

What did I learn from the exchange that informs my professional roles and interests?

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We spoke about the perception of the Public Defender in the Dominican Republic (the Republic) compared to that here in the U.S. and I will address that briefly. It initially was surprising to me but as I spend more time researching the history of the Republic it makes more sense. The history of the Republic is one of constant revolution even over the past several decades which resulted in mass imprisonment, exile and killing of the people of the Republic without any legal proceedings. Given this history I can see why it is so extremely important to these people that their individual rights be protected from a government with a history of abuse of its citizens.

We also spoke about the tradition of philanthropy. Based on my conversations with two individuals, one in the non-profit sector and one in private education it became clear that there is no sense of giving back to the community. Again the history of the Republic is built upon the rule of the small upper class with a clear objective of maintaining their role in society together with a slave state that has not progressed much in the past century with a working class controlled and largely abused by this small upper class. Philanthropy does not easily mature in this type of political and social structure and it will take time and a significant change in the culture of the upper class to overcome this structure.

The things I learned from the exchange that I already see applying to my daily life include the work I do with the schools, my role as commission chair with the City and County of Denver and as an officer of the Colorado Bar Association. I see a need for change in the way we view education at the very basic level in civic education. We are almost two and half centuries from revolution and as I see it our concern for our community is constantly being reduced as our population soars. We still see a sense of community in the small towns of our country but more and more those small towns are disappearing and the larger communities in which the majority of our population live and work no longer have a sense of community. I think the loss of civic education is a way to seriously separate our government from those it governs.

Given my experience, what ideas do I have on collaboration on civic education between our countries that will benefit both Colorado and the Republic?

I think we can take to our schools the importance of what we see in still developing countries and their strive for democracy. It is important that our students and our educators realize that it is not enough in understanding democracy to look at our own history but to look beyond to what has and is happening around us in those countries. I think we can strike comparisons between our country as it developed and today with what has and is happening in the Republic in their struggles to maintain democracy. I believe we can do the same with education in the Republic by helping them to understand the difficulties our country had in developing a democracy which included a civil war that killed more of our people than any war in our history. It is important to a country which has experienced revolution after revolution to see that educating our young people in understanding their role in democracy can only lead to a more educated and understanding government. It is necessary that both countries understand that civic education is the key to bettering our local community as well as our countries and the world we all live in.

I will end by saying what I truly took away from this experience is ONE NEVER TRULY KNOWS A COUNTRY UNTIL THEY SEE IT THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN