

Original Paper

Enhancing Teaching Quality as an Agent of Change: An Account of a Yearlong Literacy Project in a Primary School in the Dominican Republic

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Abstract

Children who grow up surrounded by poverty often remain in poverty; however, education can be a powerful agent of change. In many developing countries where poverty is high, quality education is critical in reducing it. The conceptual framework of this research is based on the premise that cultivating and delivering a quality education begins with quality teachers. This research is a narrative ethnography combined with participatory action research methods to recount a year-long project designed to enhance teacher quality. The setting is a school in Muñoz, Dominican Republic with a team of five primary public school teachers. The findings outline the stages of intervention, successes and challenges encountered, my learning about supporting educational endeavours as a long-term goal for breaking generational poverty, and my advice to others who embark on similar projects working in developing countries.

Keywords

enhancing teaching quality, primary literacy, developing countries, narrative ethnography, participatory action research, learning project

1. Introduction

Children who grow up surrounded by poverty often remain in poverty; however, education can be a powerful agent of change. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017) reported that 420 million people would be lifted out of poverty with a secondary education. Consequently, a child from a poor family is seven times less likely to finish secondary school than a child from a wealthy family. According to Global Partnership for Education (2019), giving all children around the world a quality education could help reduce poverty, promote peace, and

foster development. Many developing countries spend much of their annual budgets on education; nevertheless, a bad education is almost like no education. According to UNESCO (2018), one of the most critical goals in education is cultivating *quality* teachers that can provide a *quality* education to their students. A quality teacher—defined in this research as one who can effectively foster learning among their students—is one of the most important factors in a student’s learning. Therefore, teachers and their critical role in enhancing both access to and the quality of education have become a focus of international debate over the last decade (Ginsburg et al., 2018). This debate informed the genesis of this project: increasing the quality of teaching and consequently education in an area that experiences persistently high levels of poverty and has a weakened education system. This paper recounts a year-long project to enhance teacher quality (mostly focused on literacy) in a school in Muñoz, Dominican Republic, with a team of five primary public school teachers. The study used a combination of narrative ethnographic and participatory action research methods. Outlined in this paper are the stages of intervention, successes and challenges encountered, my learning about supporting educational endeavours as a long-term goal for breaking generational poverty, and my advice to others who embark on similar projects working in developing countries.

1.1 Inspiration for the Project

I am a faculty member at a Vincentian University and working in such a space inspires all members to support the mission and use the opportunities available to them. Vincentian universities have a long history, grounded in the Vincentian mission, which began in the 1900s based on the life and work of St. Vincent de Paul, a Catholic priest who lived in the 17th century. St. Vincent de Paul is considered to have changed the educational and spiritual landscape in France by creating a complex and effective organization that could address the bodily and spiritual needs of the people of his time and would set up structures that would ensure his good works would be effective, flexible, and lasting (Niagara University, 2022). St. Vincent’s ideas shaped a constantly growing worldwide movement now known as the Vincentian Family. St. Vincent de Paul believed that we should assist the poor in every way and do it both by ourselves and by enlisting the help of others (Maloney & Robert, 1992). Niagara University (NU) has a long history of supporting the Vincentian principles by aiming to prepare students for personal and professional success while remaining committed to the values of its patron and its Catholic heritage. It seems only fitting that NU strives to continue this legacy and promote Vincentian values through the operation of its institution. One of these legacies is an annual award, *the Vincentian Poverty Grant*, which is intended to support research and/or direct service projects that will broaden understandings of poverty—especially its causes and consequences, as well as innovative ways to alleviate it. The grant is open to faculty, staff, and community members. In 2019–2020, I submitted a proposal titled, *Enhancing Teacher Quality in Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic: Building Human Capital*, and was awarded the NU Poverty Grant.

