

Dickinson College

Serve the World - Dominican Republic



January 13-20 2012

Team Journal

January 13-20th 2012 a group of 18 students and 2 administrators traveled to San Marco, Dominican Republic for a week of painting classrooms at Fuente de la Esperanza (Fountain of Hope) school. This trip was much more than painting classrooms. The team taught ESL lessons every day, learned about poverty, encouraged education by learning foundational basics and loved the children who only ate one meal a day. The team inspired young people dream about their futures...on the moon, under the sea, in the jungle, throughout the seasons. High unemployment and underemployment continue to challenge this nation. Children are required to go to school through 7th grade; however free government schooling is very rare and often ineffective. Therefore, education continues to be a challenge for the nation and it's children. With 43% of the people live below the poverty line, there is a growing gap between the wealthy and poor. Limited electricity (the school only had electricity 5 hours a day) and clean drinking water are areas for continued focus and growth.

Prior to the trip, the team split into five crews to prepare classroom themes that included murals and ESL lessons that would integrate their newly themed classrooms with learning about English. With incorporating the children in to the painting process, each room came together beautifully as the week progressed. The now brightly colored rooms have sea animals, DR flags, trees of handprints, geckos, palm trees, blocks and cars, astronauts and so much more. The children were thrilled to help with the painting, making their classrooms personal and expanding young minds in new ways and with new possibilities for the future.

In this process our minds and hearts were enlarged. We were humbled by the way some Dominicans live, awestruck at the beauty of the landscape and beaches, amazed by the love and laughter of the children, and grateful for Pastor Freddie and his community that welcomed us for a week.

Thank you for taking a week of your winter break, raising funds and attending meetings for weeks prior, and going on an adventure to see and serve where your help was needed. Thank you for opening up yourselves to get to know other team members, to love the children unconditionally, and to allow yourselves to be challenged by the complexities of working internationally in missions. In ways we may still struggle to articulate, this week changed every participant. Read on to see some of our initial thoughts on Serving the World for week in the Dominican Republic....

Friday, January 13, 2012 – Justin Alves

Perhaps one of the most profound things that resonated with me was Rob's life story. Sharing a conversation with him at dinner, I learned of sacrifices he made for the island, in both Haiti and the DR, as well as some interesting perspectives on the current situation of education in the country and how it impacted his kids, as well as other local students.

Rob came down to originally work in Haiti, where he eventually met his wife. They decided to remain here and help the locals. He of course had some very interesting stories from his more recent years, including the earthquake in Haiti. He spoke of how desperate citizens

were for food and on dispensing food packs; the encampment was overrun by those desperate for food. They were not able to be bailed out from the station until a UN tank rolled in to disperse the crowd. Sadly, he said many conditions still remain the same.

He also told of interesting stories of children growing up on the island, a lifestyle I found interesting. His daughter, born in Haiti, learned Creole at age three (and has since forgotten it). The family then moved to the DR a few years later.

He said she quickly learned Spanish and was granted a scholarship to an international school. He said it was one of the better schools in the region, yet talked of a lack of guidance by faculty to the class size of nine students. He said the problem transcended to the public schools as well, with students dropping out at a young age.

Already I had heard interesting stories from a local, who had made sacrifices to stay here. I hope to discover more interesting people along this journey and take bits and pieces from their journey and apply it as inspiration for myself.

Friday, January 13, 2012 – Jasmine Britton

Yesterday I began writing in this journal but decided to tear the page that I wrote because it didn't express how I truly felt about being in the Dominican Republic. I wrote that I was excited to be here and of course I am, but I often wonder if the people that we will be helping will be excited as well. It always puzzles me because these people that we serve live through certain circumstances every day, and we come as strangers helping for a little amount of time. So the question that I hope I will answer during my stay here is, "Does the time that I serve—whether it be short or long—mean the same to the people that I am serving?"

Friday, January 13, 2012—Michael Blair

Today honestly may have been one of the longest days of my life. Is it Thursday? Friday? Who knows? All I know is that somewhere in between three naps (car ride, plane 1, and plane 2), a dramatic climate shift and an introduction to something Mira has dubbed a "Tap tap", (totally "Wikipedia-ing" that when I re-enter the cyber world) I arrived in the DR. My anxiousness for this trip has been mounting for six months. While I have participated in service trips before and even travelled internationally before, I know this trip is going to be unlike any other I've been on before. The DR is different from any other place I have previously travelled, and even though I have only been in the country for a few hours, my "Tap tap" road tour has confirmed my suspicions that this culture and this country is going to provide me with a fresh perspective and a new learning experience. I'm nervous about teaching; I don't know much Spanish (wish I paid attention in class more), and I'm a terrible painter, yet I've never been

more excited for a service week in my entire life. Already this team is clicking, and it's amazing to see people from all walks of campus coming together so quickly. I may be just rambling, but that is probably just the delirium associated with a lack of sleep, but the bottom line is that as a senior on my (potentially) last service trip at Dickinson, I'm incredibly grateful to be here in the DR with this great group of people, to do our best to help others. I don't know what the week will bring or what challenges I'll face, but I'm excited to finally be here and to get started tomorrow. Oh, and the beach is nice too!

Friday, January 13, 2012—Vivian Butali

Today, we arrived in the Dominican Republic, and I must say, this country is beautiful. Personally, I have never been on a community service trip abroad, but I am very excited to see what this experience has in store for us. After reading a few of the suggested articles that were emailed to us, I find myself also a little apprehensive about how the Dominicans will feel about working with me. Regardless, I am determined to do the best I can with the job that will be given to me. I realize that we have a responsibility to take care of one another. Having been an immigrant of the United States and having struggled with my family to get the stable financial positions that we currently are in, I can understand how important it is for people who live comfortably to help the less fortunate. When my family and I first got to the U.S. we received a lot of help with shelter and clothing until we reached a position where we could provide that for ourselves. I would not be where I am today if not for those generous people, so I am always willing to help someone in need. Because I have needed help before, I understand what it is like to be in that position. I believe everyone deserves to be helped if that will determine the success they will have in their lives.

Friday, January 13, 2012 – Alejandra Chavez

Music was the first thing that I heard walking out the airplane. The feeling I received from the people looking at us was different, it was just a stare. It was an exciting experience getting here, but I always get confused and wonder if coming here to help out others is really what these wonderful people want. As I sat through the truck ride I realized that I was scared because I really don't know how to make people feel comfortable. However, now I am here and all I want to do is get together in this group and leave something that the people here can get the most benefit from. I will do everything with my best intentions and do my best to serve this community. I can't wait to embrace the culture and go out into the town tomorrow.

