

## *Empowering Haiti From a Different Perspective*

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### **Introduction: Port Au Prince and Lambi Village, Carrefour, Haiti**

These analytical and reflective essays are about our experience in Psychology 340 (Service Learning/Global Education). The course was an upper-level undergraduate psychology course on the helping relationship, with an emphasis on service-learning in a global setting and its effects on mental health workers in their practice with families, communities, and individuals. This course is intended for students strongly considering a career in the human services field, such as psychology, social work, nursing, medicine, and teaching.

The course was offered as a Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) service-learning and global education course. Service-learning at VCU is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets community-identified needs (Virginia Commonwealth University 2013). Students reflect on the service activity to increase understanding and application of course content and to enhance a sense of civic responsibility. As a VCU service-learning and global education course, PSYC 340 (SL/GE) was designed to offer students an opportunity to explore critical self-awareness issues involved in cultural immersion and engaging global cultures. Students applied what they learned in the classroom to meet real needs in several Haitian communities. We traveled to Haiti on May 18, 2013 and returned on June 8, 2013. The cost for the course was \$2,999. This price included airfare, VCU tuition, accommodations, meals and water, translators, ground transportation, and security.

Our course had two service-learning and global education partners: Lott Carey Foreign Mission Board and Grace International, Inc. According to the Lott Carey website (2009a), African-American Baptists who were committed to a substantial foreign mission thrust, especially on the African continent, founded the Lott Carey Mission Convention in 1897. They believed that nothing should distract the church from executing its primary objective of advancing God's mission throughout the world. Since its founding, Lott Carey Foreign Mission Convention has intentionally and sustainably invested in Christian missions around the world.

Lott Carey Mission Convention bears the name of the Rev. Lott Carey, who was one of the first American and Baptist missionaries to West Africa. Born enslaved in 1780 in Charles City County, Virginia, Lott Carey purchased his freedom in 1813. He led a pioneering missionary team to Liberia in 1821 that engaged in evangelism, education, and healthcare. Rev. Carey became a well-respected and gifted government leader as well as missionary until his death in 1828. He was also the organizing pastor for the first Baptist church in Liberia – Providence Baptist Church in Monrovia (Lott Carey 2009b).

In Haiti, Lott Carey supports 28 churches of the Union Strategique des Eglises Baptistes d'Haiti (Strategic Union of Baptist Churches in Haiti), many of which seek to operate elementary and/or secondary schools for hundreds of children who otherwise would not have the opportunity to attend school, with additional grant support for micro-enterprise loans.

Our second global education and service-learning partner was Grace International, Inc. It provided the placement and the language interpreters. Grace International, Inc. is a non-profit

(501c3) organization registered in the State of Florida with its main operations in the Island of Haiti for almost 40 years. The mission of Grace International is to “RESCUE, RELIEVE, and RESTORE by providing health-care, education, spiritual guidance, feeding programs, and empowered living to those in need within our reach” (Grace International 2013).

Bishop Joel Jeune and Doris Jeune are the founders of Grace International. They have been operating since 1974. Together, they oversee and lead the organization as president and vice president. For the past 30 years, Grace International has been impacting lives through the oversight and management of 270 churches, 65 schools, 3 orphanages, as well as a medical clinic, a hospital, and a home for elderly widows. Within these programs and facilities, Grace International also operates a feeding program and various learning centers as well as seasonal and annual conferences. The home base of the organization’s work in Haiti is Grace Village, located in the county of Carrefour.

After the earthquake, more than 25,000 people sought refuge at Grace Village, transforming it into the second largest refugee camp in the greater Port au Prince area. Grace International is now working to resettle many of the people living in this camp and to create small communities that are models of holistic, sustainable, and industrious living (Grace International 2010).

While in Haiti we spent the first week in a private Haitian school. We were involved with students in ninth through twelfth grades. We “ministered” to the students and taught various skills (stress management, emotional self-regulation skills, problem solving skills, basketball skills, and mindfulness exercises). At times we shadowed our professor, and at other times we taught in a classroom. We also taught large group recreational activities. We had to adapt culturally and dress conservatively as missionaries, meaning no pants or shorts.

