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OF EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC

VOICES

CREATING EDUCATIONAL
PARTNERSHIPS IN THE
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



An Interview with
Jacqueline Malagón
Minister of Education

By Barbara O'Grady

VOICES OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Voices is the title of a series of interviews with leading educators about educational reform in the developing world. The series considers the manner in which the need for reform becomes crystallized into action; the process by which consensus is built among governments, educators, communities, and parents; and the interventions that have had an effect on educational change. The goal of the series is to share the methods and lessons learned with others in the international education community who are responsible for promoting reform.

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CREATING EDUCATIONAL
PARTNERSHIPS IN THE
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



BY BARBARA O'GRADY

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Jacqueline Malagón has been Minister of Education for the Dominican Republic since 1991. She holds a bachelor's degree in education from the Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña in Santo Domingo and has studied educational administration at Harvard and educational psychology and sociology at the University of Puerto Rico. Her career is testimony to her dedication to improving education in the Dominican Republic. During the last 30 years, she has held administrative, teaching, and advisory positions in some of the Dominican Republic's leading educational and social interest organizations, including Acción para la Educación Básica (EDUCA) and Acción Pro-Educación y Cultura (APEC). She has visited educational institutions throughout the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia, studying their innovative methodologies and applying them to the Dominican educational system whenever possible.

Mrs. Malagón has represented the Dominican government in international conferences on education, women in development, and other topics of public interest. She has served as guest speaker for agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Ford Foundation, the Organization of American States, UNESCO, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations. She regularly publishes articles about education in local Dominican newspapers.

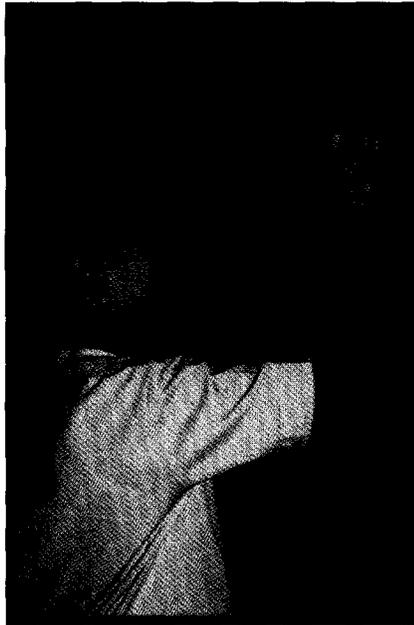
Mrs. Malagón is the mother of four children and the grandmother of three. Two of her children hold master's degrees, and a third is pursuing that degree. The fourth is in the U.S. Navy.

CREATING EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

In 1964 the leading business people of the Dominican Republic created Acción Pro-Educación y Cultura (APEC) to address the nation's need for higher education and technical training in fields directly related to economic development. APEC has received funding from a variety of international donors, including the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Inter-American Development Bank, to oversee the creation and implementation of a wide number of programs at the postsecondary level.

As told in the following interview, 25 years after its founding APEC turned its attention to the critical condition of basic education in the Dominican Republic. From APEC's examination of the basic education system came the founding of a subsidiary organization, Acción para la Educación Básica (EDUCA), in 1989. Jacqueline Malagón, who was elected executive director of APEC in 1977, became the first director of EDUCA. The interview illustrates the positive effect that partnerships among government, business, and the community can have on education.

In 1990, EDUCA began receiving assistance from the U.S. Agency for International Development through the Private Initiatives in Primary Education (PIPE) project, the objective of which is to strengthen the organization's management and technical skills. The Academy for Educational Development is providing technical assistance.



Q You inherited an educational system that was in disarray, some might say. Can you tell us what the educational system looked like before you took office?

A I was a critic of what was going on in the Dominican Republic with every government because things were not going well. The schools were in very poor condition. The salaries of the teachers were the lowest in the nation, lower than the lowest salary of the public sector.

There is a minimum wage in the Dominican Republic, and the teachers were below the minimum wage.

There were not enough chairs for the children attending school to sit on. Many were sitting on the floor, on blocks or on stones. At some schools, the older children arrived at 5 a.m. to get the front seats. Then they sold them for three or four pesos to the children that arrived at 7:30! There have never been teaching materials in schools. Things like chalk or erasers were never in existence; the teachers had to buy them out of their very poor pay.