Saturday, January 14, 2012 – Andrew Hill

There are moments that define a person's life. Through the experiences of this day I was again faced with the privilege I have come to associate with my lifestyle; I was not entitled

to these blessings which makes it difficult to see those without them and being unable to affect the conditions that I know as hardship. Yet, in reflection, I find hope. In this hope, the work that we do here defines not only our own experience, but those whom we work with.

Entering into the school at San Marcos was eye-opening to see the grounds on which over 100 students share a learning space – 4 class rooms, 2 bathrooms, one play area. To step into the classrooms themselves was enlightening in seeing the well-embraced spaces – worn desktops, simply painted walls and tables, and the phantom markings of the classes' Monday lessons. While there wasn't much, the school and the students put to use the materials given – these lessons explicitly connected to the water resources as you use what you have to the best of efficiency. These lessons position the students at the school in the privileged position of knowing want from need, they have an earnestness about them for the joy that life brings and are unbridled by what we may deem them to lack. They inspire me as much I might inspire them.

In this light, we position each other for the next step. Warm smiles and the fullness of life albeit void of many of the comforts I have known through my life awakens my sense to what's important in life – the pursuit and achievement of humanity and the realness of human experience. Positioning myself, by virtue of privilege, to uplift those in their desire for the helping hands of strangers.

In exchange, I hope to only demonstrate difference; difference from the stigmas of those same foreign hands and difference in the fantasies of American exceptionalism. To the latter point, no experience could better demonstrate the relativity of our human experiences than the basketball game in which I participated. On this plane of competition no privilege was given – a common love for the rhythmic motion of body and basketball cared us for an elaborate performance of that which we all shared. This, for me was a defining moment.

For a half hour, during which our performance played out, our language barrier fell by the wayside and my teammates and I entered into the realness of the human experience – the achievement of unity not in spite of difference but because of it. Our human journey was more complete in having found a common ride to a different piece of the puzzle. Here I found what I find to be the true value to approach the situation in greater comfort—the 'helper' might be made more comfortable and willing to help others and the 'helped' might see that in whatever place you might find yourself you may help another. In this way and in these moments others' lives might be defined and re-defined in love and service.

Saturday, January 14, 2012 – Dianaliz Cruz-Rodriguez

Dear Diary,

Today had an overall a great start. Not only did we get to go to the escuela, but we also got to meet some of the locals. The day started off well; we had breakfast and then headed off to school in the taptap or the vanvan. On the way there I couldn't help but see all the campaign billboards (duh since elections are in May!). There was one board for Danielo (the running presidential candidate for the PLD- party in power now) that said he was going to bring change. If I learned anything in my LA government and politics class is that the PLD candidates usually all focus on the same thing, including but not limited to growing the economy—usually done by tourism. Don't get me wrong! It's great that they focus on the economy and getting it to grow but if you ask me they should focus on distributing that wealth and not keeping it among people who already have money. As we all know most of the people in this country live in poverty. Even though they live in such a beautiful island with so many possibilities, nothing is being done, and the little money that comes in is barely seen by the people who need it unless your family sends you money from abroad. Even though I feel this way about Danielo, of course with my little knowledge of the elections, I do believe he seems like a better candidate than "Papa," an ex-president who was involved in a bank scandal. I say, "DR, you've been there, really think about it."

Anyway, reflection time!

Driving to the school, I couldn't help, but feel happy! The city seemed so alive even for it being 8:00 in the morning. Most of the way people pointed out things that to me seemed okay for some reason, but thinking about the conditions that they were in were no way okay. One instance that I remember the most was a salon that we passed by. I actually did not see the salon until the ride back from school, it was a small square in the side of the road. Reflecting back on it, that just shows the state that this country is in. Like the salon probably had a talented hair dresser, this country is filled with a whole bunch of talented people and potential but because they can't get a hold of the right resources they can't expand.

The thing that scared me the most and I'm sure it still will for a couple of days, was getting off the main road and into the dirt road to the town. To me that was the point where I realized just how divided this country can be, not only in wealth, but also in the level of attention the government gives to the people. I know that DR does not have a good GDP so of course not every small road could be paved but I felt like that was, if I was a tourist and was on a tour I would know that the people were living in poverty. I was afraid of what I was going to see and of how I would react.

Even though I was scared, I was glad to be there! I was glad to have the opportunity to be in my country and here to help the barrio. I will admit that as the day went on and we split up into our teams and started to paint, only in our teams without kids. I forgot where we were at and what was going on outside the school.

Luckily, I got to talk to the pastor's wife. At first it started as an introduction and then we started talking about more personalized stuff and about the country. At some point she even showed me the book that was used to teach at the nursery. I am still amazed that they start learning the country's history at such a young age! What she and her husband are doing in this school is amazing! They really are giving these kids a great opportunity and educating DR's future!

Dear Diary, even though I have lots and lots and lots of more things to say, it is getting oh so late and I must say Buenas Noches!

PS- Can't wait till Monday to sing the national anthem.

Saturday, January 14, 2012 – Mira Hewlett

My first experience in the DR has been a whirlwind of activity, adventure and challenging expectations. In just a day it feels like we have done so much—the students' work to paint the rooms paid off and all the rooms have a new coat of base paint. Cleanup was a bit challenging with some of our helpers (local kids who enjoyed painting and were great at it, but covered by day's end).

It is always an adventure going to a new place as a team—lots of unknowns and adventures to be had. Don't flush toilet paper oops (I forget everyone doesn't know that)! What exactly are the rules of sharing food? How is our budget meeting our daily life? What are the rooms, food and area like? Overall, this team has lived the rule of flexibility. They weren't fazed when the colors of their walls wouldn't match the themes. They are flexible with eating times and jobs to cover. And I feel our adventure has only begun.

Our reflection questions today were about what has challenged us. Our lack of language for some is a challenge to communicate authentically. The disparity of have and have-nots always is a challenge. Our use/overuse of resources; the things we take for granted (education, clean water, safe homes) remind us of the differences between home and here.

Yet in all the challenge we are called to expand who we are by learning more, taking new adventures, and going beyond our comfort zones to see the world with new eyes. In service we see transformation—of classrooms, of preconceived ideas, and of ourselves. The adventure has just begun.

