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# Educational Leadership in a Fragile State: Comparative Insights from Haiti

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## **Educational Leadership in a Fragile State: Insights from Haiti** **Leadership Éducationnel dans un état fragile : Aperçus d'Haïti**

Gaetane Jean-Marie, University of Louisville  
Steve Sider, Wilfrid Laurier University

### **Abstract**

Although there has been extensive examination of educational leadership in the developed world (e.g. Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Sun, 2012), there has been much less research on school leadership in fragile states such as Haiti. This paper responds to Dimmock and Walker's (2000) call for greater attention to comparative and international research on educational leadership specifically by examining school leadership in the Haitian context. The study on which this paper is based examines the experiences of eight school leaders in Haiti in response to the question: "What types of leadership practices do school leaders in Haiti exhibit?" Three themes are presented: responsiveness to localized needs, a commitment to educational change and improvement, and innovation in responding to challenging contexts. We discuss how these themes may be illuminating of school leadership in fragile states by considering communal and community-based leadership, resilience, and the momentum for change in consideration of Moorosi and Bush's (2011) work on localized networks for change.

### **Résumé**

Quoique le leadership éducationnel ait été examiné de manière extensive dans les pays développés (par exemple, Fullan, 2001 ; Leithwood & Sun, 2012), il existe beaucoup moins de recherches sur le leadership scolaire dans les états fragiles tels qu'Haïti. Ce document répond à l'appel de Dimmock et Walker (2000) pour une plus grande attention sur la recherche comparative et internationale sur le leadership éducationnel, spécifiquement en examinant le leadership scolaire dans le contexte Haïtien. L'étude sur laquelle se fonde ce document examine les expériences de huit leaders scolaires en Haïti en réponse à la question : Quels types de pratiques de leadership exhibent les leaders scolaires en Haïti ? Trois thèmes sont présentés : réaction aux besoins localisés, engagement envers le changement et l'amélioration de l'éducation, et innovation pour répondre aux contextes difficiles. Nous discutons comment ces thèmes peuvent être révélateurs du leadership scolaire dans les états fragiles en considérant le leadership communautaire et basé sur la communauté, la résilience, et le dynamisme du changement, en considérant le travail de Moorosi et Bush (2011) sur les réseaux locaux pour le changement.

**Keywords:** Haiti, localized needs, innovation in leadership

**Mots-clés:** Haïti ; besoins localisés ; innovation en matière de leadership

One of the challenges of supporting educational leadership capacity-building in fragile states is the propensity to replicate policy and practice from the developed world. Teacher performance appraisal, curriculum priorities, and standardized assessment practices may be commonplace in some contexts but may not be appropriate, or necessary, in others. As Winton and Pollock (2009) state, "What works in one location may not necessarily meet the needs of another jurisdiction" (p. 1). This statement is particularly relevant in fragile states where meeting basic needs is often at the forefront of government and/or non-governmental organizational priorities. Often these contexts are complicated by "class structures that are less differentiated, educational systems that vary in the extent to which they have been institutionalized, and occupational structures that are shaped by low levels of economic development and a weak position in the world system" (Buchman & Hannum, 2001, p. 78).

In this paper, we examine the experiences of eight school principals in Haiti as they participate in a school leadership research study. The experiences of the principals illustrate school leadership approaches that exist outside of Western frameworks. Key to this examination is the work of Moorosi and Bush (2011) who suggest that a principal's effectiveness is related to their ability to navigate, and interact with, social networks in the school context. We contend that Haitian school principals not only have to traverse school networks but they also must be able to effectively interact with the local community. By examining school leadership in the Haitian context, this paper provides an opportunity to specifically consider the role of the principal in Haiti and, more generally, leadership practices that exist in fragile states.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Fragility of Haiti's Educational System***

Haiti is considered the poorest country in the western hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person of \$673 (World Bank, 2011). Half of the population lives in absolute poverty of \$1/day and 78% survive on less than \$2/day (World Bank, 2011). Unemployment hovers at 60%, higher in certain populations such as young men (Heine & Thompson, 2011). Haiti has a significant urban-rural divide and the poverty and marginalization are even more significant in rural areas. Further, the Gini coefficient (measuring the economic disparity between the rich and poor) in Haiti is one of the highest ever recorded in the world (Lundahl, 2011).

