people—all we want them to do is dig *azanja*¹⁵ nobody comes. So, to—one of the challenges is to involve and animate the adults to see that there are whole areas of life that they could have that don't necessarily call for a lot of money but that they could better their lives if they could cooperate with us and with each other. So that is a huge stone around our neck. Most of what we do we have to do without the support of the community. They are all for us, I mean they're all positive and thank you and they're happy and they love the kids, and they love the school and they all come to the teachers' meetings but when you want to get them all together to work on a project forget it. They are very

¹⁴ Birth certificates

¹⁵ Ditch

lethargic, they're not well, they're weak, they're underfed so they don't have the *ánimo*¹⁶ to do anything much, you know to drag themselves from one day to another it's very much like a depressed situation. So that's one huge challenge. The other challenge that I'd say we work will all day, every day, every minute is that the children have had absolutely no discipline in the house and no love. The mother spawns a child every year, walks around with the child at the breast until the child can walk and at that point the child runs wild so when we get them at age four they've had no discipline and to get them to listen, focus, sit still, cooperate, is the work of the world that's why we have so a huge population of people working in the school because each kid is damaged emotionally and physically and everybody is so starved for any kind of attention at all that really we should have more one-on-one. Physical touching, they're always running up and hugging people, "I can't do this, I can't do this work" because they want you with them. So that's a huge problem; discipline, giving them enough attention, helping them to grow.

[Interview is interrupted: Skype call drops due to a failed internet connection in the DR]

Education of the people, their inability to, in a level of poverty, their inability to cooperate, the discipline of the children and I have to say that money is always a problem. We never have money; I'm always looking for money and so that cramps us. Like we like to take them on field trips and that kind of stuff but we're always you know weighing the amount of money we have. So I would say—and the other thing is the teachers. You are asking me challenges, right?

Yes.

The teachers are not that well educated so as well as running the school and educating the children we are trying to educate the teachers so that their handwriting is acceptable, so that they spell correctly, they know the difference between a b and a v and that kind of stuff so that's what I find...

Do the teachers go to any sort of teacher preparation programs outside of the batey?

Yes, most of them are in the university studying *maestría*.¹⁷ Once they get their degrees they go on to advanced studies in the Montessori-method and Fe y Alegría runs, every now and again, workshops for the teachers. We've had one in math that went for like a whole year and one in reading and writing that went on for a whole year. The American volunteers went and they sat behind me and they said we had this stuff in 5th grade and they were teaching the teachers and they were struggling with it so that gives you an idea of how much they need. So that's all I know of—we send them to any workshop and any opportunity that offers itself but remember the government has made the school day now go from 8 o'clock in the morning to 5 or 6 in the afternoon, 6 really, we let them out a little after 5, it's an enormously long day, the teachers go to school on Saturday and some of them on Sunday and some of them at night so when do they have time to go and do anything else? Many of them have families so...

So the school runs from 8 to 6?

Yes, well 8 to 5. They're there at 7:30. Long.

And what sort of organizations to you guys get grants from? Because the Dominican government doesn't have anything to do with you guys?

¹⁶ Spirit, energy

¹⁷ Master's degree

No, we are in the process of getting a grant from the Conrad Hilton Fund for Sisters. Conrad-Hilton, you know the Hilton hotels? The guy that founded those realized that Catholic nuns all over the world were doing a huge amount of good and he founded this foundation, it's not very big, but for the first time we have applied to get a grant from them. We've gotten one grant from a diocese in California where one of our Sisters works and that's it as far as grant writing. We don't have time to write grants and I don't have the expertise so most of our money comes from personal donations; my family, people that have come down here to visit us, friends of friends of friends. You know we kind of extended our network of people; groups come down from various schools they go home and raise money for us. Stuff like that.

And that money goes into paying salaries and all the materials the school has as well?

Everything. We get 7,000 dollars a year donation from our congregation apart from the room and board for the girls and our budget is 75,000 dollars a year so I raise about 70,000 a year. I don't know how I do it, it seems—when I talk about it in those numbers it seems staggering but it all comes dribbling in one way or the other. And like I'm going to New York at the end of October and there's a school there that's helped us. Then there is another school connected with a friend of mine in Philadelphia and I'm going to go down there and beg money so that's the way we do it.

