

CRECER

Challenging Racism and Empowering Communities through Ethnocultural Research



Contact Information



University of Miami School of
Education and Human Development

Department of Educational and
Psychological Studies – Counseling
Psychology



Table of Contents:

About Us:

About Us – pg. 2

Team Leader – pg. 2

The Team – pg. 2-6

Projects:

Day of Dialogue –
pg. 7

Kulula – pg. 8-9

Strong Roots –
pg. 10 - 12

Projects cont'd:

Children's Branch –
pg. 13-15

Haiti Projects –
pg. 16 -18





About Us

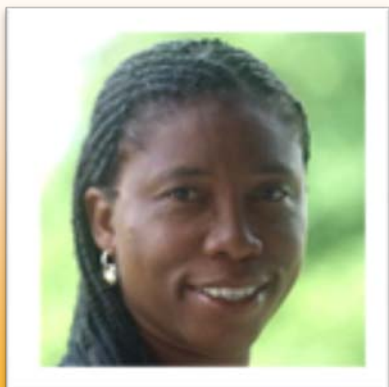
Derived from the Spanish word, “crecer,” meaning “to grow,” the Challenging Racism & Empowering Communities through Ethnocultural Research (CRECER) team is a community based participatory research team within the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies at the University of Miami committed to social justice for ethnic minorities and immigrant populations through academic research and community intervention and engagement.

We seek to create and sustain intervention programs in schools, neighborhoods, and community centers to address issues that are often overlooked by our society. Our overarching mission is to encourage community empowerment through

the development and sustainability of holistic programs for youth, families, and organizations that promote psychological, physical, relational, and community health and well-being. Collaborations and partnerships with local communities, focusing on the strengths of these communities, help us to achieve these goals.

As a research team, CRECER is deeply engaged in the study of culture and the development of participatory action research skills. Our community inspired projects provide students with many opportunities to take a stand and challenge the ways in which people think about ethnicity and culture either through their academic work or through their leadership and involvement in collaborative community endeavors.

Team Leader: Guerda Nicolas, Ph.D.



Dr. Nicolas joined the Department of Educational and Psychological Studies at the University of Miami in 2008. Prior to joining the EPS faculty, she was an Associate Professor at Boston College. She obtained her doctoral degree in clinical psychology from Boston University in 1997, completing her predoctoral training at Columbia University Medical Center and her postdoctoral training at NY State Psychiatric Institute/ Columbia University Department of Psychiatry. As a multicultural (Haitian American) and multilingual psychologist (Spanish, French, and Haitian Creole), her research is reflective of her background and interests.

Her current projects focus on developing spirituality across the life span among ethnic minorities, culturally effective mental health intervention for ethnic minority adolescents, with a specific focus on immigrant children, adolescents, and families. In addition she conducts research on social support networks of Caribbeans with a specific focus on Haitians. She has published several articles and book chapters and delivered numerous invited presentations at national and international conferences in the area of women's issues, depression and intervention among Haitians, social support networks of ethnic minorities, and spirituality.

Meet Our Team

Anna Wheatley

Anna is a fifth year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Miami and a previous student team leader of the CRECER research team. Anna is currently completing her year-long APA-accredited predoctoral internship at the Miami-Dade Community Action and Human Services Department.

Anna successfully proposed her dissertation in June 2014 and plans to defend in Spring 2015. She is conducting a qualitative exploration of the experiences of Black/White Biracial individuals in their roles as therapists. During her time on the team Anna was co-coordinator for the Kulula Mentoring and Tutoring program for three years, coordinator of the annual Day of Dialogue community event for four years, and facilitator of the Strong Roots Parents/Caregiver program for one year.

Anna is a Native of St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands and hopes to one day return there permanently. She received her BS in Business Administration from Georgetown University in 2008 majoring in Management and minoring in Sociology.



Noris Rios

Noris is a third year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Miami. She currently serves as program coordinators for both the Kulula Mentoring program and Evaluation for Breakthrough Miami project.

She earned her BA in Psychology at the University of Miami with a minor in Foreign Languages (French & Italian). During her undergraduate career she worked as a research assistant at the UM Mood and Anxiety Disorders lab.

