

ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

Oral History Interview with Diego Andrés De Sevilla Acosta

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview of Diego Andrés De Sevilla Acosta conducted by Valerie Marie Acevedo Martínez on March 4, 2022. This interview is part of course work done by students at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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Interview: Diego De Sevilla

(Thoughts on budget cuts on school systems in Puerto Rico)

Transcript:

Interviewer: Valerie Acevedo

Interviewee: Diego De Sevilla Acosta

Date: March 4, 2022

Location: Mayagüez, Puerto Rico

Part1

Valerie: [00:00]:

Good afternoon! My name is Valerie Acevedo; I'm a student from the English 3238 class, section 003D. And today I will be interviewing Mr. Diego De Sevilla on a few topics, around certain situations according to this day.

First of all, Mr. De Sevilla, how are you feeling today?

Diego: [00:22]:

I'm feeling great, what about you?

Valerie: [00:24]:

I'm doing good. Ok, I'll begin with a few questions... About, talking about yourself, so we can get into the ambience... Ok, first of all, tell us a little about you and your major.

Diego: [00:37]:

Uhh, my, I'm currently studying political science and psychology, a double major, in the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez. Uhm, right now what I'm most concentrated in, however, is psychology. Uh, however, I I I like uh both the same. Uhm, I just started studying psychology, this semester, so I haven't, eh, really dove that deep into thee, into the major. But from what I'm seeing now I kinda like it. Uh, right now I'm focusing on maybe law school or doing a uh Master's in doctorates in psychology. Not sure which psychology yet, but that's what I'm looking for, uh either psychology or or law school, aaand, you know, that's about what I do. I like public speaking, I like writing, and that's about it.

Valerie: [01:30]:

And, you would say that, that is what you like most about it? Public speaking and such?

Diego: [01:34]:

Yes, yes. I I've liked public speaking for about two or three years now. It's uh really a big part of me. As well as writing, uh essays and stuff. So yeah, I I really like that.

Valerie: [01:45]:

Ok, that's great to know. Another, a few questions, um around, regarding the situation that is happening currently. That, the current budget cuts that are surfacing through the public school system, and I wanted to ask you that; as a Political Science student, what is your point of view on the, those certain budget cuts?

Diego: [02:06]:

Uhhh, I think, obviously, budget cuts are always gonna have a negative impact on thee, on thee, you know society and the culture. However, I think that uh, right now, the government is doing, uhh. Going the opposite direction that they should be doing. Uh, the the, university students in Puerto Rico have seen a very hiighhh, ah ah very, uh decline in in students staying in Puerto Rico and becoming professionals for Puerto Rico. Wer, we're basically creating very good professionals, and just send them, sending them around the world, because we're not that good at, uhh, keeping these professionals inside the island and I think that's uh, one of the worst problems because, the the average age in Puerto Rico is rising, professionals are leaving the country. Where not many people wanna take, the island uh to the, uh to the next step, uh to the future. And I think really that's the biggest problem. It all comes down, it it all comes down to the budget cuts that the school system is facing. Uhh, the graduation rates are getting lower, students in, in highschool and intermediate school are dropping out, it has a really negative impact, and you know, the the education system is not AS good at keeping students as it was before, I think that's obviously because of the budget cuts.

Valerie: [03:22]:

Alright, thank you, so much for your input on that. Uh, another question, we have uh surrounding this topic I, what do you believe should be the average, or minimum amount of pay a public-school teacher should receive?

Diego: [03:36]:

Ohh ok, well I mean right now, the the uhh, how the system works, it, the public system is actually paying more than the private school systems. However, that doesn't mean, ah they're doing any better job. Uh, it actually means that, you know, uh ther there's not as many teachers, and teachers are uh constantly, uh, overworked aa and they're just doing too much work, too much work for what they're paid for. And often, they need to pay for the materials they use in the classroom. They need to take from their own pockets, so I I don't think it's any better to get paid more in a public school; but have to pay for real materials and to pay less and have everything at your disposal, like at private schools. And being a private school student, and having a public school uhh teacher as a mom, uhh I can really draw a, you know, very big and very important differences between both. And I think that would be the most significant. My mom having to actually take out of her own pocket to take care of her students, take care of her classroom. Uhh, versus, you know, uh private schools, which have sponsorships, have companies that help them with that. And I think that it's better off to uh have uh uh smaller, allow..., smaller, you know, less money, but you don't actually have to take out of your pocket to make your job more effective, and make yourself more effective in your job. Uh I just find that uh a little bit, uh hard to compare, but yeah, that's my point of view.