Are they Montessori schools that through the Montessori network kind of help each other?

Yeah, but we have no sustainability. We have enough money to build this new program for 2 and 3-year-olds but we do not have money to like—the three Sisters here are 70 something years old, when we finally have to retire supposedly Fe y Alegría is going to take it over but Fe y Alegría does not have the money to pay what we pay.

So what happens to the school once you guys retire?

It will revert, I suspect, I don't really know but it will become a school where the people who have their degrees will be paid by the government and it will become like a regular school with one teacher and a huge number of children.

Because technically the school is public but it's not a public school in the eyes of the government, right?

It's a public school in the eyes of the government but the government does not pay teachers unless they have their degrees and our teachers don't have their degrees yet. And there are—alright two things, there are many people, Dominicans, who do not want to work in a batey, that's number one. Number two, our children are so difficult that they would get out of there as soon as possible unless they're dedicated. And number three, if a person is really trained all the way through as a teacher in the Dominican system to have them adapt to the Montessori-method is next door to impossible. They—we don't ever hire trained teachers, they have to get their titles, they have to get their diplomas but they are training with us at the same time and they are learning the Montessori method because the normal training for a normal public school teacher is “I stand up there, I tell what you're going to do, I discipline, I have the one book and you copy the stuff in your copy book and you learn.” No, that doesn't go with us, our kids can't stand that, they go crazy. So we have never been successful in hiring a public school teacher that could work in our method, we've never really tried. We've interviewed them, they have wanted to come, but even in the

interview it's obvious that they are going to do it their way and it won't work so it will work in the future when there's no Montessori, I think I don't know. You can ask Luz what she thinks.

Do any of the teachers come from the batey?

No, because they don't have the education. Most of the teachers come from Los Alcarrizos, where we live which is the barrio next to it. Almost all of them do, I would say all of them do because it's so long to get down there so they all live around us maybe half an hour 45 minutes from the batey. And about half of them—they're all young, about your age, and some of them have families so they usually come from Los Alcarrizos and they're all Dominicans, no Haitians.

Not even Dominicans of Haitian descent?

No, because they've never been given the education they can't be teachers.

So in the last few years have there been, like you mentioned earlier the new law that just passed, but have there been any major events that affected the school or its students in any way?

Well one thing that occurs to me is that—I'm not sure if it's a major event but we have two kids who went through our school who are Dominicans, who have *cédulas* who have finally gotten to university and we have somebody in the United States who is giving money to help them pay for the university. They're transport to scrape enough just to pay their transport into the city and out again and so we have two people in the university which is a first, it's history making for us. Well, I would say all the maneuvers from the government in regards to the Haitian population and the immigration question, you'd have to get into that and read it, all of that impacts the batey. Another big thing that impacts it is the changes in the educational policies of the government, influences the school. Another one is where the government chooses to put its money for instance they closed down the AIDS program because they were spending money on things like the subway, you know the metro, and things like that so—healthcare, education suffer because of where the Dominican government has chosen to put its money.

Can you talk a little bit more about the batey in general? It looks like the sugar cane industry has dissipated in the area and people no longer work in it.

No. They were brought over, I'd have to look at the dates but I would say in the '70s to cut sugar cane and all around us was government sugarcane. There are plantations, private plantations, but ours was government sugarcane. In the 90s or early 2000s the sugarcane went bankrupt because of the corruption in the government and because of the fact that the United States undersold the price of sugar, undersold the Dominicans so those people have no work. They don't work in cane and, of course, the great question is how do they live and really nobody knows. Many of them have little plots of land where they grow *gandules*¹⁸ and *plátanos*¹⁹ and stuff like that. They sell anything they can get their hands on, there's a high degree of prostitution and drug sales. They go hungry a lot of the time so the history is that it was built as a batey for the Haitian migrant workers the government built *barracones*, you know barracks, of different kinds and then the people went building shacks onto that. And we have five generations of people who have lived in that batey. A lot of them get a little money together cook something and sell that. The men

¹⁸ Pigeon peas

¹⁹ Plantains

work in the mines, there's a sand mine. They are destroying the river by taking sand out of the river to make cement big companies are down there so the men work in the cement and in the—some of them, when they're young and healthy in the sand mines and they bring a little bit of money which then they will buy food and buy prostitutes and that's how the money filters in.

