
EMPOWERMENT OF AFRO-COLOMBIANS THROUGH EDUCATION

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE FUNDACIÓN EDUCATIVA INSTITUTO ECOLÓGICO BARBACOAS
AT THE ISLAND OF BARÚ, IN THE DISTRICT OF BOLIVAR, COLOMBIA



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Abstract

This paper presents a critical study of the Fundación Educativa Instituto Ecológico Barbacoas (FEIEB), a school serving about 177 Afro-Colombian students on the Island of Barú, at Cartagena de Indias, District of Bolívar, Colombia. The study draws from interviews with school administrators, teachers and staff, classroom observations and an analysis of the 2006 Plan de Estudios of the school. It seeks to discover the extent to which FEIEB can be hailed as a model for other schools oriented towards the empowerment of Afro-Colombians. The paper is divided into three sections. The first section presents the problems that Afro-Colombians face in the country, and particularly in Barú. The second section runs a SWOT analysis of FEIEB. It identifies FEIEB's: (i) strengths; (ii) weaknesses; (iii) opportunities; and (iv) threats in empowering its Afro-Colombian students. The third section extends a set of recommendation for this and similar schools.

I. INTRODUCTION: the status of Afro-Colombians and the founding of the Fundación Educativa Instituto Ecológico Barbacoas (FEIEB)

Assessing the status of Afro-Colombians is particularly difficult, given the conflicting definitions of this ethnic group in nation-wide surveys and international studies.¹ According to the United Nations Population Fund and the US Census Bureau, they make up roughly 4% of the 44,913,700 inhabitants of Colombia (UNDP, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2005.) According to the *XVI Censo Nacional de Población y V de Vivienda* carried out in 1993, there are more than 493,170 people of African descent in the country and they constitute less than 1% of the total population (DANE, 1993.) Yet according to more recent studies, Afro-Colombians and *mestizo* Afro-Colombians are considered together as the largest ethnic minority in the country, with estimates ranging from 20% to 30% (USOC, 2004.)

Whatever their exact number is, most studies perceive Afro-Colombians as the most poverty-stricken, war-torn pocket of the population. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that 80% of Afro-Colombians live in extreme poverty (UNHCHR, 1999.) The majority of Afro-Colombians reside in some of the most neglected and conflictive regions of the country, where they are caught in combat among state, guerrilla and paramilitary forces. In fact, over a third of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are Afro-Colombian (USCRI, 2005.) The conflict continues to reinforce discriminatory structures and policies, disproportionately affecting the Afro-Colombian community and deepening the poverty and inequality in which that community lives (USOC, 2004.)

Afro-Colombians have nonetheless succeeded in securing some rights and recognition, especially concerning liberties related to their education. The 1991 National Constitution introduced in Article 68 the right of Afro-Colombians and indigenous people in Colombia to an education that respects and develops their cultural identity (Arocha, 1998.) This right began to be formally recognized with Law of the Black Communities (Law 70) in 1993; General Law of Education (Law 115) in 1994; Decree on Ethno-Education (Decree 1860) in the same year; and Decree on Afro-Colombian Ethno-Education (Decree 804) in 1994. Whereas Afro-Colombians possess these rights, however, their situation in real life by and large impedes them from exercising these rights—not many Afro-Colombians have the degrees to become teachers, fewer can become school administrators, and even fewer can establish their own schools. The extent to which Afro-Colombians get to exercise the right to educate themselves from an ethno-cultural sensitive perspective, therefore, is mainly up to public schools and the work of NGOs devoted to education.

Afro-Colombians require economic development alternatives and social support from state and international actors in order to protect the community's human rights and to create viable options for the future. As we will see in this paper, the role of education in providing such alternatives can be both radical and long-lasting. A critical study of the way in which the *Fundación Educativa Instituto Ecológico Barbacoas* (FEIEB), a school serving about 177 Afro-Colombian students at the Island of Barú, in the District

of Bolívar, attempts to empower the Afro-Colombian population in Barú through education can yield valuable lessons for other Afro-Colombian schools across the country, and contribute to the ongoing debates on the education of ethnic minorities in the Andean region.

A. *The Challenges of Afro-Colombians in the island of Barú*

Afro-Colombians in the island of Barú, while safe from the woes of civil war, still live a daily struggle to lift themselves out of poverty. The district of Bolívar, where the island is located, has the 4th highest concentration of Afro-Colombians in the country, hosting about 29,644 of them (DANE, 1993), and has the second highest unemployment rate of all major Afro-Colombian districts – together the district of Chocó (DANE, 2004.) Barú, located in the Caribbean coast of Colombia,² is an island mainly made up of about 2,500 inhabitants (mainly fishermen), at the westernmost part of Bolívar, and is divided into three villages: Ararca, Santa Ana, and Barú. The obstacles to development in the island are mainly related to (i) *demographic* and (ii) *environmental* challenges: population pressure, economic fluctuations in the coconut industry, tourism, pollution of the lagoon, inadequate water and electricity supply,³ and mangrove destruction have made the life of the fishermen much harder (Kendall, 1992.)

1. *Demographic challenges*

Demographic challenges in Barú are multiple, inter-related, and highly complex. Families are large, and a great percentage of the population in the island is young. Children are often seen meandering on the roads of Barú, and some (as young as five or six years of age) even perform highly sexually suggestive dances and beg for money from tourists entering the island.⁴ One of the few studies done on Barú's many challenges estimates that sexual activity may begin as early as 14 years of age, and that several Barú residents have died of AIDS (Kendall, 1992.)

2. *Environmental challenges*

Environmental challenges are also becoming increasingly hard to overcome. The copra boom of the 1930s and 40s and decent coconut harvests amounted to good times in the past (Kalmanovitz and López, 2002.) But while tourism provides jobs close at hand and a market for fishing catches, it has also brought with it environmental destruction, which has made opportunities for fishing much more scant: increasing closed access to beaches, cutting of mangroves to make beaches, pollution along the coast from industrial waste and city drains, the concentration of fishermen, the decimation of fish from too many years of dynamiting for bait have caused fishing, still the most popular occupation in the island, to move farther into the sea and to yield smaller harvests. Land has also been appropriated for tourism development and what is left is unsuitable for grazing or growing fruit trees. The fishermen of Barú have few alternatives left, and their main occupation is becoming progressively less profitable with time.

B. *Education of Afro-Colombians in Barú and in the country at large*

Education, oft-hailed as many as the great equalizer and the solution to many of these challenges, is a privilege only some Afro-Colombians actually receive. A Presidential Report on the status of Afro-Colombians, it was estimated that: of every 1,000 Afro-Colombian babies born, approximately 151 die before the age of one (compared to an overall national statistic of 39); the illiteracy rate within the Afro-Colombian is three times higher than the rest of Colombians; the per-capita income of Afro-Colombian is US\$500, which is equivalent to one third of the national per capita average; roughly two percent of young Afro-Colombians receive a college education; seventy-four percent of Afro-Colombians earn salaries that are below the legal minimum wage; and Colombia has the highest population in IDPs following Sudan and Angola.⁵

Education in the island of Barú is no different: inaccessible to most Afro-Colombians, and of meager quality in those public educational facilities that provide them. Neither the village of Ararca nor Barú have any schools – the only public school is in Santa Ana. Up until 1990, the inhabitants of the island had no means through which to break out of poverty traps through education.⁶