With a mix of Dominican and Mexican roots, her research interests are focuses on issues of cultural diversity in the mental health profession. She wants to explore how culture influences perception about mental health service utilization, and the field in general.

Meet Our Team

Kimberly Ho, M.A.

Kimberly Ho is a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Miami. Her clinical and research interests include working with children, adolescents, and families. A native of Jamaica, she has a special interest in working with individuals from the Caribbean region. Kimberly is interested in investigating factors such as religion/spirituality and movement/dance and their influence on children's identity, well-being, and various developmental domains (socio-emotional in particular).

Ultimately, she hopes her research will be used to inform child development policies and create sustainable and culturally relevant mental health prevention and intervention programs in low and middle-income countries. Prior to her entry into the PhD program, she worked as a residential therapist for adolescents with substance abuse disorders and/or juvenile delinquency and completed an internship working with children and women who witnessed and/or were victims of domestic violence.

She earned her M.A. in Mental Health Counseling and Wellness from New York University and her B.Sc. in Communications with a double major in Psychology and Public Relations from the University of Miami. A student of classical ballet since age 5, she also holds an advanced level certificate of ballet through the Royal Academy of Dance and has performed throughout the island with Jamaica's Movements Dance Company.



Dorothy Addae

Dorothy joined CRECER in 2013 and is a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Miami. She earned her B.A. in Psychology from the University of Missouri, working with Dr. Anna Bardone-Cone and Dr. Lisa Flores. Dorothy began her graduate career at the University of Illinois-Chicago in 2012 and transferred to Miami with Dr. Dina Birman.

Dorothy's international background contributes to her passion and research focus. Her interests center around the immigration experience, acculturation, and international policy. In addition to adjusting to the new country, Dorothy is interested in the identity development of immigrant children and immigrant family processes. Lastly, Dorothy desires that her work and career will help in bridging the practice research gap, in disseminating and implementing research in communities.



Meet Our Team

Sarah-Jane Quessa

Sarah-Jane completed her undergraduate work at Hampshire College, a small liberal arts college in Amherst, Massachusetts. She obtained her liberal art degree majoring in cultural studies and comparative literature. She subsequently attended Tufts University where she received her master's degree. For close to ten years Sarah-Jane was a Humanities Teacher in Boston, Massachusetts. Though she enjoyed teaching and supporting the academic success of young people, the inequities in the public school system propelled her to further her schooling in hopes of having a greater social impact.

Sarah-Jane later obtained a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study, in Educational Administration at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. She is currently a Northeastern University Doctoral Candidate in the Doctor of Education, Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership program. Sarah-Jane joined the CRECER team in Spring 2014 and is currently working towards developing sustainable educational opportunities with the *Haiti Legacy Project*.



Natacha Janac

Natacha earned her master's in Nashville TN, at Tennessee State University and is a clinician who enjoys working with children and families. Currently, she provides mental health therapy to children in the foster care system. Natacha joined the CRECER team in Spring 2014.

She serves as the Chair of the policy council of Miami-Dade County Community Action & Human Service Head Start/Early Head Start program; aiming to fight the war on poverty by providing comprehensive child-development, nutrition, education, and social services for children and parents. She is a member of the (CAA) Community Action Agency board of directors, who over-see all the programs and services provided by the Miami-Dade Community Action and Human Services Department (CAHSD). Natacha is also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc.; an organization that provide services to the community and helps educated young women to understand their worth.

Natacha's research interests include working with families in the communities. She aims to develop evidence-based interventions and prevention programs in the mental health field to benefit African/American and Caribbean communities.