About how many families live in Batey Lechería?

We don't know. They move constantly, they come in constantly and leave. We've had estimates everywhere from 400 to 7,000.

Families?

Yes.

Or people?

People, I think, yea. We've attempted to have—I would say maybe seven or eight groups including Peace Corps has planned to do a census and they never could organize it.

They never could what, I'm sorry?

They could never do it. The people don't know when they came, they don't know their birthdays, they don't know how many years, everybody's married or, excuse me, related to everybody else because they all intermarry for lack of a better word so there are clans there, you know big families but they all intermarry so you know to figure out—there are like some last names that everybody has the same last name. Or there are some last names that like one is Cheri C-h-e-r-i- and then there's another group Sheri S-h-e-r-i because they don't know how to spell so it comes out different. So, its—so the history of the batey is that they were brought in, the women came in with the men, they were supposedly paid by the government they weren't, they weren't even given food. When we first got there they begged us for food. The Dominican overseers rode around on horses treating the Haitians exactly like the slaves that I've seen in the movies in the United States. They were hungry, they were sleeping on bunk beds, packed eight in a room without sanitation without food without water, it was horrific. Then little by little things continued to grow and we got involved with the families so we are mostly working with the children.

I know before bateyes were considered not really within the territory of DR, like they were up to whoever owned the sugar plantation or was in charge. But since the government doesn't own sugar plantations there, is that territory up for grabs? If you want to buy land who do you buy it from?

You can't. The land all belongs to CEA the government *azúcar* thing. So even when we get land it's leased from the government legally (...) nobody has a title to the land, the land is up for grabs. And when there is any kind of interaction the functionaries of the government go in and grab the land and then rent it out to the poor people and make money of it. That's what's happened to all the sugar cane land around the outside (...)

So people who have their homes there, are they renting it from the government?

No.

What stops the government from coming in and saying get out of here?

Because they don't want it. They don't want the land, they don't want the people any place else. They want the people to stay there and pretend like they don't exist. They are not counted in any census, they're not acknowledge as being—being there. And they just pretend like it doesn't exist.

How do you think Fe y Alegría or the school can do something to help alleviate any of these problems?

Only—we are working with five-year-olds and you know little kids so you know we are improving the quality of life and we are teaching them their rights so *they* can fight for their rights in the future. Fe y Alegría does everything possible to work with the government and to improve the lives of Haitians. They have commissions and all kinds of stuff, I'm not in that. I spend all my energy trying to educate the children but there is a lot going on but the government has been—has clamped down even worse.

It sounds negative and depressing when you deal with the government but we are very happy—you know the money does come in. The children are learning, the teachers are happy, we are thriving and so—Luz is wonderful. So on our day-to-day life everything is joyful, positive and peaceful. We are constantly fighting against the challenges that you're asking me about but we don't have the resources, human or monetary, to really dedicate our time to that as much as we would like to. We don't have that ability, we don't know how, and its—we've attempted it and we've been squelched every single time. The government is involved. So that's the end of the story.

II. Participant: Hannah, October 1, 2013

So you were at the school how long?

Two years.

And what years were those?

It was two school years so like 2009 to 2010 and then—so 2009 to 2011.

And you never came back to the U.S. during that time?

I did for—I came back over the summer for like a month and then (...) I know I came for Christmas my second year.

Ok. And then what was your official role or position?

I think it was just volunteer even though you know the responsibilities kind of varied from year to year. Like in my second year I got more responsibilities because Fe y Alegría asked us to—they asked all the schools to take on like this *mejores*²⁰ project to kind of just to take on a project to improve the school. So I kind of led that and it was like creating a math curriculum and like classroom management with the teachers (...) in addition to teaching.

²⁰ To better or improve

So while you were volunteering, what types of things did you do?

Well, like that with the school and then the educating role in the school was basically teaching. So they have the preschool which runs from like ages 3—they have the preschool and the kindergarten which was the public school and that we focused on literacy but it was like Montessori inspired so a little bit of everything.

Do they have volunteers that do things outside the classroom? Like administrative tasks?