Valerie: [05:09]:

Alright, thank you.

Part2

Valerie: [00:00]:

You previously mentioned to me that your mother's a teacher, right?

Diego: [00:4]:

Correct.

Valerie: [00:05]:

Well, that you know of, or are you aware of, has she mentioned to you anything about her thoughts on this topic?

Diego: [00:12]:

Yeah, well um, with the with the, you know a lot of schools with the budget cuts, a lot of schools have been getting closed. And my, my, mother being in a particularly small public school; there was a rumor that her school was gonna, was gonna get closed and all that and first it took sometime, you know. She, she had to start looking for other options of employment, either being in public or private schools. And, furthermore with the with the many privatizations of all the other public schools. There's also the possibility that schools instead of getting closed, they get privatized and sold to private companies, which makes them private schools. These, these are typically very good public schools that that are getting bought, and with the purchase of said school the company basically

knows all previous experience in that school. So, for example, if my mother has, had a 100 dollar a month raise, because of the experience, and the year she's been, if a uh a private, a private company bought that school, she'd start from zero. Then build up, up to, again 20 years of experience, that could've could've been a raise. So it all, you see, you know, is also a the the the purchase of schools, by private companies, can also affect the teachers directly, by, by lowering their income. So, yeah, she's she's, mentioned and she's, at at the beginning, now now her schools kind of protected by by by uh government officials or something like that, because it's uh it's a special school. It's uh half ballet, they take ballet in the, in the mornings and then they take class in the, in the afternoon sooo, you know, it's a special school and it's kind of protected. So for now, she's she's pretty uh, you know she's a little bit calm, but uh you know there's always a risk, like with other public schools. There are actually, other public schools, that are good at math & sciences, that are getting privatized so, there's always, a risk. Yeah that's pretty sad.

Valerie: [02:20]:

Alright, um, have you ever, as her son, seen any direct negative consequences affecting your mother's emotional and mental health?

Diego: [02:30]:

Umm, yeah so in, you know a little bit indirectly but because of the budget cuts, uh a lot of the employees that are getting hired, often lack the experience or the the expertise in in the job they're they're getting accepted at. And, you know that that indirectly, transforms in to to more work for others, other coworkers or just simply uh, they're maybe, they're even doing uh bad work incorrect work, which also reflects on their coworkers and among those things you know my my my mother has had a few two or three bad directors of school, bad bosses. Which can yeah affect, affect their, their mental health and you know the the dynamic between teachers is also is an important thing, that it's not looked upon enough. Uh you know in in difference of university public public school teachers and high school teachers are there. They're together every single day, morning 'till 12, afternoon, so yeah they're together evry single day. The dynamic between teachers often goes unnoticed, and it's really important, the dynamic between coworkers, to the mental health. So yeah, I'd say that, especially in the years that that the rumors where going around that they were gonna get sold, or privatized, whatever; her mental health, she was definitely, not even pissed you know, she was just disappointed and sad. Uh, that her sacrifice, and her experience in the school would go unnoticed, but yeah, yeah, uh I'd say it took a, it was it was very very hard for her at that time.

Valerie: [04:10]:

Ok, and how else has this affected your current living situation?

Diego: [04:15]:

Mm, well, I mean, uh since nothing concrete has happened, my living situation um didn't have much of an, much of an effect. However, we we, at the, at the when the rumors were going around, which was like four or five years ago, we did start looking into other other housing plans, maybe maybe even move to another, another part of the island, right, and, but other than that we didn't really do anything concrete, we just thought about it. You

know, considering that that the rumors were going around, but thankfully, nothing happened. So so for now, we're the same.