During the second week of the class we spent mornings teaching smaller groups psychoeducational lessons. During the afternoons we visited two orphanages. The women on our team visited the Girls’ Home of Grace International. The Girls’ Home is a beautiful home for over 40 girls between the ages of one and ten, all of whom have been orphaned or abandoned. The men in our group spent their afternoons at the Boys’ Home. The Boys’ Home of Grace International houses 30 Boys ranging from two to 21 years old. Most of these boys lost their birth parents in the early stages of their lives. The Home attempts to give them essential life skills to become strong men and leaders in the Haitian and world society. Our focus in the group activities was: helping, mentoring, connecting, getting the children to open up and share with us, teaching lessons about hygiene, sharing wisdom and life lessons, and sharing our personal narratives with the children.

We spent our final week on the island of Haiti working and serving in Lambi Village. Lambi Village is a sustainable community at Lambi in Gressier County, Haiti. When completed, the complex, which is on seven acres, will house 76 homes, a market area, community center and place of worship, a communal water well, and bathrooms. Currently, the complex has approximately 56 homes, a community center, and outdoor latrines. During our week at Lambi Village we broke rocks on a rock pile, shadowed families, counseled families, helped with children, completed home repairs and chores, and shared in the culture of the residents.

One of the highlights of the course was holding group reflections each evening after the day of service and learning at our hotel. We also read and reflected on readings assigned by the professor: *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell, *Four Agreements* by Miguel Ruiz, and *Way of the Peaceful Warrior* by Dan Millman.

Upon our return to the United States, we spent two weeks in reflection and discussion around the experience and the assignments. We then presented our reflections to family and friends, community partners, and the Virginia Commonwealth University community. What follows are a few of our experiences.

### **Language and Culture: Attallah Muhammad**

When traveling to Haiti, so much can have a profound effect on one's self. To me, it primarily revolved around the people and the environment, with a more respective focus on the culture and language specifically. These aspects of Haiti made my experience truly one of a kind; it changed me in ways that I could not have possibly anticipated.

The language of Haiti was one of my favorite interests. Their primary language is Creole, sometimes spelled as Kreyole by the Haitian natives. The language is unique to the lands of Haiti. You will not find a language quite like it anywhere else. Creole has a base of French language with strong West African influences. My particular interest in the language arose when working with secondary students at the Grace International school. One young lady in particular asked me if I spoke her language; I informed her that I did not. She then asked me why had I come to her country and not learned her language. I was dumbfounded; her question was more than legitimate. How could I come to another country just assuming language accommodations would be made? From that point, my mission became to familiarize myself with Creole so that I could enhance my ability to help. By taking the initiative to learn Creole, the connections I made with the people of Haiti were natural and open. Individuals were more eager to interact and open up to the help I was offering. A sense of comfort was established that might not have been present when other foreigners came to visit. Haiti was beginning to take me in as one of its own. I could not have been more receptive to this newfound connection.

Culture is the quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc. (culture 2005). Traveling to Haiti enabled me to appreciate the culture for all that it was. The Haitian people are very vibrant, in terms of music, singing, dancing, and art. Almost every corner highlighted some form of this in one way or another. While working with the youth, no matter where we ventured, they were constantly asking us to sing or dance. It was as if they thought, "Of course everyone can sing and dance." We gave our best attempts, but our artistic talents, unfortunately, failed in comparison to theirs. Aspects of their culture, such as those mentioned above, were different from what I was used to; however, the Haitian people had a welcoming, communal nature.

Traveling to Haiti will remain one of the most impactful experiences of my life. I can now see the changes that I want to make in my community as well as in myself. For that, no greater gift could have been received.

### **Haiti from a Different Perspective: Darrell Haley Jr.**

Haiti was quite a memorable trip. The Haitian culture, the people, and environmental factors greatly impacted my experience. I was inspired by the country's resilience; I saw all of its beautiful pieces.

While in Haiti, I saw pieces of a beautiful but broken country. My perspective of the country was initially bad. Before I arrived, I had classified Haiti as a violent country and was reluctant to go on the service-learning experience. However, my passion for helping others

diminished my initial fears and I decided to go. The moment I stepped off the plane, I saw why Haiti means “land of mountains.”