No, the primary role of the volunteer is just teaching like education and then on top of that it's up to the volunteer whether they want to do anything else.

What do you think are some of the challenges, if any, that the school faces as a whole?

Challenges that the school faces... I mean there are a lot of things. The children come to school hungry, they're malnourished, there's not a lot of parent involvement, there's not much parent interest in the school, what else—there's a lot of external factors that really affect the children's learning and even like you know—I mean there's so many children with special needs and there's no way—and the teachers just aren't trained in how to deal with that and like what's the best way of teaching them. And I think that comes from a lot of things even like from prenatal care from the mothers. I think also a lot of the children just experience a lot of abuse be it like emotional you know, physical and even like sexual abuse. So it's just like all these things that are just completely out of the control of the educators that really affect the children's learning. I mean I think, I don't know if this is necessarily the case, but I—I don't if the parent—the parents, from what I can tell, they are some that very much do value the education but I don't think all of them do and I can see it as just because like of their role in the country, you know, just because of the way the Haitians are treated like after 8th grade they can't even continue their education unless they have their papers to be able to take the national tests and all that so yea—those are just some off the top of my head.

Did you face any challenges yourself as a volunteer in carrying out what was expected of you?

It's hard to say because I know, especially in the beginning, like you're all just kind of figuring it out and you don't even know—you know—I still don't even—I feel like just the surface level all the problems that are going on there, you know, so especially when I first got there I was just like figuring it all out so yea—but the children, God bless I love them, but their wild especially because when they enter preschool for example they've been like 3 or 4 years completely on their own, like they've been running free as soon as they can walk so like for them to enter the school and have routines and have to follow orders is just completely out of their—out of what they've always known. So just having to deal with little things like discipline but at the same time I don't know if that's the best way to address those children because you kind of have to

meet them where they are so I think maybe the hardest challenge putting myself in their shoes which I couldn't even do and just trying to understand them, which I couldn't.

In terms of education, were resources available?

I feel like physical resources like materials we had plenty like lots of donations from the States to do that but I think what those children needed more was psychological help you know, so even having like a social worker some sort of like child therapist come in or even some trained in special needs to train us because we had been trained by like Montessori people who had certification and everything but it wasn't necessarily catered towards special needs kids. I noticed that even more so my second year when you just like see more of the reality of it, you know...

And get to know the kids more...

Right, right, it's just like I don't know how much more I can do to help because I'm not like—I don't...

So in a broader context what do you think are the challenges of the batey community? How does the context affect what happens at the school?

In terms of...?

In terms of, well just the purpose of any school is to ultimately educate the children

Right...

But how does the fact that it's not just any school that it's a school located inside a batey, do you think that impacts it in any way, how the general purpose of schooling is carried out?

Yea, I think to begin—like I said, there wasn't a lot of parental support—like you know they would get them ready for school and get them ready most of the time but like I think starting from there—so for some children—I mean there's just a lot of things going on in the batey that I don't even know about that were happening so I think the children just seeing that I'm sure that affected the way they would come into the classroom and be able to learn.

So from your time there, what would you say was the school's mission?

To educate the children. To get them to read. To better the—I mean it's so hard to say just because like I mentioned their legal status you know really deters from anything really happening in the future just because you know after 8th grade, unless they spend a lot of money to get some false documents it's just not realistic you know so I don't think the younger children saw it as much, I think once they got older they would realize it and that's when I think you would see like young girls 14, 15 getting pregnant and having a baby but when you look at it

from their point of view it's like yea but what else are they going to do. So that can really affect things.

You mentioned that the parents don't seem involved; do you think the kids themselves understand the value of education?

I think they did, I think especially—so my first year was the first year we started the preschool and like the difference I would see in those children compared to like third graders that I would teach in the afternoon that had no early childhood education was just a complete difference. They just loved coming to school, they were just learning very quickly, could read fluently by age 6 and I had other ten year olds who barely could read. And also, I think because the outside of the batey was just not a very peaceful place that I feel like they almost just saw the school as an oasis because it's like pretty, clean bubble where like they are just really loved and cared for, at least when I was there I did feel like all the teachers genuinely care for the students and a lot of the time after school we would just go out and visit the families just to get to know them better and just try and keep that communication open but I think the children really enjoy the school. It's a very safe place for them.

