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Oral history interview with Cesamil Irizarry Vélez, March 13, 2022

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ORAL HISTORY LAB (OHL)

University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez

Oral History Interview with Cesamil Irizarry Vélez

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview of Cesamil Irizarry Vélez conducted by Jason R. Gutiérrez on March 13, 2022. This interview is part of course work done by students at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez.

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

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Interviewer: Jason R. Gutiérrez

Interviewee: Cesamil Irizarry Vélez

Date: March 13, 2022

Location: It was done remotely using Discord.

Jason [00:00:00]:

Good afternoon, my name is Jason Gutiérrez. I am going to be interviewing a history teacher from The School of San Juan about the experience he had with students and families after Hurricane María. We are also going to be talking about what changes he has seen in the school. As the years go by and how the different laws created that affect education in our country have specifically affected the school where you work, before starting the interview, could you tell us your name, age and where you are from.

Cesamil [00:00:25]:

My name is Cesamil Irizarry Vélez, I am 37 years old and I am from the municipality of Caguas.

Jason [00:00:38]:

To begin with, how long have you been working for the municipality of San Juan and how long have you been working at the school you are currently in?

Cesamil [00:00:46]:

Well, for the municipality of San Juan I have been working since 2009 but I didn't start at The School of Juan, I started at the sports school which is a sister school of the municipal system I was there until 2014

around there and then in I have been at The School of San Juan since 2014 or I was in the sports school until 2013 and then from 2014 to the present, since I am at The School of San Juan.

Jason [00:01:31]:

Ok perfect and before those two schools, those were his first schools of experience or before those he had some.

Cesamil [00:01:39]:

Yes, my first experience as a teacher was in a sports school, before that what I did was the teaching practice. Between being at the sports school and at The School of San Juan I worked for a private company that provided services, well it does because it still exists, it provides technology services to different educational institutions, but what I was there was a year or less than a year if I'm not mistaken.

Jason [00:02:14]:

Ok, perfect eh then you told me that from 2014 until now he was in the school that he is currently in, so he spent the stage after Hurricane Maria teaching in that same school, right?

Cesamil [00:02:28]:

Yes, when Hurricane Maria, right... the year of Hurricane Maria I was already and had been at The School of San Juan for several years.

Jason [00:02:38]:

How would you say your experience as a teacher was before and after Hurricane Maria? How did your plan change? I imagine the calendar and all you had planned changed a lot.

Cesamil [00:02:50]:

Well, my experience as a teacher at the sports school and The School of San Juan has been very good, I have a good relationship with my classmates and students, true, there are always their situations and they always have some kind of difficult situation with the which one has to work but in general terms, they are really good students, aha, they are good boys that when María arrives, well, the first thing that is affected is the structure, the structure, and everything that is physical plant, resources, this and even the same the technology to which we had access, true at The School of San Juan we had a good laboratory room with a good program precisely of not only technology but also integration of all classes with technology, that is the first shock that There is when Hurricane Maria arrives because obviously the laboratory room suffered a lot of damage and the equipment, after the hurricane we were well for a long time without... I think we were about a month and a half without power service, then a plant was established that could supply the entire school.

Jason [00:04:52]:

Of course, because I remember that the school had a plant, but it didn't really work.

Cesamil [00:05:02]:

No because the generator also suffered damages.

Jason [00:05:07]:

Right, it was outside.

Cesamil [00:05:10]:

Exactly, but then another one was found that was one of those brought by FEMA, etc. True, gigantic, which is what is being used now and then, well, there we already had at least a basic energy service, but even so, many pieces of equipment, computers, etc. were lost. I mean, the school suffered a lot of damage, so the change that I would say that everyone had to adapt to was those resources to which we had access, because they were lost.

Jason [00:05:44]:

Exactly yes, I imagine and well, as you said, all he suffered was, well, the first thing one notices is the structure on those days. I remember when I took classes after María, with the heat and there were no fans or anything.

Cesamil [00:06:00]:

In other words, immediately after the hurricane, there were first some intense rains that, well, worsened the damage that the structure had already suffered, etc. Then then came that intense heat wave, by then you were integrated, that was the other thing, the entire school calendar had to be adjusted.

Jason [00:06:35]:

Why was it a month or two late, right?

Cesamil [00:06:40]:

You arrived about two and a half months more or less, you arrived practically at the end of October in mid-October or it was almost at the end of October, you arrived if memory serves me correctly.

Jason [00:06:52]:

That's why you have already established a plan for the semester beforehand and that changed, I imagine, the entire plan.

