

Final Synthesis

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Power, Privilege and Positioning and Its Impact on Sustainability

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December 2019

Introduction

In this paper, I share common themes that are impacting the Mission today, including identity, motivation and how communities of practice provide a forum to exponentially impact change. I close with a strategy to disrupt this impoverished community with a major paradigm shift in how learning is acquired.

Common Themes

Mission children have few affordances, Neel (2019), that provide an advantage in life. Children need to understand that despite having little, that they still have many blessings such as access to Mission communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991), its director and teachers.

A key concern is lack of power and knowledge of positioning, Langenhove & Harré, (1994). Children and parents accept their current positions in life with little to no socioeconomic improvement from generation to generation. Mission children are products of their environment. Yildirim (2017) notes that the Dominican Republic had the lowest percentage of parents that engaged in cognitive and social activities with their children. The children of the Dominican Republic become somewhat “learning neglected” at a very young age, and therefore are not formally educated via structured communities of practice. During their home life, there are typically no conversations about school or progress in their school-related assignments. It doesn't help that there are very few, if any, books or materials in the home, and very few school-related resources available.

These sociocultural norms, Wertsch (1998), may impede progress. Children and parents alike are giving up any potential power -- an attribute which describes an individual's position in an interaction or conversation -- to these norms. Children and parents are forfeiting their voice to influence or affect a course of action (DiAngelo, 2006; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1995).

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They are therefore less likely to communicate their views from a position of strength with reciprocal interactions (Anderson, 2009, pp. 291-292; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1995).

Given the deep and long history of the lack of learning culture in the Dominican Republic, where families are generally disconnected, significant change may be required before any meaningful improvement in the educational process can be accomplished. This change may require a substantial paradigm shift with regards to the social aspect of learning as well as the parent/child relationship.

Strategy

DiAngelo (2006) recognizes that poverty hurts people. Poverty is not a form of living simply that can be romanticized; it is hardship. A meaningful effort to break this cycle of poverty and begin to build a sustainable foundation must start with motivation, Gresalfi (2017). This very program will create a sense of opportunity for the selected privileged few to initially partake. The privileged few were chosen based on their motivation and willingness to follow the program as outlined, and volunteer their services to give back to the mission in areas such as cooking, cleaning, security, and gardening. As of today, these privileged few have installed fencing, prepared and planted the Missions very first vegetable crop in a newly donated 700 square meter location just behind the Mission Community Center.

As Lave and Wenger (1991) describe, the central concept is that learning is a social process that involves a series of communities of practices. Lave and Wenger (1991) also said that a person's intentions to learn are engaged, and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in sociocultural practice. This social process includes the learning of knowledgeable skills. Therefore, one might surmise that the social structure of the Dominican Republic is limited by the current culture of parent child

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relationships, making it even more difficult to learn. However, in this case, participants, especially the parents and the children, need to be engaged with the intent of becoming full participants of sociocultural practice. Sfard (1998) follows with, you have to acquire knowledge, but then participate.

Through the Mission, children will learn that there is power in knowledge. Harré (2012) notes positioning theory is based on the principle that individuals who interact do not have equal access to the same rights and duties that afford them the opportunity to perform certain kinds of meaningful actions at that moment with that specific group of people. This Mission program will focus on providing the children and parents with tools to afford them with greater opportunities.

Plan: (Detail in Appendix) Rollout a program that requires children and parents to attend class together, and spend time reading and discussing the implications of current events selected by the teacher on a weekly basis. The parent/child team will then be required to come to class to share their views and debate their opinions.

The program incorporates perspective and dialogue that introduces them to the concepts of power, privilege, and positioning by reviewing and discussing age appropriate case studies. It is important for the children to understand the levers, of which some are not in their control, that will impact their future. The parents will also be experiencing these same levers with their children, which could be an additional incremental benefit for them. The program will also help to illuminate how power, privilege, and positioning exist among the Mission and their community.

Fundamental change lies with those who have direct influence and impact over the children. The Mission director, teachers, community parents, and donors all hold power,

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privileges, and position over the micro level, and are all integral to their success Martin (2012). Teachers will need to be a key success factor in executing the new program. They are the primary interface for setting direction and expectations on a daily basis.

Training and support will be provided to the Director and the teachers. As the primary donor, I will meet with this initial class of chosen parents and children to share my role. I will also present a view of my privileges, as well as discuss how I position my privileges into power and give them examples of how they can do the same. I will also communicate that my presence in their community should not be assumed, and that it is ultimately up to them to take these privileges afforded to them to create their own power, privileges and position.

At least in part, success will be recognized when the more a child or parent's actions cannot be made intelligible by references to roles, the more prominent the personal positioning will be. Success will also be defined by other community members requesting to join the Mission community, this will be a significant step towards sustainability.

Lave and Wenger (1991), poignantly state that Mission mothers and fathers will undergo much more than a superficial change in behavior. They sometimes experience a transformation of their identities, and this change in their identities affects how they view and act in the world.

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APPENDIX

Phase 1

- Design Plan
 - o Define guiding principles - completed
 - o Create survey - completed
 - o Meet with Director of mission - completed
 - o Meet with the Community and teachers - completed
 - o Synthesize data - completed
 - o Determine measurable metrics - completed
- Develop Plan
 - o Identify strategy based on survey results - completed
 - o Review with Director and community - completed
 - o Get commitment from teachers, parents and children - completed
 - o Finalize roles - completed
 - o Finalize plan – in progress
- Rollout Plan
 - o Procure land for mission garden – completed
 - o Secure land and plant vegetables - completed
 - o Meet with teachers to train on the curriculum – Dec 12, 2019
 - o Announce day 1 to the community – Dec 13, 2019
 - o Day 1 - TBD
 - o Capture questions, concerns in a log - TBD
 - o Measure progress - TBD