Education and Social Justice Project
INTERNATIONAL SUMMER RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS 2013

A COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE RESEARCH, TEACHING, AND SERVICE AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

About the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service

The Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service (CSJ), founded in 2001, seeks to advance justice and the common good through promoting and integrating community-based research, teaching, and service by collaborating with diverse partners and communities. CSJ works within three key areas: community and public service, curriculum and pedagogy, and research. Through such critical and engaged work, Georgetown builds on its tradition of academic excellence and contributes in singular ways to the Jesuit ideal of justice education and action “for the glory of God and the well-being of humankind.”
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INTRODUCTION

This report reflects on the fourth year of the Education and Social Justice Project, which provided four Georgetown University students with fellowships to travel to Argentina, Cambodia, Peru, and Poland to conduct in-depth examinations of innovative educational initiatives, with a focus on the work of Jesuit institutions.

We are learning more every day about the deep connections between global challenges of poverty and education. Only through better access to education will the world’s poor be able to seize opportunities in an increasingly global economy. While policy analysts have documented the widespread failure of governments to meet this imperative, we still know relatively little about successful local efforts led by religious communities to advance economic and social development through education. In order to engage Georgetown undergraduates and build knowledge in this critical area, two Georgetown University centers—the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and the Center for Social Justice Research, Teaching, and Service—created the Education and Social Justice Project in early 2010.

Under faculty guidance, the Education and Social Justice fellows gather information through interviews, analyze best practices, and share their reports and conclusions with a wider global audience. The project is made possible through the generous support of Rodney Jacob (MSB’86, JD’89) and other members of the Georgetown community.

During its fourth year, the project awarded fellowships to four students who spent three weeks with institutions engaged in efforts to promote social justice through education. Sarah Baran traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina to research one of the country’s first microfinance institutions. In Cambodia, Annie Dale partnered with the Apostolic Prefecture in Battambang to examine its efforts to reduce school dropout rates through innovative family support mechanisms. Nicholas Dirago researched the ethos and pedagogy of Fe y Alegría and the College of the Immaculate Conception in Lima, Peru, with a focus on socioeconomic integration in educational spaces. Elisabeth Lembo traveled to Krakow, Poland to explore the revival of Jesuit education in the former communist country.

During the project’s first three years, students traveled to the following countries to conduct research: Kenya, Philippines, Chile, India, South Africa, El Salvador, Bolivia, Uruguay, Uganda, and France. Full reports and interview transcripts for all three years are available on the project website: http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/esj.

The Education and Social Justice Project is administered by Erin Coleman of the Berkley Center. Andria Wisler of the Center for Social Justice and Katherine Marshall of the Berkley Center serve as academic advisors.
ARGENTINA: PROTAGONIZAR
SARAH BARAN (C’14)

OVERVIEW

In June 2013, Sarah Baran, a senior Government major in Georgetown College with a minor in Education, Inquiry, and Justice, partnered with a small microfinance foundation located in San Miguel, an impoverished area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Protagonizar, founded by the Jesuits in 1999, offers loans to those who otherwise would not have access to credit. As part of her research, Sarah conducted interviews with the organization’s founders, its current employees, and the entrepreneurs who receive the loans. Her research focuses on how the foundation works to promote economic and personal development through individual empowerment while simultaneously infusing values of financial literacy, solidarity, cooperation, and trust into the community.

PARTNER INSTITUTION: PROTAGONIZAR, SAN MIGUEL, ARGENTINA

Upon its founding in 1999, Protagonizar was one of the first microfinance organizations in Argentina. As a financial institution with distinct policies designed to promote personal relationships through group-based models, Protagonizar offers loans to local entrepreneurs, many of whom don’t have bank accounts and otherwise would not have access to credit in the under-developed province of San Miguel. Protagonizar addresses this issue by offering low-interest loans ranging from $50 to $3,000 on a weekly commitment return plan which spans ten weeks on average. The foundation began as a local project originating in the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de Lujan. Driven by the ambition of the residing pastor, Father Rodrigo Zarazaga, S.J., and six volunteers, the budding idea quickly developed into a foundation that has since expanded into four different branches and currently offers loans to over 1,300 people with a successful return rate of 97 percent. Protagonizar differs from other financial lending firms in that all but one of its employees are from, and live in, the very communities the organization serves. This allows for an important knowledge of the neighborhoods and more personal relationships with the entrepreneurs. Both of these elements are key factors vital to the success of the organization. Protagonizar’s mission is “to be a self-sustainable Foundation which, with efficiency and ethical and social responsibility, grants financing in a quick and timely way to those who want to leave poverty behind and do not have capital to develop their skills.” While it is clear that the access to liquidity produces tangible results, measured through personal, social, and economic development, the organization also systematically enriches the community in ways that are less visible. By creating a system that reinforces values such as financial literacy, solidarity, cooperation, and trust, Protagonizar
actively works to cultivate a seedbed for empowerment. In this way, Protagonizar works at the intersection of education and social justice, as it eases the path for individuals to pursue and accomplish their goals.

This report offers a brief background of the current economic situation in Argentina followed by an explanation of how microfinance works to address deficiencies regarding access to liquidity. It next outlines how Protagonizar operates according to its mission, the positive impacts the organization has had on the community, and its current and future challenges. The report concludes with an examination of the role of education and faith in Protagonizar’s work.

INTRODUCTION

Argentina is a country full of cultural wealth—from its expression of music and the arts to its rich geographical diversity that spans from the peaks of Andes to the frozen glaciers of Patagonia, dotted with cattle farms, vineyards, and soy crops in between. However, the country also has an economic history that oscillates between bouts of widespread prosperity and crippling depression, the most recent being the economic crash of 2001. During this time, in the more impoverished cities on the outskirts of the capital like San Miguel, where the four different branches of Protagonizar are located, the situation grew worse. As Father Rod Zarazaga, S.J., the founder of Protagonizar, recalls, “unemployment was around 60 percent and people were starving. We were sure we had to do something. The basic needs here are always twice that of the national level.”

Barrio Mítre, where the first branch of Protagonizar was founded and still exists today, is a shantytown that sprang up as the cost of living within the city limits became unattainable. María Yapura, the senior administrator for agencies Mítre and Marílo, comments on the demographics of the neighborhood: “The population is lower working class, where many work as maids, garbage cleaners, taxi and bus drivers, security guards, street merchants, and police officers in central Buenos Aires but cannot afford to live there, and so travel by train to get into the city and back. Early in the morning and late at night you will see them pass by, overcrowded and packed with people, leaning out the doors.” Barrio Mítre lacks secure infrastructure and access to public resources is limited. As a result, inadequate waste disposal and an outdated centralized sewage system create an excess of trash that floods the unpaved streets. Water pools in the muddy streets, debris piles in the gutters, and stray dogs weave among the buildings. The housing conditions reflect the wages of its inhabitants. While some have brick walls, floors, running water, and electricity, others are constructed from whatever material is available: cardboard, sheet metal, tarp, recycled wood, or fencing.

The poverty is re-enforced in a cycle of underperforming schools, weak institutions, and a lack of economic activity. “The people that work and live here are accustomed to the government providing for them and supporting them financially. The assistance creates a relationship of dependency, one that is difficult to confront,” Yapura explains. Moreover, “it’s dangerous. There is a lot of crime, violence, drug trafficking, and robberies—all because people are desperate.” As an alternative, many families look to sustain themselves through unofficial small businesses, re-selling merchandise from vendors or opening food stands. Often, these profits supplement a regular income to cover costs. However, without access to liquidity and formal training, these small businesses face severe limitations.

Microfinance is a term that describes a specific model of offering financial services to such small businesses. Father Rod Zarazaga, S.J. discovered the concept of microfinance through reading Muhammad Yunus’ Towards a World without Poverty, which offers a financial model that utilizes personal relationships and group-based accountability to promote local economic activity...
through small loans. Inspired by Yunus’ work, Father Zarazaga began organizing people and resources to implement this practice in his own parish in Argentina. As he recalls: “I was looking for something closer to the Jesuit ideal of promoting the poor because the assistance the church was giving was all about food handouts, which are important because people need to eat, but it was not changing the reality.”

In Mitré, principal finance exchanges are completed in cash, and bank accounts are rare. Thus, the population falls vulnerable to pago darios—groups that offer unmanageable interest rates as high as 700 percent on loans. Unfortunately, loans outside of this context are scarce. “The people here are used to being subsidized by the government and at first even the concept of borrowing a loan is difficult. Here, people will borrow money and then return it, but they return it because they are pressured to through threats and violence. These are the only two forms of finances: from the government that you do not have to pay back, or loans from people on the streets where if you do not pay back...well you do not have an option: if you do not want to be hurt, you have to pay back,” comments Mariel Ybañaz, a credit assessor for Agency Mitré. “We live in a world that is far from Utopia. In a country like Argentina, where there is a lot of poverty and people live dependent on the government, the idea of a credit or loan organized and run the way we do is crazy. People are not accustomed to this idea and when we first started we were something new in Argentina,” continues Yapura.

THEORIES AND POLICIES OF MICROFINANCE AT PROTAGONIZAR

Since its founding, Protagonizar has expanded to four branches: Mitré, Marílo, Santa Bridgia, and Teresa Brogan, and now employs six credit assessors, two administrators, two agency managers, and a senior manager to cover the four agencies. Its growth and sustained success can be attributed in part to its guiding policies and their implementation. These policies have been modified since their original conception to ensure that the entrepreneurs receiving loans are capable of repayment, determined through approval requisites, evaluations, and relationships with Protagonizar employees.

Types of loans

Protagonizar offers several types of loans with payment plans that range between eight to 14 weeks, with ten weeks as the average. The most common type is the solidarity loan, given to groups of four to six people. Individual loans are issued on a case-by-case basis after a member has already received several solidarity loans and the microbusiness is significantly robust. Once an individual has received a loan, they may apply for a temporary loan to supplement the principal loan such as an active fixed credit loan, which provides for investment in a piece of equipment or machinery, or an integral accompaniment loan, which focuses on infrastructure, painting, shelves, or any type of maintenance work. For these temporary credits as well as the solidarity loans, the maximum amount each person can request is 7,500 pesos (approximately $1,500). Finally, individuals may apply for an opportunity credit, issued only for a period of three weeks and a maximum of half the person’s current credit, which enables business owners to purchase additional merchandise for anticipated holidays such as Christmas, Mother’s Day, or Easter.

The requirements

Protagonizar provides detailed and strict requirements for lending, resulting in an 80-85 percent application acceptance rate. In order to apply, the entrepreneur must have a business that has been in operation for at least six months. These micro-businesses fall into three categories: production, commercial, and service. The businesses served by Protagonizar are diverse, including small retail stores, kiosks, clothing stands, tutoring, basket weaving, pet stores, carpentry, a tattoo shop, hair salons, beekeeping, traditional wooden and leather crafts, food vendors, grocery stores, and hand-knit goods, among many others.

Beyond the six-month prerequisite, the applicant must form a solidarity group consisting of three to six people. None of the members can be from the same family or be dependent on a shared income. However, it is possible for one person to join an existing group so long as it does not exceed six people. “Within the group each member has to be no more than three blocks of distance away from another. This makes communication among the group easier and also easier for the staff to evaluate,” explains Miranda. Only one member of the group can be a traveling vendor who goes door to door or moves along street positions. The remaining members must sell from their house or from a rented location to ensure accountability so that business evaluations may be completed at a permanent residence. In addition, if one member cannot pay his/her weekly quota, the other members must make up the difference.

However, since Marílo and Teresa Brogan are relatively new branches, the policies are slightly modified. “[Teresa Brogan] has a different type of culture because it’s only been around for five years and has not had as much time to form a community. In 2001, there was a huge economic crisis

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in Argentina [...] During this time, it was easier to facilitate solidarity because more people were alone and looking for help—anything they could find to better their situation. People were more willing to join solidarity groups. The economic context was different. Now, it is more solitary, and the type of client is more individual,” explains Noelia Lugones, the credit assessor for Agency Teresa Brogan. In order to attract new entrepreneurs to these branches, individuals may apply alone; however, to incentivize solidarity groups, individual loans are capped and solidarity groups may include members living up to six blocks apart.

Once all the prerequisites have been met, the second step of application involves collecting personal data and data about the microbusiness. “The third step is an economic evaluation of the house and the business, accounting for the debts they have and current loans in order to measure the margin of capacity. During this process, a reliable neighbor is always consulted as a secondary reference,” continues Miranda.

**Economic evaluation**

Protagonizar’s credit assessors conduct thorough economic evaluations, beginning with a home visit, to determine the applicant’s payment capacity and potential quota options. The assessors calculate all operational costs of the business as well as its financial situation, including equipment, cash and bank savings, and outstanding debts—both those owed to the business and those the business owes to banks, non-governmental organizations, providers of merchandise, or moneylenders. The outstanding debts calculation is of particular importance, since a lack of liquidity often results in a distribution of informal loans among family, neighbors, and customers.

Family expenditures, such as food, clothing, health, education, transportation, and utility payments, as well as any additional income apart from the business in question, are also of importance to the credit assessors. Senior manager María Silvia Abalo explains that about “76 percent of our entrepreneurs are women. In many cases, she’s supporting two or three kids by herself,” and as a result qualifies to receive a monthly check from a program called Asignación Universal por Hijo (Universal Allocation for Each Child). Through this program mothers without legal work receive a monthly cash benefit per child for up to five children.

Protagonizar employees use a detailed calculation, taking into account both business and household expenses, to determine whether the applicant meets the financial requirements necessary for a loan. The sum of this financial assessment also determines the applicant’s weekly payment and percent of liability. Individuals enter into a contract in which their weekly payment is a maximum of 60 percent of their weekly capacity, thus preserving a 40 percent margin of error to allow for unexpected complications, including cases in which the group must cover the missed payments of one of their members.

In addition to the quantitative evaluation analysis, the credit assessors also verify the financial situation of each entrepreneur through a neighbor. Daniela Escudero, a credit assessor at Agency Santa Brigida, notes the importance of these interactions: “In some cases a small thing will be mentioned that might not seem important, but after we listen and see more of these situations you know what to look for and then you ask a little bit more.”

Protagonizar conducts periodic evaluations after issuing loans, as well as when a group or individual applies for loan renewal. “Thus far we are doing a good job with the evaluations because those in Mona, which is the period past when the final payment was due, with Protagonizar is less than the average market. Arrears for the average market are right around 5.5 percent and ours is 2.2 percent. In total it is 5.5 percent in Marilo and Teresa Brogan, which are the newest, but in Santa Brigida and Mitre it is lower which brings our total average down. Thus, the other newer branches can take more of a risk to draw in more entrepreneurs,” explains Abalo.

**Failure to repay a loan**

Before signing the loan contract, an individual must identify an item of value as a form of insurance for repayment. The item cannot be “a car or their house or another vital item. Sometimes it will be a refrigerator. Or if the loan is being used to purchase a new machine for their business then this item is used instead,” remarks Escudero. Protagonizar retains the right to claim the item if the loan is not repaid on time. However, the organization rarely follow through “because the people we work with are very poor and this is all they have” admits Escudero.

If an individual cannot make the weekly payment, she enters into a period of atras. If the entrepreneur has not already initiated communication with her credit assessor, the assessor will reach out directly. However, since the organization has a 97 percent positive return rate, these periods of atras rarely result in failure to repay the loan.

**The approval process**

The entire application process generally lasts one week. “Monday is the day when people first come seeking a loan.
Tuesday and Wednesday are evaluation days. Thursday is the day to sign and Friday is the commit meeting,” states Miranda. Every Friday a commit meeting is held, usually in Mitre, with the two branch managers, credit assessors, and the senior manager. In these meetings, each credit assessor presents the new credit petitions, explains their economic situations, and makes the case for approval. All in attendance have the opportunity to voice concerns, and the petition is either approved or rejected by the branch and senior managers. During these meetings, the senior manager also provides updates on Protagonizar’s portfolio, which determines the amount of liquidity available for loan distribution. All new entrepreneurs are always guaranteed their petition for a loan; however, existing loans are only increased depending on the organization’s liquidity.

SOLIDARITY WITH ENTREPRENEURS

Protagonizar has a remarkably high rate of repayment both because of its extensive approval and follow-up processes as well as its relationship with the community and entrepreneurs. All of the employees, except for the senior manager, live and grew up in the same neighborhoods they work in. “Our knowledge of the community is very important: we know which people are dangerous and the local area. All of this contributes to the accountability of the entrepreneurs. We know the name of each person and whatever things are happening to them in their lives,” shares Miranda.

More than knowledge of the community, they “have a commitment to the people,” as Mariel Ybañaz, one of the credit assessors for Mitre explains. “We share the same ideas and beliefs that we need to be alongside the people together with them as part of a family.” The relationship works both ways. As Juan Carlos Miranda testifies, “we are invited to birthday parties and family parties.” Maria Yapura explains how Protagonizar acts in solidarity with its entrepreneurs, in contrast to formal banks. “Here, we know them: their partner, their children, their family problems, and the progress they make. It’s a link that other institutions do not have. Other institutions have a paper, a contract, and nothing more. We have a different link.” Yapura also notes the difference between bank “clients” and Protagonizar’s “entrepreneurs”: “They say client because it’s a good list of names, but nothing more. We address those who borrow loans from us as entrepreneurs out of respect, and it also illustrates our relationship with them.”