Saturday, January 14, 2012—Antonia Johnson

Today was beyond life changing. Working in the school and with the children, I could see this being something I would want to do for the rest of my life. I have been on many

service trips that have been in low income areas, but going to a place that is so impoverished has made a huge impact. I truly want to help the people in the DR. When I get back to the states I cannot wait to research on programs where I can study and still have a chance to serve. I am in love with the culture and the pride they take into their history. I know it might be an ambitious goal to want to give hope and change the whole country, but if I can do half of what Pastor Freddy and his work does, I will be happy.

Saturday, January 14th 2012—Leigh Harlow

What I didn't expect when I applied for this service trip was the simultaneous feeling of cohesion and disconnect. While yesterday was a blur of sleepy flights and excited conversations, today felt more like a step back—a step away from it all, strangely enough. Today meant listening and observing, quietly smiling and carefully painting. Simple moments sent thoughts clamoring through my head and I'd find myself in my own little world, overanalyzing the experience instead of taking part.

The first little boy my group met today was Jomali (sp?), an introverted Haitian six-year-old who barely spoke and delightedly occupied himself with toys from our classroom. He didn't feel the need to constantly communicate. In fact, he enjoyed simply helping Nina paint and playing by himself. Something about our being there seemed to please or comfort him, and I found myself thinking the feeling was mutual. For whatever reason, kids began to flock to our classroom, and I was not only pleased but also comforted that they had joined us. Many of them didn't talk. They seemed to be soaking up the experience. And as a person who usually loves to chat, to ask questions, I was incredibly frustrated that I couldn't communicate. My moment of solidarity with Jomali had been overturned by an itching to know more about the kids: what kinds of things do they like? Where are their parents? What do they think about? What do they eat? And so began my sense of disconnect. I couldn't ask them myself; instead I had to rely on Nina and Josh for translation, and translation often disturbed any one-on-one rapport I tried to build with a child.

The thing is, the disconnect isn't just linguistic. I've read about the poverty, sure, but I don't get the feeling that I really understand it. It bothers me that I can't understand it. It feels voyeuristic to want to see how these kids live, but in some way I feel that it's the closest I'd get to apprehending their poverty. Because when it comes right down to it, kids can be remarkably cheery in the most destitute of circumstances. The lovely vibrancy of these people, particularly the children, makes me reevaluate whether lifestyle truly factors into happiness. I spent a lot of time today wondering when things were going to start making sense—my sense of disconnect was snowballing. I couldn't speak the language, I couldn't wrap my head around the children's

circumstances, I couldn't figure out how they could be so happy when they don't even have necessary amenities like clean water.

Like I said, I didn't anticipate this sense of disconnect, but most of all, I didn't anticipate it amidst an overarching sense of cohesion. While I did spend much of today further back than I may have liked—listening, watching, thinking, etc.—I was still able to connect to the kids in a very fundamental way. When I couldn't speak to them, I played with them. I'd fortunately learned from my host siblings in France that basic physical fun like leapfrog and piggyback rides are popular with kids all over the world. I didn't know if I'd learn anything from playtime or if the kids would, but I knew that it was fun—and that's what matters, right? That for one week, our presence may have made some children's lives brighter. If that means making them laugh with a game of leapfrog or making them feel helpful by letting them paint—great. But if it means working hard all week to ensure that they love their school enough to pursue learning—that's even better.

What's more, I feel that the cohesion among our small group of Dickinson students and faculty is the driving force behind a lot of our energy. I have such faith that should I ever feel inadequate this week, these amazing people will lift me up and remind me of the enthusiasm and dedication that brought us all here in the first place. I can feel the group growing closer, even after two days, and I am so excited to see where this week takes us. As I said, I didn't anticipate both a sense of disconnect and of cohesion, but I'm thrilled in my anticipation that this cohesion will ultimately sand down the rough edges and enable me to fully understand and connect to my experience here.

Sunday, January 15, 2012 – Nina Tirado

It has only been two days, but I am already developing a serious attachment to the kids. I wish I had enough means to sponsor each of them to receive a quality and deserving education. The kids are so eager to help in absolutely any way they can, be it translating, painting, and even sharing design ideas. If it were possible to take them all home, I'd have them all! The rooms are coming along spectacularly. I am really proud to be a member of this team and not only because of the amazing characters on this team but also because we are each fulfilling and executing all that we said we would. The hospital was a "unique" experience. I have never felt more intrusive, disrespectful, and uncomfortable. No matter how welcomed one is in any place, asking to take a picture is a necessary step in the documentation process. Granted, many benefits may come of that video, but simply asking does no harm. The ward holding the premature infants was just too intense for me. I could feel myself begin to choke up and my eyes grew teary. I am disappointed I allowed my emotions to get the best of me, but now I know how far to push myself and when I need to reign myself in. I have learned a lot about myself over the past few days. #1: I am spoiled rotten. I cannot wait to thank my mami

for my blessings. Speaking of blessings, church service was an awesome experience. I could feel the passion from the devout members of the church. It was one of the most joyful experiences yet. I can't wait to see what tomorrow brings. God is good.

With all my love,

Nina

Sunday, January 15, 2012 – Anne Feldman

It has been a really amazing day. It wasn't perfect, but rather I was constantly challenged and forced to re-examine situations, beliefs, people, culture, etc.

First there was the walk through San Marco. I honestly loved that and had it not been for the Spanish floating through the air I would've thought I was back in Cameroon. So personally for me there was that element of nostalgia. But what also made it different, and what later proved to be a "theme" of the day was the matter of voyeurism. Abroad I would constantly explore the neighbors and take photos of scenery and this never felt problematic. In Cameroon I felt like an adopted local and my intentions in traveling there were purely selfish—I wasn't abroad to do service but just to see the world. Yet here in the DR my "purpose" in being here is to help others and I wholly stand behind that. But when I explore a neighborhood and take pictures of what is an impoverished area I question if my service doesn't have a quality of elitism.

That said, I believe in traveling and see nothing wrong with taking pictures of a place that is: beautiful/fascinating/different etc. (And, for the record, if I am to take pictures of people I think it is always polite/right to ask beforehand). So then my question is why do I feel uncomfortable with exploring certain neighborhoods? There is of course nothing wrong with poverty—it is not a character flaw but a matter of social injustice.

The difference between curiosity and voyeurism I am starting to decide rests on human dignity and connecting with those around you. Assuming private space is not violated, I see nothing wrong with wanting to learn how the majority of the world lives and think photography can be a great source of documentation. That said it is necessary to make sure people are able to maintain their dignity and not like an exhibit in a museum, a showcase of despair.

