

EDUCATION IN PUERTO RICO

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SOME SIGNS OF PROGRESS IN PUERTO RICAN SCHOOLS

Puerto Ricans are justifiably proud of the progress they have made in the last few years in many phases of their educational program. Probably no place in the world has made as many gains in such a short time as this Commonwealth of the United States.

Progress has been so rapid and in so many different fields that Puerto Rico has become a mecca for trainees in the Point Four program of the United States government and in the Technical Assistance program of the United Nations. In the last few years well over 1000 such trainees have visited the Island to see what is being done in economic, social, governmental, and educational planning, in the establishment of factories, the building of roads, the improvement of agriculture, and the improvement of public health. In education, they have followed with keen interest the meteoric rise of vocational education, the slow but steady work in community education, innovations in the teaching of English as a second language, the extensive program of school lunches and child breakfast centers, the attacks on illiteracy, the preparation of new teaching materials, and other aspects of Puerto Rican education.

Puerto Ricans usually employ the year 1940 as the base for their statistics. That date is considered by them the beginning of their modern era. In that year there were 303,000 children in school. Today there are 533,000. In 1940 only 50% of the children from 6 to 18 years of age ever got to school. Today 72% of the Puerto Rican boys and girls of that age group are in school.

Under their Six Year Plan a goal was set for 1960 of 91% of the pupils of elementary school age in school. That goal has already been achieved.

Even more important is the increased "holding power" of the schools. In 1948 about 50% of the children had dropped out by the end of the third grade. Today the majority of pupils stay in school through the sixth grade.

In the last 14 years there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of high school pupils. In that year there were only 10,000 students in high schools. Today there are over 40,000.

This has also meant an enormous job of finding and training new teachers. In 1940 there were 6,000 of them on the Island. Today there is double that number. And today's teachers are far better educated, too, than they were few years ago.

Buildings have had to be enlarged and new buildings built. Since 1940, 3,300 new class rooms have been added. More important, many of them have been built by parents and other citizens. Partial responsibility has rested with the local municipalities through the years. Now, an experiment has been started for 1955-1956 of having the Department of Public Works construct the foundations and put up the girders and roof, with the parents finishing the structures, including the walls, floors, and windows. Forty classrooms are to be built this year in this way.

Most buildings are now being built today of concrete rather than of wood, making them more durable and hurricane-proof. Lunch rooms are an essential part of all schools, too.

Literacy has increased from 69% to 78% in the intervening years since 1940. But the problem of reducing it still further is getting larger owing to lack of resources, the rapid increase of population, and the fact that those who wanted to learn most have already been taken care of. Under the direction of a world-renowned expert, Dr. Rodriguez Bou, a strenuous effort is being made now to reduce illiteracy 10% more by 1960. And by literacy Dr. Bou means the equivalent of a third grade education rather than merely being able to read and write their names.

Spectacular progress has been made in vocational education, an essential part of the industrialization of the Island. In 1947-1948 there were around 8,000 persons getting some kind of vocational training; today that figure has soared to 25,000. There are now 11 high schools with vocational programs. In them the pupils receive three hours of general education and three hours of vocational training.

The School Lunch Program has been greatly expanded, too, since 1948. In that year there were 181,000 children provided for. Today there are 240,000 boys and girls who receive a complete meal at school. The result has been improved health for the children, better eating habits for them and their families, and an outlet for more of the Island's products, together with food from the mainland of the United States.

In addition to these children, 21,000 are receiving breakfast outside the schools, being boys and girls from 2 to 10 who are not in school.

Instruction in the elementary grades has always been in Spanish and after the Columbia Survey of 1948, Spanish became the language of instruction in the high schools. An intensive effort is being made, however, to develop English as the second language of all school pupils. Oral English is started in the first grade and written English is commenced in the third and fourth grades. Some articles in the elementary school paper "Escuela" are printed in English, many children listen to the radio programs in English or hear it over the TV, newspapers and magazines in English are now much more widely available, and persons from the mainland who speak English are much more in evidence. Supplementing these motivations is the carefully constructed program of the schools, with a special series of books developed by Dr. Charles Fries, expert on the teaching of English from the University of Michigan.

Education in community citizenship is another facet of Puerto Rican progress which is told in more detail in another article on this page.