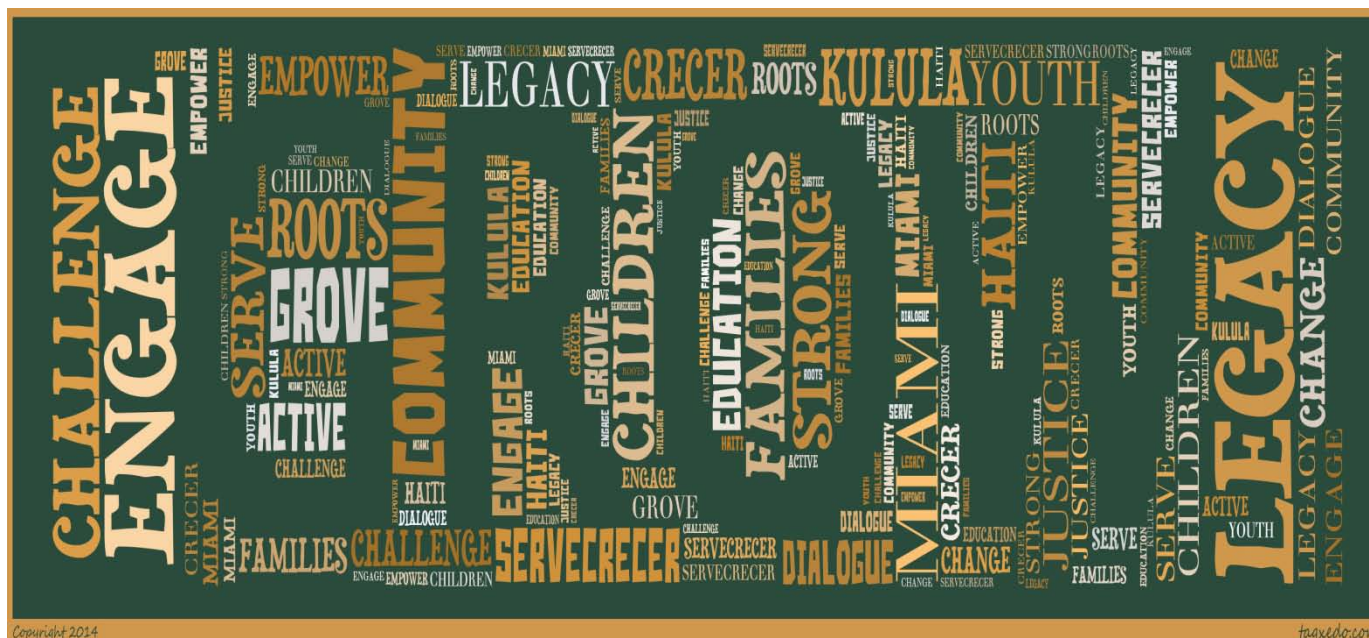
Meet Our Team

Amina Simmons, M.A.

Amina Simmons is a first year doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at the University of Miami. She is new to the CRECER team this fall and excited about the new experience. Her clinical and research interests include working with Black children and families, specifically assessing the experiences of Black student parents at the collegiate level. Her current focus is capturing the experiences of Black student mothers, in hopes of informing education policy at postsecondary institutions.

Through research and practice Amina hopes to serve as a bridge between the community and the academy. In the community, she is working with Pam Hollingsworth & Dr. Christine Hughes of the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe County (ELC) to better meet the needs of families enrolled in the VPK programs and patrons of CCRR services.

Amina's family is from North Carolina and she is grateful to have traveled much of the US for school. She holds an MA from the University of Missouri-Columbia in Educational and Counseling Psychology and earned her BA in Psychology and Africana Studies from Pomona College.



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Day of Dialogue

Spring 2014 Recap

The Day of Dialogue is a yearly event hosted by the Challenging Racism and Empowering Communities through Ethnocultural Research (CRECER) research team at the University of Miami. The forum provides neighborhood leaders and CRECER partners a space to identify the needs of the community, and develop strategies to address them.

The 6th DOD – “Are We So Different?” An Intergenerational Dialogue on Race was held on January 21, 2014 at the Miami Museum of Science. This event was an intergenerational dialogue with youths and adults affiliated with organizations throughout Miami-Dade to engage in an open discourse about issues related to race and racism in Miami. The day centered around a tour of the new exhibit, “Race. Are we so different?” with conversations and group discussions facilitated by community partners.

