

Organization: Abriendo Mentas

Location: Portrero, Costa Rica

Length of project: May 15- August 7

Background

The organization I have chosen to work with is Abriendo Mentas in Playa Portrero, Costa Rica. This is a non-profit organization dedicated to developing rural education and providing opportunities to children and adults. The mission of the organization is to empower rural Costa Rican communities by providing programs to those who need them most. Abriendo Mentas (Opening Minds) has four programs in Playa Portrero, Costa Rica: youth development, adult education, women's empowerment, and a technology center. These programs supplement the public education that students receive. Typically, students only receive three hours of school per day for 85 days a year. This lack of enthusiasm for education does not foster a community of learners that want to pursue higher education and Abriendo Mentas provides creative and educational opportunities outside of school.

The Abriendo Mentas website states "We don't only give people the tools to carve out better lives financially and linguistically, we give them the chance to change their entire perspective, and the opportunity to seek a better life for themselves and their children. Not only does AM teach job skills, we also teach self-esteem, hope, and inspiration" (www.abriendomentas.org).

My service project will include three main aspects: (1) curriculum development, (2) evaluation and assessment method development, (3) expansion of current educational programs.

Project Description

The first aspect of my service project will be working with the school's staff on developing a comprehensive English curriculum for the students at the school. The director of Abriendo Mentas has given me information on what curriculum they are currently using and has asked me to help develop it further. Currently the school uses a textbook for teaching English and does not have comprehensive lesson plans for teaching. However, having a more developed curriculum will aid the teachers and volunteers with teaching English to the students by giving teachers more ideas to work with.

The second aspect of the project is aiding in development of evaluation and assessment methods for the program. Currently Abriendo Mentas does not have concrete ways of assessing what students have learned in the English program. I will be working with the director to consider what parts of the learning are most important to assess and will be developing evaluation tools that the school can use. For this aspect of the project, it will be important to create a mix of traditional (such as written exams) and non-traditional tools (such as rubrics for assessing oral competency).

The third aspect of the project will be to work on expansion of the program into neighboring areas. Currently the school is located in Playa Portrero with most of the classes taking place within the school. Programs are being added in Brasilito, Costa Rica to reach a larger population. This expansion will begin in February 2012 so my job will be to continue to network with people, with the main goal of telling people about the

classes as well as talking to people in other areas to find potential new sites for expansion. I will also be participating in the Omprakash Cross-Cultural Education Workshop that will take place at Abriendo Mentes in July. This will be useful for collaborating with other people interested in cross-cultural education and expanding their own non-profit organizations.

The main purpose of this project is to aid Abriendo Mentes in developing a curriculum and assessment tools. In addition, networking and expanding the classes to neighboring areas is important for the organization to continue growing. I have spoken with the director to discuss the school's specific needs because I want to make sure my work directly benefits them. This project combines my skills and background in education with their need for a more comprehensive English curriculum. Because I will be posting the curriculum online, other people teaching English will benefit as well. In addition, the evaluation and assessment tools will be beneficial to Abriendo Mentes. It is especially important that the teachers have these tools so Abriendo Mentes and other organizations can track students' learning. Having documentation of student improvement in English will help the organizations when writing grants to keep their programs funded in the future.