C. *The arrival of the Fundación Mario Santo Domingo to the island of Barú*

The story of the arrival of the *Fundación Mario Santo Domingo* (FMSD) to Barú is of particular importance to understand the role of education in the empowerment of Afro-Colombians in the island. FMSD, a non-profit organization that has promoted social development in Colombia since 1960, arrived at Barú in 1990.⁷ Over its first seven years in the island, FMSD:

- (i) studied the needs of the community;
- (ii) trained villagers in different crafts;
- (iii) worked to foster better and more cost-effective uses of the resources of the community, generating sources of income through an interdisciplinary group made up of social workers, psychologists, business administrators, architects and engineers;
- (iv) contributed, with the support from the *Instituto Nacional de Vivienda e Interés Social y Reforma Urbana* (INURBE), to the improvement of housing through the project *Urbanización Altos de Santa Ana* (INURBE, 2003);
- (v) built a sports center (*Polideportivo*) in the heart of Santa Ana, seeking to promote sports among the natives and the communal use of spaces by children and youth;
- (vi) founded a modern health center, the *Clínica Julio Mario Santo Domingo*, to address problems related to (among other issues) reproductive health and nutrition, staffed with a full-time physician and a dentist.⁸

These efforts no doubt proved somewhat effective: 67% of the couples in Barú now had access to services such as pills, injections and condoms; condom use became popular and information about reproductive health became widely available; community projects engaged people in artisan crafts production and dressmaking; and a fishing cooperative of about 30 to 40 people was formed (Kendall, 1992.) Yet in spite of all this hard work, FMSD noted that it had failed to promote a sustainable change in the island.

C. *The founding of FEIEB*

Upon consulting with the members of the community, FMSD realized that improving education was pivotal to promote development and empower the villagers in the island. Although initially FMSD attempted to work with the existing public school in Santa Ana, it met resistance from the school administrators and teaching staff, who were reluctant to allow much foreign influence into the school. FMSD thus decided to found another non-profit organization, the *Fundación Educativa Instituto Ecológico Barbacoas* (FEIEB), “to improve the quality of life of the Santa Ana community, keeping the preservation of the environment as the guiding principle of instruction in the school” (FEIEB, 2006a.)

After a considerable period of search for school administrators from the community, FMSD decided to put the *Hermanas Dominicanas de la Presentación*, an order of Colombian nuns, to run the school. Together with a staff of twelve teachers and equipped with twelve classrooms, the *Hermanas* began to draft the first *Plan de Estudios* (PEI). When writing the PEI, the *Hermanas* declared that the problems in Santa Ana were: “low enrollment rates of children and youths, high illiteracy rates, depletion of the natural environment, poor quality of life, conformism, lack of ethno-cultural identity, malnutrition, and lack of access to water” (González Castro and Cordero Santana, 2006.) Their objective was: “to improve education and the quality of life of the inhabitants of Santa Ana, to strengthen their ethno-cultural identity, and to keep the protection of the environment as the guiding principle” (FEIEB, 2006a.) In 1997, FEIEB opened with 280 students. FEIEB now has 28 classrooms, 34 full-time teachers, and offers pre-school, primary and secondary education, leading to a National Technical Baccalaureate of Fishing and Tourism.⁹

According to its PEI, FEIEB understands its role to encourage students to “acquire the necessary skills to learn through active methodologies that allow for the interaction between the learners and their surrounding environment, in a playful and meaningful way, which shall result in a society where individuals can find a meaning for their life” (FEIEB, 2006a.) The PEI refers to the *modelo de la pedagogía del trabajo* (employment-oriented pedagogical model, or MPT) and, based on its fundamentals, develops the *modelo de la pedagogía del desarrollo del talento humano*—pedagogical model for the development of the human talent, or MPDTH (FEIEB, 2006b:4.) We will go into the specific areas of the MPDTH on the background section of the SWOT. Yet before we do so, we should first define our end-goal for our SWOT analysis. In other words, why do we need a SWOT analysis? According to *what end-goal* are there strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats at FEIEB? To this question, we turn next.

II. SWOT ANALYSIS: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats of FEIEB & the question of Afro-Colombian Empowerment as an End Goal

The need for a SWOT analysis of FEIEB, while seemingly unnecessary for most observers, who see in FEIEB a noble purpose and a sustainable project, remains imperative as the school confronts new challenges and hurdles to overcome. While the founding of FEIEB was the product of a series of studies of the community of Santa Ana, the school has now been in operation for over nine years, it has changed principals, and it has seen its number of students decrease in the last few years. At the same time, FEIEB has accomplished unprecedented achievements, such as reducing to zero the amount of pregnant students, and retaining students throughout their education. It is of utmost importance to assess the school with a strategic view that considers both its successes and areas wanting improvement.

SWOT analysis can be understood as the examination of an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, and its environments, opportunities, and threats (Balamuralikrishna and Dugger, 1995; Gorski, 1991.) Although originally intended for use in business applications, the idea of using this tool in educational settings is not altogether new (Balamuralikrishna and Dugger, 1995.) In any case, a SWOT analysis does not differ much from other approaches to school efficiency: it is subjective (in the sense that what some might perceive as strengths, others might conceive as weaknesses, depending on the desired end-goal); and it compares the goals and objectives of the school with its output, namely, the quality of education it provides, and in this case, the extent to which the school is serving the needs of the community. With the purpose of extrapolating lessons learned in FEIEB to other comparable schools in Bolívar, the analysis will also look at the main challenges to equal educational opportunity in the district, and gauge the extent to which FEIEB is addressing (or neglecting) these challenges.¹⁰

Even if we accept that a SWOT approach is necessary, feasible, and that it would bring about potential improvements for FEIEB, the remaining question is why doing it with *empowerment* as its end-goal? In other words, if it is the improvement of FEIEB that we are looking for, why not run a SWOT analysis from the perspective of the objectives of FEIEB only?

A. *Why do a SWOT analysis of FEIEB with empowerment as its end-goal?*

Since any SWOT analysis is bound to be subjective, it is imperative that the strengths, weaknesses, the opportunities and the threats are evaluated over both: (i) *internal factors*, such as the overarching goals and specific purposes of the subject being evaluated; and (ii) *external factors*, such as the needs of the community, the district, and the country at large.¹¹ By relying on both of these sets of factors, we contemplate possible flaws within the stated objectives of FEIEB. Otherwise, we would merely be measuring the impact of socialization processes inside the school. We would be evaluating *the extent to which students have fulfilled the purposes that FEIEB had intended for them* as opposed to *the extent to which students have incorporated what they learned at FEIEB*

to develop their own way of resolving their own problems, at the household, in the island, and in Colombia as a whole.)

By proposing empowerment as our end-goal in this analysis, we can insure that our approach will not issue recommendations for the mere *assimilation* of Afro-Colombians in the larger society, but instead push for their actual *empowerment*, for a transformational that would allow them to become *equally important agents* of change in the larger Colombian society (Arocha, 1998.) For the purposes of this paper, therefore, the end-goal of *empowerment through education* for our SWOT approach shall be defined as the extent to which:

- (i) students understand and critically reflect upon the material and lessons presented at school;
- (ii) students can use the cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge that they have reflected upon to improve the conditions of their community;
- (iii) students enjoy a wider array of options during and after their studies at FEIEB.