1.1.1 Education in the Dominican Republic

The years-long efforts of the Dominican Republic Ministerio de Educación to improve their education system have not been as effective as anticipated. The reasons for this can be predicted as inadequate system planning, a lack of skilled human and instructional resources, clear processes for implementing positive changes, and a sustainable improvement plan. Collectively, these factors have resulted in an education system in the Dominican Republic (DR) that is mostly failing its students. In the 2018 worldwide study by Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 78 nations, the DR ranked 77th (second last) with a mean score of 342 in students' scholastic performance of reading (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). This is also a decline from 2016, when the DR ranked 70th (last) with a mean of 358 in reading (OECD, 2016). In many ways, the result of this failure is consistent with the global research (for example, UNESCO and the World Bank), which states that a poor quality of education limits the possibilities for improving the quality of life by reducing levels of poverty among its citizens.

One of the most marked problems in the DR has been inadequate training of teachers, albeit the Ministerio de Educación has increased its efforts to address this issue in the past year. The lack of pedagogical skills to better teach students means that successful educational outcomes are compromised (Filmer & Rogers, 2018). In the DR, less than 4% of the GDP is spent on education, resulting in only 30% of children finishing primary school (OECD, 2020). This is low compared to other OECD countries, who spend an average of 6.3%. The limited government funding in education, as expected, results in undertrained teachers and a lack of needed resources in schools. The problem is clear and consistent with Filmer and Rogers's (2018) global report: There is a lack of quality teachers mostly due to a lack of funding and knowledge necessary to develop quality teachers, which leaves them at the mercy of the government to provide them with professional development and instructional resources. As well, the next generation of teachers—the student teachers—will be faced with the same situation. Therefore, the cycle will continue and needs to be disrupted.

In 2016, the Dominican government began to place a stronger focus on education improvements. This shift in focus was marked by the World Bank Board of Directors approving 50 million USD in financing to support the DR government's efforts to improve the quality of pre-university education through a National Pact for Education (World Bank, 2015). This money generated increased efforts to improve the quality of teachers. On 14 December 2018, the World Bank (2018) approved an additional financing of 100 million USD to help the government improve the quality of education and learning in the DR; a central part of the Ministry's plan is increasing the quality of teaching. The government pace has been gradual, however, and arguably could be considered ineffective based on the various the realities in the classrooms throughout the country—especially after the decline in the 2018 PISA assessment. It is likely that a project such as this one that provides research-based evidence, a proven plan, and a clear direction for improving teacher quality would be welcomed by the Ministry.

2. Methods

I used narrative ethnography and participatory action research (PAR) methods to conduct this qualitative research by examining the story of the project as it happened. I collected data through observations and documented the actions taken by participants during the project. The data is presented in the form of a story that incorporated my experiences during the project with my participants (Tedlock, 1991). The narrative story includes the descriptions and analysis of the members and actions of the group being studied. I used PAR methods as a framework for the cycle of reflection, data collection, and actions to improve practices through involving the participants who, in turn, took actions to improve themselves (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006). Combined, these allowed for my personal reflections and conversations with participants (i.e., anecdotal notes, end-of-project survey) to be included as data (Ellis et al., 2001), as well as new perspectives gleaned from my experiences and the teachers' personal experiences (Godall, 2001).

2.1 The Project Setting

Based on my 10 years of experience working with specific schools in the Puerto Plata region of the DR, I organized and completed a pilot project of needs-based professional development sessions in the 2018–2019 school year. It began as an initiative to get to know the schools and support the education system with a focus on improving the quality of teachers through a series of professional development sessions throughout the year. This was my contribution to my university's Vincentian mission - my volunteer service to give back to communities and to help improve the teaching and learning in select Puerto Plata schools. Based on the success of the pilot project, it became evident that more support was needed; I submitted a proposal for the NU 2019 Vincentian Poverty Grant and was selected for this direct service project to be conducted in a public school in Muñoz, DR.

2.1.1 The Project Site and Fundamentals

This project took place in School District 11-02 de Puerto Plata Ministerio de Educación at a school in Muñoz, DR. In the 2018–2019 pilot project, five schools were involved from the District 11-02 and included 10 teachers (two from each school). From the pilot project, I identified that reading levels among students were low and the teachers needed help with how to structure a literacy program in the primary grades that supported advancements in reading. I used these findings to position the activity project of the NU Vincentian Grant.