This year’s community partners and session facilitators were members of the following organizations:

- [Anti-defamation League](#)
- [UAspire](#)
- [Catalyst Miami](#)
- [En Familia](#)
- [Miami Coalition of Christians and Jews \(MCCJ\)](#)
- [Multicultural Education Center \(MEC\)](#)

The Day’s Agenda

The day’s agenda included icebreakers and activities to facilitate thoughts about how race impacts participants’ lived experiences individually and at a societal level. Participants debriefed sessions in small groups, explored the museum exhibit with guided prompts and held a large group discussion addressing the questions, “Who are we?”, “Where do we want to go?”, and “What can we do to get there?” as they related to race relations. The day ended with participants participating in a drum circle lead by Sean Dibble. For more information about Day of Dialogue or to get involved please email umcrecer@gmail.com



Kulula Project

Spring 2014 Recap

Kulula, a Swahili word, meaning to “excel” or “achieve” is a culturally enriched, evidence-based, mentoring and tutoring program for enhancing the ethnic identity and socialization skills of Black youth. Targeting elementary and middle school students in the greater Miami-Dade area, Kulula seeks to increase self-efficacy, leadership skills, and community involvement. Through the program youth improve decision-making, coping, and problem solving, increase connection to school and academic performance, and increase awareness of and pride in their African heritage.



Using an Afrocentric curriculum-based approach (including mentors of African descent) in a group setting, Kulula engages youth in activities and journaling exercises emphasizing relational interaction. The program has four modules that address various themes including: relationships, family history/ancestry, stereotypes, self-esteem, conflict resolution, leadership/role models, career aspirations and planning for the future. Volunteers support academic and social development, as well as encourage positive relationship building and model positive behaviors

The mentoring program this year was run in partnership with Coconut Grove Cares site, The Barnyard. Participants ranged in age from 9-12, and on average 10-15 youth and 9 college-student mentors were in attendance at weekly meetings. Program support this year was funded by a grant from the Pave the Way Foundation.



Kulula Project – Spring 2014 Recap

Progress on Previous Challenges

Mentoring

- Consistent presence from mentoring coordinators to supervise/plan
- Increased numbers in mentor recruitment, increased one-on-one interaction time with mentors and mentees
- Staff at The Barnyard were helpful and enthusiastic about the program

Current Challenges

Mentoring

- Inconsistent Attendance: Mentors & Mentees
 - Mentor/Mentee attrition rates (Fall – Spring semester decrease)
- Lack of engagement/enthusiasm towards curriculum with specific age group (age 9-12)
- Distractions:
 - Layout of Site
 - Other children not enrolled in program
 - Disruptive behavior from participants

Plans for 2014-2015 Implementation

- Program will run at one site: The Barnyard Community Center
- Target age groups: 8-12 year olds
- Recruitment/Training of Mentors – September 2014
 - Target Mentor Recruits: 10
 - Target Mentee Recruits: 10-12
- Meeting Time: After 5pm
 - Ideal
 - Fewer children in Barnyard space



Strong Roots Parent/Caregiver Program

Progress Report (2013-2014)

The Strong Roots Parent and Caregiver program was designed to enrich the knowledge and skills of Black minority and immigrant parents and guardians in the community, particularly around the areas of racial and ethnic socialization. The program was created in response to the needs voiced by children participating in the Kulula Mentoring and Tutoring program.

When parents and caregivers are more secure in their identities as racial beings, have a greater awareness of the ways in which race, discrimination, and oppression operate in theirs and their children's lives, and have the skills to communicate and respond to their children, they will be better equipped to aid their children in the development and integration of their own racial and ethnic identities.

Additionally, parents and caregivers will be better positioned to provide support and solutions to make meaning of, integrate, and confront experiences of racism intra-personally, interpersonally, and systemically.

This year Strong Roots met with parents or caregivers and their children bi-monthly at the Barnyard Community Center in the West Grove, a historic and predominately Black community in Miami. Parents progressed through the empirically based Strong Roots manual while children participated in an equivalent themed Children's Branch program. The program was based on collaborative learning and facilitator-led discussion based on topics from three main areas: (1) well-being, (2) empowering racial identity, and (3) parent-child communication.



Strong Roots Parent/Caregiver Program

Progress Report

Between Fall 2013 and Spring 2014, the fourth cycle of the Strong Roots Parent and Caregiver program was implemented at our community partner site, The Barnyard, in the West Coconut Grove Community. The program consisted of 1 orientation session, 9 regular meeting sessions, and 2 celebratory sessions (Kwanzaa and end-of-year). Sessions were typically bi-weekly and were coordinated around school and holiday schedules. Participating families were majority female and African American or Caribbean Black, with a small number of caregivers of Hispanic descent. Across the 10-week program, 14 caregivers and 20 children participated in the group sessions, with about 10 consistent families attending on a regular basis.

