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Tét Ansamn: Putting our Heads Together to Improve Curriculum de L'Ecole Fondamentale, Haiti

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Abstract

The improvement of the education system was identified as paramount to the overall improvement of Haiti after the earthquake of 2010. A national curriculum does exist which often goes ignored by those foreigners assisting in the education reform efforts. Assistance must be offered in culturally respectful way, honoring what does exist and the context within which it is implemented.

Context of the Study

The devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010 brought Haiti, once again, to the forefront of donor initiatives with a resulting massive flood of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) into the country. Four years later, the distribution of these donor funds and the coordination of the NGO rebuilding efforts remains slow and disjointed.

The improvement of the education system in Haiti has been identified as paramount to the overall improvement of the country. Although the earthquake brought attention to the issues associated with education in Haiti, deficiencies in the system have long existed. Haiti has the highest illiteracy rate in the Western Hemisphere and the worst educational statistics. Less than 15% of the schools in Haiti are public, and although the Haitian constitution calls for free public education for all students up to grade 6, less than 65% of primary school aged children attend school. Private schools are expensive, unregulated, and are given little guidance by the Ministry of Education (MENFP). Teachers are underprepared, and facilities and materials are lacking.

Despite the issues associated with education in Haiti, a system does exist and often goes ignored or undervalued by those foreigners seeking to assist in the education reform efforts. There is a long history in Haiti of foreign entities invading the country to seemingly provide assistance, only to then refuse to understand the context, include Haitians in the very dialogue that will shape their future, recognize the existing structures that do exist, or even show respect for the Haitian

culture. NGOs are often criticized for not only neglecting to improve conditions, but actually contributing to the problems, and in some cases making matters worse. Subsequently and whether intentional or not, sorely needed funds are spent on poorly planned initiatives or misguided projects that result in little or no sustainable improvement, and in some cases actually cause harm.

Haiti has a national curriculum that was developed in the early 1980s, and regardless of whether it is good or bad, should not go ignored by the foreign organizations that enter the country for the purposes of teacher training or to open schools. Little is written about this curriculum, and the curriculum itself, not easily accessible.

Literature, sources, or evidence to support the argument/analysis

There is a body of literature describing and analyzing the impact, albeit mostly negative, of NGOs operating in Haiti. Commissioned reports identify the major issues that need to be addressed in the post-earthquake rebuilding effort and clearly, education is placed at the forefront of the rebuilding effort. Reports and research pertaining to education reform do not discuss the current national curriculum. In an effort to improve the education system in Haiti, the current curriculum and the ways in which that curriculum knowledge is transferred from educational leaders to teachers must be recognized and included in the discussion.

Aims and Objectives

This purpose of this study was to develop a rich understanding of the primary school curriculum in Haiti and the way in which educational leaders transfer this knowledge to those who deliver the curriculum, the teachers. The resulting paper will provide a full description of the Haitian primary school curriculum and how educational leaders convey curricular knowledge to the teachers, and examine the ways others can contribute to its improvement of the education system in a culturally and contextually respectful manner.

Method

The data from this qualitative case study include transcripts of interviews with educational experts in Haiti, photographic data, personal conversations, and a review of archival documents. The data was coded, thematized, and analyzed using pre and emerging coding schemes. The preliminary findings of this study have been reviewed by informants and other educational experts in Haiti for the purpose of building trustworthiness.

Outcomes

Although final analysis is not yet complete, it has become clear that there is a working, primary level, standards-based curriculum in Haiti. There is evidence to suggest that it is not widely followed throughout the country. Teachers often do not have knowledge that a national curriculum exists, and if they do, they have not ever seen a written copy. School directors are the curriculum leaders and pass this knowledge on to their teachers. Furthermore, preliminary analysis reveals that foreign entities routinely enter Haiti, building schools and contributing to the education reform efforts, yet chose to ignore what does already exist.

Significance

It is anticipated that this study has implications for the myriad of NGOs and other foreign organizations who are entering Haiti, whether to engage in teacher training or to open primary schools. This study is significant in that there has been no such study conducted in this area, and donor funding continues to target primary school education and teacher training, resulting in a flood of ill-prepared, foreign educational organizations into the country to assist in the education reform initiative.