

Chapter 27

We Drank the Cola in Collaboration: Voices of Haitian Teachers in Haiti

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ABSTRACT

Developing high quality teachers is at the center of education reform and previous research has highlighted, high quality in-service teacher professional development leads to improved instruction, student learning, and ultimately promotes social equity. Using an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) theoretical framework, the voices and experiences of educators in Haiti were captured. This study reveals the following themes: 1) an opportunity for self-improvement, 2) an avenue for improving students learning, and 3) an approach to contributing to colleagues' development. An understanding of these themes from a cross-cultural perspective is provided with the objective that school personnel, receiving this population of students will develop an understanding of Haitian student's educational experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Although the ministry of education in Haiti provides professional development opportunities for educators in the public sector, the majority of educators teach in private sector schools. Non-governmental organizations, faith-based institutions, and private operators also administer professional development; however, there is no institutionalized system of accountability to measure the success of these programs. Furthermore, there is minimal research to support or measure the efficiency of these organizations' efforts. It is the limited literature on in-service teacher development that has propelled the focus of the current study. This chapter provides a summary of the experiences and perceptions of teachers in a semi-rural region of Haiti regarding professional development trainings. The chapter begins with a contextual understanding of Haiti's educational realities, followed by a description of the qualitative Interpretive

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Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study that highlights how teachers in Haiti experience and perceive their professional development.

Haiti History and Political Context

The Republic of Haiti occupies one-third of the Caribbean island once called Hispaniola. Ayiti (Haiti in English Translation), meaning mountainous land, was home of the Arawak and Taino people. Their rapid genocide brought Enslaved West Africans starting in 1505 (Clément, 1979). The island was known as the pearl of the Antilles, for French colonizers as Haiti's rich soil produced great wealth for various European nations under the auspices of chattel slavery of West African people. The unprecedented Haitian Revolution of 1804 is a marker in world history that is silenced in historical canons and yet made Haiti the first Black republic.

Despite this powerful revolution, Haiti struggled to establish a political and economic foundation. This republic maintained a dual society with a minority wealthy elite class (Prou, 2009) and a majority of the population dependent on a stagnant plantation economy (Bellegarde-Smith, 1990). They have since survived under a series of unstable and at times corrupt political regimes including world powers imposing debt, and decades of political embargo and occupation (Bellegarde-Smith, 1990; Prou, 2009). This includes the saturation of approximately 11,000 largely American NGOs that absorb much of the economic and political power in the country (Bellegarde-Smith, 2011). Collectively, these events have significantly impacted the education system of the country.

Education System in Haiti

The writers of the 1987 Haitian Constitution had a vision of universal education for all Haitian citizens and schools staffed with quality educators:

Education is the responsibility of the State... free of charge, and to ensure that public and private sector teachers are properly trained.... The first responsibility of the State and its territorial divisions is education of the masses, which is the only way the country can be developed (Translated from French, Art. XXXII).

Unfortunately, the current realities of Haiti's education system are not aligned with these constitutional standards. An approximate 80% of primary and secondary schools are private and charge tuition (USAID, 2015). These schools are operated by faith-based institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or private operators without any oversight or quality control (Cone, Buxton, Lee, & Mahotiere, 2013; Demombynes, Holland & León, 2010). These educational realities also reveal the perpetuation of the power dichotomy that maintains a minority elite class wielding power and access to quality schools (Doucet, 2012). The higher quality schools are only accessible to the elite 5% of the country (Salmi, 2000) leaving the remainder of the population to fend for themselves in what is pejoratively called *lekòl bòlet* (lottery schools) (Salmi, 2000), meaning the students' academic outcomes are unpredictable.

The *Ministre de l'Education Nationale et de la Formation Professionnelle* (Ministry of National Education and Professional Training; [MENFP]) is responsible for the education system and teacher training in Haiti. Over the year's various reform initiatives such as the Bernard reform (Prou, 2009) and

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