Additionally, Haiti has an adult literacy rate of approximately 48% and a youth literacy rate of 72% (UNESCO, 2011). However, even these statistics may be misleading. An Early Grade Reading Assessment, carried out in 2008 and 2009 found that, on average, children in grade 3 are able to read less than 23 words per minute, much lower than the standard of 60 (World Bank, 2011). For students studying in Creole (Creole and French are the two languages of Haiti), 29% were unable to read a single word by grade 3 (World Bank, 2011).

Part of the reason for the poor educational statistical picture of Haiti is that it has a fractured school system. Approximately 85% of Haitian children attend private schools, with little oversight from the Ministry of National Education and Professional Training. Universal primary education was a goal stated in the first constitution of Haiti 200 years ago, yet only approximately 50% of children attend primary schools and only 20% attend secondary schools (UNICEF, 2011). The recent Universal Primary Education (*Éducation Primaire Universelle*) focus of the Haitian government is juxtaposed against a context where, it is estimated, only 2 of 10 children who enter first grade will reach the fifth year, and even fewer (2%) finish high school (UNICEF, 2011). Often, families will send one child to school while other children attempt to support the family income or are left to other activities because the family cannot afford to send them to school.

The January 12, 2010 earthquake was another significant blow to an already weak educational system. Nearly 5,000 primary and secondary schools were destroyed or badly damaged and approximately 38,000 students were killed, as were 1,300 teachers (Leeder, 2010). Of higher education institutions, 87% were damaged or completely destroyed (INURED, 2010). Although many non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children and international governmental organizations such as the World Bank and UNESCO have worked toward rebuilding the educational system, much of the focus has been on building schools. The underlying challenges – limited training for teachers and school administrators, tuition fees which are unaffordable for many, limited government oversight – continue to plague the country.

Yet against this bleak backdrop, efforts are being made to disrupt social indifference, lack of access, and neglect (Buchman, & Hannum, 2001; Glewwe, 2002).

### ***Educational Leadership as Catalyst for Educational Change in Fragile States***

There has been extensive literature examining the role of the school principal within contexts such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom (e.g. Fullan, 2001; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Walker, 2006). There has been limited attention given to international and comparative perspectives on school leadership in contexts such as Africa and Latin America (Moorosi & Bush, 2011). The comparative leadership literature that does exist tends to focus on the developed world (Darling-Hammond & Rothman, 2011; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013).

A number of common themes can be identified in the school leadership research stemming from the more developed world. The literature supports that schools with good administrative leadership tend to have: students who perform better academically (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Louis, Dretzke & Wahlstrom, 2010); engaged teaching staff (Birkeland & Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Horng & Loeb, 2010); supportive parent involvement (Epstein, Galindo & Sheldon, 2011); and a healthy school culture (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). Much more has been written on school leadership (e.g. Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Moorosi & Bush, 2011) that is beyond the scope of this paper.

The demand and advocacy for educational change, and for meaningful and sustainable reform, can be potent when individuals emerge as leaders in their communities. Fullan (2001) intimates “deep and sustained reform depends on many of us, not just on the very few who are destined to be extraordinary (p. 3)”. As Heifetz (1994) postulates, “mobilizing people to tackle tough problems” (p. 15) is an alternative leadership approach that helps confront complex problems that do not have easy solutions. Whether it is the sharecropper, local minister, or lay person organizing with a collective group of people to initiate change and develop structures, they are being responsive to disenfranchised communities and families who have suffered long and are mired in poverty. Grassroots movements depict an increased momentum for the availability of education for all children and a desire to provide high-quality schools in order to eradicate educational disparities through development of educational policies and practices (Buchman & Hannum, 2001; Glewwe, 2002; Hanushek, 1995). Leadership is not practiced in a vacuum; instead, contextual, social, and cultural factors influence how leadership is enacted.