Cesamil [00:07:00]:

Yes, well, we worked on it in the month of June and that month we used it precisely to prepare the school program for the year of the course, obviously because María arrived, because everything that had been planned had to be modified and changed because you know nothing could be worked on according to that schedule.

Jason [00:07:26]:

And in terms of administration with you, the teachers were flexible or felt pressure from the administration because it was something new for everyone, that of changing the class plan out of nowhere.

Cesamil [00:07:43]:

No no, there was great flexibility because obviously it was a situation that no one had faced, not even the school administration, right, well, in that sense, there was a lot of understanding and from the administrative point of view, teachers were also asked to understand the students. We couldn't evaluate them in the same way or perhaps because we were so rigorous with the delivery of homework because it was true for all students, not only the situation at school, but each student had a particular situation at home and you know not they had electricity they did not have water many lost their houses, all of that had to be taken into consideration and in that sense well nothing the administration was quite flexible and was flexible with teachers who lost all their belongings and we had several teachers who lost their homes completely in that sense, well, nothing from the point of view of the same classmates of the teachers' school, the teachers, p But also from the administrative point of view, because they were given a hand to try to truly mitigate what they had lost.

Jason [00:09:09]:

That he remembers you really remember some without mentioning the name, nothing in specific, but of some situation that you had to deal with from a student or, as you said, a colleague or teacher who came out after Hurricane Maria

Cesamil [00:09:26]:

Look, I remember as such a colleague who, well, lived far away from school, I don't think she even lived in the same municipality of San Juan and she lost everything, that absolutely everything, the hurricane they spent completely in the bathtub because in the middle They practically ripped him out of the hurricane, the hurricane tore his house, the only thing that was safe for them was the bathroom because they took their pet themselves, they locked themselves in the bathroom and that's where they spent the hurricane. It was a very sad situation and nothing, well then, all the compañeros and compañeras joined together and they tried to make arrangements for them to be able to really help him, either with money, with materials, etc. I had a colleague who, since she was a student, stayed because she is not from San Juan and then the lodging where she was already staying, exactly the same thing happened to her, she lost everything and in that sense, well, I offered her to stay with me, okay, I lived in back then in San Juan and well we were there for a while, we were like 2 to 3 weeks in which she then got a place to stay and so on. Because they weren't available either, there weren't many places to stay or to move after Maria, so she got that because she was staying with me. No one comes to mind for students with situations like this, but for example I remember that in general with the uniforms the school for practically the whole year did not maintain its policy of requiring students to wear a school uniform there it became completely flexible because aha, there was no washer, no dryer, no water in a lot of dorms so most of the students didn't have uniforms.

Jason [00:12:02]:

I imagine students whose clothes could have even been damaged, the houses were flooded, and the clothes were damaged and even the uniforms were damaged.

Cesamil [00:12:13]:

Yes, for that very reason, then, well, the students' clothing had to be made more flexible in that sense, they were allowed to come with whatever clothing they could, the schedules were also made more flexible because there were students who found it very difficult to arrive, etc... They lost the car, also the gasoline, right?

Jason [00:12:44]:

Right, the long lines in the gas stations.

Cesamil [00:12:47]:

Exactly because of the plants, etc. Well, then many people didn't have gasoline to get to school, well that was also the case then, I really know and remember students who had the difficulty of being able to go to school consistently all week because then they didn't have gasoline and did not have access to gasoline.

Jason [00:13:15]:

But at least he saw that the administration then was flexible in that aspect.

Cesamil [00:13:21]:

Yes, this is like everything, it is also true because like everything, no administration is perfect, so there was a situation where we were not sure if the time we were away because of the hurricane, because the hurricane really happens, I practically do not know if it was your experience, but in the case of the Most of us were incommunicado for almost a full week while everything was restored, while the paths were opened. I know that many students had those difficulties that their fathers, their mothers, were the ones who had to go out to open the path because the same The government did not have access, it was true that they were then opening some areas, but one could not remain idly by either. In my case, where I stayed, well, I had to work with the neighbors to open roads with machetes with an electric saw because we were incommunicado and during that period that we were out of school, because we were incommunicado, the roads were closed, etc., we didn't know if they were going. to pay and that created a lot of uncertainty among the teachers, truth was even rumored that no, that we did not have to discount them and among the teachers they were already preparing that "look if they do not pay it we will protest" because it is not just true and much more in a situation like the one we were not cashing the check.

Jason [00:14:55]:

Even more necessary.

Cesamil [00:14:57]:

Exactly, but later the municipality finally communicated that no, that they were going to turn off those days because it was not anyone's fault, they were absent because they wanted to.