An extensive program of publications has been developed for the schools. 350,000 copies of "Escuela" are published week-

ly, in three editions, for elementary, junior high, and senior high schools and distributed free. A monthly journal for teachers, "Education" is prepared and printed. Starting this fall, a newspaper with a general culture orientation, including many pictures, is printed in an edition of 250,000. This will go to adults on the island.

A brief history of the United States, rewritten by the chief of editorial work for Puerto Rico, Dr. Antonio Colorado, from the Muzzey-Kidger volume published by Ginn and Company in Boston is another of the more than 200 publications issued by the Department of Education. Several booklets in science have also been rewritten for use by Puerto Rican children, in Spanish. Recently Stringfellow Barr's "Let's Join the Human Race" was printed in an edition of 50,000.

Progress can also be noted in the spread of school co-operatives, in the increase in exchanges with teachers and school officials in New York City and Chicago, in the expansion of the University of Puerto Rico and other colleges, in the establishment of Music Schools for the gifted, and in the continuation of the Activity Month scheme whereby teachers go to school, work in the local community, or do some equivalent work one month in the year.

All this could not have happened without aid from four sources. One is the strong support for education from the people of Puerto Rico. A second has been the generous support financially from the Legislature, with about 30% of governmental funds devoted to public education. A third has been the leadership of such men as Mr. Mariano Villaronga, Secretary of Public Instruction, and his assistant, Mr. Francisco Collazo, but certainly not least, has been the devoted efforts of the both of them Puerto Ricans rather than continentals. Lastly, teachers of the Island who have much of the enthusiasm of people all over the world who have begun to plan for themselves rather than carry out the projects of colonial powers. Perhaps that is the most important characteristic of Puerto Rican educators today, — their pride in making Puerto Rico a better place for all people to live through education.

INDICES OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

	1940	1954	% of Change
Enrollment (6-18 years)	303,000	533,000	76.0%
Percent of School Population in School (6-18 years)	51	72	21.0%
Classrooms	5,201	8,500	63.4%
Literacy (Percent)	69	78	9.0%
Expenditures for Education in millions of dollars	7.3	44	503.0%
Lunchroom attendance	54,448	199,000	267.1%

From data of the Department
Education in Puerto Rico

SOME PROBLEMS OF PUERTO RICAN SCHOOLS

Despite the tremendous progress in Puerto Rican education in the last few years, many problems still remain to plague educators in that island Commonwealth. Some of them are the inevitable problems of a system which is bursting at the seams. Others are more fundamental problems of goals and methods of attaining them.

One of the most basic problems is the extent to which young Puerto Ricans should be "Americanized". This is a question of long-term goals which will have to be decided by the general populace of the Island, but a question on which the educators should have much to say, as it vitally affects every phase of education.

With close economic and political ties with the United States, with rapid industrialization and urbanization, and a growing feeling of kinship to the States, the question of how

much of their Spanish background can be retained in the next generation continues to cause controversy. Certainly older and even middle-aged people are proud of their Spanish cultural heritage, but whether this pride can be developed in the oncoming generation is still open to question. Already most of the African and Indian heritage has disappeared; whether the same will eventually happen to the Spanish heritage remains to be seen.

Some educators are concerned on this point, but the role of the schools in helping to determine goals does not seem too clear at the present time. Many people hope that Puerto Rico can develop a rich cross-roads culture, moulded from the best of their European, North and Latin American traditions. But this problem of goals has not really been faced adequately by educators in Puerto Rico so far as the writer can find.

Closely linked with this fundamental question is the question of the place of art and music in the schools. Basically the Puerto Ricans are a creative, artistic people, with a rich heritage in African and Spanish music and to some extent in art. In the rush towards vocational education and in the atmosphere of industrialization, it is doubtful if the elementary schools have yet given due attention to art and music. Some progress has been made, especially in the establishment of free music schools for the gifted, but the place accorded the arts and crafts seems to be woefully small and the education of teachers along these lines quite poor.

Another problem seems to be the education and supervision of teachers. A problem everywhere, this is especially noticeable in Puerto Rico, with scores of new teachers to be trained each year and about 500 new teachers needed as replacements for those who drop out annually.