Before I embarked on this journey, I brainstormed possible strategies to truly help the Haitian people. After much thought, I knew that I wanted to help Haiti develop a plan for creating a sustainable environment. However, I found that there were three main problems preventing the Haitian people from truly becoming sustainable: the 2010 earthquake, emotional trauma and pain, and a lack of education. These three factors, from my perspective, were the culprits responsible for a broken Haiti.

Haiti experienced a devastating earthquake in 2010. It killed 220,000 people, injured 330,000, and displaced 1.3 million (USAID 2013). The effects of the earthquake still can be seen, architecturally and psychologically. Buildings are still destroyed, construction is progressing slowly, and many people still live in tents. The earthquake and its aftermath have caused the Haitian people a lot of psychological distress. On our visit, we were able to help the Haitian community psychologically. More specifically, my peers and I focused on helping children and young adults cope with their problems. Most of our activities involved mindfulness techniques, but also ranged from discussions to games.

We soon found out that the Haitian people are very resilient. Most of them were able to continue their lives effectively, but it was obvious they had pain bottled up inside of them. Many had no idea how to express their feelings. These problems were illuminated through their behavioral reactions, feelings, and thinking patterns. The children had a lack of confidence to discuss their issues. Even in a one-on-one environment the activation of defense mechanisms was present when trying to address issues about the earthquake. In addition, many people in Haiti choose to live in tents, fearing another earthquake. Individuals were traumatized from collapsing buildings to the extent that it still prevents them from entering structural buildings.

The devastation from the earthquake astounded me. I feared Mother Nature and her untamable ability. After I returned to the United States, however, I was taken aback from information I learned about the Chile Earthquake. One month after the Haiti earthquake, Chile experienced an earthquake that had devastating qualities as well. Although still high, only 525 people died in Chile as a result of the earthquake and 25 people were reported missing (USAID 2013); these numbers pale in comparison to the Haiti earthquake. However, the magnitude of the Chile earthquake was 8.8 compared to Haiti’s earthquake magnitude of 7.0. Technically speaking, the Chile earthquake was 500 times more powerful than the Haiti earthquake. So how did only 525 people die in an earthquake that was considered 500 times more powerful than an earthquake that killed 220,000?

This leads to the final roadblock in Haiti’s journey to sustainability: a lack of education. Although there are many factors that contribute to the devastation of an earthquake, one of the main factors responsible for the death toll in Haiti was building collapse. Most buildings were not structurally stable and crumbled once the earthquake started. The Chile earthquake signifies that there has already been progress in creating earthquake-resistant buildings. The buildings constructed in Chile were built to support each other in the event of an earthquake; they are more resistant and are more likely to tear apart and stay structurally stable than crumble entirely (Haas 2010).

The earthquake served as the catalyst to the trauma and pain in the Haitian community. The lack of education magnified the destructive power of the earthquake and has become detrimental to the sustainability of the country. In order to create a sustainable environment,

knowledge must be turned into wisdom. In order to accomplish this, the Haitian people need education.

The best strategy in helping the Haitian people is by providing methods to support them and guide them in changing and shaping their country in their own image. There is a Chinese proverb that says, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This is essential in order to create a sustainable environment.

My initial thoughts about sustainability were to establish a program that keeps Americans coming back to Haiti consistently. However, true sustainability lies in the hands of the Haitian people. We have to help the Haitian people convert knowledge into wisdom. If we continue to give the Haitian people "a fish" every day, then they will never acquire the wisdom "to go fishing." If we do not teach and have them apply what they have learned, how can they ever hope to be self-sufficient? How will they have the power to reshape their country?

Currently, education is being emphasized in Haiti. Efforts are being made to establish free education, and this will be very beneficial to the Haitians. But, right now the literacy rate is just over 50%. On top of that, only roughly 50% of school-aged children are enrolled in school. If you take into consideration that 40% of Haiti's population is under the age of 14, essentially half of the next generation will be illiterate (USAID 2013).

If we can find methods to change these numbers, then Haiti will be in a position to truly make a significant change. If I could suggest anything, it would be to continue attending service-learning and community-based research opportunities. However, on top of giving them a fish, why not teach them how to fish as well? Wisdom is self-obtained; there is no way to teach it. However, we can teach and pass on the information and education needed to obtain wisdom. Teaching and education come in many forms, and if we can give the Haitian people wisdom to continue using the methods provided to them, it can be greatly beneficial. If we can use education as the doorway to giving the Haitian people wisdom, it will enable the Haitian people to take control of their country, shape it according to their culture, and be the glue that is needed to restore their country back to its wholesome beauty.