Jason [00:15:08]:

They probably knew they had to do it too why else...

Cesamil [00:15:15]:

It would have been inhumane, but nothing in that sense prevailed in the sense of Justice and the statement that came out was telling us that yes, they were going to pay, that sense, so let's not worry.

Jason [00:15:32]:

Ok that's fine at least there they struggled well and well in addition to everything we have talked about because I asked you if the administration was flexible, but do you feel that the response of the administration was correct and quick, or could they have done a better job?

Cesamil [00:15:51]:

Look, definitely, well, there could have been more speed, well, of course, but true, you also have to take into account what I mentioned to you a moment ago from the administration, they are also human beings, they also have their families and they were also in a situation that they never really knew. they had found in that, for the whole world, Puerto Rico has always been exposed to hurricanes, yes, so there were some contingency plans, but hurricanes and the damage that we suffered really always, and many people suffer, but it had never been to the magnitude of Maria that was experienced true because then before Maria Irma had come, so it affected a particular area and there quickly after Irma because Maria came that Maria because it was massive so it is true to say that it could have acted faster in some things that I know that the true reconstruction of the school and the service and all good well maybe yes but at the same time well no one really thought that the great song... oy And in fact, when María came, the category of the hurricane was known, well, truthfully, one said gosh, it's going to be a strong hurricane, but one thing is to imagine it and then another thing is to experience it and then turn out to be incommunicado and obviously we know that at the level of the state government A series of irregularities were committed that we definitely know that at the level of corruption...

Jason [00:17:46]:

Yes, exactly, because the school administration does what it can with what it has.

Cesamil [00:17:53]:

Yes, exactly.

Jason [00:17:55]:

All of this goes to something bigger than the Government as such and what it did and what it did not do.

Cesamil [00:18:00]:

To what extent is it true that the state government is true, those irregularities and those acts of corruption that definitely cost lives and cost the quality of life of many people for a long time, to what extent did they affect us, well, I wouldn't know how to tell you the truth, well, I don't I'm up there, right, in the municipal administration, but it's probably true, that it would delay the funds from being approved quickly, the areas to be identified, and so on. Yes, I can tell you that I helped when FEMA engineers came and all those things from the United States, etc., obviously being a teacher in a bilingual school because I had administrative staff from the municipality who did not speak English, well, they were not going to understand what that the American engineers told him well then they called me to help them translate. In that sense, the matter moved quite quickly, there are always bureaucratic things that take time, I remember that they went to visit the school, identified an area, at the moment other people came and returned to visit and a little true, as the redundancy falls away, that, nothing is bureaucratic issues and I think that this is also part of most of the structures and institutions that work but you know answering the question look that perhaps it could have been more effective it could have been faster definitely but

also at the same time well ... I think that it can also be a little understanding not with the unusual situation that was being experienced at that time.

Jason [00:19:58]:

The administration did the best they could.

Cesamil [00:20:03]:

I definitely think that if I think that if we really shouldn't be so severe...

Jason [00:20:08]:

We already know that in the future, if another hurricane comes, the same thing should not happen, it should be a better response because we have already experienced what I think would be the worst of a hurricane.

Cesamil [00:20:21]:

Of course definitely not and obviously also true to the extent because these are issues that are still being investigated, not journalists, right people from the Social Sciences in general and yes, well, at the last minute it turned out that these people actually had access to funds, help, work and that for political reasons or whatever that delay is or they hid it or directed it to other areas well that's another 20 so there you have to assign blame but right now at least from the knowledge that I have well look it's one in Within everything that happened, well, one evaluates and says, well, look at this, it could have been done faster, better, but I know that everyone was doing what they could, not even in the initial cleaning, assembly or disassembly work, depending on the case, to start it. enable the school that we were the teachers. Because obviously the true staff, whether from FEMA, or the general reconstruction staff of the municipality, the state, etc., because they were busy in otras áreas.

Jason [00:21:50]:

Then you were all responsible for that.

Cesamil [00:21:52]:

The ones who did all of that were us the teachers.

Jason [00:21:57]:

Wow, so you can see, probably a lot of people think that... God knows if they say oh, the school was very clean when they arrived, everything was tidy and they think it was FEMA or the aid from the municipality and it was the same teachers.

Cesamil [00:22:15]:

I am not saying obviously when the students arrive to see it at school it was very bad but the fact that they could even arrive right and they had only one room available that in fact they could not rotate because the rooms were limited so the students always stayed in one same room, in the heat, that was a very difficult situation for them too, but the fact that they were able to get there in the first place was because we, the teachers, right, and the compañeros and compañeras, reached in, removed, voted, moved, cleaned I mean, a very hard job was done at school.