To cope with particular problems of Puerto Rico, teachers need to examine carefully the past, present, and future of the Commonwealth in relation to the United States, Latin America, and the world. They need to understand the basic economic and sociological problems of this culture in transition. They need to have close contact with children in rural areas as well as in

towns and the larger cities. They need to have special training in the development of their own teaching materials and the most imaginative help possible in making the most of little because of the lack of adequate facilities in so many schools. This means a far more practical, concrete series of experiences than most teachers are now getting.

Whether such education can be obtained in a city environment or even in a large university emphasizing university training is open to serious discussion. Perhaps Puerto Rico needs to examine very carefully such experiments as the Turkish plan of Rural Institutes for Teachers.

Even closer and more practical supervision of young teachers is needed than is now possible, especially for the many young teachers in one and two-room rural schools scattered throughout the Island.

Materials are always needed and plans are moving along rapidly to supply more and more of them to schools. Even with the most careful and imaginative planning, however, most schools will be very poorly equipped for years to come. Perhaps more attention to the use of free and inexpensive materials, the construction and creation of materials by students and teachers of needed equipment of many kinds, and the exchange of ideas among teachers could be pushed by educators in Puerto Rico.

The schools of this island have a tremendous responsibility to help Puerto Ricans improve the appearance of their homes and to encourage them in garden projects. If this is to be done, the schools need to be demonstrations of what can be done with very little effort and expense to make their surroundings beautiful. Very few of the schoolrooms, buildings, or grounds of Puerto Rico have undertaken such demonstrations as yet, a field in which much could be done with little effort or expense.

Adequate pay for teachers to prevent drop-outs, to attract new personnel and to give teachers an adequate standard of living is certainly a need in Puerto Rico as on the mainland.

The very heavy teacher load is another of the persistent and pressing problems of Puerto Rico. Today five out of six

elementary school teachers on the Island handle two groups a day, with those teaching under the double enrollment plan handling around 72 pupils each day. Surely this problem should come near the top in any list of troubles.

These are only a few of the many problems confronting Puerto Rican educators today as observed by a visitor to that Commonwealth. Some are the same as problems in other parts of the world; a few are unique to Puerto Rico. Many of them have come with the quickly expanding educational system on the Island because people there have realized in a remarkable way the importance to them of education for modern times.

SIGNIFICANT WORK IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION

All over the world today there is a movement to help people to help themselves in improving living at the village level. In Pakistan the program is known as Village Aid, in India it is Community Development, and in many other places fundamental education.

Puerto Rico is pioneering in such grass-roots democratic education through its Community Education program.

Heading this work is Fred Wale, formerly director fo the Rosenwald Fund work in the southern states of the U. S. A. Assisting him is a staff of field workers and supervisors and a large group in San Juan in charge of the production of films, charts, and simple reading materials.

Back of the Community Education program is the philosophy that the people can and must develop their own local leadership rather than relying as they have for centuries on the landowner in "the big house" or upon government.

The field workers in this program are modern circuit riders equipped with jeeps, film projectors, and simple books on health, farming, and problems of modern living. They are carefully selected persons who value rural and small town life,

understand how to work with people, have patience, and a vision of better living conditions brought about by the people themselves.

They move slowly from community to community in their allotted areas, bringing people together to see films of what other Puerto Rican communities have done to aid themselves, visiting a great deal in homes, and encouraging people to sit down together under a mango tree to air their grievances and to find ways of doing something about them.

Up until 1955 their work has been solely in rural areas. This year three city neighborhoods have been added as an extension of this idea of self help to urban centers.

The results of such a movement are not spectacular or easily catalogued, but all over the island there are new and better water supplies, bridges, schools, child breakfast centers, and other physical improvements as tangible evidence of change brought about by "the people" locally. Even more important is the enhanced belief in themselves and their ability on the part of hundreds of Puerto Ricans and a faith in the democratic process as applied to their local problems.

This is one of the most thrilling developments in democratic education and action in Puerto Rico today and one which can have tremendous influence upon the democratization of the Island as well as upon the betterment of life throughout the island.

FOR FURTHER READING

Just off the presses of Simon and Schuster is a remarkably fine volume by Earl Hanson on Puerto Rico, entitled **Transformation: The Story of Modern Puerto Rico**. In this volume of 416 pages (\$5) the author traces in vivid style the changes in agriculture, industry, housing education, health, and other phases of life in the last few years, especially since the granting of Commonwealth status in 1948.