Five years ago, we had close to 350,000 children of school-age out of school. Our illiteracy rate was about 23 to 25 percent. These are very disgusting figures.

We had a three-month teacher strike in the public schools. People were desperate. No one believed in education, including the Government for whom education was not a priority.

For close to 25 years, APEC also had never paid attention to what was going on in basic education, especially in the public sector. For our 25th anniversary in 1988-1989, we retired to a hotel on one of the beaches, and for three days we discussed what had happened in education during APEC's 25 years.

Gustavo Tavares, one of the founders, said, "While we have been attending to higher education, while we have been giving student loans, while we have been attending to poor urban women, basic education has gone down the drain. Something has to be done by APEC in order to save public education." He received the attention of every one of the 20-some people attending the retreat that weekend who were anxious to see what our goal for the next 20-25 years would be.

It was decided to create a committee, presided over by Mr. Tavares and consisting of about three or four APEC staff and distinguished educators like the head of the Catholic University, to prepare a report for APEC on the condition of public education. It would make recommendations about what APEC might do for basic, or elementary, education in the public sector. About four or five months and many meetings later, it was decided that an institution to work for basic education, especially in the public sector but also in the private sector, should be created. And that was when EDUCA came into existence. I was one of its founders. Mr. Tavares became the president.

Q What was the plan for EDUCA?

A EDUCA decided to issue a public manifesto about improving education, which

was signed by about 20 of the most distinguished private business leaders and educators in the country. The reaction of the President [of the Dominican Republic] was immediate. He asked for a report on the future of education and appointed a commission of 12 representing APEC, EDUCA, the Catholic University, and the National University. Four or five other very distinguished educators were also included, along with the presidents of the National Council for Businessmen and the Association of Industries.

We met daily for 60 days. And at the end of the 60 days, we had a report—a *Pacto por la Patria*, a pact for the country—on the future of education. That was August of 1991.

At the same time, I was asked to become Minister of Education. I had been offered the job unofficially on a few occasions many years ago. But I was always a person so strongly committed to the private sector that I never thought of going into the public sector. The public bureaucracy especially scared me. This time I thought that I was being given the challenge of changing the route of Dominican history. I accepted the challenge.

Q When you became Minister of Education, you had the *Pacto por la Patria* to work from, is that right?

A Yes.

Q Was that your vision of what education should be?

A Well, probably more important than the *Pacto por la Patria*, we had the Plan Decenal (Ten-Year Plan). The Plan Decenal was created when the representatives to the Jomtien, Thailand, Conference on Education For All returned and decided that we had no educational future—no plan to work from, nothing to direct our steps.

And from the private sector—at that time I was still only private sector—I decided to support the Plan Decenal, to join forces with all the educational technicians in the country. We got about 50,000 people working on Plan Decenal. But more important than the number was that all political parties, including the opposition, gave their consent for it to be the unique plan for the educational system of the Dominican Republic for the next 10 years. I knew that if we had the support of the people—the media, teachers, parents, children—we could come out of the educational crisis and have a much better educational system.

When the Plan Decenal was finished and a Congress was held in December 1992, it was such an emotional moment for me, then Minister of Education, to face 2,000 representatives of the educational system

and the private business sector who said, "Mrs. Malagon, if you convince the President to accept this plan, we will encourage the Government and all forces in the Dominican Republic to execute it."

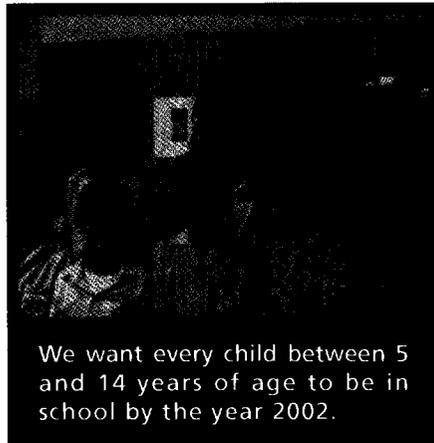
I swore that it was going to be executed or I would leave the post.