Notably absent from this definition of empowerment are specific standards of “success”, be it academic, economic, political or otherwise. Even if the definition of empowerment assumes that students should not only incorporate knowledge, but also apply it to their own lives and those of the ones around them (and thus exhibits an inherent bias to the definition of an educated person), it does not specify a particular way in which students should do so. The reason behind this omission is obvious: if we determine the particular ways in which minorities shall empower themselves, we would not allow for any degree of personal determination, which is a key component of empowerment to begin with.¹²

B. Background information

In order to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of FEIEB, we must begin by understanding the basic notions behind the school’s pedagogical model. According to the PEI, FEIEB’s pedagogical model draws from the principles of the founder of the *Hermanas Dominicanas de la Presentación*, Marie Possepin,¹³ who sees: (i) work as a “strengthening force of the spirit of the community, which allows people to engage in fraternal dialogue, accept the truth, and overcome conflict;” and (ii) education as “a testimony of quality, which acts over a person and society forever.” FEIEB’s model also borrows from St. Francis of Assisi’s conception of environmental education, which proposes: “students should learn to love all living beings, so that they could learn to coexist with them” (FEIEB, 2006b:5.)

Not surprisingly (due its pedagogical referents), the model of the school is religious, and contemplates the interactions between the human being and: (i) culture (understood as the whole person, the world, values, and identity); nature (the creation, the future, the way in which evolution works, and development); her/himself (the things, society, freedom, economics, and power); God (the faith, thanksgiving, the Church), (FEIEB, 2006b:5.)

Lastly, as previously mentioned, the MPDTH borrows much of the MPT, and it important that we understand how these relate to each other to comprehend the

pedagogical model of FEIEB. Whereas the MPT can be imagined as a triangle in which work, pedagogy, and the human being relate to each other, the MPDTH presents a much more complex pedagogical model. The MPDTH can be envisioned also as a triangle, but that shows the degree of interrelation between (i) wisdom and entertainment; (ii) the formation of the whole person; and (iii) education and evolution. To further understand the relation between the MPT and the MPDTH, refer to the Annex.¹⁴

C. *Internal assessment of strengths and weaknesses*

We turn now to the SWOT analysis proper, and begin by analyzing the strengths of FEIEB in relation to the aforementioned end-goal of empowerment as defined in previous page. Although most SWOTs are organized in the form of a chart that splits the page in four parts, I have chosen to break it down into sections with suggestions, in the hopes that this would be a more accessible analysis for those involved in the administration of the school to read through, and yet meet the formatting requirements of the thesis.

1. *Potential Strengths*

FEIEB's potential strengths are listed below, from the more general to the more specific (i.e. from the school's theoretical model, to the concrete life of a FEIEB graduate.) These areas will also be used to evaluate FEIEB's weaknesses.

PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

- *Emphasis on work* - It is clear that work is a priority both in the MPT and the MPDTH. Considering that most of the people in Barú are either unemployed or have a limited menu of employment choices, FEIEB is bound to give a great advantage to children in poor households, giving them a wider array of jobs to choose from.
- *Emphasis on religion* - religion is a great part of Santa Ana and the rest of the country (in fact, 90% of Colombia is Roman Catholic) and its inclusion in FEIEB's curriculum could be interpreted as a way of celebrating part of Afro-Colombian identity. Religious instruction is bound to remain an incentive for parents to send their children to school.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

- *Multilateral participation in the school* - although the school principal makes all of the day-to-day decisions, the Administrative Council (composed of school staff, teachers, and student representatives) issues suggestions regarding the running of the school.

SUBJECT MATTER

- *Ample and diverse course offering* - students at FEIEB are exposed to a wide array of courses and disciplines. Though students can choose to concentrate in fishing, tourism, or the recently added arts and crafts diploma in their last two years of high school, they are not bound by decisions early in their academic experience. Students enjoy a wide menu of options in their schoolwork, and left to decide how to best contribute to the development of their community.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- **Extensive and diverse extracurriculars** – students are also exposed to a series of compulsory and non-compulsory activities, or *proyectos*.
 - Compulsory activities include: *Proyecto ambiental escolar* (Environmental Education, or PRAES), sexual education, ethics and values, classes on how to best employ their leisure time, and democratic education, among others.
 - Non-Compulsory activities include: religious (Catholic) education, *Prensa Escuela* (a media-oriented project that teaches reading and writing through the use of newspapers donated to the school), *Adulto Mayor* (classes on the transition to adulthood), school for parents, and vocational orientation. The degree of exposure to so many extracurriculars seems both surprising and admirable, given the school serves a truly impoverished community.
- **School-wide projects and fieldtrips:** since its opening in 1997, FEIEB has consistently offered its students school-wide projects that target different needs of the school, the community, and the country at large. These projects range from workshops on values and *convivencia*, to environmental competitions and religious celebrations. Special projects are also offered, according to the *modalidad* (track) each student chooses (either Fishing, Tourism, or Arts & Crafts.) These sorts of offers ensure that students learn both inside and outside of the school, and that they thus come to appreciate the communities they are part of as their learning environment.

INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL

- **Open classrooms** – students at FEIEB take classes in hut-like classrooms with no walls, that allow students to feel part of their environment, interact with passersby, and learn to become aware of their actions and behavior on those around them.¹⁵ The staff and administrators of the school can observe classes easily by sitting on the side benches of the classrooms, without disrupting the actual classroom environment.
- **Auxiliary classrooms** – besides having these classrooms, the school also counts with auxiliary classrooms, which are round-shaped huts with no desks, or chalkboard, which provide an appropriate space for classroom discussions.
- **Playground activities** – students also encounter friendly facilities in the playground area, where a set of bleachers is set up for teachers and students to rest from the sun and share quotes, music (with instruments and stereos provided by the school.) On special occasions (such as the celebration of Women’s Day), teachers and students spontaneously get together during recess to play music and dance to Afro-Colombian music.¹⁶
- **Spaces for alternative corporal expression and the arts** – FEIEB features two particularly unique spaces on its campus. One of them is a dancing floor and performance arts theater whose stage was built on a foam platform so that children would not hurt their knees when dancing. At this theater, students learn how to express themselves with their bodies in a free and creative way. As seen by the instructors of FEIEB, this space provides children an alternative way to express themselves through dancing (in particular, an alternative to the sexually

suggestive dancing that many children perform at the entrance of the Island of Barú, which we noted in the introduction.)¹⁷

FACULTY

- *Diverse teaching styles* – teachers are mostly engaging in class, and though they conduct classes in different styles (some allow for more discussion than others, some make more emphasis on memorization of facts than others, some relate the issues discussed in class to the issues of the island more than others), it can be ascertained that students are exposed to a myriad of teaching styles and class dynamics. This diversity increases the probability that teachers might be reaching more students, in the sense that not all children learn in the same way and through the same methods. Diversity enhances the chances of getting most of a classroom to learn.
- *Relatively high job satisfaction* – teachers have also expressed on several interviews their desire to stay at FEIEB. In fact, last year, about ten teachers took the exam that would make them qualify to work within the public system (which would ensure them job security until retirement.) Ten out of the ten passed the exam, and two decided they could not leave the school. FEIEB provides a series of incentives to maintain good teachers, such as providing them with their own houses inside FEIEB's campus. As small and simple as these houses are, they try to incorporate the teachers into the community, so that they interact not only with the students during class-time, but also with their family members and the students' immediate environment, and hopefully come to understand its problems and appreciate its noble elements.¹⁸
- *Specialized teaching* – although there are no after-school programs at FEIEB for children with special learning needs, all lesson plans for every course include sections devoted on how to teach the material to students who cannot learning through the regular class lecture. Since all special programs of this kind are evaluated by the Academic Council (an entity at FEIEB composed entirely of teachers of different disciplines) there is also ample room for teachers to share and exchange experiences about what strategies work best in these sorts of situations. Students also enjoy specialized teaching in a different way: their class on corporal expression is taught by Álvaro Restreppo, one of the best-known performers in Colombia.¹⁹