With this in mind I feel I kept the balance while wandering the neighborhood of San Marco with the group. At the hospital though—all other issues aside—the one thing I felt sure was "wrong" was video-taping us delivering materials to the patients. After listening to reflection I now believe the intentions behind the trip were pure and our efforts appreciated and important but nevertheless by video-taping it, a dichotomy was set up which, I feel,

stripped patients of their dignity and denied everyone human connection turning good will into pageantry.

Sunday, January 15 2012—Josh Handelsman

Today reminded me of our pre-trip reading “To Hell With Good Intentions.” Most of us struggled with our visit to the hospital. We showed up in a group of 20, equipped with a camcorder and a bunch of gifts to bestow upon the patients. It felt invasive—foreigners traipsing into the privacy of the underprivileged. Despite Rob’s insistence to me that “everybody loves gifts,” as well as the appreciative response from most of the patients we met, none of us could avoid the feeling that we were unnecessarily imposing ourselves. I don’t remember ever feeling so uncomfortable or out of place, and it all seemed so avoidable. Almost everybody in the group shared this feeling. We were all a bit off as we left the hospital. Nonetheless, we healthily and quickly moved beyond that terrible experience. The church service left us feelin’ the love and impressed by its strong community. And at reflection, we helped each other grapple with our visit to the hospital. Fortunately, Peter and the Spanish speakers put it all in some perspective and made us feel slightly less self-conscious of the image we had projected. We dispersed for the night feeling good and ready to continue our hard work at the school. I’m excited for a great week with the kids.

Sunday, January 15, 2012—Lawrence Jolon

I have experienced many things that have had a big impact on my life, but today, a certain event really hit me. On the list of events was a trip to the hospital, and I really did not know what to expect. When we first arrived, I did not think much of my surroundings until we actually started seeing patients. When we all walked up to maternity ward, there was a view overlooking the city and something caught my eye: a water tank atop of a building. So many people in Latin America and the Caribbean see water as a very valuable resource. Such an important element to life is a commodity here while water is in abundance from where I am from. Then as I began speaking to the people in the hospital, they began telling me about their situations and how tough their lives were. One man was so happy I was there that he wanted me to see his wife giving birth. All of this made me really fortunate to be where I am, and it continues fueling my drive to help people in the world. The last thing that really emotionally hit me was the flock of people that came to me asking for more packages. I felt bad saying there were no more or that they were only for the patients, even though all the people in the hospital could have used them. This entire situation reminded me of my family back home in Guatemala and Mexico. I know there are so many people that need help. I wish I had the ability to help them all.

Sunday, January 15, 2012—Peter Paquette

Today was a very long but great day. It started with morning at the school prepping rooms for painting with kids until about 1pm. Then lunch at Pizza Hut, brief shopping, stop at the hospital followed by church service with Pastor Freddy, and a late trip back for a 9pm dinner at the hospital. It was a day of highs and lows, lots of energy and great emotion. I think the consensus will be that the church would be a high. We were received with such love and compassion and seeing Pastor Freddy in his element was amazing. Seeing this country come together was so heartwarming. The hospital was a challenge for many. It was an environment where most folks felt a bit intrusive. Overall an amazing experience filled with tons of love and compassion.

Sunday, January 15, 2012 – Julia Hanson

Today has been so busy and interesting in every way. We visited a school, a hospital, and a church today, and each place was unique and brought about a lot of new things for me and for the group. Our reflection was about our experience at the hospital, which our group struggled with. We felt that our work at the hospital, which was to hand out packages of soap/towels, was impersonal and perhaps invasive. These were people that needed those supplies. Initially when we started reflection I thought I'd speak mostly about how uncomfortable it made me and how difficult it was for me, but other group members opened my eyes to the fact that while we, as Dickinson students, are inclined to think about service through our culturally-aware perspective, people in need may not be so concerned with our impact as much as they are just happy to receive something which is helpful to them. It's important for me to remember that need and perception of giving are not viewed in the same way that they are in the U.S., and every experience is a new opportunity to change the way I look at service and how I serve people.

Another experience I had today was that after the church service, Pastor Freddy took the time to thank our group in front of everyone, and members of the community thanked us with hugs and kisses. It was so vastly different than the reception I received from adults and young adults on the Native American reservation I went to last spring, so that was very eye-opening and heart-warming for me. Looking forward to all new experiences tomorrow and the rest of the week!

Monday, January 16, 2012 – Molly Mullane

Today was the first official day of school, and we began by painting while our second grade class was going over verb endings. I have a favorite of my decorations—my lizard. I decided that when I'm home and have the money, I'm going to get a small tattoo of the lizard I

drew. I'm doing this because not only do I think it is adorable, but it also has significance to me, as it brightened some children's classroom in a third-world country.

I was very curious to see what type of teacher our classroom would have, and was excited to see that she was an amazing person, as though someone had thought up the perfect teacher for young kids and planted them in our minds. As we were giving our English lessons, she was just as excited to learn as the children were. She kept asking us questions and giving suggestions for things the kids would want to learn. Every day when they came to class, they greeted her by saying, "Good morning, teacher!" and she asked us to teach them that phrase so she could hear it in English every day.

The excitement with which the children greeted our lessons made it really fun to teach, even if they kept trying to whisper things to me which I couldn't understand! One girl, who was quiet when we asked for volunteers, wrote down all of the English in her notebook and proudly showed it off to her friends. All in all, it was a very fun experience to teach them, and I'm excited to see how the week goes in the area.

In the afternoon, one of the boys my age, Joel (who I had previously received a dance lesson from) came down to the classroom to help us. He had helped me by drawing a type of local flower for me to put on the wall, and I finally decided today that I was confident enough to speak to him in Spanish so I could show him his drawing in paint. I managed to tell him (in Spanish!) to follow me inside, that I had used his flower design, and asked about what colors the different parts would be. We only needed help about twice through the conversation. By that time the teacher had decided she would speak only in Spanish to us so we could learn and I managed to fully comprehend what she was saying to me for the first time, which was that I should teach Joel English and he could help me learn Spanish, with the assistance of my phrase book. I can't say I'm opposed to the idea! I was subsequently forced to pose with Joel in pictures around the room, which was hilarious and fun. I'm really happy that I feel as though learning a language through immersion is a good way for me to learn. In a strict classroom setting I have difficulties learning to speak a language, but I think being surrounded by the language is the better way for me to achieve an understanding of a new language. And a cute boy doesn't hurt to have around too!