The relationship between Protagonizar employees and their entrepreneurs extends far beyond the business transaction. Mariel Ybañaz elaborates on this mutual trust: “They always come here when there are problems. And the problems are not far and few. And they are not little either….in one day if I visit ten people, three of them will have something terrible to share, always, because we are working with people that are very vulnerable.” Cristina Coronel further highlights the significance of the Protagonizar employees from the entrepreneur standpoint: “their help is important because it is not only economical. It is important because they work alongside you, with the point of view that you are not alone. They have your back.”

Despite the importance and value rooted in these relationships, in order to maintain sustainability and continue offering loans, Protagonizar maintains a delicate balance between solidarity with its entrepreneurs and an adherence to its policies. “We are here to help the people, but issues such as the rate of interest and the amount of the credits are important to maintain even though there are people unable to borrow these small amounts. Our amounts are very small; however, the money is lent not
given. Sometimes you want to lower the rate to make it more accessible but then you would not be able to loan to other people. All the time we are constantly revising our policies and reviewing the rates of interest, the payment schedules. It is very dynamic work. [On this smaller scale,] everything has more weight. [Whether or not] I can pay ten pesos ($2) it makes a difference,” details Ybañaz.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

Protagonizar’s work positively impacts its communities in numerous ways. Beyond increased levels of production and growth of microbusinesses, reinvestment of profits contributes to improvements in the standard of living. According to the entrepreneurs, the first four items they invest in are food and basic needs, health, home improvement, and education. As Daniela Escudero, a credit assessor for Agency Santa Brigidia, explains, “after their businesses grow, the first thing people usually invest in is their house. They will fix the floor or sometimes they will be able to save enough to buy an actual house. This is what we try to help them do—work towards progress, officially in their businesses, but this of course also has effects on the quality of their life. If the family is deficient in something or if they want better education for their children then they will use the money to send their children to a private school instead of the public schools.”

According to Ybañaz, “We help women, which in turn has a huge impact on the family. They […] invest in better education and send their kids to a private school.” Rosa Maidana, a food vendor and loan recipient, articulates the effect, noting: “I did not have running water for four years, and now I have water. With my earnings I pay the bills of the house. Well, first and foremost it is for food—the basics that I need. Then, I pay for the light. My life now is different and so is the life of my family. My grandchildren have things that I could not have provided for my children. For example, look my little girl (grandchild) goes to a private school now. I help pay for that, for her uniform, and her books. Before she and all my children went to public schools […] Things like this were never available for my children.”

Education for the individual is also a central value of Protagonizar. The organization offers formal classes called Cuentas Claras (Clear Accounts), “where the goal is that they leave having a clear idea of the different types of costs they have to account for,” explains Yabañaz. Differing levels of education among the entrepreneurs makes this type of education a challenge, however. “Not everyone benefits from them, but for those who do, it is very productive and helps with their costs because they can visualize where the money is going,” notes Maximiliano Gomez. Coronel, an entrepreneur, exemplifies the positive impact of these classes. She notes: “I learned how to be more disciplined. We had to take a class on managing our finances, asking: do I have money: yes or no? How to know how much I have. How to save and grow. It is not easy, and it was not easy with a large family.”

The goal of Cuenta Claras, as well as Protagonizar as a whole, is to promote financial literacy. The entrepreneurs learn how institutions work, financial accountability, and methods for the allocation of money. Marcella Rocca, one of the entrepreneurs who owns and operates a pet shop, reveals, “honestly, before I started I did not know anything about business or selling, but my mom helped me and I started this. It has grown over the years and now I know more about where to buy the food from, what the deals are, what will sell and what will not sell, my costs, how I can reinvest, how to grow. I learned from Protagonizar how to produce things, keep control of my money, be more clean and organized in how to run my store.”

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The education offered through Protagonizar extends beyond financial literacy and includes a diffusion of values such as solidarity, cooperation, trust, and time management. Escudero
elaborates, “education has a strong role because people have to receive the credits in a group and they have to keep their promises with the group. They learn about the responsibility and solidarity of being together. If one is sick then the others have to help him recover in order to receive more credit. The promise to return the money exists so that this same money can be shared with another group. It is a cycle.”

María Yapura emphasizes: “The money for us is the means. It is not the end.” Protagonizar provides loans to ensure that its entrepreneurs meet their basic needs as well as grow their business. She states that its work, “is rooted in solidarity…We educate financially with rules and regulations that ensure that they complete their part of the deal, but all of this is only one part. Here, with Protagonizar, nothing is free. They borrow; they do not receive and in this manner they learn about their own capacities.”

Together, these two aspects of education—a formal understanding of systems, institutions, and financial literacy combined with values of trust, solidarity, and time management—provide the means for empowerment and personal development. “Our focus is on helping them realize the capacity they have in their businesses,” states Father Grassini, S.J. “It works to foster empowerment. It is the value of having something; this business is your own. Not just anyone has this capacity to have their own business because it takes a mountain of resilience to return and start anew when things do not work out. Moreover, it is the nature of business to be variable. Sometimes it works, and then there are other moments when it does not. The trust is more than just economic… It is more personal. When the entrepreneurs realize it is a mutual trust and that they need to care for the institute as well, they place value in maintaining this relationship,” confirms Yapura.

The promotion of education and solidarity with its entrepreneurs defines Protagonizar’s mission of social justice. According to the current president Father Grassini S.J., through work at the individual level, the organization, “works to create the possibility for those who have a project in their brain to modify their project to become a reality.” While Protagonizar’s work over the past fifteen years has had a visible impact on the communities it serves, the organization also clearly recognizes its limitations. Father Grassini acknowledges, “It is not going to eliminate poverty. Microcredit is not a miraculous cure for everything, but a force in favor of change, not only economic and personal, but social and political as well.”

Protagonizar strives toward fully developing human capabilities by working from the framework that first and foremost, “there are a set of opportunities for people: education, health, etc. We like to assume that this set of opportunities is a level playing field, but it is not, especially in developing countries. Social justice is leveling the field. We are hoping to level the field by providing access to credit. We often discriminate…or use the poor. Social justice is more about discovering and supporting the human being.” The organization’s founder, Father Zarazaga, S.J., explains the religious roots of the organization: “I do not think we can separate faith from social justice. Jesus’ message—his way of taking care of each other to fully develop all the human capabilities we have—is social justice.” This Christian conception of social justice lies at the heart of Protagonizar’s work.

“I sometimes wonder if we could have done it better, and if we are really reaching the poor and those who need it […] For many years the only question for me was ‘how should I assess what we are doing?’ which is hard to ask. Is this making an impact? What is the impact? How can we be sure? Yet, when you talk to someone who’s with Protagoinzar about it you will realize that we have helped many people. When you walk down the street and pass people or pass little businesses and can point out ‘he’s with us. He’s with us. He’s with us’ it is clear we have definitely had an impact and a positive one,” reflects Father Zarazaga S.J. Rosa Maidana, full of excitement and pride, agrees: “I have been living here for 30 years now, and my life changed when I started with Protagonizar. Protagonizar is everything. I cannot explain how much they have helped me.” Silvia Adriana, another entrepreneur, also describes the positive impact of the organization, noting: “I began with only a freezer and 200 pesos 12 years ago. Now I have 15 freezers, including two that I just bought recently. It has grown to be a big business. It is connected to the side of my house and there are about ten meters in the front and eight in the back. There are different windows, so people on the street can see what I am selling. We sell food, books, games, ice cream, perfume, and we bought a van for it.”

The employees have likewise benefited from their affiliation with Protagonizar. Juan Miranda comments, “Protagonizar is a part of my life. I do not only work here eight hours a day, but I have worked here for ten years contracted and 14 years in total. It is beautiful working as a team together. Beautiful. I love it.” María Lupan, who was one of the first employees, continues, “I am working here because I feel useful here. I am happy when someone says that now they can have a wall and are no longer as cold during the night because of my work. One thing, a basic need that can improve a situation, this is what ultimately makes me feel helpful.” The educational impact also reaches the employees, as Daniel Escudero reflects, “I am thankful to them for their own work because they have taught me things. When I see people who have persevered and came from lives that were very difficult, very hard, but now they have made a better life… It is inspiring. I admire the force they have to continue. I have
also learned a lot from them. I have my own little business where I teach dance classes. Dance has always been a big part of my life. I could never afford classes when I was younger but when I turned 15 I started taking classes and was part of a team, dancing in theatres, competitions, shows….This is my dream and the project I am working on—to have my own dance studio and be able to devote more time to it."

**THE CHALLENGES**

While Protagonizar continues to expand and improve, it still faces numerous obstacles. The “primary obstacle is financial,” explains Cintia Farias. “Given that their primary source of funding comes from donations, there is always a consistent need to be soliciting for more in order to preserve the functioning of the organization, an effort that takes a significant amount of time and energy,” Father Grassini, S.J. elaborates. Not only does this affect the operating costs of the foundation in terms of salaries and bills, but it also directly impacts the quantity of each loan offered. “We are constantly asking ‘Do we have money? Yes or no?’ During the holidays it is the worst because it is the time of the year when the entrepreneurs are asking for the highest amounts of loans to invest in merchandise and we never have enough to accommodate all of the requests. […] We never are short money to the point where we have to deny a request for a current loan; rather, what usually happens is sometimes we have to deny those who request for an increase in their current loan,” continues Cintia Farias. The consistent flux in donations and requests for loans creates a climate of uncertainty that makes financial strategic planning a constant challenge.

In addition to maintaining a portfolio robust enough to cover the increases in loans that the entrepreneurs request, Protagonizar is also fighting a battle of inflation against the Argentinian peso. “This year there were two million pesos of loans, and three million in growth above inflation is needed to stay sustainable,” explains María Silvia Abalo. “We are constantly fighting an inflation war and yet are able to only raise our interest to match the inflation increases.” She further notes, “Our entrepreneurs ask for more money, and with a 25 percent inflation rate right now, we need to give them larger sums if only to increase the real value of what they can buy with the money. This increase does not even include growth for their business.” The well being of the economy also impacts the success of the microbusinesses. While economic slowdown impacts all levels and sectors of work, small enterprises are often the first to feel the blow and the hardest hit.

“Our entrepreneurs grow and then return to our office, expecting to be able to continue to sustain their growth. However, to be able to sustain their growth the agency needs to grow in at least two people by end of the year to keep up with the numbers,” continues Abalo. This need for growth presents another tension, as it requires maintaining a balance between the foundation’s financial stability and its continued work in service of the poor. “Thus, we need to keep a balance between those entrepreneurs that take out large loans in order to account for those that take out the little ones. We want to grow, but growing through assisting people we want to assist: mothers, old people, those that have practically nothing. We don’t want to change the people we assist,” Abalo elaborates.

According to Noelia Soledad, “another challenge is achieving auto sustainability—which means taking in enough money to cover our own costs—of each agency.” As a whole, Protagonizar has been auto sustainable since March 2012; however, the two more established branches Mitre and Santa Brigida are financially covering their own costs as well as those of the two newer agencies. A primary goal of the foundation is to enlarge the number of entrepreneurs in Teresa Brogan and Marilo so that all four branches are auto sustainable.

The remaining challenges are embedded in the nature of the organization’s work. “The conditions of the work environment and its operative problems in terms of light, electricity, water, transportation, and security are an obstacle due to our location in the center of San Miguel. We share the same problems as our entrepreneurs, which at times is a sacrifice to the efficiency of the organization, but at the same time it was a conscious decision to be here located in the same vicinity and community,” explains Father Grassini. Small adjustments such as new bikes for traveling to the credit evaluations would make a significant difference in terms of overall efficiency. Mariel Ybañaz elaborates on the difficulty of the working conditions, noting that the offices are cold during the winter and overheated during the summer. “Our offices also need repairs. Mitre is the only one that technically meets the legal standards and the rest of our offices we just say are part of Mitre.” Protagonizar also rents its agencies, though it hopes to own them in the future.

Moreover, “there are also a lot of improvements we could use with our technology and system. For example, we do all the projections of loan development manually. These time consuming tasks divert energy and time that could be better spent, and there is always much more work than we can do. Our systems manager lives in Nicaragua. He repairs it at a distance but it is not easy through Skype. There are things
we would like to change. For instance, there are studies we would like to do such as measuring our impact. We could use these results to see in what directions we need to improve and also as evidence for our donors,” expands Abalo.

Finally, as with any organization undergoing changes in management and expansion, “there are also some obstacles with group dynamics amongst the workers. We are a little fractured and have some problems with communication,” Mariel Ybañaz admits.

THE ROLE OF FAITH IN PROTAGONIZAR

“Our location here ties back to the Jesuits and Protagonizar is the fruit of the parish. The roots go back to the Catholicism and fundamentally, Protagonizar is 100 percent from the Church,” Father Grassini articulates. The unique history of this microfinance organization is inextricably tied to the Catholic Church, and its mission embodied in the organization's structure, policies, and work. Furthermore, many of the employees have some connection to the Chapel of Nuestra Señora de Lujan. “Almost all those who work here have a connection with the Church,” offers Mariel. Consequently, many of the employees are of strong faith and see their work as a reflection of something greater than themselves. “God needs help, a hand to work in progressing in his project, and this is my role,” shares Escudero. Yapura echoes similar sentiments, “In my life, it is central. For me, God, is the reason that I am working here.”

Nevertheless, every employee is adamant that “with Protagonizar, it is our intent to keep faith separate. We do not work to transmit the faith,” voices Noelia Soledad. Protagonizar is not created to evangelize nor does it discriminate against the different or nonexistent faiths of its entrepreneurs. Instead, “faith is more in us here, in each person, and the way we work to achieve solidarity. There is no pressure or rule for the people, the entrepreneurs, to have a faith. There are many people who do not have a faith because the reality here is very strong. They are sick, with more than the flu, with chronic diseases, with cancer, things that are very strong. There are houses with nothing but the earth as the floor. Instead, faith works in the root of the idea that they can grow through the credit we offer, with a cost that is very low. The people need for others to grow in the community too,” Escudero explains.

“Faith is transmitted in the actions of Protagonizar. The entire process, the structure, and the formalities as an institution, promotes cooperation, social awareness of people, solidarity—all these values are implicit. There is no explicit role of faith, but rather it’s layered in the way the organization is run. We are not looking to offer assistance in the paternalistic mindset that if you are poor you cannot pay. In fact, it is the opposite; you are chosen to receive a loan because you can do this,” elaborates Juan Miranda.

CONCLUSION

Protagonizar is an example of a community-based initiative organized to address the urgent need for liquidity among microbusiness owners. It emerged as one possible solution to usher in social change—in terms of more financial markets, higher levels of economic activity, and the expansion of private businesses—but also as a more systemic approach to social justice through a formal understanding of systems, institutions, and financial literacy combined with values of trust, solidarity, and time management. The education Protagonizar provides its entrepreneurs leads to personal empowerment and economic development. Furthermore, the deep ties between education and social justice are embodied in the foundation’s name. Discussing its christening, Father Zarazaga recalls, “When we were talking about it […] we realized it was exactly that—they have to be the protagonizars of their own lives.”
CRITISNA CORONEL, ENTREPRENEUR ARTISANAL

Can you tell me more about when you first started your microfinance family business?

I had all types of difficulties. Imagine a woman responsible for five children, alone, and living in a place with lots of drugs, alcohol, children in the streets that do nothing or go to school and still do nothing. I would not accept this for my children. The only way to grow, to improve, to have a future is through education [...] so I started as an artisanal.

It was through this that I was able to support my family—first with food, clothes and books. Now my children are grown, and I have a daughter of forty years. She is a psychologist. She earned her degree here (in Buenos Aires) in la Universidad de Buenos Aires. My second oldest daughter is 39 and a lawyer. She also started in la Universidad de Buenos Aires, but she finished in a private university: Tecnica en Francia specializing in social rights. My third daughter studied art in a public university and my niece, too, studied art and now is an art teacher in the south, in Patagonia. All of them studied. I always placed that as the first objective. Study. Study. Study. It was my policy to give them the basics and what they needed to survive."

Moreover, I wanted to pass on the consciousness and awareness to work to create a more equal society. This is what I believe is the most important for the future, in addition to the basics of health and education. When I have time later in the afternoons, I teach in my office a class for kids on how to create these artisanal crafts. I do it because this form of work is also a way to promote the values of our country, and I want to pass that on.

MARIA ROSA MAIDANA, ENTREPRENEUR

Why did you first begin selling tortillas?

Well, one day—this is many, many years ago—I had just separated from my husband. I used to be married, but it was a bad situation, very bad, and so I had to leave. So, I left, and when I left at the time I was pregnant with my seventh child. I did not have any money and I did not know what to do, so I started walking—you always find solutions to your problems when you are walking—and I was thinking about what I could do—because I had six kids and was about to have seven. As I was walking, I saw a little cat and while I was looking at it I thought: “No one sells tortillas. And so I will sell tortillas.” I did not have the equipment to make tortillas but I thought I could borrow what I needed from a neighbour or friend. I talked to a neighbour, explained my situation and my idea. She gave me a little money. I bought what I needed and started.