In 2019, I began the activity-based direct service Vincentian Poverty Grant project with one school from the pilot project located in Muñoz, DR. I decided it would be best to choose one school to work with exclusively, as the project would be intense, and my time would be limited. The fundamental goal of the project was to model a quality professional learning and development program focused on primary-level reading. As well, the model training program was designed to ensure these teachers could disseminate their learning and begin to train others. The structure of the project can be replicated in other contexts: provide professional learning, train teacher leaders, and create mentoring partnerships with student teachers. The context and focus of the professional learning can also be adapted to align

with a problem area. This also means that the project can be continued when funding ends. Overall, the project was guided by three goals:

1. Improve the *teaching* among teachers.
2. Improve the *learning* among students.
3. Develop *teacher leaders/mentors* in the schools to continue the process within the district and beyond.

3. Results

3.1 The Project Story

The following sections contain a retelling of the details of the planning and actions of the project. The account is designed to be beneficial to readers who are planning similar projects, as it details some of the preparations necessary.

3.1.1 Planning

I began by planning the professional learning and development (PL&D) sessions that would take place for the teachers in August. Based on this plan, I purchased the resources that I thought would be necessary for the teachers to have in their classrooms. I then began to visit many low-cost stores in Canada to purchase the supplies in bulk. The supplies were flown to the DR in four bags and sorted into various bins for each teacher. I also bought many other resources in the DR to support their economy. The planning also involved selecting team members.

3.1.2 The Project Team and Teaching Team

The team consisted of a variety people in different phases of the project. In August 2019, the team started with three primary classroom teachers, the primary resource teacher, and the vice-principal. At the beginning of December 2019, the two Grade 3 teachers were added, bringing our team total to eight members including myself.

3.1.3 The Reading Program Assistants

Two reading program assistants were selected to work one-on-one with the students in the primary grades. Both were Haitians who lived and were well known in the community and had a work visa. Both could speak Spanish, Creole, French, and a little English—the perfect fit for the primary students who spoke minimal Spanish at this point in their education.

3.1.4 Other Project Partners/Volunteers

The PL&D sessions organized by NU Master's students were integral to both the project and their own professional growth. Two master's students helped with the two-week August training and setting up the teachers' classrooms. Three pre-service teacher candidates joined in January 2020 for two weeks to organize the reading books and Grade 3 reading assessments. These students received either course credit or practicum teaching day credits. As well, throughout the project other NU Master's students (who were also practicing teachers and had vast experiences with teaching reading) were available virtually and offered guidance and advice under the spirit of the Vincentian mission of NU.

3.2 The Project Timeframe and Activities

Our team used a scaffolding approach to achieve our goals. The project had five phases and each phase consisted of target areas. Figure 1 outlines the objectives of each phase. I also created a blog to document each phase (<http://patriciaabriscoe.blogspot.com/>).