Monday, January 16, 2012 – Catherine Turvey

Returning to school this morning, we saw yesterday's work with fresh eyes. I love how painting is so methodical and calming...progress is so visible. My team and I chatted until little kids started bounding through the school's gate. Playful chaos soon overcame the sense of calm. Four-year-olds dangled from the swing set as beach balls bopped everyone in the head. Little guys crawled over the boys and swallowed the girls in hugs.

Suddenly the teams were all energetic and playful. The school had so much life, and everyone seemed to have many highs.

What interested me was how passionate our reflections were; we switched locations twice to be able to continue discussions. We discussed the DR through sociology, psychology, political science, and environmentalism. There was even a little respectful debate.

Perhaps meeting the kids had something to do with sparking our passion. Painting provides relatively quick obvious results. It's calming. What challenges me is how many types of service don't provide these obvious results.

Today we all fell in love with those kids and are passionate about serving them. Still, finding the best way to serve others can be challenging.

January 16, 2012 -- Ted Dressel

Today was our first day of teaching English lessons. I was uneasy about these lessons because I have forgotten all the Spanish I learned in high school. Even so, I was able to communicate with extremely broken Spanish and hand signals. I was very impressed with each room's Spanish speakers and their skill in teaching. They were great! There were several entertaining moments in our lessons. We started teaching the first graders numbers. We'd count to five and they'd respond "one, two, three, four, five." When asking the students their names, one boy replied "My name es Michael Jackson." I am surprised by the fact that children start learning another language so young. Tomorrow the students will be helping us paint and they are excited. I'm wondering what the small children and paint combination will bring. Regardless, I'm sure it'll be fun!

Monday, January 16, 2012—Kendra Haven

It's difficult to say exactly what these past few days have meant to me—I probably won't be able to understand the full impact of the week until it is over (and then probably another week or two after that...). Anywho, I spent a lot of time today processing Peter's advice from reflection last night. Essentially, he told us to stop over-intellectualizing and start allowing ourselves to feel emotion. Geez, why does it sound so much cheesier when I say it?! Oh well. Peter's advice struck gold. Today was filled with sentiments that, at the time they occurred, struck me as extremely out-of-place. The teacher in our classroom (an absolutely incredible woman) was teaching the kids to count apples on the chalkboard, and maybe something from my childhood clicked, I don't really know; I caught a glance of the polluted river by the window and somehow these two images combined so that BAM, my eyes are misty (the graceful way of explaining tears) .

Peter's words hold extreme value. Life is too short, and far too fast-paced, for excessive intellectualization. Decades from this service trip, I don't think any of us are going to remember the specific paths of our ideological epiphanies. We will, however, remember the weight of a child in our arms—we'll remember hasta mañana, the smell of paint, the fumes emanating from the back of the tap-tap, and the feeling of being rushed by 50 small children. When it comes to long-term happiness, I think the sensory, emotional memories are far more important.

Tuesday, January 17, 2012 – Mira Hewlett

It's all about perspective! As I sit at night near the pool, waves pounding in the background, I remember the day of on and off hard rain; making us run for cover multiple times. Yet what we'd complain about quickly in the U.S. wasn't a big deal, our work still got done, and the "mist" was nice, even.

At reflections tonight, Peter mentioned how he was shocked when I asked Pastor Freddy to use the computer and he said power didn't come on until 6pm – and neither of us had noticed it was out as it was now 10:45am. That would never happen back home – no power means no school very quickly.

A day when I just couldn't get warm and always felt damp – it is a blessing to stand in a shower so hot I couldn't stand it. Yet while I wanted to soak a few minutes, I recalled our precious reflection about the commodity water is here as opposed to the U.S.'s clean running safe water, so I quickly rinsed and got out of the shower.

Each of these and so many more are opportunities for me to see the world and situations from new perspectives. From the things I take for granted to the things I never think about at home; service trips always push me to reframe, refocus, and rethink my life. In reflection tonight, I think this is true for many of us, some in small ways, and others in larger ways.

I am thankful and blessed to be with all of you in the DR, learning anew the values and opportunities that service trips provide for me.

Tuesday, January 17, 2012—Michael Blair

Today helped me to reaffirm my already firm choice to never, ever be involved with children and paint. Crazy, and sometimes terror filled the room today as 5th grade kids attempted to paint and put handprints up in our room. Yet somehow, I am in disbelief that

despite spilled paint cans, children running around with drawn on war paint, and superman jumps off the ladders, our room has transformed into a scenic seasonal wonderland. It's hard to believe that in just five short days we have been able to create such a dramatic change in our room and turn it from a dull, paint chipped environment. So while there may have been some temporary behavior issues, all in all it is great to see our almost finished product, and more importantly, the smiling faces of the kids when they see our colorful season-world. At the end of the day, today taught me that a lot of things in life aren't easy, but the rewards that follow, and the final product can always make it worth it. And yes, I'll finally admit and join the band wagon along with the rest of the group—I'm totally bringing one of those adorable children home...

Tuesday, January 17, 2012—Jasmine Britton

Antonia asked me on camera what service meant to me and I wasn't able to come up with an answer because on each service trip that I've been on, I've learned something new. San Marcos has taught me that service is that moment of truth where dreams become reality. It's that feeling of hope that has been finally achieved by the simplest thing. But service is truly recognition; recognition of change. I'm recognizing these things; I am able to free myself from all limitations. Pastor Freddy and his wife, the children, and this serve the world group have freed me from all the things that once held me back. I know that I will never forget the people and the knowledge that I have gained from this trip and hope that this service experience does not end here, but continues forever.

Wednesday, January 18, 2012 – Dianaliz Cruz-Rodriguez

Wednesday was a great day; it barely had any lows since Tuesday was very nerve wracking, since the kids were able to paint, I was hoping that today would be a bit more relaxing. I guess it was, compared to the day before. Once we arrived at the school, the kids were very excited to see us again, which made me feel very welcomed and at home. Once in the classroom, we got to painting. I was so amazed at how far we had gotten with just a couple of days, but we only have a few days left. It was that awkward and sad part in the trip where you have become very close to the community, but you know you will be leaving in a couple of days.

As always, our first class was the hardest of the day, but it was a bit easier to keep their attention. Since our class had two grades, we decided to be smart, and teach one grade at a time. We started with the 7th graders, who were way more peaceful than the 6th graders. We ended up teaching the children numbers in English and having them say how old they thought they were in English. It was a good way to get them to learn the numbers, but also a great way

to keep them busy and entertained. It was great seeing all the kids being interested in learning the numbers and also helping each other when they needed help. Sadly, when we finished with the 7th graders, we didn't have enough time to do the same with the 6th graders. Instead, we took them outside with a ball and started playing a game. The kids were supposed to count each time they hit the ball, and that worked for about the first two rounds. Kids from other classes joined us, which made it rowdy and basically another recess. I guess the lesson was over!