STUDENT LIFE

- *Impressive learning skills inside the classrooms* – at classroom observations and direct engagement with the students in some lessons, the students demonstrated (with notable exceptions): (i) deep understanding of the issues studied in class; (ii) eagerness to learn and to cooperate in groups; (iii) facility to understand newly-acquired content; (iv) a strong ability to apply new skills to different situations presented by the instructors; and (v) a friendly and propitious classroom environment, seemingly free of social inhibitions, mockery, or outright discrimination.
- *Improvement of health and nutrition outside of the classroom* – among the most salient accomplishments of the school is the improvement of the nutrition of students attending FEIEB.²⁰ Although most students at FEIEB bring their own

- breakfasts and lunches, teachers collect money among themselves to pay for those students who cannot afford to bring their own food. In a sense, FEIEB thus provides a safety net for children and their families, without necessarily creating a sense of dependence on the assistance of others.
- ***Pursuit of further studies & scholarships system:*** about 25% of the students that graduated from FEIEB last year are now undertaking further studies. Students who graduate from FEIEB have also been awarded scholarships by government and civil society organizations:
 - in 2000, two FEIEB graduates were awarded pardonable student loans by the *Instituto Colombiano de Crédito Educativo y Estudios Técnicos en el Exterior* (ICETEX) that are allotted specially for Afro-Colombian students;
 - in 2002, the student with the best GPA was granted a scholarship by FMSD ;
 - in 2003, the two students with the best GPAs were awarded two FMSD scholarships to study intensive English at the *Colombo Americano de Cartagena*.²¹ Students are indeed able to pursue further studies, even when they lack the funds to cover the costs of graduate education.
 - ***Graduates and alumni*** – other students who graduated from FEIEB are involved in different activities such as:
 - *Barú, Inc.:* given that a great percent of employment in Barú is provided by tourism, graduates from the school came together to use FEIEB’s facilities to do arts and crafts, which they then sell through to the tourists in the island. Shortly, they will also sell their products through the Internet.²²
 - *The Alumni Store:* some graduates have also established a shop with school supplies and goods right outside of the school, which has proven sustainable, and has helped to foster the importance of inputs in quality education. In other words, the shop is making families invest more in education.
 - ***Strengthening of Afro-Colombian identity*** – students at FEIEB also come to appreciate their rightful Afro-Colombian identity within the larger Colombian society, through games, dances, hairdressing workshops, arts and crafts workshops and other activities that seek to make students appreciate features that have been historically part of the Afro-Colombian culture: oral tradition, the cost-effective use of the resources in the environment, and spiritual life.²³

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- ***Enrollment fees*** – recognizing parents as equal partners means not only respecting their decisions, but also demanding more from them. FEIEB charges all parents an annual enrollment fee (negligible in value) that commits parents to keep on sending their children to school. Although FEIEB grants scholarships to those families who cannot afford to pay the fee, the existence of this symbolic fee implies that FEIEB is not charity, but a service for the families of Santa Ana. The fee could be argued to also diminish drop out rates (since children do not usually drop out of school once their parents have paid for their education at FEIEB.)
- ***Improvement of intra-familial relationships*** – FEIEB has also become more involved in ensuring safe households for its students. Visits to the students’ homes, meetings with the parents, and consultations with psychologists make it much easier for both parents and students to deal with the emotional effects of

unemployment, poverty, and other ongoing problems in the island (such as teenage pregnancy, diseases like HIV/AIDS, among others.)

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

- **Active student participation in the improvement of the community** – students at FEIEB develop and implement *proyectos de participación ciudadana* (projects of citizen participation) that entail community service initiatives where students work to tackle a particular need of the community, such as:
 - *Partnership with Smurfit Carton Colombia S.A.:* through a Smurfit-sponsored initiative, FEIEB launched the *Proyecto Ciudadano: Falta de Agua Potable*. Students of eighth, ninth and tenth grade participated in pipe construction projects to ensure Santa Ana could get better access to safe water.
 - *Garbage collection:* students at FEIEB also regularly partake in projects to clean the roads of Santa Ana through garbage-collection squads.

2. Potential Weaknesses

In spite of this remarkable nine-year record of environmental instruction, academic improvement, and cultural education, FEIEB needs to acknowledge the following potential internal weaknesses and decide how to best move forward to prevent them from halting the progress the school has achieved hitherto.

PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

- **Absence of Afro-Colombian contributions to pedagogy:** notably absent from the pedagogical models of the school (both from the MPT and the MPDTH) are references to Afro-Colombian, African, or Colombian contributions to pedagogy.²⁴ It seems hard to teach students at FEIEB to be proud of their heritage through overarching foundations of education in the school that are not their own. Inasmuch as we could argue that the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi and Marie Poussepin are part of Colombia's Catholic spirituality, FEIEB lacks the integration of Afro-Colombian approaches to education. Particularly absent from FEIEB's pedagogical models are approaches that link education with political engagement, with the historical claims of Afro-Colombians. One could argue that the students at FEIEB would profit from such incorporation, since they would be able to fully appreciate the intellectual capacity and pedagogical innovations of Afro-Colombians. Such an inclusion in the pedagogical model would even grant an instant feeling of empowerment to the students, who would be able to understand the underlying principles under which their school is founded, thus gaining a feeling of self-administration.
- **Omission of the political connotations of work** – even if both the MPT and the MPDTH recognize the importance of a person's work in life as a defining factor in her or his life,²⁵ giving too much importance to work when educating Afro-Colombian student may mislead them into passively concentrating in their work without focusing on the political, cultural and economic demands Afro-Colombians in the rest of the country are putting forward. In other words, to educate Afro-Colombians to concentrate on work alone at a time when they have not yet found a condition of political recognition might lead to forming children who are complacent with their oppressed status within the country. It could be

said that failure to design a pedagogical model that contemplates, as one of its main components, the historical struggle of Afro-Colombians to achieve political, cultural, and economic equality can lead to the disempowerment of Afro-Colombians, who (even most FEIEB students) only have access to the most marginal, low-paid jobs.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

- ***Lack of Participation of Students and Parents in Curriculum-design*** – whereas the Administrative Council takes into consideration the input of student representatives, the Curriculum Council (the council that makes all decisions related to the topics and issues to be included in the lesson plans for every class, and that design special education alternatives to the material designed for classroom activities) is entirely composed of teachers. Student (and even parental) input might give teachers a better sense of what topics would motivate students the most, which issues interest the community, and at the same time, parents and students would not feel as equal partners with the administration (who is 100% not Afro-Colombian.) The partnership would not only diffuse tensions between Afro and non-Afro Colombians, but also raise the moral of parents and students, and also teach them skills for academic planning. The rationale for this proposal is that it is difficult to design an education plan for a community whose educational thirst we have not inquired about. As much as the members of the Santa Ana community (both parents and students) might respond positively to the proposals of the school administration (such as the inclusion of Arts and Crafts as a possible degree), direct involvement would no doubt ensure a longer-term and better understanding by the leaders of the school of what the community wants.