Based on the work of Leithwood and Sun (2012), this study is situated with an understanding of the impact of specific leadership practices as a way to understand effective school leadership in Haiti. Leithwood and Sun concluded that despite different models of school leadership, many of the same practices existed across the leadership models. Thus, the focus of this study is on the experiences and practices of school leaders in Haiti and how these experiences inform and frame their leadership.

Further, we draw on the work of Moorosi and Bush (2011) to better understand how the school leaders who are a focus in this study developed leadership practices within their localized context. Moorosi and Bush (2011) suggest that a principal’s effectiveness is related to their ability to navigate, and interact with, the school context. Although school leaders in Haiti deal with many of the same issues as their counterparts in other parts of the world, we contend that what distinguishes school leadership in the Haitian context is the ability to not only effectively interact with in-school networks but also with the localized community. Haitian school principals nurture effective leadership practices through the use of social networks within their schools and within the local context.

There has been limited attention in the academic literature on school leadership in the developing world, particularly in fragile states. Mundy and Dryden-Peterson's (2011) overview of education in fragile states provides some contextual understanding as to why there is a gap in the literature. They contend that in fragile states, the focus is on the most basic of day-to-day needs, such as the provision of shelter, security and food. Principals in non-fragile states may well deal with some of the same issues but the scale of such challenges is of greater proportion in fragile states. As well, families in fragile states often face significant financial obstacles that prevent them from paying school tuition fees. These obstacles are commonplace in Haiti and other parts of the developing world (Tooley, 2009). The lack of literature on school leadership from the developing world makes it difficult to ascertain how school leaders serve as catalysts of educational change and improvement within these contexts.

## **Methods**

The key question that informed the study was: What types of leadership practices do school principals in Haiti exhibit? A qualitative research approach was used to examine the leadership practices of eight Haitian school leaders who participated in the study from 2011-2013. The eight school leaders represented diverse geographic areas of Haiti and a variety of leadership roles: four principals from private and public schools, a Ministry of Education official, a curriculum developer for a non-governmental organization (NGO), a private school system superintendent, and a business administrator for a school system. Six of the participants were male and two were female. The participants were selected purposefully using a chain sampling method (Isaac & Michael, 1997) where school leaders from different regions of Haiti were asked to identify key educational leaders within geographically diverse areas of Haiti. Accessing school leaders from across Haiti was a consideration in the selection process to develop insights and perspectives that represented a range of geographic regions. The eight participants emerged from this chain sampling exercise.

A qualitative research methodology was chosen to provide a descriptive and in-depth examination of leadership issues in Haiti. The study of educational leadership in Haiti is limited in the school leadership literature but given the rebuilding efforts of the education system in Haiti since the 2010 earthquake, this provides an opportunity to capture the nuance of leadership that is underway. As we identified and worked with the participants, we wanted to acquire insight into "the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). It is important to recognize that we saw ourselves as a part of the research process, and not as neutral by-standers. In this way, the participants and researchers were "coequals who [were] carrying on a conversation about mutually relevant issues" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 634).

Three key sources of information served as the basis of our data collection: multiple in-depth interviews with the participants; observations of the participants within their work and social spheres; and interviews with other key people involved with education in the local community. Field notes were taken during observations, interviews, and reflection periods to add details about the setting and context of topics explored. Pseudonyms are used to provide anonymity to participants.

Our analysis of the data occurred on an ongoing basis to guide further data collection to probe deeper into the participants' leadership experiences and practices. The interviews and recorded field notes were transcribed and recordings were replayed to check for accuracy of data. Using constant-comparative procedures, transcriptions from the observations and interviews

were examined several times to build a starter list of themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The transcriptions and other documents from each data collection point were analyzed to find recurring patterns. Data were triangulated with entries from the field notes, observations, and interviews.

## **Findings**

The examination of the leadership experiences of the eight school leaders involved in this study are not necessarily representative of the experiences of all principals in Haiti. However, the emergent themes can be considered illustrative for broader educational leadership discussions in international and comparative contexts. As a result, the themes may reflect the experiences of school leaders in other jurisdictions but we draw particular attention to how these themes are illustrative of the Haitian context. The three themes that emerged from the research study are: (1) responsiveness to localized needs, (2) a commitment to educational change and improvement, and (3) innovation in responding to challenging contexts.