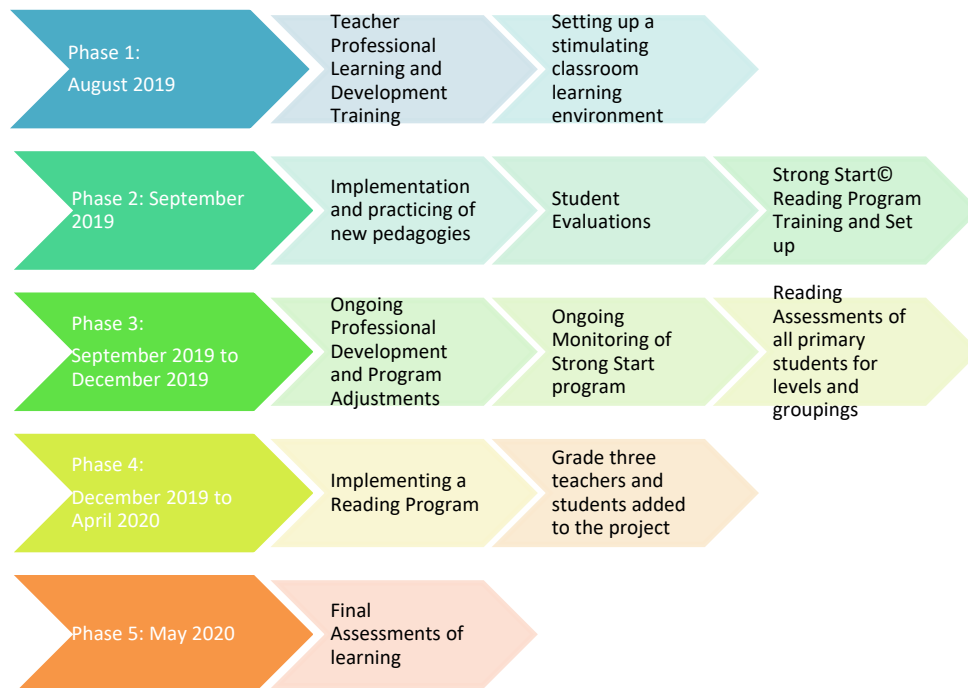


Figure 1. Five-Phase Professional Development Process for a Reading Program

3.3 Brief Overview of Each Phase

3.3.1 Phase 1: Professional Learning and Development (PL&D) Sessions

The foundational development sessions were delivered to the teaching team during the two-week period of 5–19 August 2019. The sessions were aligned with the goals of the project: (a) improve the teaching among teachers and, in turn, (b) improve the learning among students. To develop the teachers' concepts of learning and how to set up environments that enhance the learning of all students, the sessions focused on diversified teaching strategies, classroom management, teaching pedagogies, and assessment practices. More specifically and based on my observations from the pilot project completed the following year (2018–2019), the PL&D sessions focused on how to create more active learning environments with diversified teaching techniques. The aim was to help teachers prepare engaging lessons and to deliver them in a way that prioritized active learning rather than passive learning. As well, this was coupled with an understanding and development of diversified teaching practices to accommodate large classes and the wide range of diversified learning needs in the class.

One of the master's students and a certified teacher prepared the content for the two-week session. During the two weeks, the team discussed lesson planning using the PAR method (i.e., present, activity,

and review), learning pedagogies, and how to do simple diagnostic assessments with the children; introduced resources with teaching strategies to assist with student active learning and cooperative learning groupings; and planned appropriate learning activities for diversified teaching and classroom management strategies. The teachers were given opportunities to practice what they had learned: They prepared lessons and conducted them in front of the other teachers before conducting a lesson with a group of students in a mock classroom set up. At the same time, the reading assistants were preparing their instructional resources for the reading program. Because resources are scarce in the area, it was necessary to electronically design the resources, make copies, and compile them for the program. Another master's student, who volunteered to help in August, oversaw this project. She also discussed the purpose and goals of the reading program with the assistants.

In addition to the professional development sessions, it was also important and necessary to help guide the teachers in preparing their classrooms to provide a stimulating learning environment. We helped them organize the desks and chairs, create learning zones and anchor charts for learning, and use resources that aligned with the implementation of collaborative learning groups. They also received new white boards in each of their classes, which replaced the old and worn chalkboards. It was a great two weeks of learning and the teachers left feeling motivated about the upcoming school year.



Figure 2. Professional Development Sessions with the Team Teachers in August

3.3.2 Phase 2: Strong Start[®] Reading Program Set Up and Training

Strong Start[®] is a registered name for a reading development program based on giving individual instruction to students for the purpose of building the fundamentals for reading (i.e., the alphabet, vowels, etc.). As the school year began and the teachers were getting to know their students and conducting some initial assessments, we turned our focus to getting our reading team ready to start. The objective of the reading program was to work individually with students on the lower end of

achievement. The goal was for one of the reading team members to work at least twice a week for 10–15 minutes with these identified students to provide additional support and review some of the basic and foundational reading skills, such as letter recognition, vowels, syllable blends, and word recognition. The teachers provided a list of at least six to seven students whom they felt needed this program. A schedule was organized, and the reading team began work immediately. Each day, the selected students would work one-on-one with the reading assistant. The assistants were also tracking achievement markers—for example, how many letters the students could identify.