When I started I had no idea what I was doing. I had never sold anything before and I did not have any experience. All I thought was: I have these little children and I have to work hard. Every day, in the morning and in the evening, I worked all the time. I learned. I would go out to the corner, with my daughter who was little at the time and both of us would have bags in our hands.

Can you share a little about your experience as part of a solidarity group?

I am in a solidarity group, and I am the coordinator. Each has their own microbusiness and sells different things, for instance clothes or flowers. Working in a group to receive loans is a lot of responsibility. At first we would get together on Mondays, but the time was too short between the pay date and our meeting. For example, we did not have enough time if there was an emergency—because an emergency is the only reason you cannot pay—but they happen more often than you would think. We learned and now we get together on Sunday. Now we are more collected and organized. It is much better. We always pay on time.

RODRIGO ZARAZAGA, S.J., FOUNDER AND FORMER PRESIDENT OF PROTAGONIZAR

What were some of the obstacles you faced in the beginning?

We weren’t sure if we would find people with the skills, good ideas, or the will to work and prosper. At the beginning we didn’t have many people coming and looking for loans. Or people were looking for loans, but they were suspicious and thought ‘how it is possible that you’ll give us this loan with this low interest?’ They thought it was a trick because there are plenty who cheat them with crazy interest rates or promises afterwards. The church helped us in the beginning when we did not have a lot of clients because those that knew us in the church knew it was safe. Then, word spread and now we have more people than money to give out, but in the beginning it was the opposite. The most important advertisement for us is mouth to mouth.
Donations were also difficult to find. Inflation is very high in Argentina. We live in cycles of poverty. Argentina’s economy changes by the hour. It shrinks when we have nothing at all especially in construction. There are not many high quality jobs; rather, many are low skill level positions and as a whole the country is lacking in education. In 2001, it was hard to get donations and grants. We received ten or 15 donations from Argentina, from different people that found us in the news. Then, $10,000 was donated from professional foundations in the United States, which allowed it to grow more significantly.

Can you please share with me what elements were vital from the beginning that then made a difference in the setting the framework and ensuring the success of Protagonizar?

All of us were good friends. We were a community. Everyone who was helping make Protagonizar a reality—Juan, Damian, Maria Lujan, Analia, Isabel, and the other volunteers shared the same goal, but it was also fun. We would have barbeques and parties. Really, we all knew each other from different pastoral activities, and the work of Protagonizar was born there. It was important that we were friends. We enjoyed being together and part of the success is from a combination of talents. I would know someone, like Juan, and his hard work and the background experience he could bring to the table. So, I approached him about the idea. Then a friend of mine, my partner, he has a background in business. My father, he took care of the legal aspect. He was an accountant, but he knew a lot about the legal process.

We had a lot of freedom too. The thought came from a book, but we were not following anyone. It was our own implementation. We were among the first micro-finance group starting in Argentina when we first began and so that helped in getting us a lot of publicity from the newspapers. At the start, we had nothing like we do now. We only had a little notebook, no computer, no heat.

Maria Silvia Abalo
Senior Manager of Protagonizar

Silvia Guilianai Adriana
Entrepreneur and Store Owner

Cristina Coronel
Entrepreneur, Artisanal Producer

Debora Dillmann
Entrepreneur, Clothing Vendor

Daniela Escudero
Credit Assessor for Santa Brigada Agency of Protagonizar

Cintia Farias
Administrator for Santa Brigada and Teresa Brogan Agencies of Protagonizar

Father Ariel Grassini, S.J.
President of Protagonizar

Maximiliano Gomez
Credit Assessor for Mitre Agency of Protagonizar

Alex Jimenez
Entrepreneur, Commercial Kiosk

Matilde Lencinas
Entrepreneur, Vendor Cosmetics

Noella Lugoneas
Credit Assessor for Teresa Brogan Agency of Protagonizar

Juan Carlos Miranda
Manager of Mitre and Marilo Agencies and Founding Member of Protagonizar

Marcela Rocca
Entrepreneur, Commercial Pet Shop

Maria Yapura
Administrator for Mitre and Marilo Agencies of Protagonizar

Father Rodrigo Zarazaga, S.J.
Founder of Protagonizar
Cambodia:
APOSTOLIC PREFECTURE OF BATTAMBANG
Margot “Annie” Dale (C’14)

OVERVIEW

Margot “Annie” Dale is a senior in Georgetown College with majors in Government and Spanish and a minor in Justice and Peace Studies. Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, Annie studied abroad in Buenos Aires, Argentina during her junior year and travelled throughout South America. In May 2013, she traveled to Cambodia to conduct research on the high dropout rates among rural Cambodian youth. Annie visited schools and conducted interviews with teachers, students, government workers, and volunteers during her three weeks in Battambang. Her research focuses on the particular challenges to childhood education in rural Cambodia and the innovative solutions developed by the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang to promote school attendance through familial support mechanisms.

PARTNER INSTITUTION:
APOSTOLIC PREFECTURE OF BATTAMBANG

The Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang is a territorial subdivision of the Roman Catholic Church in Cambodia. The prefecture extends over an area of 80,430 km² of northwestern Cambodia, covering the provinces of Battambang, Pursat, Kompong Chhnang, Kompong Thom, Siem Reap, Preah Vihear, Oddar Meanchey, Banteay Meanchey and Pailin. The prefecture is led by its Apostolic Prefect, Father Enrique Figaredo, commonly known as Father Kike. Father Kike is a Jesuit priest from Asturias, Spain who has been deeply involved in the life of the Cambodians beginning with his work in the Thai-Cambodia refugee camps. Known as the Bishop of Wheelchairs, Father Kike founded the Arrupe Center in Battambang and promotes development all over the diocese through projects in education, adult vocational training, infrastructure, and relief aid. The Arrupe Center serves as a headquarters for the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang and is home to the offices of many of Kike’s development teams.

The Spanish NGO SAUCE, (Solidaridad, Ayuda y Unión Crean Esperanza or Solidarity, Assistance, and Unity Create Hope), supports Father Kike and his diverse humanitarian assistance projects in Cambodia. SAUCE, like Father Kike, is dedicated to improving the lives of Cambodia’s most marginalized individuals. The organization’s efforts are extensive and varied, tackling issues in education, infrastructure, health, disabilities, agriculture, and emergency assistance.

INTRODUCTION

The Kingdom of Cambodia is home to majestic remnants of an ancient history. Grandiose temples such as Angkor Wat mix with French colonial architecture in the major cities of this
small, picturesque country located in the southern portion of the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. Formerly known as the Khmer Empire, Cambodia flourished from the first century CE for over 600 years, allowing successive kings to dominate much of Southeast Asia and accumulate immense power and wealth.

In sharp contrast to its legendary past, for much of the twentieth century Cambodia was known less for majesty than for bitter and turbulent politics and stalled development. However, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, Cambodia saw a period of rapid development highlighted by high economic growth, increasing levels of foreign investment, and regular parliamentary elections. In fact, from 2010 to 2011, Cambodia benefited from an annual GDP growth rate exceeding seven percent. Increased economic growth has contributed to a sharp reduction in poverty, increased access to healthcare, and an improvement in the number and quality of Cambodia’s schools.

However, Cambodia’s poorest and most isolated communities still face significant challenges. Some 23 percent of Cambodians live below the accepted international poverty line of $1.25 per day, and 90 percent of them are in rural areas. Most of these families depend on agriculture for their livelihood, but at least 12 percent of people are landless. Small-scale farmers practice agriculture at the subsistence level, using traditional methods and yielding low productivity. Two thirds of the country’s 1.6 million rural households face seasonal food shortages each year, and rice alone accounts for as much as 30 percent of household expenditures. Rural people are constantly looking for work or other income-generating activities, which are mainly temporary and poorly paid.

These challenges are especially relevant to the people living in the northwest province of Battambang. The province, located some 350 kilometers west of Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh, is composed of 799 mostly rural villages, and is home to over one million people. Battambang is the country’s premier rice producing province, earning the name “Cambodia’s rice bowl.” Although the region does export large quantities of rice to neighboring provinces, much of the rice farming in Battambang is used as subsistence for farming families.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, international NGOs flocked to Cambodia to address the country’s high poverty levels and stunted development. At one point, Cambodia was home to the highest number of NGOs per capita in the world. While in the past, these organizations focused on de-mining efforts and HIV/AIDS prevention, the trend has shifted toward a focus on unemployment and education. Hom Toeur, principal of Don Bosco Battambang, explains, “the government does not have many funds to support education. So that’s why many of the NGOs come and they focus on education to support what the government doesn’t have, such as materials and school buildings.” In fact, less than ten percent of Cambodian villages contain a secondary school. Among the organizations tirelessly striving to improve education standards in Cambodia is the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang supported by Father Kike and SAUCE.

A TROUBLED PAST

The influx of NGOs and foreign aid in the 1990s and 2000s was, in part, an effort to rebuild Cambodia after decades of war and destruction. Gaining independence from French colonialism in 1953, Cambodia began its independent history with the administration of Prince Sihanouk. This administration would eventually be known for its presence during the American war in Vietnam, during which American forces heavily bombed Cambodian territory near the Vietnam border. The 1970 military coup that ousted Prince Sihanouk would serve as the entryway to one of the most brutal dictator regimes in history—the Khmer Rouge.

The Khmer Rouge’s popularity continued to grow from the mid-1960s until 1975 when, under the orders of the Paris-educated Pol Pot, the streets of Phnom Penh and other major cities were evacuated by force, sending the entire urban population into the countryside to work as farmers. The Khmer Rouge was on its way to reshaping Cambodian society to fit a model that Pol Pot had conceived as communist perfection by means of a brutal genocide.

The Cambodian genocide of 1975 to 1979, in which approximately 1.7 million people lost their lives (21 percent of the country’s population), was one of the worst human tragedies of the last century. The Khmer Rouge regime headed by Pol Pot combined extremist ideology with ethnic animosity and a diabolical disregard for human life to produce repression, misery, and murder on a massive scale.

The Khmer Rouge specifically targeted the educated class and regarded traditional education with undiluted hostility. After the fall of Phnom Penh, the regime executed thousands of teachers and transformed schools into political prisons. Cambodians who had been educators prior to 1975 survived only by hiding their identities, and a new education system replaced the old. Aside from teaching basic mathematical skills and literacy, the major goal of the new system was to instill revolutionary values in the Cambodian youth. For a regime at war with most of Cambodia’s traditional values, it was necessary
to create a gap between the values of the young and the values of the non-revolutionary old.

EDUCATION TODAY

Today, almost 40 years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia still suffers from the devastating effects of the genocide's destruction. Pol Pot wiped out whole generations of people, leaving a country with 68 percent of its population under the age of 30. Most of the country's youth are second or third generation offspring of survivors of the genocide. According to Cambodian educators, the history of the recent genocide has not been fully communicated to the current youth, partly because history books were manipulated to create support for the government in power. After the Khmer Rouge's fall and into the 1990s, students were taught limited reading and writing skills, and most of their knowledge about the genocide was from their teachers' first hand accounts.

Under the government's jurisdiction, public education is dictated by state budgets and constraints. Cambodia allocated around nine percent of its annual budget in 2010 to improving the quality of the education system. However, 83 percent of the funds were allocated to servicing remunerations and operation expenses, leaving little funds for schools' facilities maintenance or providing proper teaching materials like computers, textbooks, and paper. Cambodia also faces a shortage of competent trained teachers, with 58,776 teachers teaching 2,311,107 primary school students and only 27,240 teachers teaching 637,629 lower secondary students. The very high teacher-to-pupil ratio results in deep inefficiencies and children “falling through the cracks.” In addition, over 60 percent of the primary and secondary school teachers received at most secondary education, compromising the quality of their teaching.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

Considering all of Cambodia's persistent challenges in providing quality youth education, the 2000s have proved to be a time of remarkable growth and improvement. USAID data shows that in 2011, primary school enrollment reached 96 percent of the school-age population. However, the actual attendance level of the enrolled students is only 85 percent, suggesting the difficulty in actually getting the children to school every day. Moreover, UNICEF reports that, while school participation for both male and females in Cambodia is about 85 percent for primary schools, secondary school attendance is at only 44 percent.

Despite the challenges that the Cambodian education system faces in providing quality education, adequately supporting teachers, and resisting institutional corruption, educators
across Cambodia share a widely-echoed concern: the high drop-out rate of students. As the principle of Don Bosco School Battambang laments, “my biggest concern is that they will drop out…and not get the quality education they deserve.”

Although each child’s educational trajectory is dependent upon unique personal and familial circumstances, three prominent, non-mutually exclusive factors contribute to the staggering dropout rates in Cambodian youth specifically between primary and secondary schools.

**Lack of parental support**

The older generations of Cambodians are still coping with the physical, economic, and psychological implication of their or their parents’ direct suffering in the Cambodian genocide. This residual damage is compounded by the fact that many Cambodian adults never had the opportunity to receive an education past the primary school level, and results in a severe lack of support for education in the younger generations. Parents living in poor, rural villages who have never received an education often prefer for their own children to stay home and work in the rice paddies, in brick or clothing factories, or in small family-run convenience stores. Due to extreme poverty, many parents are “unable to look into the future and recognize the long-term benefit of their child receiving an education.” Instead, they focus on the short-term monetary needs of the family.

In fact, not only do some Cambodian parents discourage their children from attending school, but they also shame them into believing that school is a waste of time, a shame to the family, and a sign of selfishness. Sun Arm, the leader of a rice scholarship and microfinance project with the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang, marvels at the home situations of some of the children she works with: “Do you believe me if I said some families are jealous of the kid? And sometimes they have an argument with the kids. They say, ‘who was the person that gave birth to you, was it your school teacher or was it me?’” Echoing this sentiment, Hom Touer laments, “the children get upset and they are broken-hearted. So then the children do not want to come, they just want to go with the family to get more money. There is also a lot of materialism.”

In a culture where respecting elders is of utmost importance, many Cambodian children are unwilling to challenge their parents’ beliefs and will accept responsibilities at home rather than fight to pursue an education. Parents and children are not encouraged to communicate and, as one volunteer contemplates, “what I don’t understand is when I visit that family, the father always says he only wants his daughter to study. But then when she stops, nobody says a word. Nobody is pushing her. They just let her stay at home. Now she is still not finishing. Most of the time, the families just do not know what their children want to do. They never talk to each other. When you ask, ‘do you know what your son or daughter wants to do in the future?’ It is always, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know. I never talk to them.’ They don’t know if their child fails or if they pass. They do not care.”

The only instance in which a family may encourage their children’s school attendance is when they are too young to actively contribute to earning an income for the family. Thus, when the children are primary school-aged and unable to participate in field or factory work, the children are simply a burden on the family when not in school. The parents, in this case, will encourage the children to attend school as a way to secure daily childcare and “get them out of the way.” This explains, at least in part, the very high attendance rates in primary schools. However, as the children become physically mature enough to contribute to the family’s income-generating activities as they transition into secondary school, they are faced with familial pressure to work.

**Financial inaccessibility**

As mandated by the Cambodian constitution and managed through the Cambodian Ministry of Education, public education in Cambodia is free for all Cambodian children. In reality, however, this is not the case in many rural and impoverished areas. Teachers in Cambodia earn merely $20 to $50 US dollars per month, making it almost impossible to survive on their state-provided salary alone. Thus, government teachers resort to collecting informal school fees of $0.02 to $0.05 per day from students to supplement their salaries.16 As Sister Lakana, a religious education volunteer explains, “If you go to a school, you do not have to pay. But to have extra classes, you need to pay for that. If you don’t come to the extra classes, you don’t pass. So they have to come to extra class and they have to pay. So many children in the village don’t have money.” If they do not pay for these classes, the teacher will often fail the children and “the child’s education ends there.”

These extra classes further deter children from attending school, since they cannot afford to pay for the informal school fees. With an average of three children per household in Cambodia, the informal school fees add up to a significant portion of a family’s yearly income, making it almost impossible for parents to send their children to school. Though there are efforts by the Cambodian government to secure the promised free provision of education, the collection of informal school fees is still a formidable deterrence for children to attend school.
Furthermore, many of the public schools in Cambodia are severely underfunded and unable to provide their students with necessary materials such as textbooks, paper, writing utensils, and uniforms. Although the government is formally responsible for these supplies, the financial restrictions facing most public schools in Cambodia end up forcing the children to obtain these materials on their own. For many poor families, this is impossible. Thus, the children are not able to succeed in school and, instead, stay home to work with their families. Many of these children are put to work in their families’ rice fields for 12 hours of manual labor a day. Others work in brick factories, clothing factories, or in small family-run convenience stores. Non-economic activities such as housework tend to start earlier than economic activities, although less intensively, causing children in Cambodia to perform double-duty, in which they are responsible for both housework and income-generating activity, leaving them little or no time to attend school. Non-economic activities add an average of eight hours per week to the total work burden of the economically active children, leading to an average workweek of 31 hours.20 Child labor is both supplemented and encouraged by the aforementioned lack of parental support. According to Tola Kao, parents commonly pressure their children, asking, “Why do you need to go study if your family doesn’t have even 100 riel to buy something? You need to work.”