Other recent volumes include a special issue of the **Annals** of the American Academy of Political and Social Science for January, 1953 on "Puerto Rico: a study in Democratic Development", Rafael Pico's **The Geographic Regions of Puerto Rico**, H. S. Perloff's **Puerto Rico's Economic Future: A Study in Planned Development**, and Stuart Chase's "Operation Brookstrap in Puerto Rico, Report of Progress, 1951". C. Wrightmill, Clarence Senior, and Rose Goldsen have written an account of **The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants**.

The most comprehensive account of Education in Puerto Rico is the volume on **Public Education and the Future of Puerto Rico**, published by the Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University in 1950.

BROOKLYN COLLEGE RESOURCES FOR STUDYING AND TEACHING ABOUT PUERTO RICO

A. Background for Teachers

"The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" Special Issue of **Focus** magazine American Geographical Society 1953 6 p. 10 Cts. Could be used, too by some high school pupils. (Broadway at 156th St., N.Y.C. 32)

Garver, E. S. and Fincher, E. B. **Puerto Rico: Unsolved Problem**. Elgin, Ill. Brethren Publishing Co. 1945 110 p.

Hanson, Earl P. **Transformation: The Story of Modern Puerto Rico** N. Y. Simon and Schuster 1955, 416 p. Most recent amount, popularly written. Very enthusiastic about progress, with a little emphasis on problems.

"Know Your Fellow American Citizens from Puerto Rico" Office of Puerto Rico (1026 17th St., N. W., Washington, D. C.) Good for teachers, ministers, social workers and others. Stresses conditions in Puerto Rico and adjustments in New York and elsewhere in the continental U. S. A.

Mills, C. Wright; Senior, Clarence; and Goldsen, Rose K. **The Puerto Rican Journey** N. Y. Harpers 1950, 230 p. The story of New York City's newest migrants with special emphasis upon problems in New York City.

Monasterial, Marcelino A **Sociological Study of the Puerto Ricans of New York City** 1952. A master's degree available at Butler Library. Columbia University.

Perloff, H. S. **Puerto Rico's Economic Future: A Study in Planned Development** Chicago University of Chicago Press 1950. By a leading Puerto Rican economist.

Public Education and the Future of Puerto Rico Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University 1948 614 p. Survey for the Puerto Rican legislature, with recommendations for changes, many of which have been carried out.

Puerto Rico: A Study in Democratic Development Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Special issue of January, 1953 with several authors.

Pico, Rafael **The Geographic Regions of Puerto Rico** Rio Piedras University of Puerto Rico Press 1950. Most complete survey of the geography of the island.

Senior, Clarence O. **"The Puerto Ricans of New York City"**. From Puerto Rican Department of Labor, 1881 Broadway, N. Y. 23 102 p.

Senior, Clarence **"Strangers and Neighbors"**. N. Y. Anti-Defamation League 1952. A more popular account by a long-time authority. Shows how New York City is trying to help and gives some suggestions as to how it can be done best.

Tugwell, Rex **The Stricken Land** N. Y. Doubleday 1947. A vivid and pessimistic account by the controversial former governor of the Island.

B. Books for Children on Puerto Rico

Ashworth, Mae H. **"Puerto Rican Puzzle"** N. Y. Friendship Press 1948 48 p. 65 Cts. Illustrated booklet for young people on all phases of Puerto Rican life.

Belpre, Pura **Perez and Martina** N. Y. Warne 1932 79 p. Primary grade.
Belpre, Pura **Tiger and the Rabbit, and Other Tales** Boston Houghton 1940 Gr. 4-6.

Brown, Jeanette P. **Rosita: A Little Girl of Puerto Rico** N. Y. Friendship Press 1948 75 Cts. Primary grades.

Carpenter, Francis **Caribbean Lands: Mexico, Central America, and the West Indies** New York American 1956 \$1.96.

Eaton, Anne T. **Animals Christmas: Poems, Carols and Stories** N. Y. Viking 1944 \$2 Belpre, Pura **"Three Magi"** Pp. 62-71.