### ***Responsiveness to Localized Needs***

The participants each demonstrated leadership that was particularly responsive to his/her localized context. It was clear from the on-set of the research study that local needs, and the leaders' desire to consider these needs in and through their schools, were paramount. Although principals in western contexts are responsive to localized needs, in Haiti this responsiveness requires principals to often consider the needs of the local context without a policy framework implemented by a central educational department. School leaders in this study were keenly aware of localized needs because their school's success depended on considering and responding to these needs. In most cases, the localized need was that which was immediately within geographic proximity to the school. Three of the participants had leadership responsibilities for a broader geographic region, and multiple schools within that region, and in these cases the responsiveness was to the needs in the broader region.

An example of a Haitian school leader responding to localized needs is study participant Michel Morand who founded a school in a small town in the north region of Haiti. Established in 1993 with 65 students, the school currently has an elementary and secondary division with 1,100 students enrolled. Morand's vision for education in the community started as a young person growing up in the region. At that time, there was no high school in his community so he had to travel to the nearest city, approximately 25 kilometers away, and live with relatives while he attended high school. His father would occasionally walk the distance to visit his son and provide supplies. Out of this early experience, Morand recognized a need for a quality secondary school in his home community. This responsiveness to the need for a local secondary school has provided the community with an alternative option to having to send older students to cities outside of their community.

Recently, the Haitian Ministry of National Education provided, at no cost, a 22 acre tract of land where it would like Morand to build a university. He has developed an advisory board made up of Haitian, American, and Canadian educators who will provide input into the development of the university to serve the local community. Morand sees a teacher certification program as one of the foundational programs he hopes to create at the new university. Currently, people from his town who want to become certified teachers must travel at least two hours to attend an accredited university offering a teacher training program. Similarly, Morand recognized that his secondary school needed to provide vocational training for students since

many students would not be able to afford going to university. Morand stated in an interview, “What I am doing is building social capital in [name of town]. We are providing an education and vocational training so that students can return to this community and contribute to its economic and social improvement.”

A second example of responding to localized needs is provided by Tony Georges who has been a principal in a private school an hour outside of Port au Prince, the capital of Haiti. Following the 2010 earthquake, and previous natural disasters that had impacted the local community such as a major flood in 2008, Georges felt compelled to develop an emergency response system for his teachers and students. His plans included teaching students to recognize indications of impending natural disasters, as well as instructions on what to do if a natural disaster took place. Georges provided professional development for the teachers in his school so that they also knew what to do in the event of a natural disaster.

Following the implementation of the program in 2011, Georges completed a small research study to determine how effective the teaching had been in changing student attitudes and practices to prepare and respond to disasters. He stated, “I found that there were ways to help students so that they could help their families. As a result, we have been working to change our training so that the children can also teach their families.” The children were provided with basic teaching tools so that they could also teach their families some of these lessons. Georges demonstrated that being a leader in the school required him to consider the needs of the local community and to develop resources that would help children and their families meet these local needs.

Another of the participants, Justin Fontus, provides illustration of responding to localized needs but at a regional level. Fontus has been a teacher, school principal, and director of education for one of the ten Ministry of National Education (MENFP) departments in Haiti. This trajectory began nearly 30 years ago when Fontus recognized the discrepancy in his educational experience compared to some of his peers. Fontus was able to complete secondary school and a university degree while many of his peers were not able to due to family and work obligations. Fontus returned to his home community to teach as a way of supporting young people who experienced similar barriers. He soon became the principal of a school and quickly rose through the educational ranks of the Ministry of National Education, eventually working in the teaching qualification department of MENFP in Port au Prince. In 2012, Fontus was appointed to return to the community of his birth to serve as the director of MENFP for the region. As a result, he oversees more than 200 public schools and approximately 300 private schools.