### **Reflections on the Structure of Education as Witnessed in Carrefour, Haiti:** Amirah Bohler

For the past seven years I have increasingly found myself interested in work that involves children. I have gravitated towards community service as well as professional work in the area of nurturing and cultivating children. I presently work as a pre-kindergarten teacher, stimulating the minds of future business owners, community leaders, political activists, and educators. When presented with the opportunity to travel to another country and continue to do what I love, I thought I'd be foolish to let it pass me by.

The time we spent at the school of Grace International, Inc. was the experience I found myself reflecting on the most. Coming from a pretty well-rounded upbringing and working for a group of people with a large amount of resources allowed me to make the stark contrast between what I knew and what I would soon learn. Our first week in Haiti was spent in service to the students in their classrooms. We visited each grade level and shared with them our purpose for being there. We were able to teach healthy coping and relaxation skills as well as teach the secondary students the three important components of emotions: they are composed of thoughts, feelings, and behavioral reactions. Upon stepping foot onto the school's campus, it was quite clear how vastly the environment we were in differed from the schools we attended growing up in the United States. These differences became more apparent once we entered the classrooms.

At first sight we were greeted by a locked iron gate that separated the school's campus from the surrounding community. There were a total of five locked gates throughout the property, all which had to be unlocked by a school staff member. The perimeter of the school also consisted of concrete walls with barbed wire at the top. Where there was no barbed wire, there were glass bottles cemented into the wall upside down and broken. These features were put in place to secure the school from outsiders. The grounds were mostly dirt and rocks with some patches of grass here and there. The students were in three different locations: a two-level building for lower primary, the church building for upper primary, and a number of cement classrooms towards the rear of the property for the secondary students.

Each building lacked walls that connected to the ceiling or functional doors for classroom privacy. Entering the first classroom, we found one teacher leading a group of 48 students, and some of her students were absent. One chalkboard was filled with information, and the chalk in the room was scarce. The students sat on wooden benches connected to wooden tabletops. There were about six to eight students per bench, creating very close quarters and limiting elbowroom. The only form of ventilation came from the gaps between the walls and the ceiling.

Taking into consideration the structure of these classrooms and buildings, one can only imagine how the classroom functioned. The three lowest grades of the primary school were all housed together on the first floor of the building; none of the rooms had walls to separate it from the others. Observing the school's physical structure led me to wonder, "Where do they use the restroom?" The answer to that question: outside. Everyone used the restroom outside, wherever they could find some privacy away from the building and other people. The only age level that had a designated area to use the restroom was the secondary students. More specifically, the females had a concrete wall to step behind that offered privacy. The males utilized the side of the wall or building. There were outhouses present, but strictly for use by faculty, as they had locks only faculty could access the key to use.

Experiencing the American school system and then seeing first-hand how this school in Haiti was structured and operated, I was left speechless. To top it all off, I envisioned my own classroom and the copious resources present. My pre-kindergarten students have access to an array of things to help stimulate their minds, including: manipulative toys, trucks, puzzles, a dramatic play area, a library, computers, and regular meals. Structurally, they have a private classroom with a ratio of ten students to one teacher; the class size does not exceed 25 students. The classroom has walls that reach the ceiling, windows that can serve as a second source of ventilation, two doors for exiting as well as privacy, and gender specific restrooms with a door for privacy. Sadly the list of haves and have not's is quite lengthy between these two groups. When I stepped into the lower primary classrooms I saw classes of students the same age as mine, but twice the size as mine, with one teacher. Almost each student had a notebook and pencil or ink pen to write with. *Almost*. The teacher's supplies were limited compared to what I have access to.

So I asked myself what are the major differences between the two environments. From my observations, I was able to come up with four things: capital, staffing, physical structure, and community support. These are very important components to a flourishing school. Without these four categories being strong in what they offer, how successful can a school be? Not only is the success of the school affected, but so are those directly involved with the school as well. The psyche of these individuals eventually becomes impacted when the school becomes ineffective and no longer able to function.