Parent/Caregiver Group Sessions

Caregiver sessions were facilitated by an advanced doctoral student in Counseling Psychology, with experience in domains of parenting and family issues. Caregiver sessions emphasized discussion of racial identity, ways in which parents teach their children about race/culture (racial socialization), communication, positive parenting practices (e.g., discipline), and well-being/self-care.

Program topics for caregivers were organized primarily within three modules: 1) Racial Socialization, 2) Communication, and 3) Well-being. Within the first module, early sessions focused on establish expectations and group rules, facilitating bonding and sharing among parents and caregivers, and setting the foundation for the role of race and culture in modern, ethnic minority families. Many participants acknowledged the influence and importance of race and culture both in their own upbringing and in how they raise their children.

Participants were also able to recognize and share positive and negative racial socialization messages that they and their children encounter, and ways that they deal with these sorts of challenges.

Within the second module (Communication), sessions primarily focused on relationships and interpersonal communication with goals of helping caregivers recognize their communication patterns and learn new tools for increasing positive communications within their family. Many participants were able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses within the area of communication and share tips with one another on how to improve family communication. Overall, caregivers were encouraged to be mindful of ways in which their communication styles and approaches can affect their children and their relationship. Additional resources, such as the Black Girls Rock pledge, were also shared.



Strong Roots Parent/Caregiver Program

Progress Report

The last module focused on Well-Being and resilience, and involved sessions on mental strength, stress management and healthy practices within families (e.g., nutrition, religion/spirituality, physical health, mental health). Caregivers especially appreciated learning more about how to foster resilience in their children and ways to practice their own better self-care and relaxation techniques. Participants also shared their own strategies and gave each other new ideas for taking better care of themselves.

Overall Summary

Overall, feedback from participants was positive regarding their experience in the program. Parents provided written feedback during the final session, indicating their appreciation for the group and its facilitators. Participants reported especially valuing the camaraderie with group members, which began to feel like a family to them. Many participants shared a desire for the group to continue longer throughout the year, and were disappointed that the end of the group had come so quickly.

Program Challenges

We continued to have varying consistency in attendance by caregivers and children. Attendance was mostly strong throughout the year, and dwindled somewhat during the last few sessions; however, this was reportedly due to family circumstances and other commitments (e.g., changes in job schedules) rather than lack of interest.



Strong Roots Children's Branch

Summary Report (2013-2014)

The Children's Branch is the child

component of the Strong Roots program. In this portion, projects and exercises focus on children's individual and community identities (with a particular focus on their racial and cultural identities), and relevant practices of dialogue and communication.

The curriculum is divided into two modules. The first module focuses on the children's developing social identities and connections. Children engage in activities where they explore and share self-selected qualities and experiences with the group. The module then shifts beyond the emphasis on individuals to active-learning projects that help them to increasingly discover connections between themselves and others.

Initial connections are explored between the children, followed by connections they children may share with facilitators, teachers, and others outside of their immediate peer group. Finally, children explore the idea of all individuals' connections within varying social contexts.

Having established an emphasis on individual identities and group dynamics, the second module of the Strong Roots Children's program emphasizes the practice of dialogue and communication as it relates to those with whom we are alike, different, and connected. The children participate in activities with focuses ranging from concrete communication practices to the importance of empathy and understanding both our own feelings and those of others.

This year Strong Roots Children's Branch program met with children bi-monthly at the Barnyard Community Center in the West Grove, a historic and predominately Black community in Miami. Their parents and caregivers progressed through the empirically based Strong Roots manual.



Strong Roots Children's Branch

Progress Report

Between Fall 2013 and Spring 2014, ten children's branch sessions were held at the Barnyard. Children's ages ranged from 5 to 13 years old. In order to ensure the material presented was developmentally appropriate, children were sometimes split into two groups by age – ages 5 & 6 and ages 7 & up – and given different tasks.

