



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Baile: Exploring the World of Dominican Dance
Name: Brita Donohue

Other Team Members:

Program: Greater Houston Area Program
Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001
Location Visited: Santo Domingo, The Dominican Republic

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 01

Project Summary: The Dominican Republic has long been known for their distinct Afro-Caribbean music and dance style. In a country plagued with poverty, racial tensions, and violence, music and dance have become both a means of expression and a binding force amongst Dominican people. Knowing that my students face the same issues in their communities, I headed to the Dominican Republic this summer to spend three weeks learning Dominican dance and Spanish in order to create a Latin Dance program that would bring my students together across racial and cultural lines. I spent four hours per day learning Spanish and another four hours in dance class. I stayed with a host family and attempted to completely immerse myself in the culture of Santo Domingo. I discovered, along the way, much about myself as a learner of both dance and language and the implications of these discoveries for my English Language Learners and dance students.

Career Impact: This was my first trip to a “third-world” country and, prior to my departure, I was apprehensive of my ability to adapt to such a different environment. I lived for three weeks in oppressive heat, without air conditioning or hot water, intermittently losing electricity. I was daily confronted with both racism and sexism, and was thrown into a society with very different cultural norms from my own. And yet, I met amazing people and had incredible experiences. I found that looking at Dominican culture through my own cultural lens was preventing me from experiencing the richness of the culture. I realized how important it was to approach new cultural experiences without judgment. I am, assuredly, a more open-minded person and a more passionate traveler and learner because of this experience. Through my dance class, I forged friendships with people that I could barely communicate with. This affirmed my idea that dance can bring people together regardless of culture, race or even language. As a teacher, I learned many new strategies for teaching English Language Learners through my own second language learning. I also gained new dance skills that I hope to incorporate into the Latin Dance program.

Classroom/Community Impact: The benefits to my school and community are multi-dimensional. Most obvious is that I am now able to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents more easily. In addition, our school has several new students that have not acquired any English yet and my conversational Spanish will help us communicate and make my students feel more comfortable in our school. I also am making changes to the ESL program to incorporate new strategies that I learned in my Spanish classes in the Dominican Republic. The dance skills I learned, along with cultural lessons, will be taught in a Latin Dance class during Performing Arts time.

Open Response: My trip to the Dominican Republic has inspired me to investigate social justice as a lens for teaching history and social studies. To this end, I am currently working with my colleagues to create a new department vision that focuses on social justice and cultural appreciation. In addition, I am now rewriting my long-term curriculum plans to align with this new focus.

Quote: My goal is to help my students develop an interest in and an empathy for people of different backgrounds so that they may have the tools and mindsets that they need to influence American society and transform tomorrow.

Photos:

Zona Colonial, on my street

View of the sea

Dancing Bachata

Statue of Columbus

Plantain vendors on the street

Exploring Fortaleza Ozama

Sculpture in Santo Domingo

A Plaza in Santo Domingo