Jason [00:23:05]:

The teachers did double work (laughs).

Cesamil [00:23:10]:

If nothing, obviously, because there were no students, we weren't giving classes either, but true, we are teachers, we are not "Handy men" [Inaudible], we don't even have the knowledge, but with the little that everyone knew, well, look more or less at least even if it is the removal of debris true because there was a lot of debris in the school with the damage in the classrooms especially building A which is the building where this elementary school the elementary school buildings were the most affected.

Jason [00:23:48]:

Right because they are the oldest buildings.

Cesamil [00:23:51]:

If that can be true, one of the reasons why they were so affected is that it is the plant that has been in the school the longest and yes, they suffered a lot of damage.

Jason [00:24:05]:

Well, as we speak as we are speaking right now because this is what it is called, this is something that all Puerto Ricans should know since it was seen by the protests and that the government administration that was in charge of the damage from Hurricane María did not do very good job you say, did a bad job you could say.

Cesamil [00:24:25]:

Definitely yes, initially I don't know if you remember that but initially it was thought that the administration had really worked correctly and that it did what it could and the photos of the governor came out in these buses, the "Humvees" and the Sapa, going through the municipalities of the center where there was no communication, it was thought that yes, but later when all the investigations and the whole matter of whitefish came and the contracts that they wanted to give to companies that definitely were not going to be able to help correctly with a rapid reconstruction, what it's what everyone wanted, well then the story changes then well then no.

Jason [00:25:15]:

It was thought that the Government had supplied and had even divided the funds, well that is what was thought at first that the FEMA funds had reached where they had to go and that was later found to be false. Turns out they split it between them.

Cesamil [00:25:32]:

And nothing and obviously those contracts that are a trick.

Jason [00:25:37]:

Of course... to friends and that whitefish thing I think was what delayed us.

Cesamil [00:25:44]:

Yes, it seems to me that there was another one, but the one I remember the most was that and all the United for Puerto Rico revolt and all that was definitely why it happened, one of the reasons why the

protests of the summer of 19 occurred. , because then it turns out that what we thought during María was true and that tragic moment for everyone here on the bridge turned out to be not true.

Jason [00:26:11]:

That the Government did not do the work that it had to do.

Cesamil [00:26:15]:

And I enter corruption measures right.

Jason [00:26:20]:

So, but ok, well, I think I've already talked a little about this, but let's see if there is something I would like to add, how did you notice the efforts of the Government regarding the education of your school as such? Because everyone knows, the people, the entire people of Puerto Rico know that the efforts of the Government were that they did nothing, nothing was done and what they did the other way around was, as you say, acts of corruption. Everyone knows that, you can see from the chat that came out, the protests teach that, we also know that, but you are true from the point of view of a teacher and that you are in a non-governmental agency, but they are more or less governmental, of the municipality, how do you see it from that point of view if you saw that no funds came to the school or you feel that more funds should have come from FEMA because FEMA supposedly gave a lot of funds. If it is that you can tell me the truth because as you told me just now that is something already, up in the municipality, but if you can tell something about what you see.

Cesamil [00:27:25]:

Yes, at least that's how I live, for example, right, I already mentioned that there was greater flexibility towards students and teachers and a greater understanding towards their situation, I can tell you that a telephone line was established, right, because the phone lines had fallen, the municipality gave us one of those satellite phones, wireless to be able to stay in communication with the students and families. That was one of the things that became true to the extent that it was quickly possible was the staff to identify the damage to the schools, etc. Obviously, the whole FEMA issue, since that does not depend so much on the government, apart from the situations that occurred. truth also depends on that of the federal government and obviously nothing we know that there was a whole riot with the president who was at that time President Trump as he saw Puerto Rico and well he in the confrontations that entered with the mayor of San Juan at that time At the moment, Carmen Yulin, those confrontations on Twitter, not so much confrontations, it was more like attacks were launched, nothing, all of that to a greater or lesser extent, because it definitely affected the entire process, eh this, but nothing was done about the plant, right, so that the school could had at least light and good that one can see inside the classrooms that the dining room could work true because we know that there were students with difficulty to power then there correctly to have access to a meal on a consistent basis because then the school cafeteria quickly started to work for that very thing, I understand in general terms look you know it could have definitely, perhaps have been faster and more effective in one area but in general terms work was done quite quickly so that the school could function, be functioning again really as quickly as possible.