Figure 3. The Reading Team Conducting Assessments with Students

3.3.3 Phase 3: Ongoing Professional Development and Program Adjustments and Reading Assessments for Grades 1 and 2

We continued the professional development by having the teachers prepare and present video demonstration lessons with their respective classes. The teachers had to develop and deliver lessons based on the learning center format introduced in the early stage of the project using as many resources and diversified teaching techniques as possible. At the end of the lesson, the teachers completed a self-regulated learning process: (a) they watched their video and evaluated their teaching style; (b) they evaluated the success of the lesson to achieve the learning outcomes; and (c) they reflected on what went well and what needed to be improved. Overall, each teacher completed five demonstration lessons from August to January.

At the end of the first month of school (September), I completed all reading assessments with the first and second grade students—a total of 62 student evaluations. Based on these assessments, the students were grouped according to their needs and ability levels in each class. These results were also used to align the instruction during the Strong Start[®] program while working with the reading assistants.

3.3.4 Phase 4: Implementing a Reading Program and Grade 3 Teachers and Students Added to the Project

Once the teachers had situated themselves into a new classroom routine and a clear focus on building reading skills—combined with almost four months of students working with the reading assistants—it was time to introduce a reading program. The program was set up by collecting all the copies of primary books in the schools and putting a reading level on each one. The books were then grouped according to reading levels and the students were placed in groups according to their reading assessment. Each class was given a selection of books at various levels. The teachers designated 15 minutes each day for reading time. As an incentive for the students to read, we placed a reading log on the wall for each child. When a child read a book with the teacher or reading assistant, they received a colored dot. Once their five dots were filled, they received a small gift (i.e., pencil, eraser, or a chocolate treat) and we had planned a celebration. Unfortunately, this did not happen because the school closed in March due to COVID-19.



Figure 4. The Reading Program and Reading Time

3.3.5 Phase 5: Final Assessment of Learning

Due to COVID-19, Phase 5 did not happen. The schools were closed on March 15, 2020, and the assessments were set to be completed near the end of the school year in the middle of May 2020. However, based on their continuous reading assessments from the Strong Start[®] program, I can confirm that most of the students progressed and increased their reading levels.

4. Discussion

4.1 Project Successes

4.1.1 First Objective

I determined the success of the project based on whether the project objectives were achieved. One method I used to evaluate the first objective—improving teaching quality—was giving the teachers a survey to elicit their thoughts. Overall, there were common aspects that every team member identified. First, they felt they learned new ways of teaching, specific teaching strategies, and better ways to manage their students so that all children were involved. The participants identified specific teaching strategies in their comments, such as:

- “word formation, which consists of children using their minds and writing words, with different materials such as putty, sticks, the alphabet, stories, dramatizations, individual readings, and group work”
- “how to organize individual and group work”
- “the different ways children adapt to changes in teaching including images, drawing, books, letters, providing them with a good development, and strengthening their creativity and self-confidence”
- “creating responsibility together”
- “new vocabulary and ideas to carry out good learning in my classroom”
- “through the different resources learned to help students stimulate their reasoning”
- “classification system and the way in which this evaluation was carried out, how they summarized and presented this information allows me to improve my evaluation strategies and will provide techniques to guide other teachers”
- “how children can learn in different ways”
- “new vocabulary to lead students to curiosity and knowledge of different topics”
- “to simulate students’ reasoning with images of letters and drawings in different books and fonts, giving them their ability to develop and be critical and creative children”
- “building student confidence with speaking. They are less afraid to express themselves orally or in writing”

The teachers remarked that they felt more motivated, confident, and inspired in their role. They also commented that they noticed the students were more motivated in their learning. For example, the second grade teacher commented,

I have learned new ways to teach in my class that helps me with the large number of students. The more I prepare my lessons, the better they are. The videos have helped me see myself in my teaching. At first, I was very nervous. But I am trying new ideas and strategies in my class, and I see that the students enjoy the different activities that I prepare. I feel that I have improved the quality of my teaching, and this benefits my students. The consistent and ongoing support from Patricia increased my confidence and motivated me.