Why would you say that the batey isn't peaceful?

[Laughter] I mean because even when I was—ok—you would just hear like the way some of the parents would talk to their children, we would see beatings in front of the school, and just like vulgar things. It's not a peaceful—while I was there you heard of rapings, you know that had happened, people who had been shot, things like that, a lot of things would happen at night when we weren't there and I know more recently if anything a lot of drugs—drug has passed through there so you know people getting into the business which just doesn't create a peaceful environment for children to grow up in.

So would you say that the biggest challenges the school faces are external and not necessarily the curriculum or the school's design but...

I do because like when I was there—I mean the curriculum that they have there which is Montessori inspired it works for most I would say not all of the children obviously but it was like smaller groups, a lot of one-on-one attention—I mean I think there's still definitely changes within the curriculum because—this is probably going to sound horrible but the education levels, like I had already finished my four years of college and getting an American education as opposed to a Dominican university education it's not at the same level so like sometimes I know I would butt heads with—or like just see some of the assignments that my Dominican co-workers would give the children and I was just thinking like what's the point? You know like what's the end goal of this lesson for the child to learn? So I think that's a whole other problem which is the education of the country in general, the teachers aren't necessarily trained as much as they could be so it's a lot of factors. But I think that the biggest problem is the external, is what goes on outside the school.

Do you see the school playing an important role within the batey?

Yea, I do. It plays a very central role in the batey, like everybody knows about it. I think people despite what I've been saying I think they really do care for the school and do really appreciate it. And like I said, even just the time that I was there, in comparing students especially with those who had gone through that early childhood education the impact you know, and you can just see the difference between those children and the children who didn't receive that education. That they are just so much more open to learning, they just *want* to learn. And they have a very different perspective like more of a curious look on the world, like maybe there is something else.

What do you see in terms of the future?

I don't know. It's hard to say. I feel like I have to wait for those little kids to grow up and then tell you.

III. Participant: Anita, October 8, 2013

How long have you worked at the school?

I am in my 19th year in the Dominican Republic, but it was 18 years ago that I first went to the batey – only once a week with one of our volunteers. After three years, we began informal education in the batey every day, but did not start our “school” until several years later when Fe y Alegría obtained for us a trailer. Ten years ago a Catholic parish from New Jersey built us a rural clinic and raised enough money to build two classrooms as well. Since then the Clinton foundation added a second floor which eventually included more classrooms. I worked directly in the school only in its earliest years.

What is your position (role) and duties?

I am the administrator of the Fe y Alegría Center in the Batey Lechería, which is a supervisory position overseeing the functioning of the school, the clinic and other programs. The director of the school is now Luz del Alba De la Cruz who was trained by Sister Mary Alice, and the director of the clinic is Sister Kathleen King. I have the overall responsibility for all that goes on in the Center – which now I have to exercise by emails and phone calls from Chile!

In your opinion, what is the school's mission?

The school's mission is to provide a well-rounded education to the children of the Batey, to exemplify care for others and for the earth, to train the students to think and work independently, to help them develop good habits and self-discipline, and to offset or compensate for the negative example that many of the children receive at home.

What are the needs of the Batey Lechería community?

The community has many basic physical needs (much poverty, much hunger and disease); many have problems with their documents and are not really “legal”; the youth need to have wholesome activities that will diminish their need to become pregnant or enter the drug scene; they need help in how to control their anger.

On a day-to-day basis, what challenges, if any, do you think you face in carrying out your responsibilities?

My responsibilities are administrative which signifies that I am not with the people as much as the teachers in the school and doctors in the clinic. Therefore, on a day-to-day basis, one of my challenges is to maintain a good working relationship with all the members of the staff, to provide spiritual activities periodically, as well as opportunities for staff members to come together more in greater unity and solidarity.

What challenges do you think the school faces in providing for its students?

The school faces all the problems mentioned in #4 above, as well as the need to provide help with parenting, including psychological counseling.

In the last year or so, have there been any major events that have altered the school’s operation?

A few years ago, we started using “shadows” to help with the discipline of the children, and to act as teacher’s “assistants”; these “shadows” are young people from the batey and their help has been invaluable. . . . and it has had a very positive effect on themselves, as far as their becoming adolescents with values and maturity and their continuing to study.