Since we launched the campaign, in every speech that I have given both in the country and outside of the country, I end the same way: "After all, education is teaching how to live better." Isn't that the purpose of economic development? We want people to be productive, not for the sake of having more money but for having a better quality of life. Well, that can be achieved by education. And this is the motto of our campaign.

Q What are the specific goals of the educational campaign?

A What does the Plan Decenal want? Illiteracy to be dropped to zero for people under 30; illiteracy to be dropped to 10 percent for people over 30. Now, the average educational level of Dominicans is fourth grade of elementary school. We want to increase that to eighth grade. We want every child between 5 and 14 years of age to be in school by the year 2002. I believe that if we have 2.1 million children in school now—and I am willing to put my neck out that there are not more than 100,000 to 125,000 school-age children out of school in Santo Domingo—by next year, we will have no more than 50,000 out of school, which means that we will have a 97 to 98 percent school-attendance rate. That is our goal.

Q What else do you want?



A We want every single teacher to be trained at the university level. Now, two years of college are required for an elementary school teacher and four years for a high school teacher. Those requirements are in effect until the year 2006. After that, a bachelor's degree will be required for an elementary school teacher and a master's degree for a high school teacher.

We want every single school to be in good condition. We want every single student to be seated on a comfortable chair. We want every single school to be equipped with good, and a variety of, teaching materials.

The Catholic Church talks about fighting poverty. I don't know—and I dare anybody to tell me otherwise—any better way to fight poverty than educating people. If you give somebody a fish, he will eat that day. If you teach that person how to fish, he will eat throughout his life. I believe that. And the Dominican people, being given the opportunity for educational advancement—as I myself received from the U.S. Government, the international community, and institutions like APEC—can have a better life.

Q Some people say that education has become a national obsession in the Dominican Republic. You've created a momentum among the most diverse levels of society—educators, business people, and workers; the public sector and the private sector; people from the rural areas and people from the urban areas. You mentioned earlier the 50,000 people with whom you're involved, and I think there are about 100 institutions. How did you manage to create a national consensus for education? That's not easy to do.

A Mr. Tavares was the one who came up with the phrase, "Education—a national obsession." We recorded six messages for television and radio. They were like commercial spots, but the message was educational. Some were positive; some were negative. In other words, some of the positive messages had children going to school, holding their parents' hands. You could see the beautiful relationship between a father and a child when the father took his child to school. In a negative one, however, we saw a man behind bars, as if he were in prison because he had not been given opportunities in society, because he didn't know how to read and write.

But Mr. Tavares was still not satisfied even though more children were enrolled in school. We had jumped to 1.8 million from 1.6 million in 1991 when the campaign began. So he's come up with a new campaign which EDUCA has organized and is helping to support. It includes radio, television, and newspapers. I deliver the message, first, to the public in general that education is the best inheritance you can leave your children. It's the only inheritance that is never lost.

Second, it's a message to parents about their role in the education of their children. And third, it's a message to teachers about how important they are in the process of education. Teachers have reacted very favorably to the campaign.

At the end of every message I say, "Educar es enseñar a vivir mejor." That's the name of the campaign, "Education is teaching how to live

At the end of every [media] message, I say, "Educar es enseñar a vivir mejor." That's the name of the campaign, "Education is teaching how to live better."

**EDUCAR
ES ENSEÑAR A VIVIR
MEJOR.**

better." We also have bumper stickers and posters, in factories, in clubs, in schools—everywhere.

Q How are you financing the campaign?

A The telephone company, CODETEL, has paid for much of the campaign. But other companies have supported its efforts. They have asked permission to print bumper stickers, posters, and other materials, and to use the campaign motto to tell their clientele that education is teaching how to live better. The television and radio stations have provided free air space for our messages.

Q It appears that your success in creating a national consensus about education has resulted from establishing partnerships of one sort or another. You've spoken about involving parents; you've mentioned the telephone company's role; and you have mentioned EDUCA. Is this what you think the answer is to a successful educational system—creating partnerships?