Another notable trend has developed within the last 15 years. As Cambodia struggles economically, its Western neighbor, Thailand, has experienced relative economic success and minimal monetary inflation. One driving force behind this disparity is the damage the Khmer Rouge did not only to the Cambodian people but also to the process of social and economic development in Cambodia. Sister Lakana, a Thai nun working in Cambodia explains, “It is a difference in economy. Here, it is underdeveloped. They are very poor and there is a big difference. We say that Cambodia is 20 years behind Thailand. Before Pol Pot, Cambodia was tied with Thailand. So now, they are 20 years behind. This is a big difference.” Cambodia has attempted to catch up with its more economically dynamic neighbors through greater regional economic integration, but this has also further contributed to the amount of trafficking and illegal migration across the Thai-Cambodian border.

Parents often leave for Thailand to earn income, forcing their children to go with them, and thus pulling them out of school in their home province. Hom Toeur, the principle of Don Bosco School in Battambang, cites monetary need as the principal catalyst in this trend: “They just want money. If they want a job in Cambodia, they can find it. But they don’t want the jobs in Cambodia because they want more money.”

### Physical Inaccessibility

Modern infrastructure in Cambodia is extremely underdeveloped, especially in more rural, isolated areas. Many villages are accessible only by a narrow dirt road obstructed by deep craters and heavy stones. Thus, while some areas have made strides toward assuring children receive a primary school education, many villages are still incapable of building a secondary school. In fact, secondary schools are built in less than 10 percent of the villages. Only 5.4 percent of Cambodian villages have a lower secondary school and only two percent of them have an upper secondary school.17 Tola Kao, an education leader with the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang, explains that if a child wishes to continue his/her education past grade three, “you have to go from one village to another village and go, like, 10 kilometers or 15 kilometers. They won’t go. Someone will have to rent a house, but to rent a house is expensive. Some of them may have to live in the pagoda or in a relative’s house, but they need to pay for the food. They cannot afford that, so they cannot go to secondary or high school.” In addition, given the poor road conditions and inaccessibility to a reliable mode of transportation, this is rarely a feasible option.

Additional challenges to education access arise specifically during Cambodia’s rainy season. Each year between May and September, Cambodia experiences between 39.4 and 59.1 inches of rainfall.18 During this time, the low-lying, mud and wood schoolhouses in many rural villages are partially submerged in rain with unsuitable conditions for children. During the rainy season, “the children would have to swim through the water to get to the school. Some of the kids could not swim and so they didn’t go to school,” explains Sister Lakana. Furthermore, travel during this time is extremely difficult. Leaving the village is nearly impossible and the prospect of journeying to a nearby village to attend a secondary school is unattainable.

### Forced Child Labor

Due to high levels of poverty in rural Cambodia, many children are forced to forego an education to work for their family and supplement their income. The opportunity costs of sending children to school are very high for some families, making it almost impossible for the children to receive an education. Although the legal working age in Cambodia is 15 years old, close to 20 percent of children ages 5-9 are employed as child laborers. The figures rise to 47 percent for children between age 10-14 and 34 percent for ages 15-17. This means that there are over 1.5 million child laborers in Cambodia today, and over 75 percent of them work in hazardous conditions.19

Parents often leave for Thailand to earn income, forcing their children to go with them, and thus pulling them out of school in their home province. Hom Toeur, the principle of Don Bosco School in Battambang, cites monetary need as the principal catalyst in this trend: “They just want money. If they want a job in Cambodia, they can find it. But they don’t want the jobs in Cambodia because they want more money.”
For the children, leaving for Thailand and forgoing their education is rarely a choice. Sister Lakana explains, “It’s not that the children don’t want to, it’s that they have to have their family, but their families go Thailand.” Furthermore, there is very little opportunity for educators to prevent their students’ from dropping out. Sister Lakana continues, “they run before they finish school because the family doesn’t have anything. They don’t have a way to tell us, either. They just run. And if they ask, they know we will say no. So they run. They don’t say anything. The family does not see the importance of this. It is difficult.”

Unfortunately, access to schools along the border is very limited and most children, when travelling with their parents, are expected to work to augment the family’s income. Sister Lakana notes that Cambodian workers claim, “In Thailand, they can get a job. There they can work. They can get up to $10 US dollars per day, which is a big difference. Here you cannot get more than $5. Five dollars is the maximum.” Many of the children that go to the Thai border will pick up trash, beg in the streets, or even work in the sex trade.

Child labor is a crucial threat to children of all ages in Cambodia, but is especially detrimental to children aged 9-11. At this age, between primary and secondary school, children begin to reach the age of physical maturity necessary to work in factories or in their families’ fields under poor conditions and to make the dangerous journey into Thailand. Traffickers wishing to sell the children into Thailand’s booming sex industry also specifically target this age group.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Various strategies have been employed to address this clear disparity between primary and secondary school attendance. After years of focusing almost exclusively on primary school building in rural villages, a multitude of Cambodian and international organizations specifically targeting education as an area for improvement in Cambodian society are recognizing the need to expand efforts to ensure that children are able to continue their education into the secondary school level.

Father Kike and the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang, through the work of the Education Team, Outreach Team, and additional efforts, have employed several effective techniques to bridge the divide between primary and secondary schools.

“Hostels”

Throughout Cambodia, specifically in larger towns and cities near established secondary schools, communal living homes, similar to hostels, have become a popular way to encourage a child’s continuation through secondary school. These hostels serve as temporary homes for poor children from rural villages that would not otherwise have access to a school. These group homes are often owned and overseen by religious workers or volunteers. In fact, the Catholic Church has a very large presence in running this type of establishment and runs a multitude of Church-funded homes throughout Cambodia. The religious organization or family in charge of running the home typically also takes responsibility for financially supporting the children’s education. Many of these homes provide the children with money for the extra class fees, uniforms, school materials, and books so they can attend schools in the city free of charge.

In addition to sponsoring the education of these children, many hostels provide food, medical care, and community engagement opportunities. In exchange, the children are responsible for chores around the house such as cleaning, cooking for themselves and others, and engaging in community service or religious activities. Although many of these outside activities, specifically in the Jesuit-run establishments, are religious in nature, their intention is solely to foster a community within the home rather than promote any particular religious doctrine. According to the director of one such home, “they receive education because they
clean, and cook, and learn how to be a good person. They create so much activity when they are here. We have a good morning talk and a good night talk. We also have talks about the value of education. So three times a day they receive education. All of them have time for cleaning where we teach them how to make everything ready in the house. They take turns to cook. They do everything here, and they learn more than they can at home. They receive more of an education.”

By eliminating barriers to attending school beyond the primary level, these establishments hold the children responsible for maintaining consistent attendance and succeeding academically. With this necessary assistance and motivating responsibility, many poor Cambodian children who would have otherwise never had a chance to advance past grade three are completing high school degrees and securing better futures for themselves and their families. At the same time, many of these organizations emphasize a commitment to holding families responsible for their own education and future. To do this, many hostels will require small payments to compensate for the housing, education, and additional benefits the child receives. According to Sister Lakana, “we ask them how much they can pay us, and we take it case by case. Each person pays something different—$1, $2, $3, or $5. But they come to understand the value of it. We have to help the poor, but they need to help themselves. We need to educate them and help them. We also need to educate the community about our vision and our mission. The community comes to know and appreciate the education now.”

**Community outreach and school building**

For children who are not supported by a hostel, it is essential that they gain the access and support necessary to transition from primary to secondary school without dropping out. For this reason, Father Kike’s team, as well as other social justice organizations in Cambodia, have prioritized a process of community outreach and school building in some of Cambodia’s most isolated rural villages. This effort entails reaching out to high-need communities, engaging the people, and generating support for a community-wide effort to build a school for the village’s children.

The first part of this approach, engaging the community, is crucial to garnering support for the organization’s presence and efforts and essential to ensuring the success of the overall effort. To do this, “you need to understand their life and their needs and understand why they need their children. Sometimes they just want the kids to work but they don’t work. Sometimes there is a parent who stays home and they do not go to work but they have their kid work,” the principal of Don Bosco Battambang notes.

Father Kike’s education team frequents the villages to discuss with community leaders, parents, and potential educators the importance of education and the value of having accessible secondary education curriculum. Team members spend hours visiting homes in the village, getting to know the families and their stories, and discerning the fundamental needs and aspirations of the village as a whole. Father Greg, director of Jesuit Service Cambodia, explains, “before we build, we have a conference with the villagers and the leaders and address what they need but also what they can contribute.” As a result of this process, “they understand a little bit but not much. Not 100 percent. They listen to us a little bit and that is all we want,” education team leader Tola Kao continues.

One of these fundamental needs is a stable income. As migration to the Thai border becomes increasingly popular, the education team addresses the importance of basic reading, writing, and math skills. Tola Kao explains, “even if you go to the border, at least you need to know how to read. Why? Because people cannot cheat you if you know how to read. If you do not know how to read, they can tell you something and you can follow them and you may get lost. I tell them, ‘if you want to go to Thailand and you are working in construction, you also need...
to know how much you earn every day. You need to calculate it. So I explain all of this and tell them it is very important. So they understand and hope at least their kid can read and write and understand what they do. If they can, nobody can trick them. So these little things we try to explain.”

This approach is particularly successful for the education team. As Tola Kao recounts, “we start with them and get as close as possible to them. We start to get to know them and after that, they help you by being happy and by smiling. Next time you go, they do whatever you said. They will be very happy from their heart.”

The second aspect of this approach, school building, is the physical improvement of existing schoolhouses or the building of new schools with the capacity to support a secondary education curriculum. Kike’s team approaches villages with extremely limited infrastructure to support a child’s education where children “would learn under a tree or inside the cow’s house,” according to one teacher. These communities are often not recognized or supported by the Cambodian government because they do not support the social and civil services necessary to constitute an official village. According to the education team leader, “without the government’s support it is very hard to have a school. It is a problem.” While the Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang funds the materials and tools needed to build a suitable schoolhouse, the responsibility to build remains in the hands of the community members. Transferring responsibility to the beneficiaries fosters a sense of ownership within the community and encourages the community to embrace the building process, and eventually the education process, as a key component of their culture. Despite community pleas for compensation, Tola Kao notes “we tell them we cannot pay them because they are not our worker. They are working for the community and it is their community.”

**Rice scholarships**

The third strategy commonly used to address the disparity between primary and secondary education attendance is the administration of rice scholarships. Most of the students dropping out between primary and secondary school go to work on their family’s rice paddies as they reach the age of physical maturity necessary to put in the long hours of manual labor. Identifying this trend of labor forced upon the child by their family, Father Kike and his team developed a rice scholarship system to provide the families with a form of conditional compensation for allowing their children to attend school. The coordinator of Jesuit Services Cambodia notes: “The scholarships try to prove that, ‘you have rice already, so please let your children go to school.’ It is a small amount but it supports the parents and allows the students to go to school.”

To this end, Kike’s team calculates roughly how much rice the labor of a child between the ages of 9-12 could produce. To prevent those children from being pulled from school and forced to work, Kike’s team takes that amount and provides the family the same yearly equivalent in monthly increments. Assuming the rice scholarship makes up for the child’s absence in the field, the rice donation is conditional on the child’s consistent attendance and performance in schools. If the child is not able to comply with these conditions, based on either their family’s influence or personal performance issues, the family will not continue to receive the monthly supply. This regards the family as a cohesive unit—both parent and child are responsible for ensuring the student receives adequate secondary education.

The ingenuity of this strategy is the decision to provide rice as compensation instead of cash transfers, which are common in many conditional scholarship programs. According to the Fr. Greg, “the rice is the best way to support the children because the parents can’t spend the money on gambling or drinking.” With alcoholism and gambling addictions rampant throughout the country, specifically in males, the Education and Outreach Teams provide the family with rice instead of cash to prevent irresponsible spending. In turn, this method puts the focus on what really matters—the child’s education.

**MIND OVER MATTER**

Every generation in Cambodia faces its own unique and complex challenges. With the weight of the Cambodian genocide hanging over the country as a whole, many of the residual consequences are placed on the youngest and most vulnerable of the population in the form of extreme poverty and educational inaccessibility. Despite this dark history, though, the Cambodian people remain a community of optimism and resiliency. Educators across the country dream of the opportunities their bright yet underprivileged students could have in the future. For Hom Toeur, he hopes his students will return the generosity they received along their education journey. He professes: “My dream is that our children will have a good job in the future. We teach our children to have respect and to be disciplined. We try to help them understand their own life. It is my dream that most of them will have a better future. I hope they will find a good job and I hope they will come back to Don Bosco to help us, to teach us, to teach a new generation.” Tola Kao continues, “we cannot help all of the kids. But we can choose families to help little by little. And if I can help just one school, ten families or 15 families every year, little by little I can show them the way to make a living and let their kids grow and succeed.” Although the challenges facing Cambodia’s youth are great, with the tireless work of individuals like Father Kike and his team, this dream remains attainable.
FATHER GREG PRIYADI, DIRECTOR OF JESUIT SERVICE CAMBODIA

What does the Jesuit Service do to increase accessibility to education?

The first is supporting the teacher. The second is to improve the facilities, like building schools. Sometimes in some areas the schools are not yet built. Then, supporting the students with scholarships or with rice scholarships. Finally, we try to maintain and improve the knowledge of reading by building small village libraries. From this, we also produce some children storybooks.

What are some of the main causes that you see for why children stop going to school? Why are children dropping out of school?

I think sometimes they do not know what the use of education is in their future. They do not know the value of an education. The second thing is poverty. The children need to go to help the parents, especially in the rice fields and in the border of Thailand. Children who live near the border have better access to jobs in Thailand so the parents take the children to the border and to Thailand to work. In Thailand, they will do jobs like picking up sticks and trash or something.

SISTER LAKANA, DIRECTOR OF THE MOTHER MAZZARELLO HOUSE

Why is Thailand so far advanced? You said that most of the children go to university in Thailand. So why is it so different here in Cambodia?

Yes, because it is a difference in economy. Here, it is underdeveloped. They are very poor and there is a big difference. We say that Cambodia is 20 years behind Thailand. Before Pol Pot, Cambodia was tied with Thailand. So now, they are 20 years behind. This is a big difference. I see the problem of Cambodia as, for me, that the youth education is too basic. If you have the knowledge, all the technology will come in. For me, you say someone who graduates university here cannot compare with the Thai. It is very different. The Cambodians lack the basics. You go to university, but the knowledge is very different. They cannot compare. They also don’t know the language. I see this is a weakness.

Why do the children leave their homes to come live here?

School is too far from their house. Also, we would like if they stayed inside because they receive information because they clean, and cook, and learn how to be a good person. They create so much activity when they are here. We have a program in the morning and in the evening when we go to sleep. We have a good morning talk and a good night talk. We also have talks about the value of education. So three times a day they receive education. All of them have time for cleaning where we teach them how to make everything ready in the house. They take turns to cook. They do everything here, and they learn more than they can at home. They receive more of an education.

HOM TEOUR, PRINCIPAL OF DON BOSCO BATTAMBANG

What is the hardest part of your job?

The hardest part is seeing the children drop out. We have a difficult time breaking those relationships. And my biggest concern is that they will drop out because the parents will take them with them when they leave Battambang and the children will not get an education. It is also very hard to build a relationship with the parents of the children. We first tried to go out and build a relationship and get them to understand about the future and about what we offer at Don Bosco. We want them to let their children do something special, but some do not want to talk. They have no knowledge and they have no ideas for education. They only want the money. Tomorrow is money. They only want money for today. Today I will work so I can eat. Tomorrow I will work so I can eat. They don’t think about the future. Later on, they get drunk with alcohol and they just complain to the children. So then the children do not want to come, they just want to go with the family to get more money. This is what I worry about every day. There is also a lot of materialism. They only want to focus on materials and they want to buy something new, they don’t want to focus on education. It is hard.
What is your goal for Don Bosco?

For me, in the future, I have a big dream that we will increase the number of students. My other dream is that I believe that our children will have a good job in the future. Don Bosco teaches our children to have respect and to be disciplined. We try to help them understand about their own life. It is my dream that most of them will have a better future. I hope they will find a good job and I hope they will come back to Don Bosco to help us, to teach us, to teach a new generation. I believe they will come. Some of my teachers here were students, now they are teachers here. This guy was a student here. He could have gotten a job at a big company and make a lot of money but he comes here.

TOLA KAO, EDUCATION TEAM LEADER AND DANCE TEACHER AT THE APOTSTIC PREFECTURE OF BATTAMBANG.

If the children want to go to school, will the parents usually support them?

It depends on the place. The parents want to support them but it depends on the needs in the family. So, it’s hard to convince them. I think they support the children but you also need realize they need somebody to help. Others, they do not support. They say “why do you need to go study if your family doesn’t have even 100 reil to buy something? You need to work.” Except for in primary school, the children have to work in the field. So this happens a lot, as well. But after they come to school, visit the school, and we explain to them, they understand a little bit but not much. Not 100 percent. They listen to us a little bit and that is all we want.