The second most highlighted learning was that they identified the importance of and use of assessments to guide their teaching, especially for reading. For example, prior to the project they were completing reading assessments (and measuring other student learning) mostly by observation. They did not have a good understanding of how to complete an accurate reading assessment or how to use its results to better tailor their instruction for each student. Learning how to complete accurate assessments was beneficial. The first grade teacher commented,

In my opinion, thanks to this project I have valued the resources even more and increased my curiosity and creativity to motivate my students in various ways, dedicating the necessary time to reading and thus developing their reading skills with the child's ability to acquire new knowledge. Participating in a reading assessment helped me extend what I was seeing in class. I learned that the assessment helps discover more specific problems of the student more than what I can gain from observing them in class. For example, when I thought the student knew most letters of the alphabet, the assessment showed this was not the case. I realized that they could not recognize the letters out of order. I can use this to guide my teaching.

Once the teachers had a better idea of how to make more accurate assessments, I observed the teachers selecting students one-by-one during the lunch downtime to review their reading skills. They were implementing the assessment techniques and tailoring mini-lessons based on results.

The third success of the project, noted in their collective comments, was their gratitude for the continuous support, for the level of resources, and for being involved in the project throughout the school year to improve their teaching and classrooms. It indicated that they saw the continuous support over time to be beneficial for their long-term improvement. For example, the other second grade teacher commented,

I will continue to work to improve our education and bring a more innovative education. I will continue good motivation for me to create awareness and face the obstacles that arise and see the satisfactory results. I intend to follow the project strategies for the new school year and beyond.

Overall, when I combined their comments with my observations, there was evidence of professional learning and development, and an improvement in their motivation and quality of teaching: Specifically, the progressive nature of their lessons and the ease with which they began organizing and delivering their teaching. It was easy to see (and hear) a clear shift to focusing on the impact of their teaching on student learning. They also noted their appreciation and gratitude for the classroom and teaching resources as part of the project (something the Ministry does not regularly provide to them) and the

ongoing professional and individual support throughout the school year.

4.1.2 Second Objective

I measured the second objective, enhancing student learning, throughout the project by focusing specifically on increased reading levels. The intention was to readminister a formal reading assessment to specifically measure all the students' progress and accomplishments in reading near the end of the school year; however, due to COVID-19, this official evaluation did not happen. Nevertheless, the reading assistants kept ongoing records of select students' progress in the three primary classes and the teachers kept anecdotal notes on individual student progress. Overall, we did see a range of progress, which is typical of any intervention in a class of students: Some students made outstanding progress, others did well, and some made minimal progress. The most notable accomplishment was the motivation we saw in the students. They appeared more involved and interested in learning to read and were eager to read to everyone.

4.1.3 Third Objective

The third objective, developing teacher leaders/mentors in the schools to continue the process within the district and beyond, is still a work in progress mostly due to the interruption of the school year in early March. The reduced school time severely altered our plans to host a professional development session with teachers from other schools in the area and our other project partners at the local university in Puerto Plata. The plan was that the project teachers would become the teacher trainers: They would recount their experiences, reflect on their learning, and deliver professional development to help others plan and implement a similar reading-focused program in their schools in the following year. This part of the project had been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and now that schools have fully reopened and are functioning at the same level as pre-pandemic, we will begin planning our approach for the 2022–2023 school year.

4.1.4 Overall Success

This Vincentian Project was primarily successful on two counts: (a) the students' improvement in reading and their increased interest in school and (b) the improvements in teacher motivation and their increased interest in their roles and responsibilities. Overall, the two formed a self-perpetuating effect: As the teachers became motivated and gained new skills and knowledge, they developed a better perspective on teaching and learning and the students started to feel the same. As well, having support and feeling like part of a passionate, collaborative team focused on learning helped sustain the teachers' motivation. For me, the highlight of the program was to see and feel the enthusiasm, motivation, and increased interest in learning from the team of teachers and the students.