A I believe that creating partnerships is vital for success in education. The Government does not have the answer. The private sector alone does not have the answer. But both the public and private sectors, through a strong partnership with NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] as intermediates, do have the answers.

EDUCA has played an extremely important role as have APEC, the Catholic University, and the Technological Institute, just to mention a few of the private-sector institutions. They have come out and very strongly supported a different style of management; they have strongly supported the need to place education at the top of the national agenda.

They have also strongly supported the necessity for all political parties to support the efforts not just of the Government but of the nation in education.

Q What has EDUCA done?

A EDUCA, as an NGO in the private sector, manages a grant from AID [the U.S. Agency for International Development] for improving education. Since I am also the Executive Director of EDUCA, there is a positive transfer between what EDUCA does and what the public sector does. I make things happen crosswise between the two.

The Government wanted to train 2,000 to 3,000 public school teachers and principals through EDUCA. It was suggested that EDUCA join training efforts already underway for private-school teachers so that all teacher training in the country, private and public, would be consistent. And that is what happened. Teachers are given the same training. Only the source of payment differs. AID is paying for the private-sector teachers; and the Government, through World Bank and IDB loans, is paying for the public-sector teachers. I find that that approach bodes extremely well for the future. Teachers in the private sector will have the opportunity of transferring to the public sector and vice versa. There will be a two-way exchange of teachers, which has never happened before.

We're working on two other important things with the help of EDUCA. That's another positive collaboration—because of what the Government is able to do and what EDUCA can do. One is textbooks. Never, in the history of the Dominican Republic have students in the public sector had textbooks. Today every single child in elementary school in the public sector has two textbooks: one in Math and Social Science and one in Language and Natural Science. For free. And the workbook that accompanies the textbook, we sell for a symbolic 12 pesos—almost a dollar. So textbooks are no longer a dream in the Dominican Republic. They are a reality. In order to make a little profit to help us subsidize the cost of production, we sell the books to the private sector.

The second thing EDUCA is helping with is the national achievement test. When I went to school, you had to pass a national test to graduate from high school. The educational system began deteriorating in the 1960's, however, and the test disappeared. Well, we have been able to institute national achievement tests again—in the fourth and eighth grades of elementary school; and this year, we're going for the twelfth grade, that is, the last grade of high school.

Q How are parents and communities involved as partners in education?

A Ninety percent of school repairs are done with labor provided by the parents or the community. We don't pay salaries, although one World

Bank-financed program reimburses parents with food in exchange for school repairs.

I go to communities, I talk on television, I talk on radio, and I call for parents to assist. "The education of your children," I say, "is not the sole responsibility of the Government; it is mostly your responsibility. Come and help us, assist us in providing a better education for your child. Help us have better physical conditions in the school. Involve yourself in the education of your child."

And they have been very responsive.

Q What are appropriate areas in which parents and the private sector should be involved?

A The only thing that I think they should not be involved in is the making of the very important decisions. That belongs to the educational authorities. As to areas in which they should be involved, I would say in school repairs, in recognition of teachers, in encouraging the President to approve a 15 percent minimum of the national budget for education—these are areas in which the private sector can have a lot of influence.

Q Tell us more about your management style. Perhaps there is a lesson here for others.

A Of course, having a working team means a lot for management. I come from the private sector. I have the managerial style of the private sector. I was lucky enough to be sent to Harvard University by AID in 1978 to study Management of Education. And I learned what the style of a successful management program should be in education.

I do not believe in centralized administration. I think that at different levels there are authorities. And I think that everybody has to carry on his shoulder the load of his authority and exercise it. I have decentralized management in the Ministry. If people come to me for appointments, I tell them, "I don't appoint teachers. There is somebody in charge of that." I don't think a Minister of Education should be in charge of appointments. I should be in charge of their relations with the Government, especially with the President; I should be in charge of getting the international community's attention; and I should be in charge of giving my blessing, or my final decision, to important things.

I travel a lot. I am probably the Cabinet member that travels the most. But everywhere I go, I look for ideas. I see new things. I look for innovations that I can bring to my country.