Valerie: [04:55]:

Alright, thank you. And, how else would you say that, and this has affected the ambiance or the feeling of your family, when you're in your home in that sort of way? For example, Let's say you feel more tension in the household.

Diego: [05:10]:

Yeah, so so, I mean like like uh, uhh. Like all situations, uh this, this this, obviously had uh, ripple effects, around around her life, and you know when I was just starting high school, so there was a lot more uh, uh, money that we had to put into school, etc. Ehh I was in sports, my sister was doing sports. Uh, a little bit more money was being used, and, you know when there's rumors that maybe even we were gonna start losing money; uh it became a little bit hard on the house, and and. You know, I felt tension grew, and conversations, were not uhh, like they were before, uh. Communication-wise, it wasn't that big, in that part, and obviously evesdrop on my parents, to see what I could find out, you know, what was going on. But yeah, the tension definitely rose a little bit, we could feel it. We didn't talk that much in the car, uh I was always in the car with my mom a lot, we traveled a lot. So, uh, you know, uh, it was noticeable, nothing that uh that hard on the family, it didn't it didn't have any lasting damages.

Valerie: [06:22]:

Alright, and and any other feelings that you could see. Maybe a lot of stress probably, or a lot of disappointment, as you previously mentioned?

Diego: [06:31]:

Yeah, I I mean, uh uh when when this started going on, my mom she often, she had a hard time sleeping. And then when she had to takes us to school, you know, uh uh, we would also have, like little fights in the car. She would be sleepy, but you know, eh, it has it it puts you in a bad mood, etcetera. And, I would always get late home from practice, because with my, with the volleyball and everything. So, yeah, little things could pile up and and create these repercussions we didn't need to have, but yeah just, secondary effects of the tension, and the, all that, but yeah.

Part3:

Valerie: [00:00]:

Now we'll, I'll be asking you some different questions, to put the the audience into a different perspective... If you would have to put yourself in your mother's shoes, how would you feel that you would have reacted?

Diego: [00:12]:

Mm, I mean. All it's a It's a very complicated situation. She was kind of uh, in a uh, sort of gridlock, because she couldn't, she couldn't go to a different school because uh, you know she, the salary will be, will be significantly less, uh given that she had a lot of experience in the public system and with the experience came raises and shee couldn't, she had to stay. And then she was, there was rumors that she was gonnaaa, either way

loose money. So, that was kind of uh, sort of a gamble. So I I think I would probably just stay, you know it was uhh a safer bet. But honestly, If she would've uhh, chosen another path uh uh I would've understood because, uhh, it's a very very hard gamble like I said, umm. I would've felt like very, very tense. But I feel like, just with time, uhh, solutions could've been... mm, presented in an easier way; like, liiikee, what she did is she gave it time, she gave it time to settle, to things to settle down. And then, obviously the school became protected. So yeah, I think I would have just done what she did. Give it time and just, uhh weigh the pros and the cons. And in this case, the, the clear winner was, uh, staying in the school and just take the, take the gamble.

Valerie: [01:35]:

Would you have done anything, anything different if you were her?

Diego: [01:38]:

Yeah, no. I I think I would've, I would've done the exact same thing. I always, I I know she always kept the family's interests uhh in mind. So I probably would've done the same. You know, put the family first and everything else, and she didn't want to lose time with us, because if she if she uhh uhhhh. Went to another school, or you know uh if her school was privatized or whatever. She would uhh, she would need another way to make money, and she would've probably done tutoring or something like that and she would, we would have seen her much less so, yeah. I think that seeing her, seeing her every day at home, and the time that uh, the amount of time that I see her is great. So yeah, I think she took the, took the right decision.

Part4:

Valerie: [00:00]:

Next question. What are your opinions on how the governor, of Puerto Rico, is handling the situation?

Diego: [00:08]:

Mmm, I mean, uhh with with everything that has happened, I think the most important, uhhh, think to focus right now on would be on on investing the future of Puerto Rico, and I think that the best investment in the future of Puerto Rico would be directed towards the education and main- and holding holding on to these professionals that we are creating. And creating even more professionals that stay in the island. I think that's the the biggest problem with uh, with the govern-, with the government in general right now it's unable to to maintain the the professionals and the future of Puerto Rico inside the island. And and that's what's hurting in the most and we don't have people who wanna uh, make themselves better for the island, and make the island better for themselves. You know it's it's hard to hold on to these professionals, that's what I would do as governor. Uhh I think I'd, you know, just maintain maintain these uh, try to maintain these professionals, and create even more professionals for for the island.

