

Chapter 38

Piti, Piti, Wazo fe Nich Li (Little by Little, the Bird Builds its Nest): Promoting Change and Health Education in Post–Earthquake Haiti

Shewanee Howard-Baptiste
University of Tennessee – Chattanooga, USA

Mo Baptiste
Haitian American Caucus, USA

ABSTRACT

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, many people desired to help in relief efforts. Despite “good intentions,” there are a number of mistakes educators, scholars, and do-gooders make in an effort to “serve” those they determine to be “in need.” A married couple provides their individual and collective perspective about their experiences in Haiti. They discuss the histories and cultures that influence the structural barriers that exist between different communities. In order for relief efforts to be sustainable, it is imperative to create a culture that puts the Haitian community and their perspectives at the center of any change that would take place. The authors discuss personal and professional efforts to address the need of health education standards in a school in Haiti.

MO’S STORY

On January 12, 2010, I woke up ready to tackle the world and face my upcoming challenges. My entire day was planned, and I was anxious to get started. I was home in Orlando, Florida visiting my family for winter break after a tough semester in my fourth year as a doctoral student at Miami University (Oxford, OH). My major was Educational Leadership and my research centered on using the narratives of historically marginalized people to better understand how we as a society can critically critique traditional

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0778-9.ch038

leadership and schooling practices while suggesting new ones. During my coursework, my research became more focused, and I decided to use the stories of my Haitian ancestors and the Haitian Revolution as my subjects. Based on my research, I realized that very little scholarship has been written about Haiti and its Revolution. Furthermore, I was confident that no one has ever used these two subjects to re-conceptualize leadership theories. With these two notions in mind, I was finally ready to tell a story about my people through my dissertation.

Later that morning, I drove to a local bookstore and decided to remain there until I completed at least six hours of writing. As an incentive, I would reward myself with overpriced iced coffee and fatty desserts throughout the day. I sat down, plugged in my computer, and began typing. Around 5:30 p.m. that day, I received a call from a friend living in North Carolina. She called to ask me if my family was ok. I was confused by her question and I asked her what she meant as I knew my parents and siblings were fine. She was surprised that I hadn't heard, and her next five words caused me even more confusion: "The earthquake that hit Haiti." My first thought was that my friend was obviously confusing Haiti for another island because, as far as I knew, Haiti was not a country that experienced earthquakes. After further discussing the validity of her story, I went online and saw the images that confirmed her story. I vividly remember some of the first pieces of footage on the CNN website taken from a camera phone, particularly a young lady yelling in the background, "The world is coming to an end." I checked other news websites and there were some stories of the earthquake, but the images were limited. It was another thirty minutes or so before the images were flooding the Internet. I could not quite grasp the true magnitude of the earthquake until I saw the image of the Haitian presidential palace in ruins, which not only represented strength and pride to the Haitian people, but it was also considered to be the most modern architectural marvel in the country. At this point, I knew I had to call my parents, inform them of what happened, and set my writing aside. While driving home, the images kept replaying in my mind. I began to pray and ask God why. Why he would allow an earthquake to hit one of the poorest countries in the world? After 200 years of inhumane embargos and global isolation, I felt the people of Haiti had suffered enough and did not need this additional burden.

I pulled up to my parents' driveway and thought about how I was going to tell them the terrible news. I hesitantly walked through the door and informed my mother of the earthquake. Needless to say, she did not take the news well. We both sat in front of the television to watch the seven o'clock news while I informed her of what I knew since she did not speak English. I tried to explain to her the destruction of the presidential palace; however, I could not find the right words in Creole to truly capture the level of damage the building sustained. After an image of the palace flashed on the screen, she understood the severity of the earthquake and began to hyperventilate. She immediately began calling family and friends in Haiti but was unsuccessful because, as we later found out, the communication infrastructure had suffered tremendous damage. Over the next couple of days, there were more frequent reports and the news became more and more devastating. In the end, approximately 200,000 people were declared dead or missing and about 1.3 million were homeless.

As those numbers echoed in my mind, I could not help but feel a sense of guilt. Here I was, just a few days before reflecting on my life, thinking how "difficult" it was growing up. I was made fun of for being Haitian and now my people had suffered one of the worst catastrophes in human history. A million thoughts ran through my mind and the guilt increased. Within forty-eight hours of the earthquake, there were reports of private and public organizations, as well as various nations all over the world, mobilizing to provide aide to my stricken country. I wanted to be a part of the relief effort,

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