I have brought efficiency to my job from the private sector. If you want to achieve a better quality education in the Dominican Republic, you have to increase the efficiency of the public sector. I have between 500 and 700 of the most distinguished businessmen in the community working with me. They had paid, together with AID, for my education. So they are committed to me; I am their product. They have to support me in order to make the educational sector the best sector in the Dominican Republic.

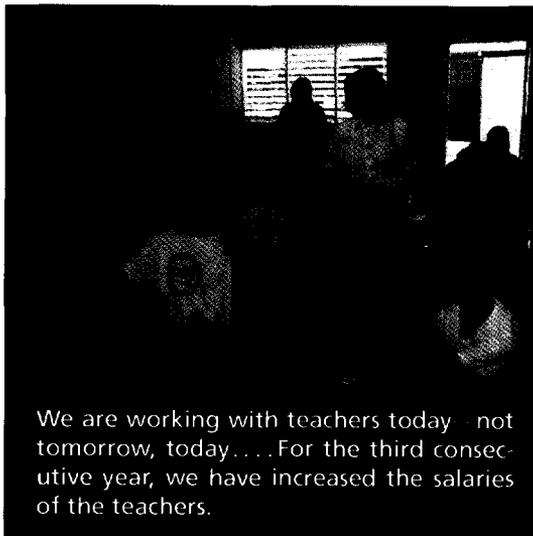
That is my management style.

Q Have you seen any concrete results yet of the educational reform specified in the Plan Decenal?

A We are not waiting until the year 2000 or 2002. Last August, we distributed more than 150,000 student desks and chairs and about 2,500 teachers' desks and chairs. We distributed more than 3,000 blackboards. We equipped 5,000 schools with teaching materials that included maps and natural science posters.

We are working with teachers today—not tomorrow, today. There are 14,000 teachers out of 35,000 going to the university under World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank funding. That means 14,000 teachers trained in the public sector, almost half the teaching force.

For the third consecutive year, we have increased the salaries of the teachers. Those rated "excellent" receive a higher increase than those rated "good" or "acceptable." Those in remote areas receive a higher percentage



increase than those who are not. Those who teach "difficult" grades also receive a higher percentage as do those with more teaching experience, those with advanced studies, or those who are studying now. Those studying receive money for transportation and meals; tuition doesn't cost them anything.

The teachers are more satisfied than they have been. In 1990, a teacher earned 480 pesos a month. Just three years later, he or she was making between 2,200 pesos and 3,600 pesos.

We have everything in computers. Every single child in fourth or eighth grade last year had a computer code so his test results could be computerized and sent to the teacher. An automated report tells what the child's weaknesses are, what his strengths are, what needs to be emphasized, and what work should be done. And we're going to do the same thing for this year's high school graduates.

We're building schools like crazy. The President has ordered schools and schools and schools and schools—everywhere. We've been inaugurating, on average, two to three schools a week. And now the President's ordered the construction of about 200 more schools. I think that by 1995, if this construction rhythm is kept, we will be able to house most of the children.

Q How will you be able to provide them with teachers?

A With the salary increases that we have had and with the recognition being given to teachers, we hope that the motivation for new teachers to enter the system will increase. And as it does, we will have enough teachers. People that abandoned the system are starting to come back because we are paying higher salaries.

To continue our previous discussion about results, let me also tell you about the school breakfast program and what that means for a poor country like the Dominican Republic. When I came to post, I was informed that the school breakfast program for 100,000 children in the frontier of the southwest, the poorest region of the country, was going to be discontinued because the North Americans were going to stop the food aid program. For most of those children, breakfast is the only meal they have each day: rice, beans, oil, and flour. It provides more than half the proteins and calories they need. It peeps the children up, and they are enthusiastic about what they're doing in school. The teacher can capture their attention much more easily than if they have nothing in their stomachs.

I ran to AID and said, "You can't do this to me. You have invested in me. You just can't stop food aid when I come into power. Give me a chance." So they extended the program until February 28, 1994. On the 1st of March, the European Economic Community took over with 100,000 rations a day.

Meanwhile, at the donors' table in Paris last June, we got the attention

of the food program of the United Nations. In May they approved a multi-million dollar grant for food rations to be provided on a declining basis over six years, at which time the Government of the Dominican Republic will be totally responsible.