How do you get them to understand the importance [of education]?

Every year we have all of the parents come. We talk to the parents and we try to give them the example of how when we started, there was no parent support. I take this example to show them how much we have changed since we started until now. So little by little they see this is also important. Also, people are now going to the border with Thailand to go working. Even if you go to the border, at least you need to know how to read. Why? Because people cannot cheat you if you know how to read. If you do not know how to read, they can tell you something and you can follow them and you may get lost. I tell them, “If you want to go to Thailand and you are working as a worker in construction, you also need to know how much you earn every day. You need to calculate it.” So I explain all of this and tell them it is very important. So they understand and hope at least their kid can read and write and understand what they do. If they can, nobody can trick them. So these little things we try to explain. We never expect everyone to listen to what we are saying. But I think more than 30 percent listen and they start to let their kids come to the school.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Sun Arm
Head of Anatha Project, Arrupe Carina Center

Father Greg Priyadi, S.J.
Director, Jesuit Service Cambodia

Tola Kao
Education Team Leader and Dance Teacher, Apostolic Prefecture of Battambang

Raja Hassat Purti
Teacher, Phnom Penh Jesuit Student Center

Sister Lakana
Director, Mother Mazzarello House

Toi Sulu
Teacher, Battambang Province, Cambodia

Srey Mom
Director, Arrupe Carina Center

Hom Teour
Principal, Don Bosco Battambang
OVERVIEW

Nicholas Dirago is a senior in Georgetown College with majors in Philosophy and Government and a minor in Justice and Peace Studies. He is originally from Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. In May 2013, with institutional support from Antonio Ruiz de Montoya University, Nicholas partnered with two Jesuit educational institutions in Lima, Peru: the College of the Immaculate Conception and the Fe y Alegría network. He conducted interviews in order to evaluate the roles of both institutions with an eye to inequality in Lima. Building on the Education and Social Justice Project’s previous research with Fe y Alegría in Bolivia and Uruguay, Nicholas focused on the ethos and pedagogy of the organization and examined it alongside the College of the Immaculate Conception in order to probe questions of socioeconomic integration in educational spaces.

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

El Colegio de la Inmaculada (the College of the Immaculate Conception) is the Jesuits’ flagship pre-university school in Peru. Founded in 1878, the college has become one of the most prestigious schools in Lima. It prides itself on providing students with a comprehensive, people-centered education that endows them with a capacity for individual discernment and service to others. The school strives to integrate the pursuit of human development in Peru directly into the educational experience through engagement with environmental responsibility, human rights, diversity and intercultural dialogue, and gender equity, in and out of the classroom. In particular, the College of the Immaculate Conception has undertaken innovative, award-winning ecological projects on its campus in the Surco district of Lima.

Fe y Alegría (Faith and Joy) characterizes itself as a movement of popular education and social promotion dedicated to serving marginalized and excluded populations. It was founded by Fr. José María Vélaz, SJ, in Venezuela in the mid-1950s and has spread throughout Latin America and into Africa in the last six decades. Fe y Alegría schools across the world follow a set of guiding principles and practices, but each country has its own independent governing body comprised of Jesuits and a particular religious congregation is entrusted with the administration of each individual school. Now in its forty-seventh year of operation, Fe y Alegría’s network in Peru operates 79 schools under the supervision of nearly 50 congregations, serving over 86,000 students. The network’s well-established pedagogy focuses on
quality education for the poor that forms men and women who understand their socioeconomic context and see themselves as capable of changing it, with a long-term vision of a better Peru.26

INTRODUCTION

Javier Quirós—a Jesuit priest recently installed as the national director of Fe y Alegria in Peru and the former director of the College of the Immaculate Conception (CIC)—explained socioeconomic stratification in Lima in terms of five groups: A, B, C, D, and E. He was straightforward and unapologetic about the contemporary relationship among these classes: “There isn’t very much integration in Peruvian society. We’re very much a society of castes.”

Jeff Klaiber—an American Jesuit who has been in Lima since 1963—made this commentary on Lima’s changing economy: “Globalization has been dumped on [Lima].”

María Elena Bravo—a Marist nun who runs Fe y Alegria #1 in the St. Martin de Porres district of Lima—made the following observation about race in her country: “Peru is a very racist country... It’s a very exclusive society; it excludes many people... There’s a general affinity towards whitewashing at work in Peru. We haven’t taken pride in our races or learned to accept each other as we are... white Peruvians don’t even look at me.”27

Bob Dolan—another American Jesuit who has also been in Peru since the 1960s—spoke about the country’s struggles with corruption and the concomitant waning of Peru’s senses of trust and justice. “There’s so much corruption,” he said. “Power is money, and money is politics. It’s status: you’re in or you’re out. [This is] as old as Lima itself, but since the 1950s, it’s transformed because of the type of economic structure, [including] major international companies and investment.”

This litany of social problems is not an indictment of Lima or Peru, nor is it intended to imply that issues of segregation, discrimination, and economic inequality are exceptional to the capital city or country; indeed, they constitute a common thread—the legacy of colonialism and exploitation—that runs through the Americas and across the world. Yet these issues, explained by educators who spend their lives in the complex milieu of contemporary Lima, elucidate the context in which Jesuit education is working in the twenty-first century. They are the social and economic results of a strife-ridden history. This report focuses on how Jesuit pre-university educational institutions in Lima are utilizing curriculum and pedagogy as well as educational space more broadly in order to confront that history, attend to social problems, and contribute to a more just Peru—and, crucially, to empower students to do the same.

This research centered on several motivating questions: What is the relationship between education and social justice for practitioners of Jesuit education in Lima? What are the demographics of the schools in question? How do students from different backgrounds interact? What are the prospects for integrating students from different socioeconomic realities into the same school? How are Jesuit schools pushing for social change? In this way, the report attempts to understand Jesuit education as a system with constituent parts rather than in atomized terms of particular schools. For this reason, CIC and Fe y Alegria were chosen as research sites. Both represent distinct, representative facets of Jesuit education: the private schools that emerged as the secular pressures of liberalism prompted the Church to establish separate spaces for Catholic education; and the schools that emerged in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and liberation theology that serve marginalized communities—a tradition known as popular education that is often subsidized by the state.28 This report explores these facets in order to understand their relationship to each other and to the order’s larger vision of social justice.

GLOBALIZATION, MIGRATION, AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LIMA

“The only development we have in Peru is Lima.”
— Sr. Bravo

Lima has experienced rapid growth since the end of World War Two, with globalization leaving an indelible mark on the sprawling capital city. Mirroring a familiar pattern for Latin American urban centers in the twentieth century, Peruvians flocked from the mountains and countryside to Lima, which, in tandem with higher fertility rates and lower mortality, rates pushed the population from approximately 600,000 in the 1940s to almost ten million presently.29

Hoping for work and economic security, many settlers found themselves unable to secure housing and jobs in Lima. As a result, informal settlements known as barriadas began to arise. Originally, these communities concentrated close to the city center but, over the course of several decades, they stretched the boundaries of the capital, with new residents squatting on undeveloped land surrounding Lima. In an attempt at nominal misdirection, the Velasco government rebranded these shantytowns as “young towns” (pueblos jóvenes) in the 1970s. They now constitute a geographically vast periphery of Lima, and the government has incorporated them over time.30 Many barriadas have experienced economic development since the 1950s, and some are joining the middle class.31 Yet, Lima still has “by far the greatest concentration of poverty in the country,”32 due in large part to the slum conditions that are still present in...
many of these young towns—which are becoming less young every day, and, often, no less impoverished. Many lack electricity and running water. María Elena “Lala” Romero, who oversees curriculum and pedagogy for Faith and Joy Peru, made this poignant observation: “In marginalized urban areas...we find people that came from mountainous areas to the outskirts of the city. They thought Lima was going to be better, that they would be able to develop as people... Almost all of our first students were the early settlers. But now we're teaching their children and even some of their grandchildren.” Even as the small, largely white elite gets steadily richer and a new middle class emerges, bi- and multi-generational poverty in the outskirts of Lima highlight that progress for some Peruvians has come at the cost of stagnancy and broken dreams for others.

THE COLLEGE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (CIC)

“If we're not concerned about people, we have nothing to say about education.”
—Fr. Dolan

CIC is located in an upper-middle class area of the Surco district of Lima. The fenced-in campus, situated at the foot of a mountain that the school owns and maintains, houses some of the only green space in the city. All interviewees agreed that CIC draws primarily from the B subsection of Lima’s class structure, perhaps with a handful of students from A or C; by and large, students are not from the absolute upper crust, but most come from comfortable upper-middle class backgrounds. The school's social reach is likely a bit broader than that of peer institutions, but its demographics hardly represent those of Lima as a whole. According to Fr. Quirós, “A very small sector of the population—maybe ten percent, or less—makes [enough to send their children here], even though they're still only the B sector.” Of course, the Jesuits' flagship school in Peru is “academically very good,” said Fr. Miranda. With top-notch faculty and significant resources at its disposal, the school gives families their money's worth, including a highly desirable bilingual education. Nevertheless, there remains an air of irony to the notion of an elite, expensive school run by a religious order vowed to poverty. This is not lost on the Jesuits at CIC: “We feel very guilty for having schools that work with the rich,” Fr. Quirós noted.

Despite the school's physical location and the socioeconomic composition of the student body, it would be a mistake to characterize CIC exclusively as an insulator or manufacturer
of privilege. Steeped in the Jesuit tradition, CIC integrates an educational standard that sets the school’s modus operandi apart from those of peer institutions: as Fr. Miranda, explained it, “we believe in the dignity of the human being.” Fr. Quirós developed this idea further: “the Society’s work seeks the development of personal freedom. Our formative experiences as Jesuits are our spiritual exercises. Jesuit education wants to be a way of doing those exercises through education, that is, freeing the individual so that she or he can choose the best things for her or him.” Thus, the faculty and staff at CIC consider attentiveness to students’ individual circumstances to be central to their work.

Although CIC’s students have largely benefited from globalization and the changing face of Lima in terms of their families’ socioeconomic statuses, the often unforgiving demands of the city’s globalized economy have erected new obstacles to well being. Fr. Dolan, a counselor to younger students at CIC, emphasized that family life in particular has taken a heavy toll in the middle and upper-middle classes, with the amount of time students spend interacting with their parents drastically reduced as increasing workplace demands change the nature of parenting. This is particularly worrisome for Jesuit education, which, in Fr. Dolan’s words, “has a thesis that the most important educators, the principal educators, are the parents.” CIC does not seek to substitute for parenting. It does, however, take seriously the call to accompany the student down his or her individual path, providing resources to surmount obstacles. This compassionate attention to individual students is one manifestation of the many ways in which CIC remains faithful to the inextricable link between Jesuit education and social justice. Fr. Quirós offered the following explanation of this relationship: “God calls on all of us to self-actualize with others, right? So, justice is getting rid of the impediments to a person’s full self-actualization.” Since the current landscape in Peru presents impediments to students’ self-actualization in family life and elsewhere, CIC accompanies students in addressing them.

Crucially, however, as Fr. Quirós’s explanation points out, the Jesuits pursue self-actualization with others. “The process of formation in Jesuit schools tries to create in our students… [the recognition] that there are other people and that it's important to share life with them,” Fr. Miranda said. “We strive for this sharing of lives through experiences.” CIC intentionally builds these experiencias into the educational process through a set of programs it refers to as social formation. From as young as age 4, students participate in small experiences, such as going to a nearby Fe y Alegría school and completing an activity together. Over time, the depth of the programming increases, and once or twice a semester students will participate in pastoral activities that examine social issues through the lens of social justice. This creates what Fr. Miranda called a “particular sensibility,” even in younger students.

One of the more formative experiences is a ten-day program in rural Peru for students just before their second year of high school. Students live and work alongside residents of the Andean region. They sleep on the floor during some of the colder months in Peru and share meals with the community. “The idea is that the school moves to the countryside,” said Fr. Quirós. “[Students] get to know another world. They meet people and establish a bond of affection. You can’t love anything you don’t know.”

The school is not alone among Lima’s colegios in attempting to inculcate a social conscience in students. CIC is fairly distinct, however, for the kinds of lessons that students are encouraged to learn from social justice-oriented experiences. Fr. Quirós noted that many schools have service programs, but he underscored that “there’s a difference between social service, where you’re required to hit a certain number of hours to pass for the year, and the experience of social formation. In Peru, anyone who doesn’t know the realities of poverty is ignorant.” CIC, in addition to incorporating community service, works to ensure that their students encounter other realities through the interpersonal nature of the social formation programming. As such, these experiences avoid a treacherous pitfall in that they do not reinforce the structure of existing power relations. They are not stories of wealthy whites “helping” or “giving to” poor, indigenous Peruvians of color; they do not normalize dependency or reproduce existing hierarchies. Indeed, students from CIC often find out how much they have to learn from marginalized communities. “They learn that they didn’t come to help,” Fr. Miranda explained. “They came to learn how others in Peru live and work. We want to get any idea that they’re saviors out of their heads. Much to the contrary, they’re going to learn... The people teach them.” Ms. Romero touched on a similar theme in discussing a visit from a Jesuit colegio to a Fe y Alegría school: “[the students from the private school] admired how the students [at Fe y Alegría] conducted themselves.... It taught them that those students were equals, even though they were poor.” Social formation at CIC, then, is at its core about discovering a different reality: poverty in Peru.

CIC students spoke convincingly about their experiences and the socioeconomic composition of contemporary Lima. One student, Jorge, rooted exclusion and segregation in Peru in the history of private property in the country, explaining the country’s class structure in terms of a triangle with marginalized masses at the base and a privileged few at the top. He understood where he fell in that hierarchy, and he explained...
the value of CIC’s formation programs in the following way: “creating a bond between you and the other,” not providing “support” or “help.” His classmate Alvaro demonstrated how his pastoral experiences made him aware of his position: upon arriving to the site where the group would be staying, he said that the dynamic at first was “as if we were Spanish,” reflecting a critical eye and understanding of history. Despite this initial tension, however, all agreed that the experiences had left a significant mark and that they had developed much more of a social conscience than had peers at other, non-Jesuit private schools. Piero, for instance, reflected on the various conceptions of success at play in Peruvian society: “For some people, you’re successful only if you have a penthouse and all that. But you can be truly happy living in a tiny house with only the bare necessities.” As consumerism becomes an increasingly powerful force in Peru’s collective conscience, Piero’s statement demonstrates the changes that CIC’s curriculum has, at least on students’ frames of reference.

Finally, an integral part of CIC’s efforts for social justice and a better Peru are evident in a series of independent ecological projects. Perhaps the most well-known is the on-campus zoocriadero, an impressive establishment that houses species from across the animal kingdom—pumas, bears, birds, an alligator, and even a capybara, the world’s largest rodent. The zoocriadero preserves one of the only spaces for animal life in sprawling Lima. Similarly, CIC’s reforestation project—which has planted trees, shrubs, and grass throughout campus, particularly on the mountain at the foot of which the school buildings sit—has made the grounds of the colegio one of the only green spaces in the capital city. It is a creative, resourceful response to the desert conditions that plague Peru’s coastal region, and the school has begun selling products like olives, olive oil, oranges, figs, and honey from the mountainside harvests at affordable prices. The school has also established an ambitious water treatment facility to confront the paucity of water; another desert-related challenge that many predict will pose serious problems for Peru in years to come. The facility draws water from drainage in the surrounding area and purifies it throughout the day. While initially expensive, it has proven to be a valuable investment: the campus is self-sufficient in its water supply, and the plant has paid for itself.

On some level, it might be unclear how ecological projects—or perhaps even social formation programs or interventions addressing the fallout from changing family structures—contribute to education. For the Jesuits, however, education is part of a larger vision of human development of which reforestation or a zoo are small parts. Indeed, as Fr. Dolan explained, the ecological projects are as much about proving a point as they are about making measurable dents in social problems: Peruvian authorities shy away from investments with less immediate results, rendering viable solutions like a self-sustaining water treatment plant less likely to gain traction. “We believe a better world is possible,” said Fr. Dolan. Changing the landscape of Peruvian politics and society is always a principal goal; in and out of the classroom, CIC seeks to prove that a better world is possible.

FE Y ALEGRÍA PERU

“To hell with this word ‘poor.’”
—St. McLaughlin

Fe y Alegria’s educational model has three pillars that guide its work: popular education; education in, and for, work; and education for values. The network shares a similar vision of social justice as that of CIC; educators at both institutions described social justice in terms of eliminating obstacles to full personal development. A subtle but instructive difference between explanations from Fe y Alegria and CIC emerged, however: educators from Fe y Alegria included not only notions of equal opportunity but also of perceived equality of ability and worth. For instance, Ms. Romero, the Director of Educational Mission at Faith and Joy Peru, described it this way: “social justice is where everyone, men and women, can be treated and recognized as having the same dignity as everyone else, and that they themselves feel that way. But beyond that feeling, that they have equality of opportunity to fully develop.” Indeed, questions of self-confidence and empowerment are central to Fe y Alegria’s discourse in general in a way that they are not at CIC. This distinction relates to a familiar theme: the structure of the contemporary economic system in Lima has consequences that reach beyond income disparities. Students in young towns and other underserved areas of Lima are born into a milieu where success and self-worth are not taken for granted in the ways that they might be among the CIC students; the broken promises of Lima can inter-generationally perpetuate a sense of defeat.