Jason [00:30:23]:

Ok, I understand, since, as you told us, he has been working for the municipality for a long time and, for longer, I believe in the same school that is The School of San Juan, you have seen changes in

administrations, either from the Popular Democratic Party or the New Party Progressive, would you say that you notice many changes that come as a result of these changes in government administrations?

Cesamil [00:30:50]:

If I'm being honest I don't notice many changes...

Jason [00:31:00]:

With changes I mean not that you see a change of school as such but that the change of administration teaches you, see that they change what do I know, if funds were normally given for the school or something with the change of administration it changes or less things are given.

Cesamil [00:31:25]:

It doesn't seem to me that perhaps the access to money, to resources is due so much to the changes of administration, right, the school begins with a real administration of the New Progressive Party of Jorge Santini, who is the one who founded the program, not obviously at the time when it does so because San Juan perhaps had access to lines of credit, funds, etc. The economy was not as battered as it is today, as time has gone by because we know that the economy of Puerto Rico has been getting worse, so we definitely do not necessarily have the latest model equipment as we had at some point, how to say the laptops etc. With that and everything from time to time, for example, the last purchase that was made was the Surface, which is tremendous technological equipment for the students, so it is true that there were funds that there are no longer, well yes, it is not the same than before but there is also an economic issue. The changes in the school that I don't know if that would be the same in the department of education, right, since those schools already work differently from us because we are municipal, but in our case the main changes that can be seen when there are a change of administration right after Santini the mayor Carmen Yulin came and now we have mayor Miguel Romero, I suppose that the biggest changes will be at the level of the education system higher up right at the administrative level, we teachers do not see much change .

Jason [00:33:30]:

Instead, you don't see through right, you said 2014, or well, when was it for the sports school?

Cesamil [00:33:42]:

Not in the sports school I started in 2009 I arrived with Jorge Santini.

Jason [00:33:47]:

From 2009 to 2022, as you said something about the economy too, but haven't you seen a change in pay or in salaries as such?

Cesamil [00:34:00]:

Yes, there have been some changes in the type of hiring that we had, but it does not seem to me that this is so much due to a change in administration that definitely occurs when that change occurs, but it really is a request that the teachers have been carrying for a long time. Time and constant and in different ways, the teachers have been and the teachers showing their faces and mentioning and practically fighting for a fair type of hiring. We began working for professional services, this type of contracting, because it does not guarantee any type of right or stability for the teachers. In this case, from the school we were in, and in fact, many teachers left, very good teachers, and very good teachers because, well, they did not have

They were not entitled to security nor did they really have benefits during María. We were precisely working as professional services, so it was really difficult because we went to the school, the teachers incurred additional expenses because of everything that was happening, but then we had to save for the month of July because in the month of July we did not get paid and we did not have accumulated vacations or had anything accumulated, so it was a very difficult situation when there was a change of administration, then we became regular employees, which is something that was carried out asking for a long time, that's why I tell you I don't know if it's because of him change of administration...

Jason [00:35:58]:

Or because they had been asking for it for a long time.

Cesamil [00:36:01]:

I think that it is more the other thing, true, each mayor or candidate for mayor brings their own proposals, true, and has their own interests according to their political campaign, etc., but at least in terms of school, perhaps changes, well, perhaps a little in the curriculum when there was the change from Jorge Santini to Carmen yulin so it is established that the curriculum includes the Matria organization so there is a focus on women's rights, right, maybe there wasn't before, the teachers always always right, that's something we had in mind teach it as well as the whole question of trying to eradicate racism and so on.

Jason [00:36:52]:

Of course not, it's not something you just have to give credit to the change of administration and the teachers for a long time wanted that.

Cesamil [00:37:01]:

Exactly for this reason, yes, I believe that in general terms, when there is a truth, at least I have experienced these 3 changes, we continue to function, there was a change that when the change between Jorge Santini and Carmen Yulin occurred, there really was a change, mainly in the director. from the sports school, from the director of The School of San Juan who was there at some point, right, but outside of that, she changed from Carmen Yulin to Miguel Romero, really, I haven't seen that there have been any big changes, so no... also I really think well you can't be naive either and anyone who becomes mayor of San Juan is going to be cautious with the school because it can really have a political cost to work with the school in an inadequate way or that the students or teachers feel truly threatened And that is almost like a symbiotic relationship, that is, if the students are affected by a political decision, the teachers are going to shout just like the parents because teachers you know tend to be quite jealous of their students in the same way students are quite jealous of their teachers only if they see any unfair dismissal or that kind of thing the students and families are going to yell too so in that sense I also think that any mayor who arrives for the first time is going to be careful, obviously they are going to put emphasis perhaps on different things than the previous mayor, because perhaps due to his priorities he did not have them, but from then on to radical changes, well, I don't think so.