To begin, the first component of a fully functional educational facility is that of capital. The school we spent time at, like many of the Haitian schools, is a private educational institution. Parents pay a yearly tuition rate that covers education costs as well as uniforms. Since only 10% of schools in Haiti are public, a majority of parents and guardians have to pay tuition (Office of the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Community-Based Medicine and Lessons From Haiti 2013). Higher tuition costs are associated with a higher quality of education, better trained teachers, and better in-school teaching resources and supplies.

The school's educators were not only teachers, but served in other capacities in the community as well. "The country suffers from a lack of qualified teachers and inadequate curricula." (Office of the Secretary-General's Special Advisor on Community-Based Medicine and Lessons From Haiti 2013). Also, a number of educators teaching in Haiti do so without adequate training. Without the proper training and resources, staff members are forced to utilize what they have. For many, this includes what they have been taught by someone else with limited resources and insufficient learning. "A coordinated effort is emerging to improve teacher training, student enrollment, attendance, and completion. Often the teachers are not only unqualified but also face extremely difficult work environments, with little to no access to school materials and very inadequate salaries" (Hope for Haiti 2013).

The physical structure of the school is the third important factor I feel affects school success in Haiti. I observed four walls that did not connect to the ceiling and a lack of doors. "School structures range from being made out of coconut and banana leaves to corrugated metal roofs and concrete blocks. Many lack electricity, bathrooms, clean water, food, first aid, benches, chalkboards, and daily classroom necessities" (Hope for Haiti 2013). One can only imagine how greatly the physical structure affects the learning process as well as the retention of students and staff. While in our designated classrooms teaching, we could certainly hear what was going on in other rooms. Not only was it heard, but it distracted the students as well. Once there was an uproar next door and immediately students popped out of their seats to see what was going on. This happened a number of times during my experience in the Haitian classroom. Also, I observed how freely students roamed the school grounds while classes were taking place. Some students left their classroom or had break-time, walking over to another class and standing outside the "doorway." Not only does this impact the experience for the students, but for the teachers as well. "It is well acknowledged that the Haitian education system is far below International standards and that the majority of school 'facilities' are beyond inadequate to provide a suitable learning environment." (Hope for Haiti 2013). When I reflected on the structure of the school, I thought how much the lack of access to a private restroom can impact the retention of female students. Female students as early as the upper primary level are beginning to experience physical changes with their body. The lack of restroom privacy coupled with feminine growth and development can surely impact a female student's desire to attend school regularly.

The final component I observed that has a major effect on the education of Haitian students is that of community support. Support begins at home with the parents' desire to send their children to school, and then support must come from within the Haitian community. A number of U.S. school systems have Parent Teacher Associations as well as school boards. With the involvement of these two organizations, schools and school systems have the added outside support needed to help effectively run schools. Looking at the initial support from parents, the need for financial stability is the core hindrance to educational support for students and schools. "The probability of a child attending school is positively associated with the household's

education and wealth levels” (Demombynes, Holland, and Leon 2010, 11). Parents send their children to school when they have the adequate resources.

What can a person thousands of miles away do to benefit the four issues that weigh greatly on education in Haiti? Be consistent in any capacity you serve. If it involves giving, continue to give. If it involves doing, continue to do. If it involves being, continue to be. Continue to give monetarily if your resources allow, continue to do work from a distance or in Haiti, and continue to be an advocate either locally or abroad. I learned that whatever you begin to do as an advocate for this issue, or any issue of importance to you, you must be consistent. Positive changes do not come without persistence and commitment. And for the people receiving what you have to offer, it makes a great impact seeing and knowing it comes from a dependable source.

### **Children in Haiti:** Mariam Nadri

During the three weeks I spent in Haiti, I learned endless lessons about the culture, language, people, schools, families, and children. I also learned many things about my personality and myself. We spent three weeks in Haiti and each day was spent with children. Whether it was in a school, an orphanage, a village, or the streets, we were in constant contact with children. These children all come from different backgrounds and all have endless talents and desires to achieve their goals; I had an attraction towards these children. Maybe it is my natural motherly instinct that pulled me towards these children or the fact that I saw my own reflection in their faces. The reason is not that important. I just felt a strong urge to help them. The motivation present in their hearts is incredible. Each and every child I came across had a dream. If I could help in any way, I would be more than happy to do so.