SUBJECT MATTER

- ***Omission of the Afro-Colombian outlook on the subject matter presented*** – all students at FEIEB in every grade learn one hour of Afro-Colombian history. Students spend three times as many hours on religious studies from pre-school to 9th grade, and twice as many hours on religious studies during 10th and 11th grade. It could be argued that, if one of the goals of FEIEB is to promote a sense of pride in the students' Afro-Colombian heritage, one hour is not enough to achieve this purpose. If FEIEB is serious about promoting a sense of equality for Afro-Colombians, the school should make Afro-Colombian history rather the 'interpreter' of all material in history. In order to achieve such a change, the inclusion of Afro-Colombians in the Educational Council (discussed above) is imperative.
- ***Compulsory nature of religious education*** – although it is a fact that religion can be an important aspect of Afro-Colombian identity, students at FEIEB seem to be precluded from ever challenging or complementing their Catholic religious beliefs, since they do not have the option of opting out of Catholic religion education classes. Given that Catholic religious instruction is not an option but a requirement, it could be argued that its compulsory nature could serve to *reproduce* rather than to *celebrate* the spirituality of the students at FEIEB. Making Catholic instruction compulsory also bars students from connecting to spiritual

elements and lessons from African religions, which could make them either complement or challenge their Catholic religious beliefs.

- ***Rote as a tool of foreign language instruction*** – most English classes that were observed during the visit to the school teach students this foreign language by rote.²⁶ Teachers often use translation as their main EFL instruction technique. It could be argued that making students think critically about the reasons behind language differences, making them internalize grammar and English language rules, and making them reflect upon the linguistic codes of both Spanish and English could lead to more effective and more lasting second language acquisition.²⁷

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- ***Lack of political activism/awareness activities*** – even if the *Hilo Conductor* (Pedagogical Axis) of the education of students in 10th and 11th grade is ‘Quality of Life’, none of the extracurricular activities promoted by the school has hitherto exposed FEIEB students to political, cultural, and economic demands by Afro-Colombian groups to the government. Failure to expose students to these types of demands, that have shaped the status of Afro-Colombians in the country, can be argued to be counter-productive to the goal of promoting ethnic pride and engagement, and can be detrimental to empowering the students. Several Colombian scholars have suggested interesting means of promoting both Afro-Colombian pride and engagement through the role of music, a strength of FEIEB that could be redirected to further political awareness.²⁸

INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE SCHOOL

- ***Lack of a power generator*** – FEIEB (much like the most of the island) suffers through at least one day per week without electricity, due to government-sponsored *planes de racionalización de energía* (plans for energy consumption control.)²⁹ In the case of FEIEB, the day on which the outage occurs is crucial, since the school receives all of its food for the cafeteria on a certain day of the week, and when they do receive meat or chicken, or any other perishable good, a day without electricity can ruin the food and leave the entire school with little to no meals to distribute for an entire week. A power generator could most certainly correct this problem.
- ***Outdated hardware and software and access to Internet*** – although the school is fortunate enough to count with a computer lab, the number of computers (about 20 operating stations) does not even cover an entire class (classes have, on average, about 30 students.) Computers were also donated in the year 2000, which means that for the most part they are outdated, have reached their storage capacity, and do not have any new educational software with which students can learn. Both teachers and students have experienced problems with the computers, saving files, opening programs, or even turning the computers on. This problem has caused a series of inefficiencies. Some teachers had to write their lesson plans entirely by hand, administrators have also had to prepare handwritten documents to present to different government and non-government organizations.

- *Lack of loud speakers* – although FEIEB has about 10 to 20 loud speakers spread across its large campus, there is no connection to make them work. This connection problem is not only resulting in a failure to take advantage of the existing resources of the school; it is also making teachers, staff, and administrators to roam around the campus to make announcements, call teachers or students; finally, it could prove most dangerous when the time comes to announce emergency evacuations.

FACULTY

- *Lack of integration of the faculty in the community* – perhaps due to the fact that all of Santa Ana is Afro-Colombian and the members of faculty are not, even if they do live inside FEIEB's campus, it has been noted by school administrators and even FMSD officials that they do not integrate in the community, but instead live their lives inside the school and occasionally go outside FEIEB when they need to do so. This lack of integration could make give parents the impression that FEIEB does not truly appreciate of the Afro-Colombian community in Santa Ana.
- *Lack of consultation with the teachers on the sustainability of job satisfaction* – FEIEB should note with great concern the fact that about ten teachers have taken the state examinations to become public teachers. Whether this drain is caused by internal weaknesses or external threats, there is no doubt that the lack of knowledge on its causes is one of FEIEB's internal failures. Just as there were factors that made two out of those ten students stay at FEIEB, there were factors inside the school that made eight of them leave to go teach to the public sector. Personal interviews with the teachers could help FEIEB identify these factors, and determine, whether teachers leave to work at the public sector due to the failure of FEIEB to provide more incentives, or if the factors involved in those decisions are mostly exogenous.

STUDENT LIFE

- *Failure to capture all students in every classroom* – whereas most students at FEIEB show a great deal of interest in and knowledge of the material in the classroom, there was, per class observed, about a 30% of students who were either not interested in the material discussed, or who did not understand the material when asked questions about it. Although this is not an important number of students within each classroom, it becomes worrisome if we consider all classrooms in the school. It is clear that the current teaching methodology is not capturing the students. Either personal interviewing, or the experimentation of different teaching methods (other than the rather traditional in-class discussion) could help in discovering how to best stimulate uninterested. FEIEB should also at least contemplate the option of setting up after-school classes for those children who are falling behind in many classes.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- *FEIEB's attitude toward parents* – although FEIEB is constantly seeking the involvement of parents and members of the community in projects sponsored either by FEIEB or FMSD, several comments by school administrators and other

personnel involved in getting the parents involved indicate some worrying attitude towards parents. Administrators and other school personnel have complained about the “culture” of parents, or the “culture” of the community, referring to negative attitudes of the members of Santa Ana, such as throwing garbage on the streets or issues of personal hygiene. These comments undermine the fruitful partnership that FEIEB is trying to accomplish with the members of the community and may even sever important ties with parents who feel that those who help them also look down on them.

- ***Decrease in FEIEB’s active role in talking to the parents of out-of-school children*** – one of the greatest strengths of FEIEB during its first years was its active role in talking to parents who had not enrolled their children in FEIEB, to explain to them why it would be important that their children receive an education. According to an official in FMSD, since the new Principal took office, FEIEB has not been quite as active in talking to parents about getting them enrolled in FEIEB, which has resulted in lower enrollment rates. It is important that FEIEB holds open houses, and invite the parents of unenrolled children to the schools. It is also important that the administrators, the staff, the teachers, or even the students engage in conversations with the parents of unenrolled children to discover the reasons why they do not send their sons and daughters to school. These conversations could throw light on further internal weaknesses of FEIEB, and hence lead the school to revise some of its decisions.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

- ***Dependency on other FMSD projects*** – although FEIEB has done much to improve the quality of life of the residents of Santa Ana, it often relies on other FMSD projects (such as the *Clínica Julio Mario Santo Domingo*), or on funding from FMSD itself, to either accomplish or evaluate its goals. This dependence need not be a weakness, except for the times when the other projects cannot either provide the personnel to assist FEIEB, or cannot provide the funds necessary for the implementation of a project. Inviting parents or students to staff these projects would rid the community of the perception that they are constantly being evaluated by people from the outside, while at the same time reducing the costs of the projects or evaluations, and ensuring the sustainability of these projects through continued community involvement.
- ***Sustainability of FEIEB*** – it seems that FEIEB’s progress in promoting development in Santa Ana depends solely on the funding of FMSD and other charitable organizations. It would be important to develop relations with businesspeople to ensure five- or ten-year long funding commitments to FEIEB. FMSD could thus serve as the intermediary between FEIEB and businesspeople to facilitate these commitments.