Additional comments: THANK YOU!

IV. Participant: Alma, November 15, 2013 (Transcript translated from Spanish)

What is your position in the school?

Presently, I’m the director. That means that I’m working with everything that is administrative-pedagogical not monetary, only with what has to do with teaching. Similar to a coordinator something like that.

And how many years do you have at the school?

I have like 10 years in different roles, volunteer, teacher, like 11 years.

If you could give me information about what you think is important about the school as a whole. What do you consider is the school’s mission or why do you think it was established?

Well, the school was established with the priority of teaching boys and girls about the importance of an education; teach them, take care of them. The first phase was like to teach them

to read and write, now we do more like more than reading and writing. Like—you know how to read and write so now the more is for you to learn to think, add, subtract, multiple, more than the basic. And now our focus is on children at the initial level from 4 years old to 8 years old, in the first years of elementary school. But in January of next year we will begin with 2-year-olds and up because we believe that if we start earlier you know that in the community that we are located the boys and girls are not home a lot, the parents don't have the culture of taking care of their kids a lot and so we think that if we start earlier we can teach better from the very beginning. Anything else?

No, anything you want to tell me is fine.

Ok, the school is also important because the children develop the ability to think, analyze, widen their view of the world. One of the most important missions of the school is to teach the boys and girls that beyond the batey there is something greater.

Ok, if you could talk a little bit more about batey Lechería.

Well, batey Lechería since 1930, you know from around the era of Trujillo, until 1990 was a great sugar producer. The Haitians came from Haiti to cut cane and work in that area. But from 96 forward sugar production declined and then it became a completely unprotected community, without a source of employment because up until then the only job they knew was sugar cane production so then—about the batey, it's a community that has grown a lot—in the batey there is a lot of poverty, and it's a poverty not so much of material goods but I have noticed that it's more of spirit of pushing oneself to do things—to do things for oneself. It has a culture of giving them things for their betterment as if God is going to arrive and change their situation from their own chair and they don't have to move, but that was a culture from like two or three years ago, I have noticed that the dads and moms are more interested in improving their children's education, that they send their kids to school, that they send them better dressed, that they worry that they always attend, that they are on time; therefore I have noticed that they are giving greater importance and value to education.

So you think that in general the parents are involved in their children's education?

Currently yes, in general. Like in 80 percent this year it has been like wow! In previous years, we worked on that that you have to send your children to school, punctuality, attendance. This first meeting that we did at the beginning of the semester was a success because they have learned the boys and girls have to go to school, that it is a priority for them to go to school, and for them to understand that the earlier children receive an education and receive a better education the better it will be for their future lives. Therefore, this year they are valuing early childhood education and are demanding that nearby schools give class and I liked that, it filled me with pride.

Do you think that the training the teachers receive is adequate or at the necessary level for working at a batey school?

I think our teachers have a priority, they see the work in the batey as if it were a mission more than a job. They see this job as I picked it to do something more than teach and it's like to protect, take care of, foment values so I think so because our teachers have grown alongside our school and therefore have the capacity to better this type of context, these children in particular. You know that sometimes they are very difficult children, it's not the same working with children in another context where the mom has already taught them manners, how to behave, but these are kids that arrive at the school at zero where you need to teach from proper manners to mathematical operation or a reading. Therefore, I think they are prepared, that they receive training, that every day they are concerned with learning more, with taking classes and workshops, that the school offers its own workshops for them. That we offer workshops for the teachers and that presently we are backed by a Montessori school in the United States that sponsors us so that the teachers can better prepare themselves—in those areas.

I was also told that there is a psychologist...

The psychologist who had come in recent times hasn't been coming but now in December a volunteer from Chile is coming, she is a clinical psychologist with a specialty in learning disabilities because we have a lot of children with learning disabilities so she is coming to work in that area. This lady arrives like the 1st of December and that is going to be her job, accompany the children that have learning disabilities.

What would you say are some of the challenges the school faces on a daily basis?