My love for these children grew stronger by the day. Some of the children I only saw once, but that was enough to make me want to provide them with all that I could. Food was one of their biggest needs. From my observations, their nutrition was not adequate. They may or may not get food in school. In the U.S. efforts are made to feed children so that they can think and do their best in school. In Haiti efforts are made to feed the children, but these efforts are not always successful. The retention rate in Haitian schools is very low. The lack of steady, nutritious meals for the children could be a possible contributor to this rate. If the schools were able to provide meals for these children on a daily basis, the student attendance rates could possibly spike.

Food is the source of energy needed for these children to be able to perform to the best of their abilities. They need the education to be able to help themselves, their families, and their country. However, in order for them to be able to think, study, and focus on school, they need a full stomach. This energy is needed not only to fuel their bodies but minds as well.

Everyday we had three meals. It was a routine for us; we were fed no matter what. During the week in the school and the orphanage we had our meals in the van across the gate from the school children. One day I found out that the children were not on a regular eating schedule; lunch is only given to them occasionally, depending on the accessibility. Learning this blocked my stomach. I could not get myself to enjoy my food anymore. Every time I looked at the food I would think of the hungry children across the gate. I knew I was going to get a meal later in the day, but I was not sure if they would be able to eat. These thoughts constantly ran through my mind. It got to the point where I would take one bite of food and that would be enough for the day.

How could I eat when these children are suffering from malnutrition? How could I eat when I know the pain they are going through? I considered these children as my own; how could I eat when I know my own children are hungry? I have been raised with the concept that we have to feed our neighbor before we eat. It is a part of my culture and beliefs. Going on this trip made me realize how strongly I felt about this issue. I realized how strong my love is for children. I found myself in Haiti; I found out what I really want to do in life. I went on this trip because I wanted to give back to my community and help others. I succeeded, but this trip also helped me discover who I am and what makes me really happy. This was one of my most important experiences and I would love to go back again next year. Until then, I would like to participate in organizations that provide food for the children and raise awareness for aid. These children are the future of Haiti and if we want Haiti to prosper, we have to help these children get on their feet.

### **The Downward Spiral: Jessica Watts**

“You don’t want to regret not experiencing a once in a life time opportunity out of fear and the opinions of others,” is by far one of the best pieces of advice I received from a friend before going on this trip. I’ll admit that at first I was hesitant about going to Haiti because of all of the negative stereotypes surrounding the country, including its health problems, crime, and poverty. I’m so thankful for the friend that gave me that advice because I would not have learned as much about myself, service, and other people as I did in my three-week stay in Haiti this summer. I would say overall my trip was an eye-opening experience. You always hear that you never know what is really going on in someone’s life; someone can be the happiest person and you would never suspect that they are dealing with pain. This trip gave me a chance to see that first-hand. I have a newfound appreciation for all of the things I used to take for granted, such as: air conditioning, clean water, plumbing, and electricity. These are things I would have viewed as trivial until I went to a village where the people had no running water or electricity.

One of the most poignant things I found myself thankful for after being in a culture surrounded by poverty is the opportunity in America to have good healthcare. As a nursing student at Virginia Commonwealth University, health was naturally one of the main things that stuck out to me. I was a little embarrassed that it had never occurred to me just how poor healthcare is in other parts of the world. This experience made me more appreciative, although it was hard to see the darker side of the field I plan to go into. It made me think about incorporating a cultural aspect into my future career as a nurse. I never realized how hard it is in some countries to see a doctor or get proper treatment for health problems until it was right in front of me. In America we are extremely lucky to have an abundance of doctors, medical technology and equipment, immunizations, the list goes on and on. By contrast, Haiti’s healthcare is on a downward spiral.

We toured a hospital in Haiti that was technically shut down but I still noticed a few people being treated there. I was completely blown away to say the least. Each room we passed was essentially four white walls and two hospital beds. No more, no less. A scale, a stethoscope, and two wheelchairs at most were the extent of the medical equipment in the entire building. I was no longer unaware that Haiti had a huge lack of resources in the medical field. Pastor Francois, one of the people we worked closely with throughout our stay, told us that there is a very long wait just to be seen by a doctor in Haiti. He mentioned that a sick person can go to the hospital and wait two hours at minimum to be seen and can still be waiting there after a week.