Jason [00:39:13]:

Do you think that in any case if there is a change it could be more in the municipality as such.

Cesamil [00:39:19]:

At the administrative level, it's true, and about those things, well, we don't necessarily know about it, we're at school and we always have a lot of work.

Jason [00:39:30]:

He believes that the change that can be seen in the school is the same thing he said about the teams, and that is more the country's economy as it is today.

Cesamil [00:39:37]:

I understand that yes, obviously maybe it's my perception I'm not up there maybe I'm being naive, but I don't think it's political I think there is less money in the country obviously there will be less money in the school sadly.

Jason [00:39:52]:

Sure and ok no law comes to mind right now if you know of any, not necessarily a law but something that has happened in the Government, well I imagine that the Fiscal Control Board has made various cuts to teachers and education of the country, but if you know, do you feel that some of the cuts that have passed through the years of the Government to the educational system and not only from the Government can also be from the Board, do you feel that any of all affected in the school The School of San Juan or haven't you seen it?

Cesamil [00:40:28]:

I haven't seen it, perhaps the closest thing, right now, our school is going to be part of the alliances school program of the education department and that's not really true, the educational system of San Juan openly said it and that it was also to have access to some definitely additional funds if the municipality is looking to have access to the fund, it is precisely because there is an issue that money is needed, so we could see it there, but apart from there, some legislation or something related to cuts, this is not obviously, because one sees it, perhaps in the repair of the structure, this or if, for example, the repairs, perhaps of the air conditioning system, perhaps it takes a little longer, before, the orders for books ran faster, that type of thing, requests for materials sometimes, well, like that they take a little while to arrive.

Jason [00:41:53]:

It is better to say that it is not so much the government cuts but rather the decisions that the government has made and how it has brought the economy to what it is today.

Cesamil [00:42:01]:

Definitely yes, but even so, some legislation that has affected the school, not that I am aware of..

Jason [00:42:18]:

You feel that this thing about the economy as we have been talking about, the economy has gone down from 2009 until now since before it has been going down, but from what you have been working in the municipality, how do you think these changes have affected what you have seen since 2009 Until now, how have all these changes in the economy affected students as such, if you have seen anything?

Cesamil [00:42:57]:

Look, to begin with, there are new students, right, who entered the municipal system, students who came from schools because their families could no longer pay for the schools because their parents lost their jobs, they closed the businesses. I have a particular case of a student whose father as such He owned some real agricultural land and they sold products to a supermarket chain, etc., I'm not so soaked, but the case

of that student had to enter the municipal system because when María passed by, it devastated her father's land and crops and of her family and she had no way of recovering and on top of María the whole economic crisis is true because it was a family that could not recover and that is the case of a family that at some point had privilege I have cases of students where at no time They didn't even have access to a few amenities. In the case of the student, what was I going to say, because one notices that his situation has worsened and one quickly sees that in the student's performance at school, this student simply does not perform well and that is what I have consistently seen in the students. In this situation of poverty and extreme poverty, they are students who do not produce, perhaps they do not produce, the correct word should not be the truth, they are not available to work on the subject and the work, etc., literally they are completely paralyzed in almost all the cases that are They have found this way at school, the support staff that we have, the social worker or psychologist, work for them and they are students with some kind of mental health situation, this is depression, anxiety, many of them have had to go through hospitalization in the same environment of the semester then that brings other problems and other situations because we are talking about students from poor families who are spending or because of a situation that prevents them from developing academically, which then results in them remaining in that situation of poverty because these students, once they leave school, are not going to go to university.

Jason [00:46:21]:

Exactly, it's a cycle.

Cesamil [00:46:26]:

Exactly they end up in low-paying jobs.

Jason [00:46:31]:

Perhaps the student has the potential and would like to study something if they had the resources and were more focused as you say that this goes hand in hand with both.

Cesamil [00:46:45]:

I know of very good intelligent students, it is true that one as a teacher would love to have the possibility of being able to exploit that potential, but they are simply not available due to the situations at home and then that ends in mental health problems. There are many students with a lot of mental health situation and definitely the economic factor in the home is one that has a great influence, in many cases it is not the only one, but it is an important factor.

Jason [00:47:30]:

It is something that seems too common that from economic need to mental health problems and from that mental health problem it happens that they do not continue studying as you say.