Yet the genesis of Fe y Alegria schools occurs exactly when members of an underserved district make a stand against stagnancy and deprivation: “It’s important for [Fe y Alegria] that a community… want[s] better education—that they demand it and look for better alternatives,” explained Ms. Romero. Fe y Alegria originates from communities, which alone is a powerful confirmation of the agency of marginalized groups. Sra. Patricia McLaughlin, the head teacher at the highly successful Faith and Joy #58 in the young-town of Jicamarca, put it this way: “I am absolutely convinced that God has no favorites. Whether the children are in the Inmaculada or they’re here at Fe y Alegria, God has...
given every single one of them the same ability… it is not acceptable to say that we’re going to give a poor education to poor children.” It is this unwavering belief in the potential of communities and individuals—coupled with an aversion to reproducing the consumerist association of “poor” with “low quality”—that Ms. Romero believes is the basis of popular education: “It’s essential to believe in people, in communities, in culture. Believe, love them, value them. Without this essential aspect, we can’t walk alongside [students] as equals or accompany them in order to empower them.”

Such a focus on empowerment may not seem to be particularly unique, and it might come across as platitudinous. The difference between this pedagogical starting point and that of alternative models of education around the globe, however, should not be underestimated. For example, Fe y Alegría is comparable to the charter school model in the United States: its schools are privately operated but for the most part publically funded—the Peruvian government pays about 70 percent of the schools’ costs, with outside donors providing the rest of the funds. Unlike the discourse around charter schools and improving public education in the United States, however, Fe y Alegría does not understand education through a prism of achievement gaps and races to “the top.” Instead, Fe y Alegría begins with students’ potential and remains cognizant of the ways that social structures have impeded its realization. “It’s important that we begin from their culture, their richness,” said Ms. Romero. This is a radical departure from contemporary approaches to education in that educational questions are not framed in terms of how students from underserved communities can best achieve success in the way dominant groups have defined it. Instead, Fe y Alegría asks what society has been missing by marginalizing so many communities and seeks ways to correct for those errors.

The role of the Fe y Alegría educator is, above all else, accompaniment, and this willingness to work alongside students and invest in them is palpable. Students at Fe y Alegría #58 flocked to Sr. McLaughlin anytime she entered a room, greeting her with excited hugs and eagerly sharing what they were learning. She relayed stories—some uplifting, others tragic—that demonstrated an involvement in students’ lives that was more than superficial. Students were also quite comfortable around Sr. Bravo, and she weaved stories about her students and their relationship with the school into her explanation of Fe y Alegría #1. Wendy Montenegro Chávez, a teacher at Fe y Alegría #58, left her job teaching at a private colegio because she was looking for something different, an experience of closeness and coexistence with students that pursued more conscientious ends. “We teachers are always trying to listen to [students] more and figure out what challenges they’re facing. There is a lot of coordination [among faculty] in the process, and we try to figure out what is best for them. We try to respond to their concerns.” This attentiveness
to students makes educators aware of the context from which their students come and marks a distinction between Fe y Alegria and many of Peru’s public and private schools.

Thanks to this familiarity with students’ frames of reference, teachers are much more capable of facilitating students’ grasp of what Fe y Alegria considers the guiding steps of popular education: see, judge, act. “Seeing” refers to St. Ignatius of Loyola’s concept of reading reality, or “seeing and contemplating reality in order to be able to love it and change it,” as Ms. Romero put it. “This is essential because it helps you become conscious of the way things are. If you don’t read reality, you’re not conscious of the situation and you become numb. The status quo—violence, marginalization, injustice—starts to seem natural and doesn’t cross your mind.” For students coming into consciousness in contemporary Lima, this step is crucial in that it empowers students to understand that the world is structured in such a way and that they are positioned in a particular place within that structure.

Next, in the judgment stage, students hone a critical lens, developing their capacity for discernment, which Ms. Romero explained as seeking “the best for a given community and a particular reality.” Students begin to imagine in this phase that it could be otherwise; a better world is possible. Finally, there is action, or development of the capacity to change—in both the transitive and intransitive sense: students change their own orientation to the world and are empowered to change the world and the relation of their families and communities to it.

This tripartite process of popular education is accomplished by integrating many stakeholders in the educational process. Teachers and administrators at a particular school undergo a periodic collective “reading of reality:” they sit down together and, based on their experiences with students and in their communities, determine what problems should be addressed in the educational space. These conclusions are integrated into the curriculum. Fe y Alegria is also careful to include families in this process. Many schools hold courses for family members, the content of which is determined by the needs of the community, or at least periodic meetings where parents can discuss their children’s education with administrators and faculty. Their advice, too, influences curriculum. In addition, much like CIC, pastoral programming at Fe y Alegria schools utilize experiential learning to introduce students to the realities around them. At Fe y Alegria #1 in St. Martin de Porres, a lower- to middle-class district of Lima, students write stories about their lives and experiences and share them with students from nearby young towns. These strategies contribute to an indispensable goal of a Fe y Alegria education: producing agents of social change, or, as Ms. Romero phrased it, “education to create a new citizenship, in which everyone has the same rights.”

The second pillar of Fe y Alegria’s pedagogy, education in and for work, consists in familiarizing students with elements of important trades such as electronics, woodworking, and sewing. Primarily accomplished through a series of workshops that all students complete as part of their curriculum each year, this pillar is a means of responding to the realities that Fe y Alegria reads. They endow students with tools to participate in the economy in a way that circumstance might otherwise have inhibited. Yet this practical element of a Fe y Alegria education has not transformed the institution’s model into an exclusively vocational or highly technical one—a change that occurred in many schools in Peru beginning in the 1990s (the Fujimori era), according to Fr. Klaiber. This is largely because of the third pillar of Fe y Alegria: education for values. The inculcation of an appreciation for justice ensures that even in a world where technical proficiency is in high demand, students develop a framework in which technology and the economy more broadly are understood as at the service of humankind—rather than vice versa.

Fe y Alegria’s model is an ambitious scheme, but it works—so much so that the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru is partnering with the organization to produce a report on the network’s practices and why they are more effective than the average Peruvian public school in community needs. There are indeed some impressive success stories. Sr. McLaughlin’s school, Fe y Alegria #58, had the highest reading scores and third-best math scores on a recent round of national standardized testing; the school, located in one of the most underserved areas of Lima, outperformed virtually every school in Peru. While not yet typical, the network has had overall “good results—not as good as CIC, but [Fe y Alegria schools] are successful,” says Ms. Romero. Students who want to go to college are able to do so, due in large part to government scholarships and new partnerships with universities, representing an enormous improvement from the opportunities afforded to marginalized communities in the absence of Fe y Alegria. And, as Sr. McLaughlin emphasized, young adults who do not opt for postsecondary education enter any walk of life with a core set of a values and an orientation towards change for their communities; they develop as human beings and as participants in the economy.

Fe y Alegria students interviewed for this report embodied many of these principles. Secondary school students, whose inequitable access to nourishment had left noticeably smaller in stature than students at CIC, possessed comparable ambitions to their counterparts in Surco. They intended to be doctors, engineers, and politicians. They were also aware that they
came from socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods. This knowledge, however, did not translate into hopelessness; indeed, students felt empowered to strive for social change. Luz, 16, explained it this way: “One of the biggest challenges we have is the lack of electricity and running water. We know that our community is lower in the economy. We don’t have floors, we don’t have parks, we don’t have grass, we barely have anything. But we go… to our school and we see a new goal: I’m going to complete high school, get a scholarship, and help advance my family and the community. We live the realities here… and we are capable. With time, we’ll have running water and electricity.” Even much younger students aged seven to 11 had begun thinking critically about the prevalence of issues like violence in their communities. Students at Fe y Alegría #1 and #58 made explicit reference to the set of values that they had developed over the course of their education. “Peace, respect, solidarity, and humility,” said one 8-year-old student when asked what values she had learned. Another, age ten, explained, “We want to be professionals and to change Peru.” In short, the three pillars of Fe y Alegría and the spirit of an education oriented towards social justice are more than abstract pedagogical principles; they are manifested by students’ ability to see, judge, and act. Further research might trace students’ paths in order to determine the more tangible differences in terms of income and social mobility, but there is little reason to doubt the effectiveness of Fe y Alegría’s formation process.

THE POSSIBILITY OF INTEGRATION

“You can’t pretend.”
– Fr. Quirós

Both CIC and Fe y Alegría provide quality education to students in a Jesuit tradition that caters to their development as individuals without losing sight of creating a more just society. The fact still remains, however, that under the current model, students from rich and poor areas are de facto segregated within the Jesuit school system: students from affluent backgrounds attend CIC, and students from poor districts and young towns attend Fe y Alegría. Clearly, these institutions are both dedicated to experiences that draw people together for impactful experiences that transcend the gulfs among classes that exist in Peru. Nonetheless, there would still seem to be elements of exclusion or inequality in a scheme where there are certain schools for some socioeconomic groups and other schools for other socioeconomic groups. The most just solution might be to integrate rich and poor students into the same schools.

When pressed about this possibility, there was almost unanimous agreement among educators at CIC and at Fe y Alegría that direct socioeconomic integration in the pre-university educational space was simply not feasible in light of current stratification.
This does not mean that they were opposed to the idea; many expressed interest, and all appreciated it as a kind of long-term goal for which to strive: “It’d be wonderful if we could do it successfully,” said Fr. Dolan. Ultimately, however, it does not seem that Peru is ready for such a move by Jesuit education. “We can’t strive for something so wild [as this kind of integration]. It’s too wild,” Fr. Quirós concluded. “It’s really about where you place each person. And by that I don’t mean having a mentality of castes. I mean the pragmatic thing, based on experience.” Some of this diction is jarring, but it demonstrates the depth of social division in Peru and raises questions about the limits of the role that schools can play in transcending it.

Furthermore, it would be a mistake to interpret this skepticism of integration as insidious or regressive, as it is largely rooted in attentiveness on the part of faculty to students’ contexts and tendencies. “In the young towns and at CIC, it’s important to pick up on students’ existing frames of reference,” explained Ms. Romero. Schools, of course, are far from the only institutions that exert influence on these, and many students enter their education with problematic preconceived notions of class, race, gender, and sexuality. For Jesuit educators in Lima, it would be a mistake to think of the school only as a place where they develop a way of looking at the world; students need to reevaluate critically what they already assume and believe. A more radical socioeconomic integration in schools could prove harmful for poor students in terms of their self-esteem and self-image. There are, after all, enormous differences in access among students from A, B, C, D, and E castes. According to Ms. Romero, “The wealthier students have much more social and cultural capital than the poorer students—linguistic ability, access to books and internet and libraries, international travel. It’s not easy, sometimes because students’ parents are intolerant of the poorer student.” If this challenge is not met, poorer students could end up strolling down a road, albeit paved with good intentions, that leads to a host of unintended social and psychological consequences: students who cannot afford a particular brand of clothes or travel to the neighborhoods where gatherings are hosted would become marginalized in a dangerous reinforcement of structures that exist outside the school.

The Jesuits have experimented with integrating students from poor neighborhoods into the elite colegios in the past. “The problem was that the school was a kind of bubble because in society students never came across each other; they [only] came across each other in school,” explained Fr. Quirós. “At school, [the poor students] felt bad. They couldn’t participate… I had students that spent their vacations skiing in the United States, while others were at the public pool and playing in the street. They were in the same class… but the measure was fictitious. You still had the whites on one side and the others on the other side… Putting everyone together permanently in the classroom is harmful for the poor. It’s worse for the poor. I think we need to find other ways.” This
sentiment was expressed by many interviewees. Educators did not believe that integration was impossible, but rather that it was quite difficult and should only be undertaken if the chances of success are high.

Many educators were more optimistic, however, about the possibility of integration at the university level, when students have matured and are more likely to be able to transcend discriminatory worldviews. Fr. Klaiber, who is a Professor of History at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, suggested that Fe y Alegría students fared well at universities partially because the rest of the student body was more welcoming. Fr. Quirós agreed: “I used to talk with [students] about issues of discrimination and try to get them to move beyond it. But you can really only do that starting at age fifteen. Before that the bullying is so severe… When they’re older they understand ideas like intimacy and friendship a bit more. Here in Peru, the universities are democratizing instruments much more than the pre-university schools are.” Primary and secondary schools, then, should at this point be thought of as laying the groundwork for that democratization. Even if “democratizing” is not quite the correct word—as the process seems to lean more towards integrating poorer students into a middle-class context than towards bringing together various socioeconomic realities—the basic idea is that Jesuit education maximizes its potential to bridge the gaps that Peru’s history left among A, B, C, D, and E.

MEETING IN THE MIDDLE

“The goal of both [Fe y Alegría and private schools like CIC] is the same.”
– Fr. Miranda

Since the immediate goal in Lima is not to integrate students from various backgrounds into the same classroom, a different framework is necessary in order to understand the system of Jesuit pre-university education there. Students from either end of the spectrum are met in their context, and their individual needs are addressed in the educational process. Gradually, students are exposed to the socioeconomic realities around them, and they develop the critical capacity to analyze them and to discover their situation therein. Through pastoral experiences and other mechanisms, they are brought into contact with peers from different backgrounds in a conscientious way that helps students understand a different reality. These experiences deepen, and over the course of a student’s education, preconceived notions give way to more inclusive worldviews. This happens in an environment that, by its very existence, demonstrates the idea that a better world is possible, and students leave it with the ability to transcend gaps of segregation and inequality in their future education, careers, dealings with others, and the ways that they shape their society. In other words, they meet in the middle, striving for the same goal: a changed Peru and a more equitable society. They do so, however, from different starting points. At this point in history, it seems that the great distance between those points significantly protracts the process, making it doubtful that meeting in the middle can be fully realized over the ten-year course of a pre-university education.

The Jesuits have always sought to improve not only Catholic education but the quality of all education. As such, both Fe y Alegría, and to an extent CIC, are interested in having an impact on public education in Peru as a whole. Looking at the system more broadly, as Fr. Quirós assumed his new role, he understood the process as follows: “[the Jesuits] aim to have an impact on public education. My dream is that [our] four private schools, which have more resources and excellent teachers, truly be laboratories that pursue pedagogical innovation—that they’re on the cutting edge, that they’re really creating. And then use Fe y Alegría as a transmission network for all of that to the public education system. That would be my dream.” Although this may seem to devalue the kind of innovation that takes place in Fe y Alegría or reserve innovation exclusively for the middle class, Ms. Romero agreed that her organization could learn from CIC and other private Jesuit schools. The issue that she saw, however, was that there was effectively no institutional collaboration between Fe y Alegría and the other colegios. In fact, Ms. Romero believed that it has decreased over time, with joint teacher formation programs that used to be commonplace now virtually disappearing. Indeed, one of the only points of collaboration of which Fr. Quirós could think resembled top-down charity more than horizontal solidarity: Fe y Alegría’s annual raffle, for which students and families of private schools buy and sell many of the tickets.

As Jesuit education evaluates its future in Peru and looks for ways to find common ground for students across Lima’s stratified socioeconomic spectrum and transmit the know-how to public schools, perhaps an observation by Fr. Miranda says it best: “It’s always possible to work in a more coordinated way. One very good thing is Javier Quirós’s promotion to the head of Fe y Alegría. With all of his experience, he can establish a better relationship...The private Jesuit schools have always worked together. I suppose the next step would be working more with Fe y Alegría.” It is a propitious time for collaboration between these two faces of Jesuit education. Taking advantage of this opportunity could be an important step towards a Peruvian landscape in which the lines among A, B, C, D, and E are increasingly less divisive.
FR. JEFFREY L. KLAIBER, S.J., PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, PONTIFICAL CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF PERU

What has globalization meant for Lima?

It’s a provincial city, and globalization has been dumped on it. A provincial city means that people in Lima have little consciousness of the rest of Peru. That’s a central point in all of Latin American history. For many years, Peruvians were just not aware of the rest of their country, and that’s still true.

Lima has become a major connecting link in Latin America. When I first came here in 1963, it was about two million people. It’s now eight million, who knows exactly how many? In the 1960s, they called [the settlers] invaders. In English they would call them squatter villages; with little reed huts. They would squat on empty property, sometimes public property, and then the old term was barriadas. But they were never slums; slum is not the correct word. The military in 1968 gave them a new name: young towns—pueblos jóvenes. Uplifting. They actually sort of took over these towns in the good sense—incorporate them, build them up. So actually some of them look pretty good today. But there are always new groups coming in. Now they use a more neutral word, like “human settlements.” But there are always new ones coming up. Usually they don’t have water, they don’t have electricity, even today.

FR. JAVIER QUIRÓS PIÑEYRO S.J., DIRECTOR OF FE Y ALEGRÍA, PERU AND FORMER RECTOR OF THE COLLEGE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, LIMA

What role does a school have in integrating students from various backgrounds?