Once the kids were gone, we had lunch. I was really happy because a couple of us went to the bodega a couple of houses up from the school. It felt like I was finally out of a cage and was finally able to explore my surroundings. The visit there was a good one, me being the awesome translator that I am, I forgot the Spanish word for peanuts and had everyone in the bodega playing the guessing game with me. One thing I didn't notice was that one of those people was one of the students in our second class, until she came up to me and told me before our class.

In the second class, things always go better. Since we had already done something similar with them yesterday, we taught them "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" in English, since they already knew it in Spanish. It was a good activity, because some of them were singing it during recess and the next day.

As great as that class was, I saw how cruel kids were. The day before, there were various kids crying during painting and recess, because of bullying. Today during recess, when I decided to attempt to finish the awesome astronaut, one of the kids that were crying yesterday came in to class crying again. I, of course, tried to help him and got him to go outside as I did some translating. Next thing I knew, he comes back in crying and bleeding. Luckily, the cop-paramedic was right there and was able to take care of him. I guess everything was fine, since I saw him the next day, and he was happy☺. That is, until we left☹.

Wednesday night was GRRREATTT. I finally got to see my aunts, uncle and grandma after 12 years. It was great seeing, hugging, and talking to them. It's been such a long time and that was a great reunion.

That night, after they left, I had a lot to think about, about the kids, my family, and my conversation with Belquis, Pastor Freddy's wife. She had told me about the students in my classroom. She had told me that one of the 6th grade girls was in a fire this week and everything of hers was burned. She also told me about the parents of one of my favorite students, which explained some things but also helped me connect with him more. She told me about the "Original Nine," a.k.a. "Los Originales Menos Uno." These were the first 9 students of the school who are in 5th grade, but one had moved from the town.

That night I thought about all the good things I have in life, even with all the bad things that have happened in the last two months. I should not let it get me down. It also reminded me that there are people who are going through similar things and those who are going through even worse things. That night I really thought about why I do service.

Even though my family needs help there are people who need it even more and by helping them I am helping myself and getting stronger.

Another defining moment on Wednesday was my short conversation with Pastor Freddy. He had come into our classroom and saw the Dominican astronaut. Before he came in I had been talking to Samuel, the teacher, and his friend about how there has not been an astronaut from the DR yet, but that there were Dominicans in NASA. When Pastor Freddy came in he saw the drawing and said something along the lines of, "Wow a Dominican astronaut... do you think that will happen soon?" I responded by telling him that's something he should ask the students because they are the country's future.

I was really happy the next day to have one of our fourth grade students keep on coming up to me saying that she was going to be an astronaut. It is amazing how much that one painting affected her.

Wednesday, January 18, 2012—Vivian Butali

Today is the day before the last day we spend in the Dominican Republic. I am baffled by how fast the time we've spent here has gone by, but I really hope being here has made a difference for the better in the community that we've been serving. This afternoon, I thought about how frustrating it was that it was taking so long to complete the classroom my crew and I were painting because I desperately wanted to tell the children my crew and I were interacting with that we finished painting the classroom. I wanted to spend as much time as possible watching the children enjoy their new classroom, and I know they are going to enjoy it because they had a part in improving it this week. Regardless, I take pride in knowing that my crew and I put forth a 100% effort in painting our students' classroom. I am glad that at least for a little while, our students will have a new paint job and the experience of painting a classroom to remember us by when we leave.

Much like Kendra, I found myself interacting a bit awkwardly with children before this trip. This is probably because I have what I consider to be an annoying little brother, and I have never spent this much time with children I am not related to. Seeing and engaging with children in a school environment has enabled me to find a way to be more comfortable being around children. I guess the cheesy sayings are true; children really are fascinating and their innocence cannot help but compel you to become attached to them in between the numerous annoying things that my little brother likes to bother me with, I think I have subconsciously

noticed his innocence and his remarkable, never-ending, positive energy and attitude. These subconscious observations are probably a big part of what I love about him so much. I am anticipating having a difficult time saying goodbye to the students tomorrow, but the bright side is, at least for me, I know that something positive is going to come out of this experience, and I think I can live with that.

Wednesday, January 18, 2012—Andrew Hill

I still find myself grappling with the signature I left on the wall...

When all is said and done what can be said is the greatest impact of my being here? While not meant to dwell on existentialism, this week begs to question the net result of our work here in the DR. What has thus far been my greatest contribution? The re-painted classroom? The comic relief in Spanish ability? The mobile jungle gym/basketball court? My honest thought is that I have done no more for these students in San Marcus than they have for me.

These students, those we set out to help, have impacted me tremendously. For any English lesson given they have taught me the value of patience and careful listening. As much as any parent can understand their child well before their child's first coherent words the needs that the students have are made in their earnest attempt to be understood. At this place of cultural acquaintance the love and joy that the students share with us becomes our greatest reward. The smiles on their faces are so beautiful. Truly, these (their smiles) bring a new light to my life.

In spite of the statistics and the perpetual obstacles they may face, they retain a faith and a hope in the everyday that is genuine. Without the many privileges afforded to me or my classmates at their age, they carry a personality in a class of their own. As was mentioned prior to our coming here, we were prepared to meet them—to interact with them. They were not given the same opportunity in preparation. In this light, these young students have demonstrated a huge heart and a great compassion for those who they meet either in spite of or because of their difference.

In this way I felt they may have done more for me than I have for them. They opened their lives and spaces to us to accomplish a 'want'- for re-painted classrooms and English lessons—giving to the education and community already served in that place. We came in with the intention of having the experience not to be about us but to cater to them. They wouldn't have it, simply stated. Our painting became a mutual experience in observing the beauty of art and appreciation for the work that goes into it; mutual headaches of paint stained uniforms and shared excitement for the innovations of color and design, from the many themed walls to the big and small hand prints symbolic of the common standing of Dickinson and Colegio de San

Marcus. Our games were an exercise in futility if we ever desired to tire them out. We had every bit the feeling of love and fun as they did in game and hugs.

Even as I reflect they demonstrate the impact they've had on our group—they liberated us of awkwardness with our now common stories and experiences of our love for them. Their love for us has fostered a love for each other.