In his current role as director of a department, Fontus has made a concerted effort to respond to local needs. An example of this was his work to establish a public university in the community which now enrolls over 1,000 students in multiple degree programs. Fontus states that he recognized “the need for a public university in the region so that students could remain at home while attending university, thus decreasing the cost involved for families.” He has supported the university as it has forged international partnerships and brought in colleagues from North America and France who are supplementing its business and education programs. His involvement in the university has enabled the community to benefit from students who can complete degree programs within their own community instead of having to travel to Port au Prince, a six hour drive away. As well, the university is supporting the development of the tourism industry in the region. Again, Fontus has given leadership in this as he has brought partners to the region to provide training in areas such as English as a Foreign Language and in supporting the technological infrastructure of the university.



Other participants illustrated their responsiveness to local needs in a variety of ways. One participant, Joseph Romelus, developed a vocational school so that students could receive training in welding, farming, and mechanics. Another participant, Andre Wilson, left an administrative position at a large public school because he recognized that the children in his immediate neighborhood had no school to attend. He started a school to serve the needs of a population in that community who cannot afford the fees of schools further away or the costs incurred with transportation. Each of these examples illustrate how principals in fragile states such as Haiti have to be aware of local needs and responsive to them. Often they do this without government direction or policy frameworks; in this sense, their responsiveness to localized needs is organic and at a grassroots level, thus distinguishing it from the ways in which school leaders in other parts of the world may be responsive to local contexts.

### ***Leadership for Educational Change: Non-institutionalized Practices***

A commitment to changing and improving education, at the school, regional, and national level in Haiti, is a key attribute of the participants involved in this study. One of the participants, Rose Zita, serves as an administrator for a network of private religious schools located throughout Haiti. Zita stated, "I know this may sound surprising but many school leaders [in Haiti] don't have any training in financial management. They often just take in tuition fees and then try to pay their bills without a good accounting system." Zita developed a series of workshops on financial management of schools and delivered these in various parts of Haiti. She complemented the workshops with electronic templates that principals could use to track their school fees and spending.

Another participant, Joseph Romelus, designed an early education curriculum that was research-based. He was able to complete a literature search on early childhood studies that had been conducted in Quebec, Canada and France. He used this research to design a program that would meet the needs of students who were 4, 5, and 6 years old. Romelus sought input on the program from other school leaders and was able to implement a well-designed program that was well-received by teachers and families. Romelus stated:

We have a lack of educational research in Haiti. Although I looked at the research from other contexts, I had to design a program that made sense for Haiti. The success of this program is due to not importing something from the US or Canada but developing a program of excellence for Haitians by Haitians.

The development of innovative, research-based programs that are particularly suited for the Haitian context points to the potential for improving education in the country.

Michel Morand is committed to excellence in his teaching staff and regularly engages the teaching staff in professional development. The quality of the teaching staff and the school's commitment to excellence is represented in the state exam results of its students. Since 1998, an average of 92% of students have passed the state exams at the various grade levels. The school buildings are also kept in good condition to create a positive learning environment. Most schools in Haiti do not have libraries, yet this school has a well-equipped one. Morand stated in an interview:

We invest in books and, although it's not the best library in the world, we certainly have resources to introduce children to reading. Even the little ones come to the library and the librarian reads to them and helps develop a love for reading.

The attention to the physical facility, as well as training for teachers, indicates that Morand is committed to excellence in the development of the school and its impact on the community.

Romelus, Zita, and Morand are committed to educational change and improvement in Haiti at a local level. The fact that school leaders in Haiti often have to develop educational templates and curriculum documents themselves in order to shape the educational program, as opposed to receiving them from a centralized government department, illustrates how school leadership is differentiated in Haiti from western contexts. School leaders often have to work independent of an institutionalized education office simply because the Ministry of National Education in Haiti has not had the capacity to provide leadership to the sector.

Other participants demonstrated this commitment to change, with limited government support, at broader, regional levels. For example, Justin Fontus has a vision of transforming the educational landscape of the region. He regularly visits the dozens of public schools in the region, greeting many principals and teachers with hugs and encouraging words. In one secondary school, Fontus was asked why there were over 100 students in the classrooms. Before he could respond, a student stood and said, “Before Fontus, we had nearly 200 students in our classrooms. We had to write our notes on each other’s backs because there was no space to sit. To us he is a hero.”