There isn’t very much integration in Peruvian society. We’re very much a society of castes. For example, the College of the Immaculate Conception, in economic terms, works with segment B. There’s A, B, C, D, and E. There are some from A, and a few from C. Now, I think that what distinguishes the College of the Immaculate from other similar schools is that our social reach is a little broader. There are other schools that are more focused on even smaller segments of the population. The student body of Fe y Alegria is from segment D, and even E; they’re poor.

At the College of the Immaculate Conception, we encourage students to integrate amongst themselves—with an eye to their differences, which are sometimes more subtle. But it’s an experience of recognition and respect for the other. And indeed we strive for the students to encounter the country and get to know its socioeconomic, cultural, and even racial diversity, for the sake of justice based on direct experience with the poor. There is so much involved in coming to understand the world of the poor. If you never encounter it, you’re never going to understand. That is the experience of the students in the College; prompt them to get to know it.

MARÍA LEONOR ROMERO OCHOA, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL DESIGN, FE Y ALEGRÍA PERU

Who are the students of Fe y Alegría? What populations do the schools serve?

In marginalized urban areas, which surround the big cities, we find people that came from mountainous areas to the outskirts of the city. They thought Lima was going to be better, that they would be able to develop as people. They came with grass mats, looking for water and electricity and education. And that’s how it began. Almost all of our first students were the early settlers. But now we’re teaching their children and even some of their grandchildren. We also have schools that serve the people of the countryside as well as schools in indigenous areas. And depending on where we are, we work to respond to the community while respecting its culture; we meet them where they are, starting from the richness that they have. We work with them to construct a new culture. Schools have always reproduced the system. We want to change it.

Can you describe the curriculum and pedagogy of Fe y Alegría? How are they different from those of public and private schools in Peru?

Our pedagogy focuses on popular education. The goals of popular education are transformation, development, integration. That doesn’t happen in public schools, because sometimes popular education is misunderstood solely as education from the poor for the poor. That’s only a tiny aspect of it. It’s important that we begin from their culture, their richness, so that they can grow fully, so that they can become more capable, have a voice, and make decisions about their functional organization. And we try to make that reality we’ve been talking about penetrate the curriculum. We have a methodology that allows us to
work together in figuring out how best to do so. Every two years professors and administrators of the schools undertake a reading of reality, and from there they make changes to the curriculum. They define the most urgent problems and from there prioritize the basic issues, which are then analyzed further to determine how to work with them in the curriculum.

In many schools, they saw violence, really bad violence that was affecting the schools and the children. Violence has been prioritized [as an issue to address]. It's important that we define certain values to work on. And we try to work these values into the curriculum and into the management of the school. Students learn to read reality; they develop that critical eye. Various disciplines—social sciences, religion, tutorials—work in the key theme, a transversal theme. But it's translated into other words. You wouldn't say "violence." You'd say "education for peace," for example.

Another key element is that the teacher discovers his or her role: accompaniment, being by students' side, to be able to facilitate the construction of understanding. We very much respect students' culture. We're mediators with them; we're by their side, and we establish with them a dialogue of knowledge. Of course, teachers can shed light on certain things. But it's essential that they understand their role.

What are the principles that guide you as an educator?

I believe in education. I believe that education is the key. The second thing is that I believe in the children themselves, that they can do this. We can do this. But we have to believe in it. We have to believe in these children. Because these children, although they're poor—they have problems in malnutrition, they have lung problems, they have violence in their families—these children can do it.

The other thing is infrastructure—what you give to these children. Now, poor children should not be expected to sit on a dirty chair or to be in a dirty classroom. These children need the best; they need an education. I have a beautiful library. I gave them computers. They're going up there to learn how to cook. They need music and dance... It's not just mathematics and language.

And the other thing is that the director has to get off her bum and get out there. I'm not the boss; I should be the servant. I do everything that a head teacher is: a social worker and a nurse and a mother and a policeman and a plumber. Get out of the office, for God's sake.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Wendy Montenegro Chávez
Teacher, Fe y Alegria Peru #58

Sr. María Elena Bravo Cubas, S.M.
Director, Fe y Alegria Peru #1

Fr. Bob Dolan, S.J.
Counselor, College of the Immaculate Conception

Fr. Jeffrey L. Klaiber, S.J.
Professor of History, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru

Sr. Patricia McLaughlin, S.L.
Head Teacher, Faith and Joy Peru #58

Fr. Victor Hugo Miranda, S.J.
Pastoral Coordinator, College of the Immaculate Conception

María Leonor Romero Ochoa
Director, Department of Educational Design, Fe y Alegria Peru

Fr. Javier Quirós Piñeyro, S.J.
Director, Faith and Joy Peru
Former Rector, College of the Immaculate Conception

Students at the College of the Immaculate Conception
Piero Briones
Jorge Ignacio Espejo
Leonardo Morera
Alvaro Vidal

Students at Fe y Alegria Peru #1
Bryan Lara
Susan Mendoza
Eduardo Solis

Students at Fe y Alegria Peru #58 Primary School
Ten primary school students were interviewed. Their names are excluded here for their privacy.

Students at Fe y Alegria Peru #58 Secondary School
Verónica Bustamante Javier
Luz Clarita Cervantes Huayhua
Erick Chamorro Tantaullca
Mayra Juispe Contreras
Orlando Minostoa Amable
Margarita Murillo Velayarce
Jackelin Pérez Huaranccay
Pessly Quispe Gabriel
OVERVIEW

Elisabeth Lembo, originally from Caldwell, New Jersey, is a senior in Georgetown College, with a major in Government and a minor in Art History. In July 2013, she partnered with Kostka Gimnazjum and the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow to learn about the recent resurgence of Jesuit education in Poland following decades of Communist rule. During her time in Krakow, Liz researched Jesuit education at both the primary school and university level through interviews with priests, professors, students, and community members. Her research examines the ways in which the reemergence of Jesuit education advances social justice in post-communist Poland.

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

Kostka Gimnazjum opened in 2010 in a low-income district outside of Krakow, after the only school for children in grades six to eight in the neighborhood had failed and was shut down. Father Pawel Brozyniak, S.J. founded Kostka shortly after he returned from Loyola University Chicago, where he completed his master’s degree in Education. During his time in the United States, Fr. Pawel spent significant time learning about alternative approaches to education reform and became interested in bringing the charter school model to Poland. Kostka is the only publicly run gimnazjum (middle school) directed by Jesuits in the country. While only in its second full school year, Kostka has shown signs of developing into the high performing educational facility that Fr. Pawel envisioned. With an enrollment of 108 students, Kostka promotes social justice by offering a challenging and comprehensive education to students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, in addition to conducting outreach efforts to the greater Krakow community. Currently, Kostka is open to students in grades six to eight, although the school’s leadership hopes to eventually expand its curriculum through high school.

The Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow is a Catholic school of university standing run by Jesuits. While the beginnings of Ignatianum date back to 1932 when the Faculty of Philosophy of the Society of Jesus in Krakow obtained the rights of a church school, it was not legally recognized during the communist era. In May 1989, following the end of communism, Ignatianum’s legal existence was confirmed by state authorities and since then it has conformed to the rules of the agreement between the Polish government and the Conference of Bishops of Poland; it is a Catholic university with state rights. Ignatianum is comprised of the Faculty of Philosophy, which offers degrees in philosophy and cultural studies, and the Faculty of Education, which of-
fers degrees in pedagogy, political studies, and social work. The university has engaged in significant work in the field of social justice both internally through its commitment to providing a Jesuit education to its students, and externally by seeking to engage in social justice work both in the greater Krakow community as well as internationally.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1952 and 1989, education in the People’s Republic of Poland was directed by the communist state. Under this system, education was significantly reformed under the country’s authoritarian rule, and it was free, uniform, public, and compulsory. The Catholic Church, despite communism, enjoyed a fair level of autonomy compared with other countries under Soviet domination, as the Church was one of the few institutions that could openly criticize the communist government and stand up for the oppressed.37 With time, however, the intersection of religion and education in Poland came under increased scrutiny. Religious Polish educators, including priests, were massacred during the wars, and with the communist education system came enhanced political censorship and distrust or religious leaders. By 1961, all schools in Poland were officially secularized.38

THE JESUIT REEMERGENCE IN POLAND

While one advantage of the communist-ruled education system was the growth in the number of schools and thus students reached, the state’s control over the curriculum was absolute. Many citizens, particularly religious leaders, lamented the lack of focus on individuals’ obligations to serve the poor, among numerous other concerns. Following the fall of the communist regime and the reemergence of the Polish Republic, religious entities were once again free to integrate their faith traditions into the country’s education system.

The Society of Jesus, which has roots in Poland reaching back to the end of the sixteenth century, was one of the foremost religious groups to renew its education system. The central goals of the Jesuit reemergence were both to reestablish their physical institutions and to instill a renewed appreciation for religious education in a country so long under staunchly secular rule. The Jesuit approach to education over the last two decades has emphasized the centrality of social justice and its promotion through education.

SOCIAL JUSTICE IN POLAND

The term “social justice” is not heard frequently in Poland. Religious leaders have expressed that, for many people, religion in Poland has historically been so prominent that good acts were done out of pure religiosity, rather than in the name of social justice. On the other hand, others emphasize the fact that communist rule prevented the country from appropriately engaging in social justice. According to Father Marcin Baran, S.J., “Poland is living under the inheritance of the former system in which the state takes care of everything;” it has only been in recent years, after hearing the term social justice, that people in Poland have realized the “need to do something on the basis of addressing structural poverty.” The recent work of the Jesuit order in Poland places a clear value on the importance of a sustained focus on service to others—a central tenant of the Jesuit education model.

As the concept of social justice is a crucial tenant of Jesuit education, it became critical to the Jesuit reestablishment of religious education. While early Jesuits described their work as “helping souls,” Jesuit leader Pedro Arrupe adopted the ideal of “men and women for others” during the twentieth century. This phrase emphasizes the Jesuits’ deep commitment to social justice through the giving of oneself to others.39 Although the large majority of the population identifies as Roman Catholic today, according to Marcin Baran, S.J., there is a large degree of “cultural Catholicism” in Poland in which “many people go to church but do not actually practice their religion.” Another educator, Fr. Pawel, S.J. expressed that in Poland and the rest of Europe, there is also a “suspicion of the Church” and that “the Church must serve more to be more credible in the eyes of the world. We need to see the needs of the people today. The answer is to give a clear example of the good work the Church is doing.” While the education system endured significant changes under communist control, some leaders in Poland feel that the ideals of social justice did not properly develop. Both leaders attribute this in part to the strict secularization forced on the country under communism, asserting that the idea of merging religious ideals and daily life is largely a new concept to Poland. According to Fr. Marcin Baran, S.J.: “Here in Poland, we need a new beginning. We need education to try to take the best things in our tradition from the Second Republic and reflect on the modern problems of today. This emergence of education will help give identity back that was lacking. We as Jesuits ought to take up our tradition and offer it as something new to Polish people…we must show how to run a school, teach ideas, and try to transplant these methods in the Polish system.”

Jesuits in Poland are actively working to reestablish the country’s connection between education and religion during the Third Republic—the current era in Polish history since the end of communist rule. Two particular Jesuit schools in the country—Kostka Gimnazjum and the Jesuit University of Krakow—are engaging ideals of Jesuit education to develop a
more socially just society. Through these schools and others throughout the country, the Jesuits strive to develop a more socially just society through excellent educational standards for students at various ages.

POLAND TODAY: CHALLENGES FACED AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION

During communist rule, religious education was dissociated from educational institutions and was relegated to the parish community. This situation posed a particular problem in Poland—a country where religion and education have been united for centuries. Additionally, the curricula in Polish schools fell under strict scrutiny, causing many Poles to become skeptical of their education. Among other repercussions, state-controlled schools negatively affected the country’s education systems by ridding Poland of its national identity and stripping schools with strong histories of their pride. According to Fr. Pawel: “Unlike the States where schools have large alumni networks with generations of the same family going to the same school, we do not have this in Poland. In fact, decades ago during communism people were not proud of their schools.”

Fr. Pawel further expressed his concern that the history of communism in Poland led to a spike in Polish nationalism in the Third Republic, which effectively overshadowed the importance of education. As he notes, “In America, I think, it is very common to link education level to identity and place in society….due to obvious parts of Polish history, when Poland needed to stand up for itself, it has always been very important to put your Polish identity first.”

Today, however, Jesuits are seeking to reaffirm the importance of education, and to also use education as a means to emphasize the importance of serving others. The Jesuit focus on education has certainly proven important to addressing some of the modern struggles of Poland. Similarly to the United States, where it is not uncommon to discover struggling school districts in inner cities, there are also numerous cases of failing schools throughout Poland. Due to international economic downturns, communities throughout the country currently struggle with low-enrollment in poorer-performing schools, or schools in more remote regions, and many schools have failed entirely.

In 2009, one example of a failed school could be found just a ten-minute tram ride away from the city’s main square. Located in one of Krakow’s poorest neighborhoods, and where one-third of the children are from single-parent households, this was the only school for students grades six to eight in the entire district. The school struggled with high dropout rates, angered parents, and discontented teachers. The city government finally shut down the school in 2010. Concerned about the future of their children, parents from the area asked the Jesuits to take charge of this middle school, believing that their leadership was a way to provide a good education for their children and to save the school. The Jesuits in Poland saw this as an opportunity to implement their mission of education and social justice, and sought the help of Fr. Pawel Brozyniak, S.J.—a native of Poland who had recently completed his master’s degree in Education at Loyola University Chicago. Seeking to implement tools that he learned during his time in the United States, Fr. Pawel took over this failed school in Krakow in order to create a “charter-
KOSTKA ELEMENTARY: A JESUIT “CHARTER” ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN KRAKOW

Catalyzed by community interest, and after receiving permission by the Society of Jesus and the Polish government, Kostka Gimnazjum opened its doors in 2010. Kostka is a public school partially financed by state funds, with the remainder of funding coming from private fundraising and grants. The goal of the school is to combine students from higher- and lower-income areas in order to develop a highly successful institution of private school caliber that is publicly funded. As a public school, Kostka has a quota that it must maintain with students from the immediate district. Once this quota is filled, the remainder of the class may be filled with high-achieving students from outside of the district. This charter-style school is the first of its kind in Poland, and Kostka has succeeded in turning a failed school into a state-of-the-art facility, turning it into one of the most popular gimnazjums in Krakow in a few short years. The Jesuits want Kostka to be place where students will learn the value of education and the good it can provide for society.

KOSTKA’S STUDENT FOCUS: A CULTURE OF EQUALITY

After recognizing a failed school on the outskirts of Krakow two years ago, Fr. Paweł sought to create a school from which students would be proud to graduate and would develop an alumni network similar to that of top schools in the United States. In order to achieve this goal, the Jesuit model of cura personalis has been central to the work at Kostka. Despite their different socioeconomic backgrounds, all students and parents affiliated with Kostka are treated with the same degree of respect and integrity. The guiding principle at the school is that the student is always paramount, a factor that permeates all aspects of the school. “If students and parents feel love”, says school director Fr. Paweł, there will be more trust and more success at the school. The purpose of Kostka is to be as “student-driven” as possible.

One approach to developing this culture of equality has been through the implementation of school uniforms. On the first day of school, students are brought into the main office and are sized and fitted for their free uniforms. The students wear these uniforms everyday to reduce signs of economic disparities so that all students see one another as equals. The student-centric culture at Kostka is also evident through students’ shared meals at the Canteen—the school's cafeteria—where students share free breakfast together every morning. Furthermore, the value of interpersonal connections and communication are even evident through the school’s absence of wi-fi. School leaders instituted this ban in order to combat the tendency of today’s younger generations to forego face-to-face interaction due to overindulgence in technology. Overall, the emphasis on community has proven successful at Kostka. According to one student, “We are interested in this school because each student has the same opportunities and there is a feeling that everyone is equal. No matter where we are from, we all go to Kostka. According to another student, “We feel like we get something from being here that will prepare us for the future. We will have opportunities that we otherwise might not.” It is evident that the ideals of reaching to others through an emphasis on community, compassion, and drive are central to the work at Kostka.

DOING “MORE”: KOSTKA MAGIS, AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Kostka Gimnazjum also strives to promote a culture of equality and excellence by developing its school facilities. As the government provides a fixed amount of money for each student that is sufficient for staff salaries and basic maintenance, Kostka has held fundraisers, written grant proposals, and developed other initiatives to build the school into an institution that the students are proud to attend. The school has undergone a complete transformation over the past two years from an outdated space with few resources, to a twenty-first century facility with a new chapel, science lab, language lab, and state-of-the-art turf field facilities. The desire and plans for these developments may be attributed to Kostka’s mission to do whatever it takes to provide a high quality education with the ultimate goal of transforming this underserved district. Students have identified these structural improvements as one of their favorite parts about Kostka.