By virtue of these observations I find myself still grappling with the signature I left on the wall. The impressions made—the life experiences and new perspectives—were no more made by us than by them. By what right do I leave my name when their smiling faces remained etched onto the memory of my heart? They have changed me and the character of this group, yet the only proof of these impressions are our names on the walls. The only justice would be for our thoughts and actions, the desire for service, and our open hearts to testify to our being changed in this place, and to make a difference at home and through the future.

Wednesday, January 18, 2012—Julia Hanson

At our final reflection tonight, I feel so proud and satisfied with the quality of our group members. Everyone has gone above and beyond what I expected, pushing their kindness, intelligence, and passion every time I saw them teaching and interacting with kids and members of the community. I loved watching so many people feel a connection with each other and the community, and it meant so much to me as a team leader and group member. Watching the dynamics of the group come together was amazing and I hope we've inspired people to apply for more trips in the future, and to get so much out of such an experience. I look forward to more trips and travel, and I am inspired by the week's events and memories!

Wednesday, January 18, 2012—Antonia Johnson

Sad, empty and wanting to steal the tap-tap and go back. I miss the kids so much already. Each one of their smiling faces has brightened my day in so many ways. From the way they make an effort to get to know or interact with you despite the language barrier to their eagerness to help, everything about those kids is amazing. I know I could fill up this whole journal writing about how much I miss them and will be sad every time I hear "Twinkle twinkle" but doing so would take away from the greatness that has occurred in this mere week. The kids will forever remember us as they look around their school, the teachers will remember the lesson and Pastor Freddy and his wife will know that there are people out there that care and want to help support their dreams and what they do for the children. And while my paint stains may fade and not see their faces, I know that when I get back to campus I can see the faces of 18 amazing people I have gotten to know and each one will remind me of an awesome memory of the trip.

Wednesday, January 18th 2012—Leigh Harlow

It's hard (read: devastating) to believe that we only have one day left with the kids. We've been here for five days at this point, and it's been amazing to watch them gradually open up to us. What started with goofing off in the classroom or on the playground has turned into hugs in the morning and hugs when we leave in the afternoon. I can't even remember a time when I trusted people as quickly and unconditionally as these kids seem to trust me.

Today I started thinking about the fact that we have to say goodbye tomorrow, and I can't yet fathom how to do that. Given my limited Spanish vocabulary, my rapport with these students is built entirely on physical interactions—games, silly faces, tousling of the hair (and I have this weird older-sister tendency to tickle the little ones when they walk by). These interactions have made for surprisingly strong relationships with a number of kids, and not just the kids I've worked with in fifth grade and in the nursery class.

What I keep wondering is whether anyone told them that we're not a permanent fixture in their lives. This is a conversation I've longed to have with them from the very beginning—at the risk of spoiling the entire experience—but it breaks my heart to think that the kids might not understand that tomorrow we'll leave as suddenly as we came. Don't get me wrong, I've been happy to brighten up their days as they've certainly brightened mine, but I so badly wish I could personally explain why we're here, what we had hoped to learn and accomplish. Thankfully we have the words of Nina, Larry, Ale, Catherine, Josh, etc. I have faith that these questions have been asked and answered, that the students understand why we came in the first place, but more importantly, why we can't stay. (I catch myself asking the same questions: why exactly can't I stay? Or... why did I really come?)

Anyways. I'm getting prematurely nostalgic. Today was a *great* day. I worked with Mike, Larry, and Vivian this morning teaching the fifth graders the seasons. They loved the little chant we came up with and insisted that we sing it over and over. There's an incredibly sweet boy in the class who's very shy, but he hung by my side during the game today. It was rewarding to verify that he'd learned just as quickly as his more extroverted classmates. On some level, it's just rewarding to know that we're teaching them something and that they're having fun learning it.

I could go on about today and how it ended with what Ted described as "joyful chaos," but I won't. So much about it was absolutely beautiful, from kids laughing everywhere to our almost finished classroom walls. The only thing that unsettles me is that Jomali doesn't have the opportunity to learn in these classrooms. Hopefully tomorrow we can learn more about his situation and what can be done to improve it.

Thursday, January 19, 2012—Anne Feldman

I feel like I lucked out on the dates I was assigned for journaling. First, I had the day at the hospital, which, for better or worse, had a great impact on me, and now I get the honor of describing our last day at the school.

The day started out great with beautiful weather, which we hadn't seen in awhile and the ride over to the school in the tap-tap couldn't be beat. Once at the school, we were divided into our original 3 teams and worked on painting: the bottom half of the school walls orange, the fence around the basketball court blue/ green, and finally the swing set a bold red. I worked with the swing set crew dealing with the red oil paint and the takeaway here was: oil paint sucks (to note: oil and water paints do not mix. See Peter for questions).

Before lunch, my group went in and taught our English lessons to the 6th and 7th graders. We tried to teach them slang (hey man, peace out, cool, what's up etc.), which they sort of got and played a game of Simon Says with the names of the body parts in English (same lesson plan for the afternoon too). Then lunchtime and before the afternoon classes were in all of the outdoor painting was done. While waiting for the ESL lessons, my group organized our classroom materials and tidied up a little.

What sticks with me though from the day is the end. At 3 pm, Pastor Freddy gathered us all outside in a circle, having the Dickinson students holding hands in a circle surrounded by the kids in another circle. I certainly was confused and wasn't quite sure what was going to happen next – first there was a quick game of hot potato, then a prayer from one of the 4th graders, and then, seemingly out of the blue after Pastor Freddy had given a short speech, the kids all rushed us and jumped into our arms, giving us hugs and smiles. Honestly, it was amazing and to describe to someone who hadn't been there feels impossible.

The whole thing was really emotional – half of us were already overwhelmed with saying goodbye and then, after seeing some of the kids try to hide their tears, I know I couldn't help but get teary eyed. For me, the hardest part came when a girl asked me when I would be back and when I told her “as soon as I could”, she asked “fall?” Telling her no made me feel terrible and like I had let her down.

In the end though, I think we did a really great thing. The school looks great now with the bright, cheery classrooms and our week with the kids, while fleeting, was nevertheless positive and something that will surely stick with us.