This is partly due to the minimal amount of nurses and doctors available in the country. Many doctors are sent to Haiti from Cuba for a period of time because Haiti has very few of its own doctors. This also represents a lack of educational resources because there isn't proper training or money to send people to school to learn about medicine. As an example, there is a hospital in Carrefour with 275 beds serving about 400,000 people (Ekine 2013).

One of the most striking moments of the trip was when we were at Lambi Village. The following is a quote that captures the experience I am discussing, taken from the blog I wrote everyday while I was there:

Right before we left I noticed a lot of commotion going on by a truck. A bunch of people were lifting an older woman into the truck and she looked very upset. One of the translators told me that she had vomit and diarrhea on her and that she had cholera from drinking the water. That same group of people gathered money together to send her to the hospital and then she left on that truck. That was really sad for me to see. Especially knowing how hard it is for a lot of the people here to have access to clean water. I wondered how often that happens because based on the behavior of the people after she left I got the impression that it is the sort of thing that isn't really new to them anymore or they didn't seem to see it as big of a deal as we did. I'm really glad Lambi Village has the community center area that holds classes about Cholera prevention after seeing this today.

Later on we were told that she may not have even had cholera because she was under a lot of stress; those are some of the same symptoms as dehydration. But this showed me how much stress and strife poor health brings to the Haitian people. The money that the woman needed to go to the hospital was about 40 Haitian Dollars. According to Pastor Francois, most of the Haitian people only make two dollars a day. Therefore, on top of the costs to feed their family and send their children to school, most people likely do not have the money to visit the hospital, which is part of the reason why the death rate from cholera is so high. The cholera outbreak has been ongoing since October 2010 and began by the United Nations Peacekeepers. As of March 31, 2013, 652,730 cases and 8,060 deaths have been reported since the epidemic began (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2013). One of the most important things that can be done for the country as far as prevention goes is to teach the people techniques such as boiling water to kill germs before they use it and to bury waste far away from bodies of water.

One day when we were visiting the orphanage we were playing with the girls and noticed the youngest one had a bump on her stomach when we were tickling her. She lifted up her shirt to show us. It was then that we figured out she had a hernia. I started to see more and more children and adults with the same problem. I actually didn't know what a hernia was until I researched more and learned that it is when an organ or tissue squeezes through a weak spot in a surrounding muscle or connective tissue. It can be caused by anything that increases pressure in the abdomen such as lifting heavy objects, diarrhea, or sneezing (WebMD 2013). I thought about some of the things I saw there daily and understood why this is a common problem. Many of the merchants on the street carry big baskets on their heads, children carry buckets of water to their homes after pumping it from a well, and diarrhea is common due to dehydration. It bothered me knowing there was hardly any money or knowledge about treatment, which usually involves surgery. If a hernia is left untreated, the protruding organ's blood supply can become cut off and

infection and tissue death may result (WebMD 2013). Raising funds for medical care could be a solution to this problem.

I feel I am a stronger person from this trip after hearing about all of the hardships the Haitian people have gone through. All of the things I would worry about before going to Haiti seem miniscule in comparison to the stories I heard while I was there. The overwhelming amount of stress in every age group made me think about the Stress Management class I took at VCU. I took a look at some of the root causes of stress in the country. These causes ranged from death or illness of a loved one, loss of a support system, financial worries, inability to finish school, and other family conflicts such as infidelity. When we were at the school I decided it would be a good idea to teach the kids some of the stress relief techniques I learned in my class. I taught them three basic techniques that I felt were easy for them to practice. The first one was simply deep breathing, where you focus on bringing the air from your stomach to your chest as you inhale through the nose, hold the breath, and then exhale through the mouth. I told the children this one is my favorite because I can do it wherever I am and it even helps me when I have headaches. The second one I taught them is called Progressive Muscle Relaxation. In this technique each muscle is tensed one by one and held for about ten seconds; as you release this tension it is easy to take note of which body parts hold the most stress. Many of them really enjoyed this technique because it is so interactive. The third one I taught was called Mountain Meditation. I felt it was perfect because Haiti means “land of high mountains.” During this technique, you envision yourself as a mountain, thinking about how the mountain has been there through everything and endures all the bad weather that surrounds it. The kids sat, looked out the window, and saw the mountains as I walked them through the meditation, enabling them to better visualize it in their minds. With more and more practice, this technique has been proven to improve self-confidence and resiliency.