Cesamil [00:47:40]:

I can tell you that perhaps this is one of the areas that is true, returning perhaps to some of the questions that you have asked previously, it is one of the areas that as an educational system we are still analyzing and discussing and looking for how to work on them because we do not have consistent solutions, we have students with what we have managed to get them to leave, there are other students that I honestly wonder right now how they will fare because I'm sure they couldn't handle the situation even with the efforts, right, and I speak in this case not only at the administrative level, right, we as teachers who At The School of San Juan the teachers who have a great preparation, that is, the majority have a master's

degree, are doing their doctorates, if not, they are taking certifications of different kinds, some even have additional preparations such as speech therapy, etc.

Jason [00:49:00]:

For lack of good teachers, it is not.

Cesamil [00:49:03]:

It really is a different situation from Puerto Rico, basically Puerto Rico has always been in an economic crisis, our economy has never been buoyant but we haven't had to face a situation like this and you can see the effects on the student body visible and well we are still wondering what we can do, I did this with this student it worked now I am doing it with this other one and it is not working let me try another method another way, communication with the family is not working either. What do we do? So it's a situation that we're still looking at and I know the economy is definitely part of it.

Jason [00:49:57]:

It is something that we have talked about in class before that sometimes the students say that because of the economy a student can say I am going to study and I am going to be a doctor to get out of poverty or something like that, but many times they stay like you you said in that same cycle you know if you are not from a family that is economically well off with privileges you will probably not get out of that cycle, you can get out, but there are very few cases.

Cesamil [00:50:29]:

It is very unlikely and then you bring another factor that is not being studied either, but we teachers see it and then the students are looking for more ways to escape.

Jason [00:50:47]:

Exactly if streaming or making music.

Cesamil [00:50:51]:

Exactly then they put aside university studies or perhaps vocational studies I have students who would have been very good I mean I had students who could have been very good in auto mechanics but what they wanted was to escape their situation because they immediately joined the army quickly no they had graduated from their fourth year and had already signed up with the Army and I have students then who are very good perhaps in the Social Sciences who might have been able to enter the area of communications, the area of psychology some kind of study, right? Social Sciences, etc., but what they are looking for is to escape their economic situation, and they see the way out in medical studies, perhaps, and that shows a problem because all the students have strengths and all the students have weaknesses, and all the students enjoy some classes and others do not enjoy them so much, then students who do not enjoy Natural Sciences study at Micro biology is a student who has a hard time in his high school so they finish, that is, they are the cases that we later see that they drop out of the University they do not complete their high school studies and end up getting involved in other pyramidal things including this that I have no problem with that nothing there are real people I know people who like it but maybe that's not for everyone this and it's a pyramid scheme you know you're making someone else rich but they're seeing it as a quick escape measure.

Jason [00:52:45]:

That is the bad thing, perhaps a student loses years of his life thinking that, because he has to study this or else, he is not going to make money in his profession because that is what he is looking for like any person, it is the approach, without money you won't be able to do much.

Cesamil [00:53:05]:

Yes, and the more vulnerable the family is, the more that type of change of errors will affect them, right "I got into a concentration that is not the one I want, I don't feel comfortable, I don't feel comfortable, I'm not happy, I'm suffering" right, well, a student from a family with a higher income, because he simply moves, right, and he has that ease, a student who comes from a family with limited resources, because there he has a tremendous problem, so there is already an investment, there he lost part of the scholarship, maybe later he was paying for lodging because it is money that was lost, maybe it cannot be recovered, he is a student who has to work on top of studying because he is no longer paying the same attention to his studies, maybe he has to leave his studies even for staying in a low-paid job but at least he has some income that can really help the family it is a difficult situation and it is being seen in the students right now you know definitely.

Jason [00:54:10]:

Yes, I have a friend that we knew, I have had friends, several friends that I know who have an art but brutal they draw or whatever or is in music even to act whatever it is and I have friends who went directly to engineering because well they knew that, well, that was what he was going to leave him or they needed that, as you say, that quick way to get to and from what they are in and they felt that drawing that is not going to leave them anything, although it is what makes him happy but that does not it's going to leave nothing so you can't do that you understand.

Cesamil [00:54:49]:

That is what I was going to tell you, I am, I am sure that right now you probably remember, partner, who went through or are going through the same situation, you know what I am talking about, of course, and one as a teacher cannot do anything, that is. there is very little that one cannot do as a teacher because he advises the student as one can but nothing you have other pressures other situations also have the family that without knowing it sometimes make the same mistake and well one sometimes with a little bit of impotence and sadness look at the situation, as I was telling you right now we don't know and I speak for myself right and you also know I don't know how to always work on that situation I do the best we can.

Jason [00:55:52]:

It is difficult because all students are different.