For Fontus, localized problems included a corrupt and inefficient educational bureaucracy. Fontus states, “I recognized that we needed a new vision for education which recognizes the need for an educated citizen who will work to eliminate corruption.” He has worked hard to eliminate practices involving the poor management of finances and corruption in schools. As a result, he has received multiple threats from those who were previously profiting from the lack of oversight; he now regularly travels with two armed guards. School leaders in the region credit Fontus with making significant in-roads in improving educational practices in the department.

Another leader who is responsible for a private school system, Moses St. Baptiste, has developed a system for ensuring educational improvement in the schools he is responsible for. St. Baptiste oversees schools attended by more than 60,000 children. In order to ensure that the principals and teachers are providing a quality education, St. Baptiste has appointed 14 coordinators to oversee the schools with the mandate to move all of the schools toward improved student outcomes. He has equipped each coordinator with a smartphone and regularly engages them in collaborative problem-solving. They meet regularly face-to-face at which time he also provides workshops on how to improve teaching practices for those primarily responsible for the education of the students. St. Baptiste indicates, “Our schools serve some of the neediest children in all of Haiti. However, we are committed to helping children receive an education so that their families may move out of poverty.” St. Baptiste believes that, even with limited means, he can support improved teaching and leadership in his schools.

### ***Innovation in Challenging Contexts***

In the midst of the challenges of the Haitian context, the school leaders who participated in this study provide examples of innovative school leadership. Innovation represents change in the status quo, discovery of new things, and the spread of such discoveries (Oke, Munshi, & Walumbwa, 2009). Innovative school leadership in Western-based literature includes aspects such as providing a clear vision of change (Jackson & Kelley, 2002), supporting teacher professional development and collaboration (Orphanos & Orr, 2013), and thoughtful consideration for succession planning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). Innovation in the Haitian

context refers to practices that are not typically or traditionally implemented. Thus, the practices may not be innovative in more developed contexts but they are seen as innovative within the Haitian context.

Avril Jean, who is a principal in a large school in an urban area in northern Haiti, discussed the importance of supporting students with special education needs in her context. She recognized that traditionally Haitian schools have not accommodated students with special needs and often these children were ostracized in their own communities. Jean states:

We know that these children need our support because they will not receive it elsewhere. We cannot provide the types of programs that are in the United States but we can be creative in using our resources to meet their needs.

She has established a working group of educational leaders to discuss how her school can be a model school of including students with special education needs. Jean's hope is to develop resources to properly identify specific needs, to supplement teaching practices, and to adequately educate her staff in this area. Again, this may not seem innovative from a western context but in Haiti this is ground-breaking leadership. Jean is demonstrating Oke, Munshi, and Walumbwa's (2009) concept of innovation by challenging the status quo that students with special needs are generally not supported in school, discovering how to best support these students despite limited means, and encouraging her staff to develop inclusive teaching practices.

Michel Morand has used creative steps to overcome limited resources. For example, Morand developed an innovative method to help students receive university education and return to the community to support the school and the general economic state of the region: the school helps finance its alumnae who attend universities, and in reciprocity they agree to return to the community and be engaged in the school and community life. If the student chooses not to return to the town, the student has to repay the university scholarship to the school. This approach to developing local social capital is reflective of Morand's own experience as he was supported to go to the United States to complete a Master's degree before returning to the community to develop his school. An example of the success of this initiative was the graduation in 2013 of seven medical students from a Cuban university who were all graduates of the school. Upon completion of their medical training, they returned to their communities in the north to provide medical care to patients in local hospitals. The hospital in Morand's town is considered the best in the region largely due to the number of graduates of the school who have returned to practice in the community. Through innovative leadership, students develop social responsibility and are expected to contribute to the social and economic viability of the community.

Each of the school leaders in the study challenged the status quo by recognizing barriers and limitations within their own school and community context. They have implemented programs and initiatives that have enabled new ways of teaching and leadership to emerge (Oke, Munshi, & Walumbwa, 2009). What distinguishes this type of innovative leadership from that experienced in more developed contexts is that the participants have had to be innovative because of the limited resources available to them. Financial limitations could serve as a barrier to innovative school leadership practices but the leaders in this study have indicated that the lack of these resources has actually compelled them to look for different ways to meet school and community needs.