Teaching these lessons was one of my favorite parts of the trip because I was able to see how much of a difference the things I learn in school can make in other people’s lives. It showed me how important it is to take advantage of America’s great education system and use it to help others who do not have the same learning opportunities. The kids telling me which technique was their favorite was very motivating. I felt that they may practice it more and it is something they may find they can teach others as well. It also showed me they were paying attention and understood my message.

It may sound cliché to say this trip was life changing, but it truly was an unforgettable experience. It changed the way I think about everyday things, my future, my culture, and other cultures. I have always wanted to help other people and make a difference in someone’s life. That is part of the reason I chose to study nursing. My trip to Haiti showed me how to help people in a variety of ways. For one, I have always been the type of person who does not want to ask for help because I want to be proud of myself for being able to say I did something on my own. This trip showed me that this is not always realistic and asking for help does not make you a vulnerable person. I also saw that in helping others you also help yourself. The message I would really like to send to others going on a service or mission trip is how important it is to continue to help even after you come back. Many countries have the impression that we forget about them when we come home. I really want to make the same lasting impression the Haitians made on my life to their lives as well.

### **Beautiful Pieces of a Broken Country: Themed Commentary**

Our learning experience in Haiti was very rich and rewarding. During the trip, we became culturally aware of the Haitian people and were able to appreciate their culture. Although many aspects of their culture were different from ours, we were able to adapt and become better in tune with the lifestyle changes. This service-learning experience not only allowed us to understand the Haitian people, but also empowered us to become aware of ourselves. Each one of our experiences was life changing; the dynamic of helping and teaching others in need also enabled an environment in which we learned. Education can serve as a catalyst for development. This development is empowering; it extends across the entire learning environment. If education can be used as a tool of empowerment, then the Haitian people will be able to develop into a self-sustaining country.

By traveling to Haiti after the Haitian earthquake, we were able to see a different type of Haiti. We were able to see the pieces that are in the process of being put back together. Seeing the separate pieces of a whole helped us to understand it better. Similar to the beautiful pieces we observed in Haiti were the pieces of our personal reflections, which combined to equal our whole experience, and in this case have been presented here through this reflective process and our reflective artifacts. Like the beautiful pieces of Haiti, the combining of our pieces of experiences, reflections, and observations has come to equal a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Essentially, the reflective essays discussed here address three emergent themes relevant to our learning and development from our time in Haiti. Those themes are:

- Cultural Awareness
- Personal Awareness
- Experimental Education (as Service-Learning) as a tool for Development (of those serving/learning and those being served/taught)

In order to truly help the Haitian people, cultural awareness is required; it makes the experience truly one of a kind and enables change in unimaginable ways. Many aspects of the culture are different, but the Haitian culture is very welcoming and communal in nature. Personal awareness and growth also occur on the journey; it is essential in the discovery of effective ways to make a difference, whether it is brainstorming possible strategies for sustainability or simply comforting those in need. The experience will be the key to encouraging education; learning about the country, the people, the culture, and the roadblocks is important. We know that in this process of teaching and educating the Haitian people, personal growth is prone to occur, which we found was one of the greatest gifts of our trip. The process of lending a helping hand towards a sustainable Haiti produces a breathtaking result; we witnessed the beautiful pieces of a broken country steadily mending together and experienced a glimpse of true beauty. We hope that through collaboration and education, Haiti will be seen once again in its wholesome beauty.

### **Conclusion**

As stated previously, we traveled to Haiti as a part of a VCU service-learning course. To paraphrase our professor, Dr. Micah McCreary, we stopped using embedded psychology, where you simply believe and affirm that hurting people will get better because they are resilient, and began using a deliberative psychology where we applied psychology to the life, situation, condition, and culture of the individual, family, community, and organization. We hope that our reflections have conveyed the life changing experience we shared as a community of scholars.

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