D. External assessment of opportunities and threats

Having assessed the internal strengths and weaknesses of FEIEB, we conclude our study by looking at the external opportunities and threats that Santa Ana, the island of Barú, the rest of Colombia, and the world present for FEIEB.

1. Potential Opportunities

FEIEB's potential opportunities below are listed according to their location (i.e. whether they come from the Santa Ana neighborhood, from other places in the island, or from other parts of Colombia.)

SANTA ANA

- *Communities surrounding Santa Ana* – Santa Ana is clearly the most developed area of the island, and Ararca and Barú are not served by any public schools in their respective locations – children often have to commute to Santa Ana to go to school. Given that FEIEB has both the infrastructure and the endowment to accommodate at least another hundred children, it is important that FEIEB administrators look into opportunities of busing students from Ararca and Barú into Santa Ana for school. Government or private grants could cover the costs of busing, and FEIEB could thus serve a more diversified and ampler sector of the population of the island. Given that the fall in enrollment rates has been a concern of FEIEB, the busing solution could serve to mitigate this problem.

ISLAND OF BARÚ

- *Degradation of the Canal del Dique* – environmental degradation has almost completely obliterated the *Canal del Dique*, one of the major waterways in Barú. Due to the sedimentation of the channel, projects for hotels, new beaches and other tourist attractions have been halted. It would be possible for graduates at FEIEB to present a project to the government through which the channel could be improved, or at least how to stop its destruction. Students would therefore be able to use their Tourism and Fishing certificates for the good of the island, and could be recognized as partners in the preservation of the environment. FEIEB could also propose a community service project where students, graduates, and families could work to improve the condition of the channel.

COLOMBIA

- *Proyecto Playa Blanca Barú* – since the beginning of 2005, the Colombian Government has been working through the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism to implement a colossal 500,000-million-peso project for the development of tourism in Playa Blanca, in Barú (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social, 2005.) The project aims at both, serving the needs of tourists (given that Cartagena de Indias, where the island of Barú is located, is the most popular tourist attraction for foreigners coming into Colombia) and providing employment to 9,000 people in Santa Ana, Ararca and Barú. It is of utmost importance that, as this project develops, students at FEIEB can be incorporated either as employees of the projects in Playa Blanca, or as consultants for the implementation of this government-sponsored project. Attempts to develop tourism have at times destroyed the natural environment in Barú, so the assistance of FEIEB families could prove crucial in the success of this project. Either FEIEB administrators or FMSD officials could serve as intermediaries between FEIEB students and government officials in charge of implementing this project.

REST OF THE WORLD

- *ISO 9001* – in the upcoming months, independent observers will evaluate FEIEB in order to grant the school the ISO 9001 seal of quality. It is pivotal that FEIEB and FMSD explore how this certificate of quality in education can serve to attract potential donors from across the Americas, who are seeking to reward and promote educational opportunities for minorities like Afro-Colombians.
- *The Americas Multilateral Investment Fund* – the FMSD should finally contemplate the financial resources outside of Colombia. The *Americas Multilateral Investment Fund* (MIF) is an American initiative that has recently been expanded to specifically target Afro-Colombians.³⁰ It is now seeking to expand employment and educational opportunities through the channeling of funds through NGOs and grassroots organization that help Afro-Colombians. This opportunity could help FMSD make the project more sustainable over the long run and could enhance the breadth and scope of FEIEB.

2. Potential Threats

FEIEB's potential threats below are listed according to the same criteria as the opportunities—i.e., by their location: whether they come from the Santa Ana neighborhood, from other places in the island, or from other parts of Colombia. Using the same criteria will enable the reader to draw comparisons and contrasts between the external opportunities and threats for FEIEB.

SANTA ANA

- *Racial discrimination within Santa Ana* – interesting studies have been made on the issue of racial discrimination within the community of Santa Ana. Some scholars argue that, although its inhabitants present a united front that claims it is being discriminated against on the basis of their class, Afro-Colombians in Santa Ana also discriminate against each other along race lines (Streicker, 1995.) It has been argued, nonetheless, that the people of Santa Ana perceive little racial prejudice or discrimination in Cartagena—yet this misperception could potentially serve to perpetuate racial discrimination in the village.³¹ These apparent racial conflicts within Santa Ana, although contested by some,³² should be contemplated and carefully studied lest the emphasis on Afro-Colombian identity at FEIEB cause unintended negative consequences in the Santa Ana community.

ISLAND OF BARÚ

- *Already established power relations in the island* – some recent studies have suggested that there are already established power relations in Barú, Isla Grande, and Islas del Rosario, whereby the owners of the land exploit the natives.³³ It has been argued that regardless of the education that Afro-Colombians can receive, it is ultimately possession of lands what determines power relations in these territories. The solution, some argue, is therefore not in education, but instead in land redistribution, or at least in halting the efforts of public and private actors to acquire more land from the Afro-Colombian community in Barú (Streicker, 1997:109-128; López and Valdés, 2000.) What is more, some even argue that by concentrating in educating minorities to work in the tourism industry, schools

can serve to reproduce problems of unequal distribution of power and oppression.

- ***Government appropriation of land for tourism*** - the Government's increasing interest in the properties in the island of Barú have caused controversy and has aroused serious suspicions about the means through which the government is "recuperating" some of its lands. Months after the government launched Proyecto Playa Blanca (mentioned above), the Government entered into a legal dispute with natives of the island over the ownership of territory in the island. The project was launched in January, approved by March; by May, the lawyer representing the inhabitants of Barú had been killed at her home, together with her son.³⁴ The government (and personally, President Álvaro Uribe) has been accused of taking away lands from Afro-Colombians in the island, to later employ them in the hotels and resorts to be established in the island. The intentions of the government remain unclear, and they could pose serious threats to the empowerment of Afro-Colombians in the island, particularly to FEIEB graduates, who seem to be seeking more than a cleaning or clerical position at a hotel. Prominent journalists and defenders of Afro-Colombians claim that the Government is planning to: (i) turn the island of Barú into a mega-tourist attraction, either displacing or exploiting Afro-Colombians with low-paid jobs; and (ii) legitimize its intentions through the implementation of minimum social programs for Afro-Colombians in Barú. Arocha, the most vocal advocate against the government plans for tourism in Barú, dubs the government plan as *modernización perversa* (perverse modernization), (Arocha, 2005.)

COLOMBIA

- ***Conditions for employment for Afro-Colombians*** - FEIEB should look into how to fight the dire employment situation for Afro-Colombians in the country. As outlined in the introduction of this paper, Afro-Colombians are the most underpaid, unemployed, and under-employed section of the population in Colombia. Until FEIEB studies the problem of employment for this minority, it will not be able to provide Afro-Colombians in Santa Ana with a sustainable improvement of their quality of life.
- ***Energy outages*** - FEIEB should also address issues of energy outages with the Minister of Education of Bolívar, or with the local authorities in Cartagena de Indias to find a solution with government officials for the unnecessarily grave consequences that the national plans of *racionalización* are bringing to the school.

REST OF THE WORLD

- ***Fragmented Afro-Colombian Community*** - certain NGOs in the United States and across the continent are beginning to collate information about people of African descent, and especially on best practices on education for the empowerment of these minorities, scattered through the Americas. It is imperative that FEIEB reaches out to similar schools within Colombia and the rest of the continent to both share its own (and profit from other's) experience, to identify what has worked and what has not. The fragmented Afro-Latino movement will not be a contributing factor in this endeavor, but FEIEB should

try its best to reach out and compare itself with other educational facilities across the continent.

III. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: FEIEB as a Model of Afro-Colombian Empowerment

Empowerment has been a common theme of the literature on the sociology of education since the 1960s and on works on reproductive health since the late 1990s (Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, Zimmerman, 1994; Lugo, 1996; Kar, Pascual, Chickering, 1999), and has thrived in Latin America since Paulo Freire, Minister of Education in the Municipality of São Paulo, Brazil, began out his *Escolha Nova* project in 1989 (Wallerstein and Bernstein, 1988; Giroux, 1988; Cummings, 1996.) In each of these cases, different writers attribute different meanings to this word. We have already stated that in this evaluation, we would understand *empowerment* as the extent to which:

- (i) *students understand and critically reflect upon the material and lessons presented at school;*
- (ii) *students can use the cognitive and non-cognitive knowledge that they have reflected upon to improve the conditions of their community;*
- (iii) *students enjoy a wider array of options during and after their studies at FEIEB.*

Neither a study that looks exclusively at the internal aspects of FEIEB, nor one that exclusively considers the environment in which FEIEB could accurately ascertain any of these three criteria. Drawing from the holistic SWOT analysis explained above, we shall now seek to suggest that *there are clear and important obstacles that bar most FEIEB students from gaining a status of empowerment, as understood in this work.* These obstacles are related to: (i) the lack of resources at FEIEB; (ii) attitudes towards Afro-Colombians, both at FEIEB and in the whole country (both from outside of the Afro-Colombian community as well as from within); (iii) lack of equal opportunities for Afro-Colombian students after graduating from FEIEB.

A. *Lack of resources at FEIEB*

The clearest and least arguable obstacle to empowerment is the lack of resources at the school, which can be seen both through internal and external analyses of FEIEB. We have already discussed that the lack of a power generator; the outdated hardware and software and the lack of access to Internet; and the lack of loud speakers make work at the school both time consuming and ineffective. As we pointed out, the dependency of FEIEB on other FMSD projects, and the dire economic situation of the community add on to these problems, hampering the learning process not only in time, but also in quality.

These economic deficiencies negatively affect the first and the second stated goals of empowerment, especially when these children's education is compared to the resource-rich private schools or even average schools where public spending per pupil exceeds that of FMSD in FEIEB. If we recognize that Afro-Colombian students at FEIEB already have economic problems outside of the school, we can see why FEIEB fails to entirely make up for economic deficiencies in these children's homes.

B. *Attitudes towards Afro-Colombians, both at FEIEB and in the whole country*

Roadblocks to empowerment for Afro-Colombians have been presented in the all-too-grueling review of the status of this community in the introduction, but the SWOT analysis reveals that it is not entirely clear the extent to which FEIEB administrators and funders (such as FMSD) appreciate and understand the evolution of Afro-Colombian identity. On the one hand, students participate in the activities of the Administrative Council; they demonstrate a wide range of skills in the classroom; they have some spaces within FEIEB to express their identity through arts and crafts and dances; they become active in the improvement of their community. On the other, Afro-Colombian contributions to pedagogy remain absent from the school's pedagogical model; students remain unaware of the social and political connotations of the work they are prepared to perform after graduation; they (and their parents) are denied participation in the curriculum design and implementation for the various courses; they mainly learn about their African heritage through their limited exposure to Afro-Colombian history; they have no choice over their religious instruction; they are seldom exposed to (or encouraged to participate in) acts of political activism or awareness; their teachers are not even nearly integrated in the students' community; and finally, the behavior of the students' parents is mainly evaluated on the basis of what the administration considers as appropriate, and generally negative behaviors are associated with the "culture" of the community.

It is evident that if Afro-Colombian students at FEIEB are to improve their perception of themselves and their community, they need to be demonstrated that they are worth it of participation in the defining processes of the school, and that they will be allowed to interpret (and thus mold) their cultural heritage, so as to feel a sense of ownership over their culture. It seems highly unlikely that non-Afro-Colombian funders, school administrators, and teachers could accurately define or even envisage what a proper interpretation of the Afro-Colombian culture should be. It also seems thoroughly disempowering that students and parents are constantly told to value their Afro-Colombian identity, and yet they are not encouraged to participate in activities that are most defining for their status as Colombians. This seemingly dual discourse needs to be terminated to demonstrate that FEIEB truly embraces Afro-Colombians, and to allow for Afro-Colombian students to appreciate their own identity.

C. *Lack of Equal Opportunities for Afro-Colombian Students after Graduating from FEIEB*

Although FEIEB's mission to provide an equal access to quality education to this island-based Afro-Colombian community might be rightly conceived by many as both a daunting yet admirable objective, it is evident that, except for some notable exceptions, established power relations within the island and in the country at large make it truly difficult for students to enjoy a relatively similar array of choices to that of the rest of the Colombian youth. Those FEIEB students who pursue further studies are at the top of their classes in school, and possibly in their district, and even in their country. They have to compete with thousands of other equally gifted applicants. Whereas other sectors of

the population undergo a more smooth (and less demanding) transition into further studies, Afro-Colombian students at FEIEB are at a natural disadvantage.

Even those who choose to remain in the island are clearly hampered by dire economic constraints and from the lack of a market other than that provided by tourism to establish their own formal and informal businesses. Yet given that tourism is so closely associated with the depletion of natural resources, and with the displacement of Afro-Colombians from the island, it is questionable to what extent the training of students in arts and crafts, tourism, or even fishing, will prove sustainable in the long run. If FEIEB is to ensure the empowerment of Afro-Colombians even beyond the school setting, it seems imperative that the school finds a way to coordinate and supervise the work of students after they graduate. Establishing a center for career or employment services might be a start, although any such initiative must be based on the prior success and failures of previous students.

D. Final Conclusion: A Glimmer of Hope in FEIEB's Mission

The obstacles noted hereinto attempt to demonstrate that empowerment through education does not end at the school. It seeks to show that as direct as one might think the impact of education is on long-term empowerment, this condition is hardly an attribute that can be taught or given to a particular person. Empowerment is rather a status only one can acquire for oneself, and therefore formal instruction contributes only partly to its achievement. The example of FEIEB illustrates, perhaps too painfully, how even a relatively well-funded school faces a series of risk when attempting to foster empowerment over the long haul. It is therefore important that FEIEB considers the possibility that such end-goal (if ever embraced or considered by school administrators) will necessitate a more active role from the community and the students themselves.

This work took empowerment as an end-goal in hopes of illustrating the importance of the degree of relevance that education should have in life after school in order to change social conditions and to redress inequalities resulting from a clearly unequal racial balance of power. Although scholars, education analysts, school administrators, and teachers are generally almost too ready to believe that a relatively decent quality of education leads to an improvement in the quality of life, FEIEB poses new questions and answers to that same question, as it deals with a particularly disenfranchised group within Colombia. The extent to which FEIEB could be hailed as a model for future schools that seek to empower Afro-Colombians will depend, to a great extent, on the degree in which an honest assessment of the school recognizes the internal and external obstacles listed above, and capitalizes on its strengths and opportunities to overcome them.

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ENDNOTES

¹ In fact, the miscounting of Afro-Colombians by the Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) has raised much concern by the Afro-Colombian population. See Carrillo, K. J., "[Census could miscount Afro-Colombians](#)", 01-31-06, <http://www.afrocolombia.org> (Date last accessed: April 1, 2006.)

² See Figure 1.1 in the Annex.

