

Environmental Education Summer Camp to Empower and Inspire Haitian and Dominican Girls
Dominican Republic
Lewis and Clark College
Samantha Hernandez, United States, Lewis & Clark College
Yeny Soler Sandino, United States, Lewis & Clark College

Section I: Narrative

With the project for peace grant, I facilitated an environmental awareness and engagement summer camp in partnership with the DREAM Project. I developed a curriculum that incorporated practicing project-based learning to help students develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. With this in mind, I was hoping the students would learn to apply their knowledge in a manner that manifests positive change in their communities while also aspiring to mend the relationship between Haitian and Dominican children. Another one of my main goals was to instill a concern for the environment and spark a conversation about how important it is for Haitians and Dominicans to mend their relationship as they are both facing major threats due to climate change.

In addition to the Project for Peace grant, I was given \$2,500 by my college. This money was used for additional material expenses and employment of a local volunteer named Yonauris to upkeep the gardening based projects we completed over the summer.

The origin of the idea came from a basic desire to aid my home country in a manner that I was fully capable of doing and an area in which I am knowledgeable. My family is from the Dominican Republic and I visit every summer for two to three months at a time. Each passing summer, I felt and saw tensions rise between Haitians and Dominicans and thought this needs to be discussed. The current culture on the island holds on to the notion that it is taboo to talk about the subject of Haitians facing racism and discrimination in the Dominican Republic. There are some Dominicans who refuse to recognize it is an issue, some who do recognize it is an issue, and others who hold the beliefs that allow racism and discrimination against Haitians to prosper. The political climate also adds to the perpetuation of maintaining this stance. While visiting Dominican Republic every summer for the last four years, I have seen graffiti sprawled on walls stating "Fuera los Haitianos," which translates to "Out the Haitians." Seeing these messages concerned me because I knew this attitude towards Haitians in the country was going to hinder the progress and possibility of working together to resolve and overcome climate change. I am a Hispanic Studies major and Environmental Studies minor at Lewis & Clark College and developed the idea that if I could somehow inform the public about this connection and present it in a way that helps them draw this conclusion themselves, people would be challenged to think in a different way and bring up those conversations at home.

I researched organizations to work with and thought the best target audience I was most equipped to work with was children. I developed an educational curriculum which included Haitian and Dominican children working together on activities, socializing during environmental trips, and learning about environmental issues facing both Dominican Republic and Haiti. I wanted to use the learning as a platform, starting base, and pretense to set the conversation in motion and discuss the idea of why Haitians and Dominicans should come together to deal with the consequences of climate change. As previously mentioned, there is not enough dialogue concerning climate change and attempting to mend Dominican and Haitian relations that stem from historical issues.

I chose my host site because I am familiar with the country and I know the people, the politics, and the language. I chose to work with the DREAM Project because the organization works with both Haitian and Dominican children, an essential part of my proposal. DREAM was supportive and helped in every way possible from providing transportation to buying materials to making sure my dietary needs were met. The organization went as far as connecting us with a local volunteer who helped us construct a vertical garden.

One downfall is that I did not have as much time as I would have liked to facilitate my program. I taught four different classes each week for a total of four weeks. Each class had 25 students that I saw once a week and met with for only 45 minutes, meaning there was only 180 minutes of total class time instruction with each group of students. This worried us because, at first, it seemed that it was simply not enough time to not only teach the material but to foster trust and build a relationship between student and teacher, which is so important when using the classroom to discuss difficult and controversial topics. We

solved this problem by serving as teaching assistants in other classes and building a friendship with the children in this way. The field trip gave us more time to engage with the children, but I wish we had time to take them on a couple additional field trips. Considering all of this, I am grateful to DREAM for their kindness in allowing me to pursue this project and giving us the the platform to do so.

There were also some logistical issues that were sometimes brought to our attention at the last minute. For example, sometimes a group of children would arrive late to class because they were doing an activity with another teacher, which took away from our class time, or a group of students who we were teaching that day were going on a separate DREAM field trip and not attending our class. We were advised about sudden changes such as these late enough that there was no time to come up with a solution other than attending the field trips as an assistant and using that as an opportunity to engage with students and discuss environmental topics in casual conversation.

I define peace as a state of mind physically, emotionally, socially, and politically. It is something attained when all people can exercise their rights, are provided basic needs and are able to enjoy their definition of "a good life." I think my project contributes to peace in an indirect way that is not so obvious. My main goal is to spark a conversation that will make people think about the issues hindering those three aspects of peace. Nothing and everything can seem to be in your control. It is difficult to navigate those two contradicting dynamics because they lead to two extremes, being too optimistic or too pessimistic, and I think it was balanced out in the end when I decided to be realistic. The world is overwhelming to take in and experience, particularly when trying to build peace in a world that seems to be fueled by chaos. This summer I learned about how environmental issues are interconnected with other branches of issues facing the world's population. I think this project was valuable in realizing that everyone no matter the age can accomplish something good, whether it be on a small scale or large scale.

"Doing this project, which gave me the tools to actually pursue an idea to bring about peaceful change, made me realize that comparing yourself to others will only harm your progress and the small efforts made will culminate into something bigger that you may not be there to witness firsthand. There is room for the youth of the world to accomplish many things and opportunities that might not present themselves until you take the initiative to think about them."- Samantha Hernandez

Section II: Photographs