The sessions were led by a doctoral student in counseling psychology with a Master's in mental health counseling, and a background in child development, and two to three undergraduate volunteers from the University of Miami.

Each session, post family dinner, was about one hour long. Attendance per session ranged from 8 to 15 children, with the median being 10.5, the mean being 10.7, and the mode being 7 and 15. Volunteers were assigned to groups of around three to five children to assist them with activities.

Children's Group Sessions

Module 1

The first half of this module was to dedicated to helping children get in touch with aspects of their identity. Children completed an "All About Me" book where they shared their names/ages, physical appearance characteristics, and details about their family, friends, and environment. The children were able to identify and share most of the information and in doing so similarities and differences became apparent.

The second half of this module was dedicated to helping children explore how they think and feel about themselves, how the opinions of others make them feel, the meaning attached to their phenotypes, and identifying their strengths and weaknesses.

Children were asked to identify positive traits, draw self-portraits, and compare themselves objects/people that were similar to them and exhibited positive traits. Many of the children identified their character, minds, and personalities as things they were proud of and compared themselves to objects that matched their skin color.

Session goals for module one were successfully imparted evidenced by the children's responses to discussion questions. For the most part the children engaged and listened to one another and were open about sharing information.

Module 2

The first quarter of this module focused on children's family and friend relationships. The goal was to help children identify their systems of support and aspects of a healthy friendship. Children discussed qualities of a good friend and identified examples of friends and relationships that are supportive.

The latter part of this module focused on the importance of communication, managing problems, showing gratitude, and goals for the future. It appeared that the topics were relatable to the children. They identified people in lives with whom they could have supportive communication; most cited their parents, siblings, or close friend. Many of the children shared positive views for the future, readily identifying careers/jobs they would like to have.

A good friend is: "someone who listens, is honest, plays games with you, [and] is there when you need them." - Participant

Strong Roots Children's Branch

Progress Report

Feedback

To conclude the program we elicited feedback from the children about their likes and dislikes. Children shared enjoying the food, people, and drawing/coloring activities. Their dislikes included writing activities, disruptive behavior, and being indoors.

Overall Summary

Overall, it appeared the children would like to see more interactive/outdoor activities incorporated into the curriculum. Outdoor play was used as an incentive for some children, as some sessions were held outside and incorporated free play. All the children shared they would be involved in the program again if given the opportunity.

Future Improvements

When revisiting the curriculum, the children's feedback should be taken into consideration, in particular their preference for incorporating physical activity. Facilitating team-building activities that involve taking turns, sharing, leading and following, as well as allowing children to act out their experiences in plays/skits could be methods for actively engaging the curriculum.





Haiti Legacy Project:

*An Education Program Focusing on
Haitian Slavery and its Global Impact*

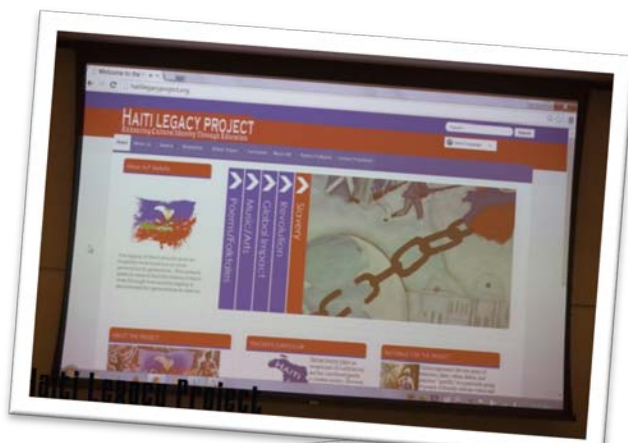
The study of the Haitian Revolution is vast, provocative, and rich. The narrative of independence struggle, offers scholars, students, artists, and activists, an opportunity to examine *St. Domingue* and Haiti from multiple lenses. Furthermore, it allows for a contribution based on their diverse disciplinary perspectives.

This project will create an educational program centered on the history of colonization, the liberation story of Africans in the island, and their global impact. Through forum, the project aims at fostering a sense of pride and identity among teachers and the next generation of Haitians in the island, promoting educational and psychological well-being among all.

The project is a collaboration between the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, the Musée Ogier-Fombrun, and the Haitian Heritage Museum in Miami.