One of the difficulties we are presently facing on a daily basis are like the malnutrition of the children, that the children come to school hungry, that they work—the maltreatment at home, still the parents don't understand how to educate a child without violence. Every day, I have 4- or 5-year-olds with strong physical marks and if I go to the house to talk to this dad, he is going to become upset because he still doesn't comprehend that there is a law that protects children, that he cannot abuse them physically or verbally but you also need to understand that they are also poor in terms of education. They have little education so they have a pattern of I was raised that way and I'm fine therefore I'm going to continue the same pattern that I was treated badly so I'm going to treat others badly, so that's one of the problems. But the biggest problem is malnutrition and hunger because when the children come in the afternoon they come very hungry at 1:30 and by 2:00 behavior is a big problem. In the school we try to give what we can, a cup of juice, a milk, a piece of bread but the government itself doesn't provide a lunch for the children. It still doesn't have that type of money, our government. But that is one of the biggest challenges, the maltreatment, the violence, there are a lot of children that are abused both physically and psychologically, the abandonment of some parents when they don't worry about their children having the proper nutrition, the necessary clothes, because these are things that the parents need to supply. It's a form of abandonment that the child spends a lot of time outside, that there isn't much supervision and that puts him (...) to the dangers in the surroundings like to

people that aren't good, that can abuse them and all that, or that can use them to do something that is not age appropriate.

The community is deeply affected by the fact that the parents lack employment, that they don't have a job, a fixed income every month because sometimes I understand the parents. I don't have a way to give this child food but then my reaction is in the form of aggression therefore one of the things is that the parents to have a fixed employment, that they don't have a job, that they don't do thing that can give them money (...) a fixed income that would in turn give them a sense of permanent security. And one of the problems that the school currently faces is the issue of documentation because you know that our students our 85 percent direct descendants of Haitian parents and you know that with this new Constitutional Tribunal that says that all immigrants are not from here, then where are they from because they have never been to Haiti. Therefore we have a big problem with documentation because the Ministry demands that these children have documentation but from where if the dad doesn't have and the mom doesn't have so that excludes them from the rights that they should have as citizens. It's a forgotten community, very excluded, and very much like in the outskirts, like in the hole in which it is located (...). There are some political interests in a system that doesn't know how to confront the situation. Honestly what they demand of us is that these children have documentation, that the documentation is up to date, but it is something that is out of our hands. And perhaps the other small thing that we confront as a school is the children's behavior, their sometimes aggressive behavior, their lack of control but for that same reason that they are malnourished, sometimes they have to deal with that and sometimes it's hard to get them to focus because of those factors, because of the maltreatment and the poor nutrition.

How do you think the school has adapted, if it has adapted, to the particular needs of the batey community?

I think it has adapted to the necessities of the batey because one need is to include the 2-year-olds, to start earlier for that reason that they are on the street too much, that they are left alone, that—therefore there needs to be an alternative for those kids, that they receive an education even if it is only a little but that they receive some. The other thing is that the school has made a large impact on the community in the sense that it works alongside the community to accomplish the development of certain projects for example this year we are working on a project so that when it rains that streets don't get flooded instead that the water can circulate and for that the community came together—the community united and claimed their right to have a safer community for the school. Also, they give a lot of protection to the school because at night we are not there and it's a whole other world, the batey, and we have never had the building vandalized, there haven't been robberies, or any loss because the community feels like the school is part of them, something that belongs to them, something that gives them pride, the dispensary as much as the school. Therefore, the community has its particular needs and we try to give solutions alongside these needs, to look for the channels so that they, the dads and the moms, can

have a greater understanding of how to raise their sons and daughters and there are two counselors that come every Tuesday to simply hear the moms or dads who want to talk because they understand that they don't have with whom to talk to about their problems, someone who will listen, someone who will not simply come to judge because you hit that kid but that will listen that they truly have a problem and that they can feel valued. Between them and the counselors they look for a way to have more patience with the children because imagine that you are 17 or 19 and already have two children you lose your patience because 2- and 3-year olds are very—investigating, exploring the world, breaking things, looking for things but they don't know what is going on with that child so there is a counselor that gives her talks based on her experiences with her own children who are 2 and 3 years old and there is another one that has teenagers so they discuss their experiences (...) how to reduce stress, what to do to not kill them or hit them, to understand. Therefore, that is one of the ways that we are adapting to the community, giving workshops and talks that can help them grow and mature. Also through the nutrition programs *Niño Sano* (Healthy Child) there is monitoring of their growth, so they bring the children every month to monitor if they are growing adequately, if they are lacking any type of vitamin, iron, phosphorus, so they look at that, at the results and all that.