Cesamil [00:55:56]:

Yes, it is true, and you know, one begins as a teacher in high school, in high school we are taught many things and I had great teachers, but it is true that we learn more technically and theoretically, I do not know how right now they have updated the teaching in the field of Pedagogy, true, they taught me a lot, but once you enter the field and start working with students and not only with students, with fellow teachers, fellow teachers, all these situations begin to arise and we were not prepared for that, we do not know what it is like or learn it or see as you go see how one does it as is this case that we were talking about almost now this because up to a certain point one does the best one can, right of course and we have to see I am sure that perhaps more in the future and with more studies Universities definitely play a

transcendental role there because that is where these investigations are carried out and they are based on these investigations, since one can already Then make some changes, make modifications and so on.

Jason [00:57:26]:

Sure, and well, but finally, what do you think the Government needs to do for its students?

Cesamil [00:57:39]:

Well, that question is very broad..

Jason [00:57:43]:

We are going to minimize it as you think it can be implemented, obviously laws can be implemented, right, legislature plus other aid.

Cesamil [00:57:55]:

Look, I'm going to put a different angle, right, because money will definitely always be needed, now a raise has been announced, a delayed raise for the teachers of the education department, these raises should have been given years ago and the cost of living is rising by At the same time, so I think it's a raise that still doesn't do justice to the teachers and we, the municipal system, have a different salary, a more competitive salary. more money will be needed but everyone knows that. I would say that what the Government needs in terms of schools and education is to be less centralized, to give greater autonomy to the school and the schools themselves, to give greater autonomy to teachers.

Jason [00:59:11]:

Of course, because each administration knows its school, the Government is not going to know each school as you say.

Cesamil [00:59:19]:

Exactly to the extent that the central government and, in our case, the municipal government seek to have greater control over the school, a more centralized control, everything is delayed and interrupts the process. I am talking about the full meaning of the word when seeking, for example, to control what the teachers teach the planning of the teachers in the classroom what you are doing is wrong when they really take away that autonomy that responsibility from the classroom teachers for X or Y reason you are doing wrong, when they you take it away from the school itself to centralize it at a central level, you are doing a bad thing because we are the specialists they hired us for a reason.

Jason [01:00:18]:

How the government will know more than the teacher if you are not a teacher.

Cesamil [01:00:21]:

And we are the ones who are in the "field", no central authority is going to know more than the people who are there every day because you can go and visit but it will never be the same as being there every day and it is not that there will be supervision, right, maybe there will be people who differ from me, you know, I'm not against supervision, on the contrary, we who are public officials, that is, they pay me with public money from the people, no, that is, I They have to supervise and control because there has to be proof that the money that is being paid to me is being used properly, just as it has to be done with the people who are higher up, you know that it has to be controlled.

Jason [01:01:04]:

Of course, it goes hand in hand, it's not that only those at the top, everyone who is using people's money, has to be controlled.

Cesamil [01:01:10]:

Everyone from those of us who are below and from those of us who are above have to go through a process of supervision and control, right, because there it is understood that this money is understood and that it is stated that this money that is used and there is no money thrown away is not wasted money it is not that it is being stolen and not that I am from a very comfortable position, let's say nothing, I dedicate myself to giving the students homework from the notebook and then the exam a pareo with a choice and that's it and with that I They give a mega comfortable check. That is not the case, that is not true, but that does not mean true supervision and oversight does not mean that there should be greater centralization and loss of autonomy and academic freedom to the extent that that is lost, because then you have already done damage to the educational system.

Jason [01:02:10]:

They are very good recommendations indeed and well that is what should be happening because as you said as long as the government continues to control everything that is given and taught it will never change, that is why it will go according to what each ruler and administration thinks.

Cesamil [01:02:29]:

And all the processes are hindered, the educational processes are hindered, the arrival of the resources that are needed is delayed.

Jason [01:02:39]:

It is true that, if you want to give it a theme or not a theme, but let's suppose an excursion that I remember was a very big problem in the school, an excursion that had to go through 1000 people obviously exaggerating right.

Cesamil [01:02:53]:

Yes, it is an extremely bureaucratic process and I believe that it is one of the areas that we still have to improve, now that you have gone to an area that definitely needs to be improved.

Jason [01:03:11]:

Well, thank you for your time professor and this so you know this interview was recorded and if I have permission to upload it.

Cesamil [01:03:20]:

Yes, you told me of course yes.

Jason [01:03:25]:

Thank you very much and have a good day.

Cesamil [01:03:28]:

Of course, thanks, yes, really, thanks for considering me and I hope that everything goes well and much success there, in your university studies.

Jason [01:03:37]:

Thank you very much.