## **Discussion: Lessons in Leadership**

### ***The Importance of Communal and Community-based Leadership***

The school leaders involved in this research project have developed leadership abilities that are honed from their community involvement. They are seen by community members as being legitimate leaders because their focus is on community development. For Morand, this has meant developing a scholarship program that encourages the brightest students from the community to get a post-secondary education elsewhere but to return to contribute back to the community. For Georges, this meant the establishment of a school for families who could not afford to support their children traveling out of the community. For Fontus, the focus on supporting smaller class sizes and establishing a public university in the community comes directly as a result of his vision to support community-development in his region. What we see here is that schooling and the local context in which it exists continually inform each other (Sider & Jean-Marie, in press). In a sense, what the school leaders in this study have demonstrated is that they are social entrepreneurs who see their roles as being more than “simply” a school principal, but a leader who must deliberately interact with the community for broader social impact (Anderson, 2009). The ability of school principals to make schooling-community connections is a key attribute of leadership (Normore & Jean-Marie, 2010) and yet the focus on community development in Haiti is one which is frequently lacking in western contexts (Anderson, 2009).

When education is changed, other aspects to the community are positively impacted (Lunde, 2008). For example, Morand made it his first priority to improve education in his town. Over 20 years, this initial focus has led to change in other community areas. His town was the first community to have consistent electricity supply in the region and, as a result, served as a model to many other communities in the country. The health care system in this rural community is considered one of the best in the country. These changes are a direct result of an initial commitment to improved education. The interconnectedness of improvement in education, health, and economic systems all contribute to the well-being of the community (Buchman & Hannum, 2001; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Glewwe, 2002).

This type of organic leadership, in which the leaders are responsive to, and responsible for, their community seems to be characteristic of the other participants in this study. A Haitian proverb “Neighborhoods are like white sheets” represents this sense of responsibility; school leaders are expected to nourish a sense of responsibility in their communities just as a host provides clean linens for a guest. There is a delicate balance in this leadership tension where leaders have to be responsive to their community and listen to the concerns which are presented while at the same time providing direction and vision for the community. In a sense, these leaders illustrate the conclusion of Moorosi and Bush (2011) that “... the impact of leadership learning influenced by local experiences remains a challenge for further research as it is strongly believed that crosscultural learning becomes more meaningful when it is informed by local experiences” (p. 72). It is clear that more comparative and international work needs to be done to consider similarities and differences in educational policy and leadership development, in a global sense, particularly considering how these factors affect fragile states (Buchman & Hannum, 2001; Bunnell, 2006).

### ***Resilience and Overcoming Barriers for a Larger Purpose***

Each of the participants provided examples of how they have not allowed barriers to serve as deterrents or impede their vision. They each recognized that their leadership roles were not just for their own benefit but to drive what they perceived as a larger purpose. Participants enacted a

social justice imperative that undergirded their leadership. This commitment to disrupt traditional ways of schooling and to deconstruct barriers and inequities is not just talked about but is represented in their actions (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011; Fullan, 2001; Marshall & Oliva, 2009; Tooms & Boske, 2009). For example, despite death threats, Fontus continues to work diligently to overcome corruption in his region. When asked if he fears for his life, he is quick to explain, “No, the people are with me.” This is quickly evident through the interactions he has with people on an everyday basis. He fosters this relationship by responding to needs, sometimes facilitating meetings or directly intervening in difficult situations such as when teachers are not paid. Every Sunday, he hosts a radio program where he speaks to the need for an educated and literate population. People in the community regularly refer to what Fontus has said on the radio program and it is clear that his message has a moral imperative and echoes the call of Freire (1998) for deep levels of awareness and conscientization. In many ways this reflects global efforts to develop practices and policies that provide more just access to education for all (Buchman & Hannum, 2001; Glewwe, 2002; Hanushek, 1995; Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; UNESCO, 2007).