Valerie: [01:08]:

As you just had mentioned, you would, this is what you would have done if you were governor. Would there be anything else if you had the opportunity to change the situation?

Diego: [01:17]:

Umm yeah. I think I think, uh, you know investing in the, in the education, doesn't mean it's solely gotta be for the students. Uh investing education provides jobs around for all different kinds of people with all different kinds of uh all different types of educational levels. For example, you create jobs, you create uh in a school you create jobs for teachers, you create jobs for people who work in a cafeteria, you create jobs for people who clean the school, uhh you create jobs, you create management positions for for the people at the school. You create even more moree, another space for students, you know it's it's uh all around the the safest bet, and the most positive investment one can do is to invest in the education. I think that's, that's what uhh, not only Puerto Rico but uhh the United States is failing at. Puerto Rico is just but a small reflection of the, of mainly United States and I think that's that's the biggest problem right now, if we compare to uh Europe, for example. Uhhh, Europe are investing a lot of their money, with the you know Socialist system, investing a lot of money to the education, and students are actually far superior to american students in that aspect. So I think, I think that the key is, you know is in watching other countries and other governments, how they treat their education and, that's the key. Treating the education like like a priority, and not just a, you know, secondary budget. So so yeah that's what I would do.

Valerie: [02:51]:

And ah, do you believe that Puerto Rico is handling this situation well?

Diego: [02:55]:

Mmm, not necessarily. I think the, with the budget cuts and everything, closing down universities, when when. For example, we're using Utuado, the UPR of Utuado as an example, uhh we can see students that are literally unable to get to the other parts of the island and and that that university was the only chance of getting a post-graduate studies. And when you take that away from them, they got no chance but to resort to jobs that don't need any type of education, which uh then reflects on to uh lower income and then just uh uh worse quality of life. All because you are taking away the the only place where they could ah ah actually develop themselves as a professional. So yeah I think uhh uh I'm not really that satisfied with how, with how Puerto Rico is handling the situation.

Valerie: [03:49]:

Finally, do you expect there to be any change in the next few weeks? If so, what would they be?

Diego: [03:55]:

Umm, I I don't see any any change, uhh by the government, happening, in in the in the next few weeks. However, I see that recently the the teachers are getting are are starting to protest, cops are starting to protest, students are starting to protest so I think that uhh, now that the country knows, the island knows what's happening. I think that this is this just the start of it. You know in the in the coming months and years, uh people are gonna get madder and one day, you know it's just gonna be too much of a predicament to handle and they need to actually uhh inject money into the to the education and I just

think that eh it's up to the people. You know, getting uh protesting about until they give us what we want, and what we need which is education.

Valerie: [04:47]:

Well, that is all for now. Mr. De Sevilla, we thank you for this interview and for your time. We're glad that we got the chance to interview you.

Diego: [04:57]:

Thank you, I had a great time.

Written questions:

How has this affected your point of view of the government of PR?

Frankly, as one grows up, our own views of the government are in constant change, and right now with the recent events occurring around it and my education I'm quite distraught with how everything is being handled, I've lost trust in the government.

How has this affected your pov on your major or field of study?

Given I'm currently studying Political Science, any doubts I had about my field of study have now been firmly erased and I'm even more dedicated to my area of study.

How has this affected your feelings, due to you being a student of the public school system?

With everything that's going on around the island with the education, if anything I'm really worried with how or even if I'm going to be able to culminate my studies here in Puerto Rico

How do you feel this has affected the students from the different school systems?

Mainly I think it just hit the UPR the hardest, however many private University students did continue graduate studies in the UPR so their future plans are in danger and even more so when the schools of law and medicine here in Puerto Rico are so elite, if there was competition between private versus public before, the probabilities are probably shifting more towards private education now.