³ There are up to 10 dry months a year; water must be collected from Cartagena, 40 km north of Barú. Electricity has just been brought into the village, and power cuts take place at least once a week in places where there are no private power plants.

⁴ See Figure 1.2 in the Annex.

⁵ The Colombian Presidential Report was cited by US Rep. Gregory Meeks, on his "[Statement of Rep. Meeks on Authorization for U.S. Participation in Enterprise for the Americas Multilateral Investment Fund](#)," March 16, 2006.

⁶ For works on the role of education in aiding children (especially, minorities) breaking out of poverty traps, see Barham, V., Boadway, R., Marchand, M., and Pestieau, P., "[Education and the Poverty Trap](#)," *European Economic Review*, Vol. 39, No. 7 (Aug., 1995), pp. 1257-1275(19.) For a regional study and a case-study of Colombia on the topic, see López, R., Valdés, A., "[Fighting Rural Poverty in Latin America: New Evidence of the Effects of Education, Demographics, and Access to Land](#)," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Oct., 2000), pp. 197-211; Reimers, F., ed., *Unequal Schools, Unequal Chances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.)

⁷ For more on FMSD, go to <http://www.fundacionmariosantodomingo.org.co/> (Date last accessed: April 1, 2006.)

⁸ For more on the Clinic, visit <http://www.fundacionmariosantodomingo.org.co/tutorias.htm> (Date last accessed: April 1, 2006) or <http://www.fundacionmariosantodomingo.org.co/resena.htm> (Date last accessed: March 15, 2006.)

⁹ See Figure 1.3 in the Annex.

¹⁰ For an independent and relatively recent analysis of the challenges in Bolívar, see "[Nuestros Niños Necesitan Aprender Más y Mejor: Informe de Progreso Educativo - Bolívar](#)," Serie Situación Educativa de las Regiones de Colombia, PREAL, 2004.

¹¹ For a justification behind this dual approach to evaluation that includes both an evaluation of the institution and its surrounding environment, see Broadhead, C. W. (1991). "Image 2000: A vision for vocational education. To look good, we've got to be good." *Vocational Education Journal*, 66(1), 22-25.

¹² For a theoretical analysis of personal and parental choice in education, and its relation to empowerment, see Goldring, E. B. and Shapira, R., "[Choice, Empowerment, and Involvement: What Satisfies Parents?](#)" *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 15, No. 4. (Winter, 1993), pp. 396-409. For an analysis of choice and its relation to political empowerment, see Chambers, S., "[Urban Education Reform and Minority Political Empowerment](#)," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No 4, 1 Jan 2003, pp. 643-665(23.)

¹³ For more on Poussepin's pedagogical foundations, see Préteseille, B. and Vaillot, M. C., [Marie Poussepin: or the Exercise of Charity](#), (Dighton, Massachusetts: Dominican Sisters of Charity of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, 1990.)

¹⁴ See Figure 2.1 in the Annex.

¹⁵ See Figure 2.2 in the Annex.

¹⁶ See Figures 2.3 and 2.4 in the Annex.

¹⁷ See Figure 2.5 in the Annex.

¹⁸ See Figure 2.6 in the Annex.

¹⁹ In fact, in the summer of 2005, students at FEIEB (under the instruction of Prof. Restrepo) presented a series of dance performances at the school, which drew prominent members of Colombian society from all over the country. The most special attendee was the first lady of Colombia, Mrs. Uribe. For more on Restrepo's work, visit: http://www.256colores.com/me/reportajes/ar/AlvaroRestrepo_01.htm.

²⁰ A study carried out by both the school and the Clínica Julio Mario Santo Domingo revealed that all FEIEB students were making adequate progress regarding their size, weight, and nutritional intake.

²¹ Data for 2004, 2005, and 2006 has not been reported.

²² The URL of the website will be <http://www.baru.com> (Date last accessed: April 1, 2006.)

²³ In fact, through the *Encuentro de Educadores Ambientalistas del Caribe*, FEIEB was recognized as a local, national, regional and international *centro piloto* for the creation of similar environmental and human education initiatives in the future. FEIEB also won the Award for Excellence in Environmental Education at the *Red de Educadores de la Secretaría de Educación Distrital 2001* competition.

²⁴ Afro-Colombian teachers have made important contributions to the field of pedagogy, especially as it relates to education for empowerment and liberation. See "[Cultura y Pedagogía Afrocolombiana Vista de las Propias Maestras y Maestros Afrocolombianos](#)", Ruta Afrocolombiana Regional Bogotá, Servidor de Laboratorios de Informática/Red Académica: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2005. See also Mosquera, J. de D., *La Etnografía Colombiana: Guía para docentes líderes y comunidades educativas*, Biblioteca Virtual del Banco de la República: 2004.

²⁵ See Figure 2.7 in the Annex.

²⁶ See Figure 2.8 in the Annex.

²⁷ For more in-depth criticism of traditional, rote-oriented second language instruction, see Long, M. H., "[The Experimental Classroom](#)", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 490, Foreign Language Instruction: A National Agenda. (Mar., 1987), pp. 97-109. See also Ellis, R., *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁸ *Champeta* is a type of music typical of popular neighborhoods in *Cartagena de Indias* (where the Island is located within the larger District of Bolívar) that integrates elements of socio-cultural resistance and Afro-Colombian identity. See Bohórquez Díaz, L., "[La Champeta en Cartagena de Indias: Terapia Muscial Popular de una Resistencia Cultural](#)," *III Congreso Latinoamericano de la Asociación Internacional Para el Estudio de la Música Popular (IASPM)*, Bogotá, D.C., August 23-27, 2000. See also Bermúdez, E., "Música, identidad y creatividad en las culturas afrocolombianas: el caso de Colombia," in *América Negra*, No 3, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, 1992, pp. 57-68. For more general background sources, see also McClary, S., "Música y cultura de jóvenes: la misma historia de siempre," *A Contratiempo*, No 9, Bogotá, 1994, pp. 12-21; and Mosquera, C., Provansal, M., "Construcción de identidad Caribeña popular en Cartagena de Indias, a través de la música y el baile de champeta," *Revista aguaita*, No 3, June 2000, Bogotá, pp. 98-113.

²⁹ For more information about the *Planes de Racionalización de Energía*, visit [ISA.COM Fax Report](#) (Date last accessed: April 7, 2006.)

³⁰ *Ibid supra* note 5, Meeks.

³¹ Scholars have argued that naturalizing inequalities is a powerful means of representing them as legitimate or even inevitable. See Bourdieu, P., *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Connell, R. W., *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); and Stolcke, V., "Women's Labors: The Naturalization of Social Inequality and Women's Subordination," in Young, K., Wolkowitz, C., and McCullagh, R., eds., *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination Internationally and Its Lessons*, pp. 159-177 (London Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1981.)

³² See the following text for an opposing hypothesis of the role of race in Afro-Latin America: Martínez-Alier, V., "Marriage, Class, and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society," (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989 [1974].)

³³ See Durán, C. A., "[Isla Grande: Colonización y descolonización del régimen de representación sobre el territorio y la población de la isla](#)", Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá, D.C., Colombia, November 7, 2005.

³⁴ For the full article, see "[Asesinan a abogada de los nativos de la isla de Barú y a su hijo](#)", *Indymedia.org*, Sunday, May 29, 2005. See also "[Llamado Especial: Situación de los defensores de los derechos humanos en Colombia](#)", *El OBSERVATORIO para la Protección de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos*, May-June 2005, p.

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