A number of the participants in this study were born into impoverished environments. They have overcome these financial barriers in their transition to positions of school leadership. Despite challenges such as having to move to other communities to complete their education at young ages, they have demonstrated that they are resilient. Fontus points to the fact that his wife and son have to live in another community for fear of reprisal against him due to his anti-corruption measures. This resilience to succumb to the challenges that surround them seems to be a key characteristic of the participants. Despite incredible obstacles and challenges, there appears to be a common determination to support educational development so that the community might become more socially just (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011; Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; Sider, 2014). What is remarkable in the experiences of the participants is their desire to see other school leaders engage in the same community building experience. For example, Morand invests heavily in the professional development of teachers, not just at his own school but at any school in the community. This willingness to invest in others demonstrates a leadership outlook which is resolute in overcoming, and helping others overcome, personal barriers so that a more socially just community may emerge (Normore & Jean-Marie, 2010). It is important to consider that the magnitude of their commitment to social justice and disruption of previous ways of schooling is most likely much more significant than that of a principal in North America. Although school leaders in both contexts may speak about social justice and the moral imperative of school leadership, in Haiti and in other fragile states there are very real and significant barriers and challenges to achieving this (Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; Mundy & Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

### ***Momentum, Commitment, and Help***

The momentum that has carried each participant over an extended period of time is significant. Many of the participants are leaders in the community in which they grew up. The sense of responsibility to their home is borne out in many other school leaders we have examined in Haiti (Sider, 2014; Sider & Jean-Marie, in press). This commitment to their home community is not as a result of financial reward. There is a sense of responsibility to one’s home community which is not consistently mirrored in leadership practices in other western contexts (Adams & Jean-Marie, 2011; Moorosi & Bush, 2011).

It is ironic that despite being “nested” in the community in which they grew up, the leaders are not provincial in their outlook. They have engaged school leaders from western jurisdictions in conversations and research projects. They seem to be able to recognize what strategies, resources, and techniques these other contexts avail to the Haitian context and implement them as they see fit. An example of this is the work of Wilson to support the knowledge of teachers and principals in using manipulatives in subjects such as mathematics. Although this hands-on approach to teaching is not traditional to Haiti, Wilson has provided workshops for teachers on how to use a more constructivist strategy in teaching mathematics.

Although the case is being made here that the leadership styles and dispositions of the participants demonstrate some non-Western characteristics, it is also important to recognize that some participants have achieved some of their success due to external help. For Morand, this included having an American sponsor him to complete graduate work in the United States. Many of the students from his school who receive sponsorship to complete university programs do so through American and Canadian benefactors. Zita completed an undergraduate degree in business studies in the United States, thus providing her with contacts and knowledge to help her in developing financial management workshops. Likewise, Jean has invited Canadian educators to support her team in developing resources for students with special education needs. These participants demonstrate that they have been able to forge relationships beyond their jurisdictions to support them in their leadership roles.

## **Conclusion**

This study sheds light on how school principals operate in a fragile state such as Haiti. As we stated earlier, at the center of educational movements in fragile states such as Haiti, is cultivating local capacity to disrupt social indifference, lack of access, and neglect (Buchman, & Hannum, 2001; Glewwe, 2002). The school leaders who are highlighted in this paper provide an opportunity to consider how these localized aspects of leadership have an impact on regional educational and socioeconomic factors.

Many challenges remain for educational leadership capacity-building in Haiti. As the Haitian government and international partners support the building of schools and the training of teachers in Haiti, concerted effort must also be given to ensuring the on-going professional development of school principals. Many barriers remain to the accomplishment of this task. One barrier is the disconnected nature of school leadership in Haiti. There is no national professional organization of school principals that can research, promote, and align effective leadership practices. At the same time, as can be seen by the participants in this study, there are many examples of school leaders who are responding to localized needs and developing innovative, Haitian-made solutions to the challenges of the country.

Dimmock and Walker’s (2000) call for more attention to international and comparative research on educational leadership provides a challenge for educational researchers. As we engage in research that is international in nature, it is critical that we also reflect on the comparative aspect of the research. Our research on educational capacity-building in Haiti provides an opportunity to consider the context within Haiti and other fragile states as well as raising instances of comparison with other jurisdictions, whether those are in the developing or more developed world. We encourage the continued examination of leadership practices in fragile states to supplement that which has been done in other contexts.

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