Project Goals:

- Create a historical resource book and other supportive materials that outline the history of slavery and revolution in Haiti that educators can learn from and integrate into their curriculum
- Document and highlight the global impact of Haiti in the world before and following the revolution
- Provide training to teachers in Haiti on the materials and effective strategies that can be utilized to implement the materials into their curriculum with their students
- Develop a team of teachers who will serve as trainers for other teachers of the project in the future – an effort to ensure sustainability of the project
- Evaluate the overall impact with respect to individual and systemic impact



The Teacher's Mental Health Training Project of Archaie:

Train the Trainers Approach

Project Overview

The specific aims of the mental health component are to:

- Train and provide ongoing support for teachers in Haiti to identify, screen for, and offer support for mental health needs of children and adolescents
- Prepare a selected group of trainees to become trainers in identifying, screening for, and offering support for mental health problems to children and adolescents
- Prepare selected teachers with training on how to make an appropriate referral for further services

of psychological distress in individuals across different age groups and genders.

- Train health professionals, teachers, religious leaders, and community members to become trainers on how to conduct information sessions with other groups in their respective community.

Through the train the trainer model we seek to increase community awareness about mental health issues and ways of seeking services for these issues.

The Training Program

Rebati Sante Mentale in partnership with the Musée Ogier-Fombrun, and School of Education and Human Development at the University of Miami in Florida is implementing this program, aimed at providing training to teachers on mental health issues. The overall goal is to equip the teachers with support and knowledge that will enable them to better support young students they teach. Our Mental Health Training Program is grounded in a community empowerment and sustainability framework that seeks to meet the follow key objectives:

- Increase capacity and sustainability of mental health in Haiti by training health professionals, teachers, religious leaders, and community members in psychosocial programming and implementation that is culturally grounded in Haitian culture.
- Train health professionals, teachers, religious leaders, and community members to recognize symptoms



The Teacher's Mental Health Training Project of Archaie: 2013 Session Updates

General Attendance:

- *Session 1 – January 2013*
 - o A total of 15 teachers (10 males and 5 females) were in attendance at this session.
- *Session 2 – February 2013*
 - o A total of 16 teachers (11 males and 5 females) were in attendance at this session.
- *Session 3 – March 2013*
 - o A total of 16 teachers (11 males and 5 females) were in attendance at this session.

Regional Representation

These teachers represented several main sectors of the area: Montrouis (tourist area), St Marc, Arachaie (main town), and Tbwa (mountain) and different types of schools (public and private).

Grade Level Representation

These teachers work with:

- 4th AF
- 1-4th AF
- 7th AF
- fundamental-seconnaire
- Fondamental

Training Focus Key Areas:

- Difference between *maladie mentale* and *Sante Mentale*
- Difference entre normal development and mental health issues among kids
- Difference between symptom, syndrome, and disorder
- Causes of mental illness
- Roles of teachers
- Overview of specific disorders were discussed: Depression, Anxiety, Trauma, and Grief
- Overview of the history of Haiti from pre-colonization to 1804 is provided; and the link between history and mental health

Additional Program Benefits

The groups were created with the intention of integrating them and building a sense of community among such a diverse group of teachers with the same objective (education of kids). Arranging the group in this manner enable us to accomplished some additional benefits of the program:

- Teachers from different parts of the region connected with each other for the first time
- Teachers had a chance to share experiences across different types of schools
- Teachers from the mountain area felt that they had a voice and place at the table and were instrumental in ensuring that the participants knew their presence and their importance.



Get involved with CRECER?

We are always looking for individuals and organizations who share our commitment to social justice and our dedication to enhancing cultural identities and promoting health and wellbeing amongst ethnic minority and immigrant individuals and communities.

If you are interested in developing competencies in community-based, culturally-informed research, are interested in bringing a CRECER program to your community, or would like to make a donation, contact us at umcrecer@gmail.com



Contact Us

University of Miami
Department of Educational & Psychological Studies
School of Education and Human Development
5202 University Dr. Coral Gables, FL 33146

Online Contacts

www.education.miami.edu/crecer

<https://twitter.com/umcrecer>

<https://www.facebook.com/umcrecer>