Who is responsible for those services?

There is sponsorship for each of those services because we, as a school, receive very little State help, from the Dominican government. All the help—everything that the Sisters do is a result of donations from North American friends that are interested in supporting the bately, the inclusive education for all but one that is of quality. That what the children receive is of quality, with decent materials, good teachers so the sponsorships come from different people, from American universities, from the Sisters' friends, of the Sisters' congregation, and the program *Niño Sano* is monitored by a Canadian. From there come all the resources.

Do you think that affects how the school develops?

Yes, I think it does, I think it affects us because by not having—by not knowing how much—for example the Sister—every year we live for that year there isn't a five-year budget, we live each year for that year. Donations that we receive that year suffice for that year, therefore it impedes our growth because if I want to keep growing with the kids and that the school keep growing with the kids I have to think that if I add one grade I have to think that I need to hire a new teacher, where is the money going to come from, then making more juice for the children means money, where am I going to find the materials for a more complete classroom for the group, and who is going to manage it so it like limits our growth. A gradual growth. That's the reflection that I have been making recently, how to look for institutions that are willing to sponsor us for longer periods of time without having to live year by year because that doesn't give security. Because what happens if we don't receive donations this year? We close because we can't survive without teachers if we don't pay them so the first thing always is to assure the teacher's salary because if we don't have teachers or children there's no school. So that is what the Sister

secures, that every teacher receives their incentive, there isn't a lot, it's small but that incentive helps us with college, and with our lives in general. And I think one of the limitations we have is that we don't know if we are always going to have enough money for the whole year.

Do the parents have to pay?

No, our parents don't pay anything, absolutely nothing. But this year I've been trying to tell parents that even though we have a lot of resources, a lot of materials that education requires some sort of investment if it is not monetary it's time and if it is not time it is of accompaniment and if it is not of accompaniment it's of interest. They already have the interest so the school's administrators have reached the conclusion that parents don't have to pay anything in cash but that they have to make a commitment with the school that the older kids will study at home, that they will create a space for them, a study habit in the house (...) they have to buy—they have to cooperate with any material for the school like loose leaf paper. That they begin to understand that not everything is free because everything that the school has costs and it costs a lot so we want to eradicate that culture of I give you everything and you don't give me anything in return. So, what have you given us as a school? If we are a channel, a tool (...) we always work very closely but I think they should contribute, not money because I know they wouldn't have how to and that's not the culture we want to foment, but we want to foment a culture of oh! I can contribute a stack of paper, I can perhaps buy construction paper for the school, because they see the school with an immense amount of materials but I tell them that we don't buy it that they are donated from the United States and therefore they should know that if at any moment the people who donate to us decide that we are no longer their priority we will not survive. We will remain with our hands tied like prisoners because where will we go? Therefore, they need to learn from now on to contribute something to the school even if it is small.

I have like four or five students in secondary school but I don't think so—we asked for special permission for them to enroll in school and be able to be in ninth or tenth grade. But if we don't get their documentation, their lives have reached an end point. Because in twelfth grade you cannot continue if you don't have a birth certificate, if there is no registry that says that they exist in any part of the world. Unfortunately, that is going to be the hardest thing with the recent reform to the migration code that is going to be very difficult. A young lady that started working with us, to make it more real for you, she finished high school but when she went to retrieve her birth certificate to go to college she had problems, a lot of problems, and that—I was shocked because she is really smart, very capable, and if she could have gone to university she would have been a good person for society as a whole and for her community's development because she would have been able to compete with anyone. But documentation now is the hardest thing, it's a limitation and I have begun to think, it's my own perception, that it can be a result of racism of the State saying that they simply cannot accept responsibility for so many Haitian compatriots because we do not have the money, one would have to see it from their point of view because I wasn't there when they made that decision but it can be perceived along those lines, like damn where do we leave them, Haiti doesn't want them but Dominican Republic either so then

who are they? Because there are a lot of people that arrive daily but there are many that have never been to Haiti and that is what one would have to reconsider.