

Environmental Education Summer Camp to Empower and Inspire Haitian and Dominican Girls
Lewis and Clark College, Samantha Hernandez
Cabarete, Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, July to August 2018

The Dominican Republic is one of two dozen island nations in the Caribbean whose sustenance is at risk because of environmental degradation. Warmer temperatures, rise in sea level, and more frequent occurrences of extreme weather leaves Hispaniola in a state of susceptibility that can damage the country economically, socially, and politically (Caffrey et al). Dominican Republic depends heavily on tourism as a source of revenue and economic growth, which helps fund public education and infrastructure initiatives. Dominican Republic does not have the means to recover from calamitous weather events on such a frequent basis. The most recent tropical cyclone, Hurricane Maria, resulted in more than 5,500 people being evacuated, storm surge of up to six feet, and many collapsed homes along the coastline (Watson). It is only a matter of time before this middle income developing country regresses due to the detrimental effects of environmental degradation.

With the Project for Peace grant, I wish to teach an environmental awareness and engagement summer camp in Cabarete, Puerto Plata in Dominican Republic in partnership with the Mariposa DR Foundation. Through practicing project-based learning in an environmental education curriculum, I wish to enhance the quality of education of young girls by helping them develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills so that they learn to apply their knowledge in a manner that manifests positive change in their communities. Another social issue that I aspire to address in this summer camp is mending the relationship between Haitian and Dominican children. I wish to promote peace in doing this project by providing a learning environment where Dominican and Haitian children can learn together in ways that promote empathy and understanding. I want to educate the girls in the Mariposa DR Foundation about the environment in order to instill a concern for the environment and make them aware of the policies and events driving the degradation of their country's land. Through the integration of the girls working together on these projects and activities, socializing during environmental trips, and learning about the ecological problems facing both Dominican Republic and Haiti, I wish to bridge the gap between Dominican and Haitian youth.

Cabarete is a tourist town and a prime example of gentrification as a result of tourism (Estevez Cruz). Due to the increased emphasis of catering to tourists, the local government has divested time and energy from social issues such as quality of education. There has been unequal access to quality education between urban and rural areas as there are not enough public resources being invested in rural children's education (UNICEF).

An important factor to note in the decision to work with the Mariposa DR Foundation is that this organization works with both Haitian and Dominican girls to invest in sustainable solutions to end generational poverty. Dominican Republic suffers from wealth inequality as the highly stratified society is composed of a very small and wealthy upper class and very large and poor working class. Many families in the large poor working class do not have the means to provide their children the safety, health, and education they deserve. The foundation, with the construction of the Mariposa Center, offers a community center where impoverished Haitian and Dominican girls go to participate in sports, and receive life skills for jobs, health, and wellness care as well as many other things. The organization also has an experiential learning program of environmental education, which they hope to expand with my help and the Project for Peace grant.

In 2013, a Dominican court ruling stripped 200,000 Haitian immigrants of their Dominican citizenship ("The Dominican Republic and Haiti"). Anyone with Haitian parents born after 1929 could potentially lose their citizenship if they did not prove legal residency by June 17, 2015. This xenophobia stems from a complicated, long and contentious history between the two countries as Haiti occupied

Dominican Republic from 1822 to 1844, and under the dictatorship of Trujillo, the Dominican government carried out the Parsley Massacre, which resulted in the execution of thousands of Haitians ("The Dominican Republic and Haiti"). The vilification of Haitians continues to be a problem that marginalizes and makes them vulnerable to discrimination and hate crimes. The knowledge these girls acquire will provide them with the skills to question how to solve environmental issues facing their country, the tools to carry out those solutions, the values to tolerate, help and accept peoples equally from both countries, the knowledge to care for their environment, and the voice to advocate for their future.

The first step in the process will be to assess the students' level of knowledge about the environment in order to make adjustments in the proposed curriculum and establish a two-way street educational program in which the instructor and pupils are in egalitarian positions of learning. The curriculum will be divided into six parts: water, air, soil, energy, landscape and wildlife, and positive action. Each topic will cover basic general ideas and then include a section that relates the subject to a local community or national problem. In an effort to mend the relationship between Haitian and Dominican girls, the curriculum will also focus on environmental degradation issues facing both Haiti and Dominican Republic including river flood risk, contamination of water, and deforestation. The project-based learning will include activities such as constructing a greenhouse, going on field trips to nearby national parks and ecological attractions, painting community murals, designing environmentally themed posters, and assembling KNex renewable energy kits. Project based learning will allow these girls the opportunity to foster their creativity, inquisitiveness, and permanent learning. Continued assessments will be in the form of discussion and accomplishment of projects. There will also be Mariposa Foundation volunteers co-presenting the program and I will be training them as well to ensure that there will be resources and trained individuals available for the program to continue every summer.

I was born in Hialeah, Florida, but both my parents are from the Dominican Republic. I have visited the country every summer for as long as I can remember and know how to read, write, and speak in Spanish as it is my first language. I am majoring in environmental studies at Lewis and Clark College and believe this background knowledge together with this experience will allow me to teach about what I know and learn about what I do not know. I know and have witnessed the poverty, environmental degradation, and corruption facing my homeland and possess the enthusiasm and eagerness to help my people emerge from their hardships through education and awareness starting with the future.

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