Hoffman, Eleanor **Four Friends** N. Y. Macmillan 1946 \$2

Kelsey, Alice **Mingo of the Merry-Go-Round** N. Y. Friendship Press 1948 126 p. About 6th grade reading level.

Kelsey, Alice **Ricardo's White Horse** N. Y. Longmans 1948 \$2. The son of a Puerto Rican road worker helps change a balky horse into a useful animal. About 6th grade.

Lee, Muna **Pioneers of Puerto Rico** Boston Heath 1944 90 p. 48 Cts.

Martz, Charles E. "The Caribbean Islands" Columbus American Education Press 1948 20 Cts. One of the World Geography Readers. Pp. 28-32 on Puerto Rico.

Millen, Nina **Children's Games from Many Lands** N. Y. Friendship Press 1952 PP. 93-98 on Puerto Rico.

C. Materials for Junior and Senior High School Pupils

There is very little material on Puerto Rico in book form for this age group. Teachers would do well to save newspaper clippings and articles from school current events papers.

Some pupils can handle some of the books in the teacher reading list (A), such as the special issue of **Focus** magazine, and the Hanson book. Encyclopedias can be used sparingly.

A study for use in church groups primarily can be utilized. It is "Puerto Rico Today and Tomorrow" by William and Ruth Hastings. Friendship Pres 1948 64 p. 50 Cts. For junior high readers, some of the materials in the Books for Children list (B) can be used.

Two National Geographic articles of value are:

"Growing Pains Beset Puerto Rico" April, 1951.

"Puerto Rico, Watchdog of the Caribbean" December, 1939.

D. Films on Puerto Rico

"Caribbean Sentinel" Teaching Film Custodians 1940 10 min. Sound Black and white. A travelogue, somewhat dated.

"A Girl from Puerto Ricoo" 16 mm. Color sound 15 min. Dept. of Labor, 21 West 60th St., N.Y.C.

"Puerto Rico" Encyclopedia Britannica 1943 15 min. Silent Black and white. A general account.

Some films used in the Community Education Program in Puerto Rico will be of value to adult groups and may be borrowed from the Dept. of Labor as listed above.

E. Filmstrips

"Christmas in Puerto Rico" Congregational Christmas Churches 1948 18 frames Color \$1 rental.

"Democracy's Problem Child" Film Publishers 1948 50 frames.

"Profile of Puerto Rico" Available early in 1946 from Leonard Kenworthy, Brooklyn College. Color 50 frames. Pictures of the island taken in 1955, with stress on progress.

"Puerto Rican Story" Congregational Christian Churches 1948 82 frames Color Sound Rental \$4.

F. Puerto Ricans in New York City Schools

Berger, Max "An Experiment with Core for Puerto Rican Students".

Educational Leadership December, 1954 Pp. 156-159 In Murray Hill Vocational School.

"Children from Puerto Rico" **Curriculum and Materials** May-June, 1954 Issue devoted almost entirely to Puerto Rican children. Very good.

Entman, Frederick "Our Puerto Rican Children: One School's Approach" **Strengthening Democracy** May, 1955 P. 3, 5

Finocchiaro, Mary "Our Schools Meet the Challenge of a New Migration" **High Points** March, 1953 Pp. 29-33.

Finocchiaro, Mary "Puerto Rican Newcomers in Our Schools" **High Points** Pp. 37-49.

Ingraham, Leonard W. "Our Puerto Rican Students Must Become a Part of All the Children" **High Points** February, 1951.

Kahnheimer, Leah W. "A Program in Social Living for Puerto Rican Pupils" **High Points** June, 1954 Pp. 58-68.

Montag, Jeannie and Finocchiaro, Mary "Guidance and Curriculum for Puerto Rican Children" **High Points** January, 1951 Pp. 32-51.

G. Some Addresses for Further Materials as They Appear

Economic Development Administration: — 5795 Fifth Ave., N.Y.C.

Puerto Rican Information Office: — 88 Columbus Ave., N.Y.C.

Puerto Rican Tourist Information: — Rockefeller Plaza, N.Y.C. 20

Dept. of Labor, Puerto Rico: — 21 West 60th St., N.Y.C.

Additional References

L. S. Kenworthy

Brooklyn College

Brooklyn 10, N. Y. 1955

