

Recently I asked our kids to put into words what **Education and Hope** means to them. I gave them some simple questions and asked the teachers to make sure the students responded on their own. The results were phenomenal! What an incredible gift to be able to step back and see your children through a different lens... and realize that all you have been teaching them over the years is shining through.

What impacted me the most was the response to the question: *What do you hope to do with the education you have received?* Out of the 80 students who responded, 75 of them chose service professions and/or made a direct reference to their desire to give back to others with their talents. The overwhelming majority of our students are not only imagining their lives as teachers, doctors, nurses and "professionals", but they also dream of sharing what they have been given to help lift their families and neighbors out of poverty as well. The childrens' responses validate the work of **Education and Hope** beyond my wildest dreams. One teacher reminded me, "When you sow love, you harvest love."

Many themes circulated throughout the answers: unconditional love and support; second home; affection; understanding; respect; a better education and a better way of life. I was moved by their description of education as "a special opportunity", "a privilege", "a gift"; but most especially by their deep awareness of all those who do not yet have these gifts. Being able to attend school (and "not have to work in the fields", as 7 year-old Ottoniel relates), is not something that is taken lightly. Many were even perceptive enough to express their amazement that "nothing is asked of us in return". And yet here they were, in overwhelming numbers, enthusiastically imagining the ways they might someday be able to share what they have been given with others. I read repeatedly how grateful they were not only to feel loved, but to feel that love from people they did not know. You were showered with great blessings for making it possible for them to raise their families out of poverty. Many offered special thanks to you for believing that they had the potential to "be somebody in this world", something they have slowly grown to believe themselves.

During this time of adversity in our own country, we have the opportunity to step back and reflect on what is most important in our lives. While the media continues to heighten our focus on the economic downturn, I would counter that now is the perfect time to focus our attention on all that we still have, as well as the hidden blessings to be discovered. Our experience with financial loss or insecurity brings our own awareness that much closer to those who suffer in great need every day. When we shift the focus outside of ourselves and respond to the needs of others, we are provided with an opportunity to view our own concerns in a larger context. Seeing the ripple effect of this crisis across the globe provides yet another example as to how all of our lives are connected. When we fully recognize our connectedness we realize that lifting up another in need lifts us up as well.

I am very grateful to be able to share these simple images of joy during what many consider a complicated time. Hearing the words of our students allows us to further witness how deeply rooted the love is that we are planting in their lives. I hope that you feel the transformational power your gifts continue to have on the lives of all touched by our program. These are the gifts that will sustain us all: knowing that our actions have eased the suffering of another. Even my students are deeply aware that all of you make choices and sacrifices in order to make this work possible. I hope the happiness and love you see in these faces inspire your continued contributions towards all that we are creating together.



In gratitude,

Julie Coyne