4.2 Project Challenges

There were also challenges during the project; however, we remained steadfast as a team in pursuing the goals and objectives of the project and overcoming the challenges. There were many interruptions in the schedule for one reason or another—the many holidays, unannounced professional development days, unplanned and planned community events, and school maintenance, for example—and my time

was limited at the school. I always felt rushed and as though I never had enough time to do what I intended or complete these tasks how I wanted. Although the teachers took everything in stride as they are accustomed to constant interruptions in the best laid-out plans, it meant that the goals of the project could be compromised and I did not want to report back to my funding providers that things did not go as planned or, even worse, that they did not go at all. This constant pressure of being responsible and accountable for the funds and outcomes is sometimes overwhelming.

The teachers noted other challenges such as lack of time. One teacher noted,

Time was a major factor in this project. It challenged us to wisely use strategies to achieve more for the neediest students. They needed more time to catch up with their classmates, but we also must achieve our curriculum expectations. This was challenging for us.

Personally, my biggest challenge during this project was that I was not present at the school on a full-time basis. Due to my responsibilities as a professor at NU, I could only visit the school periodically throughout the various stages of the project. Therefore, the teachers were left on their own to carry out the project and implement new teaching ideas. Even though the teachers were eager to learn and always willing to try new ideas, learning and doing things differently is challenging. At times, they were unsure how to go about starting something new and were reluctant to do so when I was not there. For example, during our professional training in August, we organized a word wall for each class. When I returned in October, however, there were no words on the word wall. The teachers were unsure how to implement the wall into their lessons, so they did not use it. Once I explained and provided an example, they understood and began using it every day thereafter.

4.3 Recommendations

The successes of the program were evident in the students' increased reading levels. I believe this achievement can be attributed to the concerted effort of the team. The teachers showed an increased interest and motivation in their teaching; I witnessed them planning lessons and always asking questions to help improve their teaching or discussing ideas they had and wanted to try with their class. I saw them become more prepared for class and follow routines that were shared with them in the professional development sessions in August. The reading program and assistants helped to give individualized and additional support to those students who normally would not have received it in large, whole-group classes. Overall, everyone was focused on the goal of improving reading and worked together toward this goal. It became a magical learning environment that confirmed the Hawthorne effect: Productivity is increased dramatically when employees feel heard, supported, and involved.

4.3.1 Personal Reflection

My learning about supporting and breaking generational poverty was stimulating. When looking at generational poverty from "the balcony view," it is easy to be overwhelmed by the many layers involved in making any sort of transformative, sustainable change. Working on a project such as this, it is sometimes difficult to see how the small role you play contributes to the bigger picture. I was constantly asking myself: *am I making a difference?* The confirmation of your efforts in long-term

goals are not always visible. For example, the purpose of this project, when funneled down to its objectives, felt far removed from breaking generational poverty. This disconnect can affect motivation when the connection to the bigger picture is not in view. We like to see immediate results from our actions, and to know that what we are doing is indeed making a difference. Nevertheless, daunting as it may appear, it is possible to focus on the smallest of successes to keep motivated. My hope is that this project will inspire interest in education that will carry on for many generations in Muñoz.

4.3.2 Advice to Others

I have advice to others who embark on such projects that involve working with marginalized groups in developing countries. First, form your plan based on their needs (not what you think they need). Therefore, know your school community where you plan to serve. Spend a considerable amount of time there before you decide to work with the community and its members. Talk to many people and get to know the culture, traditions, forms of social capital, and ways of thinking in the community. Second, remember developing countries are different from developed countries. You will need to be flexible in your planning. Many factors and events may impede your project plans. For example, a rainstorm will stop all events planned for the day and maybe even the day after. Third, seek out as many community members and various stakeholders/partners as you can to join in to complement and add value to your project. This will help connect to the bigger mission and create a more sustainable community effort. Fourth, be prepared to make a long-term commitment (up to five years). Otherwise, your momentum from a year-long successful project may not be sustainable. As well, always be cognizant that many marginalized groups have been colonized and oppressed by majority and privileged populations. Work within an anti-colonizing framework to support them toward emancipatory spaces and self-learning. Finally, always think about the sustainability of your actions and be prepared to not see the immediate results of your efforts.

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