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Coprodeli
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“Life here...it’s not easy. But we have progressed so much, and we will keep on progressing, and someday things will change. Someday, life will be better.”

~ Minerva

Fourth grade student, Colegio San Juan Macias: Pachacutec, Peru

Minerva, like so many of the students I taught this summer in Peru, comes from an extremely poor family. She has spent her whole life in Pachacutec, a shantytown of migrant workers built on sand dunes two hours outside of Lima. Most of her classmates live in extreme poverty, without access to adequate water, sanitation, electricity, or other basic necessities. However, despite these obstacles, Minerva remains positive and expresses a maturity rarely seen in someone so young. She, like so many of the other choir students I taught over the summer, made interning for the non-profit organization, Coprodeli, a true privilege and joy. For a few hours a week, I was able to share music with these students, grow with them, and hopefully provide a bright spot in the school day. Although my internship experience was not without frustrations, I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to work for Coprodeli as a music intern over the summer. Coprodeli and the people of Pachacutec and Callao opened my eyes to true urban poverty in Peru and showed me how something as simple as choir can be a meaningful escape from the pressures of a harsh life which is their daily reality.

The following reflection paper will first elaborate on the assigned project for my internship, provide an outline of what I did on a daily basis, and describe some of the obstacles which arose throughout the ten weeks in which I served as an intern. I will then proceed to

evaluate the success of my work at Coprodeli and explain the ways in which I feel both Coprodeli and I have benefited from the experience.

As stated, I spent my summer as a music intern at the non-profit, Catholic organization, Coprodeli in Lima, Peru. The first task assigned to me and my site partner, Clarisa Ramos, was to establish choirs at four schools in Pachacutec and one school in Callao. We dedicated the first week and a half of our internship to this task. From the beginning, working out the logistics of this project was more difficult than anticipated. None of the schools had a designated space or time reserved for the choir to rehearse. In order to decide which students were going to sing in the choir, we had to interrupt class time and individually listen to each student sing a scale. Although this was not the most efficient or sufficient way to judge a particular student's singing ability, there did not appear to be an easy alternative at the time. After we selected the choirs, our task was to teach twelve church songs in preparation for Coprodeli's 20th Anniversary Mass at the end of July. Because we taught at so many schools, we only had time to teach at each school once a week. Monday through Thursday, we took the hour and a half *combi* (the public bus transportation) ride to teach at the schools in Pachacutec. On Fridays, we worked at San Augustin de Ipona in Callao, and on Saturdays, we rehearsed for three hours with 10-15 students from each school who would sing at the Anniversary Mass as part of the "Coprodeli Choir." Our daily lesson plan included vocal warm-ups and exercises, review of old songs, and instruction of at least two new songs per class.

Several factors added difficulty to the completion of this project. Most obviously, this was the first time that the students were participating in a formal choir. Therefore, even simple tasks, such as watching the conductor, paying attention to the lyrics, and trying to blend as a group, were difficult to explain and execute. In addition, the music teachers at the Coprodeli

schools initially wanted the students to sing in four-part harmony. The problem with this was that singing in four parts is difficult for people who have been singing in choirs for several years, much less for fourth and fifth graders who have never even sung in two parts. Clarisa and I tried to teach in four parts for a week but soon realized that it was going to be far too difficult as we had no piano, a limited amount of rehearsal time, students who were unable to read music, and boys who were not old enough to be able to sing the low bass part. Although we were hesitant to express our concern about not being able to teach all four parts, we ultimately confronted the teachers and decided that we would teach the soprano and mezzo (or alto) lines. I believe that the music teachers thought that since Clarisa and I were talented American music students, we would be able to work wonders with the childrens' voices. This was a cultural perception that surfaced several times throughout the internship. While still being sensitive to their expectations and excitement at having two music interns at the schools, Clarisa and I had to learn how to explain that in two months there is a limited amount which one can do to improve a person's singing voice.

In fact, teaching the songs in two parts proved to be a challenge enough in itself! Because we only had access to a piano at one of the schools, we used a "listen and repeat" learning strategy to teach the songs. Clarisa and I would teach the songs in sections, first singing the new part two times and then having the students repeat until they had a good grasp on the section. In this way we slowly but surely proceeded to learn both parts to all of the songs. Although this process seemed tedious at times, it was exciting to watch the choir progress. They began to look forward to the routine vocal warm-ups—warm-ups which, by the way, they first thought to be strange and funny and could not do without laughing or looking at their neighbor. I knew that we were getting somewhere when a new student joined one of the choirs and I

watched one of the old students do the warm-ups with pride and a kind of “look how experienced I am” attitude! Also, I will never forget the first time each group sang their first harmony. They were so proud and amazed at how cool they sounded. They even began to create a friendly rivalry between the sopranos and mezzos, seeing which one could learn their part faster and sing it better.

The last factor that complicated the completion of the assignment was that there were many “holidays” and transportation strikes while I was in Peru that made it impossible for Clarisa and I to teach. For example, class was cancelled for the Day of the Teacher, teacher sport’s day, teacher planning days, two *feriados* (holidays), and the swine flu. In addition there were at least four days of transportation strikes during which it was too dangerous for Clarisa and I to make the long trip to Pachacutec. The amount of class cancellation was, for me, probably the most frustrating part of the internship.

However, despite these obstacles, I feel that Clarisa and I successfully completed the work assigned to us by Coprodeli. We were able to teach all of the Mass songs in two parts, and the choir did an excellent job singing at the Mass. In fact, I think that the end Mass was probably one of the most rewarding parts of the internship. I have never felt more proud of a group I have taught, and I was excited that the students had the opportunity to participate in something important and special. For most of the students from Pachacutec, it was the first time that they had travelled to Callao. They all dressed in their best clothes, and many of their parents were able to attend which I thought was a really wonderful way to both showcase the students’ hard work and gain support for Coprodeli’s future projects in Pachacutec. In addition, I thought that we were relatively successful in regards to our work with the students who did not sing at the end Mass. Although we did not have as much rehearsal time with these students, they were able to

get a fairly developed grasp of the songs, harmony, musical terms, and choir in general, especially in comparison to the amount of knowledge they had prior to this internship.

Lastly, I believe that I, as well as Coprodeli, benefitted from this internship in several ways. As previously stated, I think that the successful choir performance at the Anniversary Mass increased support and admiration of Coprodeli's programs in Pachacutec. This was communicated to me through several comments made by other Coprodeli workers, parents and community members. Our work with the choirs also helped to relieve the workload of the other music teachers, especially in regards to overcrowding in their classrooms. The internship was also beneficial to the students as they had the opportunity to participate in a real choir and learn a lot about music and singing in the process. Personally, I know that I benefitted in many ways. I increased my teaching experience, substantially improved my command of the Spanish language, and gained a clearer understanding of the effects of music and performance on community, growth and culture—a topic related to that which I will be pursuing as part of a senior thesis in the Peace Studies department. Lastly, I believe that the internship was mutually beneficial in the sense that interaction between myself, Clarisa and the Peruvians with whom we formed relationships through Coprodeli allowed for a rich, interesting dialogue which ultimately created deeper cross-cultural understanding. In the increasingly globalized and complex world in which we live, I believe that fostering international relationships and understanding is one of the most important steps to eradicating various world problems such as poverty, violence, and disease. I know that I was able to gain a much more complete and complex knowledge of Peruvian history and culture, and I hope that I was able to do the same for the Peruvians in regards to the United States.