The ideal of a holistic education tailored to the whole student are also evident through additional courses available at Kostka. While students are in classes everyday from 9:00 a.m. through 3:00 p.m., they are able to come to school early at 7:00 a.m. and stay late through 6:00 p.m. After school, groups of students often join together to participate in the Kostka Magis program. Through this program, students who require extra help in English are offered additional classes and those students who are advanced are offered extra time for one-on-one training for academic competitions. According to English teacher Zofia Nazim, “These lessons are free and I don’t earn any money during this time, but these hours are the most satisfying for me.” Students in Kostka Magis work with English through discussions, quizzes, crosswords, group work, songs, films, and exposure to native speakers. Both teachers and students at the school have cited this as one of their most valued aspects of Kostka. Speaking
of the lessons, one student said they are “energizing” and another attributed the success of the program to teachers, stating, “The teachers are very good, you can ask teachers everything—we always ask the teachers questions. It is easier for us to learn this way.”

Beyond the Kostka Magis program, there are additional courses that students and teachers develop together in which students may participate during their elective periods, as well as after school. The themes of these courses range from a cultural Krakow club, to a history club, acting, photography, and many other options. Beyond developing their own interests, students are able to interact further with the community through service opportunities such as the annual Christmas dinner. On this day, Kostka students are encouraged to invite family, friends, and community members into the school to celebrate the holiday together over a meal prepared by the students. Overall, the development of the student as a pupil as well as an active member of society is of central importance to the school. In addition, a general feeling of community is omnipresent at the school. According to Academic Director Josef Rostworowski, “For many students, coming to school is an opportunity to forget about the issues that they have.” The work of programs such as Kostka Magis provide evidence of the advancement of Jesuit ideals of a focus on education and development as men and women for others.

ACHIEVING GOALS AND MOVING FORWARD

While last year was the first full academic year for Kostka, tangible evidence quantifies the school’s successes since its opening. As the goal of Kostka is to develop a top-tier school, all students have been held to high and demanding standards. Last year, roughly 20 percent of the students received averages of US system “A,” while 10 percent did not pass and needed to retake courses. Despite the challenging academics, the students at Kostka are thrilled about the school and according to Mr. Rostworoski, the school director, “Students love coming to school and that is the biggest joy of being here at Kostka.” While the previous school closed down due to under-enrollment, Kostka now has over 300 applications for limited slots. This overwhelming desire to attend Kostka is a testament to the rapid development of the school and the positive experience of the students, families, and teachers associated with Kostka.

In addition to student and parent contentedness with the school, the experiences of the teaching staff also exhibit the success of the Jesuit model. While there are only two Jesuits on the teaching team of 21, all teachers have been encouraged to learn and embrace the Jesuit ethos at Kostka. Teachers are expected to hold their student to high standards and act as supportive mentors and guides for the students. After the previous school closed down, roughly 95 percent of the teaching staff stayed on the team to work at Kostka. While there was significant backlash from parents angry that the same teachers who had worked in the failed school would be teaching at Kostka, the teachers have shown major improvements and many have expressed their excitement about working at the new school. There is no union at Kostka and teachers work for lower salaries—signs that teachers remain for the school’s mission. According to English teacher Zofia Nazim, “The atmosphere at Kostka is special as teachers are interested in a student’s life not only at the school life but also about his or her background. We want to do our best as teachers.” Teachers at Kostka receive support from one another, as well as from school leadership. According to Fr. Pawel, “We try to show people that they can make a change for themselves and others through their work.” The transformations of the teachers have been recognized and appreciated by parents, who have held multiple celebrations to express gratitude for the hard work of the teachers.

THE FUTURE OF KOSTKA

As Kostka Gimnazjum is the first Jesuit-led charter-style school in Poland, it has done excellent work in promoting the importance of education through the Jesuit ideals of respect, service, and care for the whole self. The goal of Kostka has been to revolutionize the opportunities of a public education for children. There are plans to extend the school through high school so that students may attend Kostka up until they reach university or vocational school. In the meantime, students at Kostka have opportunities for high school and university preorientation programs so that they may learn more about their options for the future. Ultimately, Kostka is a leading example of the innovative work possible throughout Poland to merge the ideals of excellent education and social justice.

CHALLENGES FACED AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN POLAND

Similar to the secondary education level, during the communist era, most religious-based educational institutions were deemed invalid at the university level. The intention during this era was to limit the role of the Church in education since the philosophical and theological values associated with Catholicism did not align with communist ideals. The resulting problem, according to Fr. Marcin Baran, S.J., is that many of the present political leaders in Poland were educated under these communist ideals. Fr. Baran points out that during the liquidation of Polish elites in World War Two, leading educators were killed and students were subjected to communist-led education—creating a moral deficit in academia that affected the country’s elites. Due to the social circumstances in Poland, Fr. Baran further emphasizes that the concept of “social justice” is a relatively new concept, and that the idea of non-governmental organizations
or grassroots groups of people working to address social problems in society has only gained prominence in recent years. According to Fr. Baran, many structures in Poland reveal the inheritance of the former system in Poland in which the state took care of everything, and the idea of individuals having and fulfilling personal duties to others is a new concept.

While religious-based schools scrambled to rebuild themselves and reopen after the end of communism, this work has been long and arduous. Today, there are still only three Jesuit Universities in Poland—Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, as well as schools in Warsaw and Gdynia—though there is a strong desire to rebuild the Jesuit education system in Poland so that it becomes more like the thriving network in the US. However, the Jesuits also understand that such change requires time. Since reopening two decades ago, the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow has already made great strides, and its future remains bright.

ADVANCING HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY: THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY IGGATIANUM IN KRAKOW

Upon regaining legal status in 1989, the leaders at Ignatianum immediately developed plans to enroll students and develop new fields of study to meet the needs of the struggling country. Although it is a Catholic, Ignatianum receives public funding because it entered a concordat with the state and is thus treated like other public schools in Krakow. At Ignatianum, it is important to incorporate the Jesuit mission of “open-access” for all students, which allows for both the laity and clerics to attend and receive an education at an affordable cost. There are roughly 3,500 students at Ignatianum and about 70 percent of them are from outside of Krakow. The school has many students from low-income backgrounds who receive full tuition in order to attend.

IGNATIAN PEDAGOGY, FAMILY ASSISTANT, AND CENTER FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES

One primary goal of Ignatianum is to educate all students—whether clerics or lay students—to work towards a more socially just world. In order to fulfill this goal, Ignatianum offers a holistic curriculum for all students beginning in their first year with a required course. Taught by Dr. Ewa Dybowska, the goal of the course is to explore the basis of Ignatian pedagogy. Dr. Dybowska teaches students to use the Ignatian paradigm while searching for the “call for a deeper meaning and deeper philosophy to life.” According to Dr. Dybowska, this course is based on presentations and students must strive to connect one or more elements of the Ignatian paradigm when considering topics ranging from childcare to social work. As a supplement to their course materials, students receive spiritual guidebooks and information about spiritual and religious organizations.

According to Dr. Ewa Dybowska, the goal of the Ignatian Pedagogy course is to express the ideals of service through empowerment. The work of the school, done in the spirit of Ignatian pedagogy, may be also be seen through service outreach programs such as free courses for students over the age of 50, as well as college advising offered to high school students. Students also work with youth in detention centers as they learn about “resocialization pedagogy” and help the children re-adjust into society. Most recently, students at Ignatianum have had the opportunity to explore the pedagogy of a new career in the field of social justice in Poland—that of “family assistant.”

Poland is comprised of 16 provinces, each of which has an institution responsible for the preparation of social policies for the province. In each of these provinces, the European Union offers funding for concrete activities to prepare people to work with families, disabled persons, and victims of violent crimes, among other social issues. One of the newest jobs developed in Poland under the Social Welfare Act of April 28, 2011 is that of “family assistant.” The goal of the family assistant is to have the “elementary objective of improving the conditions of everyday life and strengthening family bonds by accompanying dysfunctional families that are unable to cope with life problems.” Family assistants offer psychological and emotional support for struggling families through actions ranging from diagnosing and monitoring, caring, advising, mediating, education, motivating, activating, and coordinating activities directed at the family. As a flourishing career, the task of family assistant is to provide thorough support for families bringing up children who are deemed “at-risk.” Students in Dr. Dybowska’s class spend significant time understanding the pedagogy behind this
new position, and many pursue this career after graduation. According to Dr. Dybowska, the job of a family assistant is “solution-based” as it focuses on empowerment of others. The teaching at Ignatianum educates students on the holistic nature of this job, as well as other jobs that they may pursue. While Dr. Dybowska explains that clients of social workers in Poland may not be treated with equality or given the time and care necessary to address their specific issues, students at Ignatianum are trained in the holistic approach of the family assistant job in order to enhance their abilities to work together as an empowered unit. At Ignatianum learn both the skills and pedagogy for important careers like that of the family assistant, which have contributed greatly to the advancement of social justice in Poland.

While courses and job training at Ignatianum exemplify the achievement of social justice through education, the university also engages Poland’s unique history in order to serve as a resource on the international frontier. One large goal of Ignatianum is to become a leader in the field of Eastern and Central European culture and history. Dr. Tomasz Homa, S.J., the director of cultural studies at Ignatianum, explains: “There are many outside perspectives of the problems in the country…but what is being done inside the country to educate others of our past?” The Jesuit University of Krakow sees itself as playing an important role in this discussion and plans to develop a center for knowledge and exploration of Eastern and Central Europe. According to Dr. Homa, “The main advantage of the work here at Ignatianum is that we are in Eastern Europe and have experienced and understand this region’s history firsthand.” Unlike outside sources that have ideas and opinions of how to understand and consider the Eastern and Central European world, Ignatianum hopes to establish itself as a leader in this conversation. While the plans for the center remain in the developmental stages, Ignatianum hopes to collaborate with educational institutions in nearby countries such as the Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, and Belarus.

THE FUTURE OF IGNATIANUM AND JESUIT EDUCATION IN POLAND

As one of the only Jesuit universities in modern Poland, Ignatianum has succeeded in reestablishing itself as one of the country’s leading educational institutions during the past two decades since regaining legal status. Ignatianum is currently on track to become a full research university, with the hope of developing into a full-fledged humanities university as well. The school has also placed a much greater emphasis on English. As students realize the importance of learning the language, the university has increased its exchange and study abroad programs and has even initiated bilingual courses. Ultimately, this linguistic emphasis will not only enhance Poland’s ability to expand educational opportunities for its own students but also allow the country’s universities to gain prominence abroad.

While Jesuit education in Poland thrived for many years, communist rule succeeded in severely weakening its influence for much of the twentieth century. Over the past two decades, however, the Society of Jesus has made great strides in reestablishing its educational facilities and unique teaching philosophy throughout the country. Today, Kostka Gimnazjum and Ignatianum are examples of schools that have embraced hardship and emerged as stronger institutions with a palpable emphasis on social justice and the betterment of society through holistic education. The success of these institutions demonstrates the viability of Jesuit education throughout the country, and serves as a model for the reemergence of religious education in Poland in the wake of its communist past.
**Interview Excerpts**

**FR. Paweł Bróżyniak, S.J., Director and Founder, Kostka Academy**

**What are the greatest institutional challenges here at Kostka?**

In America there is a very long tradition in schools for alumni to give money. People come to Poland and think they are seeing “old Europe” when in reality in Krakow, it is old buildings, with new people. Poland has gone through a history of wars, suppressions, and changing boarders. Unlike the States where schools have large alumni networks with generations of the same family going to the same school, we do not have this in Poland. In fact, decades ago during communism, people were taught lies in their schools and were not proud—they were being taught the truth at home and lies at school. There was a great school near Przemyśl but it was closed during Communism, and hasn’t been in existence for the past 50 years. This lack of an alumni network that systems such as Christo Rey enjoy, is where we have much less support. We want Kostka to become a school that people are proud to graduate from and that they want their grandchildren to go to years later. We are just beginning this legacy now, rather than 50 years ago!

**How do you express this importance of education to your students?**

I am a Jesuit priest and I put in twelve hours per day in because it is very much a spiritual experience that I feel called to do. Ignatius says to “help souls.” I see a lot of needs here and know I can help. But, the most important thing is to truly know that “to love is to serve.” Pope Francis has said to be simple and to be for others. The most important thing is for kids to feel care. When I worked in Italy at a Jesuit high school, many of the students were from very wealthy families. Yet, despite having beautiful (but empty) houses to go home to, the students preferred to stay after school to do homework. We don’t have wi-fi here for a reason – we want the students to learn to socialize face-to-face! The fact is, there is a decrease in Jesuits across Europe. We must be creative in our work in order to save our identity. While some Catholic schools are closed to different religions, we are not. One of our students, an Orthodox Jew from Georgia, said this is the “best school she has ever attended.” This shows that we are open to everyone and that we are interested in giving good educations.

**Józef Rostworowski, Director of Academics, Kostka Academy**

**This school’s approach and mission is very unique. Are there any special programs or trainings set up for the teachers so they may best perform at this school?**

The majority of the teachers at Kostka worked in this same school building here before when it was a failing school. Since this school became Kostka, many of these teachers have had the opportunity to develop with time. There has been a huge improvement in their performance as they are now affiliated with this school that is so different from before. The teachers associate with this school and say that they are proud of it. Other teachers have heard about this school and are interested in working here. We were just doing interviews today for seven positions that we have open, and we have a few hundred applicants. While there is no single criteria we’re looking for, we do generally want a younger team so that they get a chance to develop. We also have some older teachers who can serve as great mentors.

**Dr. Ewa Dybowska, Professor of Ignatian Pedagogy in Social Work, Jesuit University of Philosophy and Education Ignatianum**

**How are Jesuit Pedagogy and Ignatian Pedagogy different?**

Ignatian pedagogy, I think, is a way of thinking. It is open to everyone, particularly to a layperson. One may use elements of this thinking in his or her everyday life. Sometimes, it is difficult for students to understand the process. Basically, an Ignatian idea of “charism” calls for a deeper meaning and deeper philosophy to life. We strive to show that it is very important to work on oneself. Self-awareness, ingenuity, love and heroism are all important. The key to Ignatian thinking, I believe, is that there is not one set way for all people or one way of thinking about education. There is a stress on *cura personalis*—the idea that teachers accompany students while learning of Ignatian pedagogy. This includes context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Students are also assisted with documents of Ignatian pedagogy. From the beginning, pedagogy is very important.
Are there any plans to extend the mission of social justice of this University to other educational institutions in Poland and across the world?

Yes. Our really big plan for Ignatianum is to improve the university as a center for knowledge and exploration of Eastern and Central Europe. This includes the cultural and social context, and a center than understands the difficulties and problems that this region has experienced. The main advantage of the work here at Ignatianum is that we are in Eastern Europe and have experienced and understand this region's history firsthand. This is a perspective from the inside, rather than an outside perspective, such as a Western perspective of the region and history. Further, we see our location to be a potential center to collaborate with other nearby countries such as the Ukraine, Romania, Slovakia, and Belarus.

Zofia Nazim, English teacher, Kostka Gimnazjum

How do you feel the Jesuit mission in everyday life here at Kostka?

I can feel social justice connected with Jesuit mission here at Kostka everyday. Everybody is free and everybody has the same rights. It’s very important for students and their parents. Kostka is in one of the poorest district in Krakow and these families need good education and help. They need a good canteen, psychological help, a safe place to go to and to find cheerful people to talk to. And you can find all of this through the Jesuit mission at Kostka. Students development is possible thanks to proper learning, physical activities, being and working with others, and taking part in social deals. Kostka also helps parents in their duties connected with bringing up the children.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Father Marcin Baran, S.J.
Professor of Political Science, Jesuit University of Philosophy and Education Ignatianum

Father Pawel Brozyniak, S.J.
Director and founder of Kostka Academy

Dr. Ewa Dybowska
Professor of Social Work and Ignation Pedagogy, Jesuit University of Krakow

Dr. Tomasz Homa, S.J.
Director of Cultural Studies, Jesuit University of Krakow

Kinga, Wictoria, Dominik, Kacper, and Sebastian
Students as Kostka Academy

Tomek Kunewicz
Director, Auschwitz Jewish Center

Zofia Nazim
English teacher as Kostka Academy

Dr. Paula Olearnik
Professor of Political Science, Jesuit University of Philosophy and Education Ignatianum and the Jagiellonian University

Jozef Rostworowski
Director of Academics, Kostka Academy

Monika Tylka
Student, Jesuit University of Philosophy and Education Ignatianum
ENDNOTES

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16. Tola Kao interview.
20. Ibid.
21. The word “college” here is a translation of the Spanish word colegio and is more or less a false cognate: in Latin America, colegio is a general term for a pre-university school. Many colegios encompass kindergarten through high school—from approximately ages six to sixteen.
22. Previously an all-boys school, the College of the Immaculate Conception adopted a coeducational model in 2010.
27. Sr. Bravo is mestizo.
33. Wilkinson, “Prosperity.”
34. A zoocriadero is essentially a zoo, though the term is slightly more specific: it refers to an institution that focuses primarily on caring for and breeding animals rather than showing them to spectators.
36. Sr. McLaughlin prefers this title over something like “Director” or “Principal.”
41. Ibid, 31.
42. Ibid, 52.
The education and social justice project: international summer fellowships 2013

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