Q You've obviously gotten everybody's attention. You've created a momentum in the Dominican Republic for education. How do you now sustain it? How do you now keep education at the forefront of the national agenda?

A I am proud to say that even the opposition leaders have said that the Plan Decenal is also their educational plan, that, should they come to power, they will continue what I have begun.

If President Balaguer wants me to keep my post, we're talking about an extra four or four and one-half more years going in the same direction. I'd bet my neck that in five years, the country is going to be a different country because of what we have already achieved in education. I'm not a politician, but I have political advisors and I listen to them, especially to the ex-President of the Dominican Republic. Most important, I have the President's ear, and I talk to him. I am committed to this post for the future of the Dominican Republic. I am committed to the people, and I want them to have the same kind of life that, through education, I have been able to have.

The representative of the European Economic Commission said recently in the Dominican Republic, "If you are in education, you have to have commitment, you have to have enthusiasm, and you have to have passion. And this is why I believe education here is a success."

Q Besides that, are there other things contributing to the success of educational "transformation," as you prefer to call it, in the Dominican Republic?

A I have a lot of things to be proud of. First, the team I have been able to create. Ninety percent of the high-level officers in the Ministry of Education used to work at other jobs at night. Every one of them has now resigned his evening job and is dedicating mornings, afternoons, and nights to the Ministry. Of course, I am paying five and six times their former salaries so they don't have to go to the university to work!

Second is the media support, which has been very, very important. When you have the media in your favor and they recognize what you are trying to do for the country, that is a source of inspiration.

Third is the way the private sector has responded. When I don't have

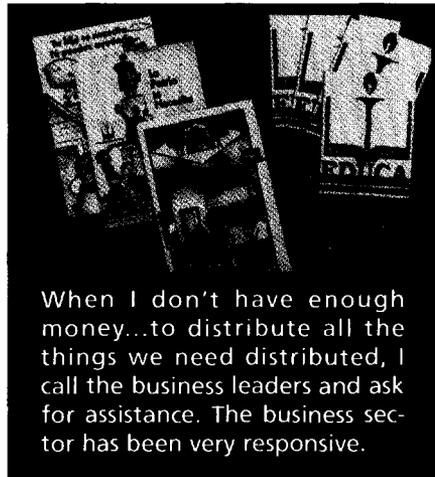
enough money, for example, to distribute all the things we need distributed to schools, I call the business leaders and ask for assistance. The business sector has been very responsive, especially so because someone from their sector is managing education.

Q How do you keep the media on your side?

A I've been honest. I tell the truth and the media knows. If we make a mistake, I am the first one to come out and tell the country that we've made a mistake and that it's going to be corrected this way. The media appreciates that.

When I came to this post, I declared at a press conference that I would never let the media down, that I know how important they are in a democratic society, and that telling the truth at all times was going to be my model in my relations with them. And I have kept my word.

Q Given your success, other countries may look to you for answers. What advice will you give them about educational reform, or transformation?



When I don't have enough money...to distribute all the things we need distributed, I call the business leaders and ask for assistance. The business sector has been very responsive.

What lessons have you learned?

A I have been disgusted for the last 20 years with the irrelevant things being taught in the schools of the Dominican Republic. Advances in technology and science have not entered the classroom. We do not have computers in public schools as they do in Costa Rica.

In the curriculum transformation—which is bigger than reform—that we have undertaken, we will be teaching relevant matters. For example, one main source of income for the Dominican Republic is tourism. We are famous for our beaches and monuments. This year we will have more than 2.3 million tourists visiting the Dominican Republic. To continue to foster tourism, we must be able to speak other languages. Thus we plan to add language studies to the curriculum.

It is important that curriculum transformation bring about a new education for the children. Teachers will be better trained to teach things relevant to one's life. I don't want children to come out of school at the end of the eighth grade not knowing what to do in life. I want them to be productive. If they are not productive, what was the purpose of education?

My advice to Latin America is that curriculum reforms, or curriculum transformations, have to occur. In Latin America, the revolution has one name, and it's education—education that is relevant, education that is of quality, education that fights and defeats poverty, education that leads to a better life.

That's my message.



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