Thursday, January 19, 2012—Josh Handelsman

“Abrazenlos” the half-cop, half-medic cried, and all of the children of the afternoon section rushed towards us in search of a body part to embrace. It was the best possible ending to a fantastic week. In my 4 years of service trips at Dickinson, I have never had one in which

there was always work for everybody, every day of the week. Of course, it helps when there are dozens of kids for whom you can play with and still feel productive! Still, we made a huge difference for this school. The classrooms look beautiful; each displays masterful art and contributions from its pupils (not much overlap between those two categories). We developed meaningful bonds with the students, and learned an enormous amount about ourselves in the process. Receiving hugs from all of the children made that impact sink in...and made it that much harder to say goodbye.

Friday, January 20, 2012—Nina Tirado

As I look out the airplane's window, I say farewell to the beautiful island of La Republica Dominicana. This has been quite a learning process for me. Today it really and drastically hit me that I may never see the kids again. Their tears touched my heart. Never did I expect to become so attached to a group of children. My tears just proved and validated that nothing is more powerful than a child's love. The transition back to Dickinson will be a bumpy one but I now have such a greater appreciation for my education. My drive will be those children's faces, be they smiling or crying, they were all so beautiful to me. The plane keeps taking us farther and farther from where I want to be. My job here is not done. I will be back. I feel as though I've left half of my heart here. As much as it looked like we made such a difference, I still feel as though the kids had such a larger impact on me than vice versa. They have taught me patience, humility, but most influential than all the rest: gentle love. It is the type of love that is silent yet speaks so loudly. I am truly blessed to have been a part of this team. Each person has a trait that I hope to acquire. Peter and Mira have done a phenomenal job, helping in any way they could. After this trip I thank God extra hard for the life he's given me. Never will this service trip be forgotten. I love everyone tremendously and am lucky to have been able to experience a new type of love.

Friday, January 20, 2012—Molly Mullane

As today is the last day of travel it's hard to write something without it becoming a dissertation of the week. I find myself already planning my return because I fell in love with the people and the natural beauty of the DR. There is almost no doubt in my mind that I will return, and I hope that it will be with people from this trip. When we went shopping I felt like I could use another week to explore other aspects of the DR that I had never seen. I feel like I've caught teasing glimpses, but I'm drawn in to them in a way I find myself brushing off back at home. I'm extremely sad to be leaving, and unprepared to describe the trip to people in a coherent way which isn't just a bunch of little stories jumbled together. I can't find a way to make this entry longer; I'm just surrounded by travel when I want to be surrounded by the

beach and the Dominican culture. I am excited to go to the diner at 3:00 am tonight though- it'll be a classic Carlisle ending to an exotic adventure.

Friday, January 20, 2012—Lawrence Jolon

Well, it is finally time to head back to campus and I wish I could stay longer in the Dominican Republic. It will be very difficult to not think about this trip this upcoming week. Honestly, I would never have thought about going to the DR in the first place. The similarities between Guatemala and the DR were astonishing, and I felt right at home. Being in the DR also included my first real teaching experience. It was amazing to see children so enthusiastic about learning and growing during the short time I was there. I am going to miss my class very much. At the end of the last lesson, the class prayed for me, and hugged me. Even though I said I would not, I shed a tear. As an up and coming teacher, this was an excellent experience, and it is becoming clear that this is the path I want to follow. I am planning to return in the summer. I am so glad I went on this trip.

Friday, January 20, 2012—Ted Dressel

Today we began the long trip back to Dickinson. We concluded our service trip on a warm, sunny day before returning to the cold of Pennsylvania. So much has happened in the past week that I hardly remember what I expected. I have met many great people that I would not have otherwise. We came together from different parts of the Dickinson community to serve others. We made connections, not only in our Dickinson community, but to San Marcos as well. Rob said that all mission crews were welcomed in the same way we were, but he had never seen the children so sad as when we left. Despite my transient appearance in the life of the community, the community has had an impact on me. We played with the children, taught ESL, and painted classrooms. But Pastor Freddy, his wife, the teachers and the children gave us a window into the human experience. They showed courage, commitment, dedication, and resilience in the face of poverty. They demonstrated the human spirit to improve one's community, not only for themselves, but for future generations—so that their children will have opportunities they did not have.

Friday, January 20, 2012—Catherine Turvey

Today was our last day in the DR. After waking, we tried our best to soak in as much sun as we could and forget that it was almost time to go. We made our last peanut butter sandwiches with wacky jelly, and hopped on the tap-tap for one of our final rides. Smooshed together, we reveled in new jokes and nicknames we'd made, silly memories and new stories. In Cabarette we had some of our last chances to use Spanish as we tried to find some little

trinkets to bring home. Would our friends understand the vibrant San Marcos community through a painted bird? Would a larimar stone hint at the clear blue of the ocean? How could we convey all that we'd seen and learned? Souvenirs in hand, we squished together for the last ride and shuffled through airport security. With all our layover time, there was plenty of opportunity to reflect on all we'd experienced. I feel so lucky that I had this experience. I am still processing all that I learned about gratitude, making connections, spirit and oil and water based paints. As my head filled with thoughts, I escaped into sleep. We left Dickinson at 1:30 am on a Friday and got back at 4am on a Saturday. How had my perspectives changed? How had we all changed?

Friday, January 20, 2012—Kendra Haven

Our last day in the Dominican Republic! While I know that my place is at Dickinson right now, my heart is aching with the thought of going home. I don't want to leave the kids or the school; I don't want to give up our perfect routine or the pineapple juice or the tap-tap rides... mostly though, I just REALLY don't want to give up the mindset this trip has provided me. After a year and a half at Dickinson, I've learned a lot about social justice, global inequalities, environmental implications, etc. In the grand scheme of what I hope to learn before my life is over (more importantly, actually, before my time at Dickinson is over), the information I've imbibed amounts to a small percentage of the whole. Still, sometimes it seems that everything I've learned weighs extremely heavily on my conscience. In other words, I fear I sometimes take on what some might call the "apocalyptic" view of the world. At the same time, this view clashes so violently with my dichotomous desire to embody hope, to love everyone around me, and to believe that I can make long-term change. Before I came to the Dominican Republic, I expected to have a fantastic experience on this trip; but I also expected to come out of the week having had my sense of desperation significantly increased. Instead, the opposite has happened. The kids on this trip have changed me. Every day at the school I have been able to observe their resilience. These kids are growing up primarily without access to clean water, and yet, they remain so incredibly energetic and curious. The happiness they have shared with us despite their challenges has delegitimized any personal weakness for hopelessness. As overly simplistic as this conclusion may sound, there *IS* true happiness despite suffering, despite injustice. Ah!!! What a way to end the week! I can only hope the impact I've made in this country is as positive as the one I've experienced.