Educational Development and Technology
Saltadere, Hinche in the Republic of Haiti
University of Notre Dame

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Section I

The goal of my project on educational development and technology was to present low-power computer technology to St. Michel School in Saltadere, Haiti and begin reducing the effects of "miseducation" on its expanding student population. With the Davis Projects for Peace grant, I sought to install a computer system in the classroom and host a week-long computer training camp for the students and teachers of St. Michel Parish and School.

This project focused on building a sustainable environment for the education of students at St. Michel. The new technology was intended to present the foundation for a new generation of learning technology and ultimately contribute to a shift in the education system throughout Haiti. My project was funded in full by the Davis Project for Peace grant but received necessary labor and help from a variety of supporters: Chemen Lavi, a foundation that establishes student computer centers throughout Haiti; its founder Patrick Eugene; the Director of Education for the Diocese of Hinche, Richard Joseph; and the St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish Bi-Parish Haiti Committee, which has been "twinned" with St. Michel School and Parish for over ten years.

The installation of the new computer lab has been completed, and two students and the principal of the school have been trained to be responsible for the computer classroom during the school year, per my initial project goal. This will allow the computer lab to become a part of the Saltadere community and an integral part of the classroom environment at St. Michel. The computer lab is a fantastic addition to the growing school and aids the prosperous environment being built by the Bi-Parish Haiti Committee.

In completing this project, I was faced with many unexpected challenges which required reorganization of my initial plans and flexibility from all parties involved. The nature of my problem began with the decision of the U.S. State Department to issue an official travel warning for all U.S. citizens travelling to Haiti. Therefore, I was unable to travel to the project site in Haiti due to rules and guidelines established by my University with regard to student travel under travel warnings. Instead of cancelling the project, I decided to complete it remotely. The importance of this computer lab to the Saltadere community provided me with a strong desire to complete my project despite my inability to be present on site. Thankfully, my many close relationships with members of the St. Michel Community, Chemen Lavi, and the Director of Education in Hinche allowed the project to continue according to schedule.

The majority of the summer was spent in preparation for our week of installation and training at the end of August. My remote role in the lab proved to be a challenge when planning for materials, supplies, and an initial timeline, but with Chemen Lavi, I planned the wiring for the lab, the computer placement and set up as well as what equipment was necessary for the most functional, efficient system possible. I had planned for Chemen Lavi to complete the lab and training during the last week of August; however, during our week of installation, Hurricane Isaac shifted into Haiti and the Dominican Republic, causing torrential rainfall and delaying our timeline.

Thanks to the Bi-Parish Haiti Committee, the lab was able to fit into the room designated by Fr. Ilric, the pastor of St. Michel, and we were able to connect five computers with one communal system for a connective classroom environment. The computers were attached to a main system and fed off of one

PC. This efficient system lowered the amount of power being used by the computers and decreased the average monthly cost of the lab for the school. The lab was powered by the school's solar panels to increase efficiency even more. Furthermore, a projector and screen were installed for use in future virtual lessons or important meetings via video communication. To complete the lab, I ordered desks and chairs for the students, and thus each computer had its own separate station.   Our struggles to get the necessary supplies during the hurricane led to a shortened time window in which to teach the students and members of the St. Michel community, but once the computers were installed, Patrick Eugene was able to give computer lessons to the three students chosen by Fr. Ilric. He trained them on how to use the lab software and about the fundamentals of the lab space for future repairs, maintenance, etc.

In my discussions with Patrick Eugene, after the installation, he described the students as overcome with joy and excitement about the new possibilities the computers offer. The students were able to test the lab during the week of installation, before training began and classes commenced for the year. We were also able to install internet access, which allows the students to research and explore communications with many sources outside of Saltadere, Hinche, and Haiti.

Section II

Peace is the result of freedom from all constraints.   Sustainable peace, furthermore, is a state that stems from a harmonized environment that is continuously free from hostility and violence without aide from outside sources.   For Haiti, with a poverty rate over 90% and over half the population illiterate, a new vision of the future must come from a revolutionary focus on the children of today's generation. I believe that for a country struggling to maintain a prosperous economy, government, and position in the world, adults and leaders in Haiti must discuss the issues in the system of "miseducation" that hurt the Haitian children. Peace will come from the students of today who, with a connection to the world via internet and technology, can learn and direct Haiti towards a brighter future of intellect, prosperity, and peace.

This project is just the beginning for the students in Saltadere. Installing computers at St. Michel brought permanent, low-power technology and communication to the entire community. The unused building has already become a center of great interest for all of the students. The new computer lessons will provide real world skills to students who wish to look for work post graduation. Over the next few years, it is my hope that the computer lab student specialists will transfer their skills to the rising students and a tradition will develop as the school grows and the education system is reevaluated.

Completing the project remotely proved to be an extremely challenging task for me. It was necessary for me to be in constant communication with my team on the ground. The access to modern technology and its ability to provide connectivity was essential to this project's success. The project was not simply installing a computer system but rather a reinvention of how education is presented. Teachers at St. Michel can now utilize more sources and materials for lessons plans. In addition, students can acquire novel skills to adapt in the real world. My access to technology was crucial in implementing my vision for St. Michel and the Saltadere community. Without the forward thinking of these systems, our communication and plan for the computer camp could have suffered and discouraged students from embracing the environmental changes.

Personal Statement

After many years of learning about the Haitian community and education system, the Davis Projects for Peace grant allowed me to give St. Michel Parish and School access to current technology and updated education materials for its growing student body. This project was the foundation of peace for the community of Saltadere and a step towards new future for its children.

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