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Developing Cross-Cultural Relationships

Laura Davis
Linfield College

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Developing cross-cultural relationships

Linfield College students left more than a newly constructed softball field and a freshly painted mural in Mexico last spring.

They also left dozens of new friends and a bit of themselves.

The 11 students, who studied in Oaxaca for the semester, spent three weeks of service learning at Pimpollo orphanage, in the southernmost part of Mexico. There they drew upon their own skills and interests to help disadvantaged children. They painted a mural, built a softball field, and taught swimming lessons, English classes and kitchen hygiene.

The three-week experience went beyond examining cross-cultural issues and strengthening Spanish language skills, according to Tom Love, Linfield professor of anthropology, who directed the program.

“It was really about developing relationships,” he said. “These types of experiences build character and develop an attitude of citizenship, mutual respect, critical self-reflection and responsibility.”

Mary Doyle '06, a studio art and political science major, painted a mural based on more than 70 drawings created by the children. The result was a sign for the orphanage incorporating flowers and a beach scene, with the kids' blue hand prints creating ocean waves.

“Painting is a creative outlet that encourages kids to be themselves as opposed to their economic circumstances,” said Doyle.

At the orphanage, Linfield students came face-to-face with issues of poverty, domestic violence, child abuse and retardation. The children's need for attention was palpable, Love said.

“You're instantly mobbed by kids who come up and hug you,” he added. “And they care for each



Linfield students, from left, Mary Doyle '06, Veronica Walker '05 and Vanessa Patterson '06, help children add handprints to a mural at the Pimpollo orphanage.

other. You offer one a piece of candy and he makes sure every kid has a piece of it. It's very humbling and it makes you deeply question what's important.”

Erica Crossman '05, Kim McGough '05 and Emily Pierce '05 constructed a softball field for the children. Crossman still remembers the smiles on the kids' faces when she and the other Linfield students arrived each day.

“As soon as the kids saw us, they would run to help us,” said Crossman, a sociology major. “It was incredibly humbling to see how little they had and hear their stories of what they'd been through.”

Rachyl Stupor '06, was particularly drawn to Auterilli, a 17-year-old who wanted to learn English and attend college.

“That was surprising to me to find a girl living out in the middle of nowhere that had the same aspirations I do,” Stupor said.

More than anything, the experience showed Stupor how privileged she is as a United States citizen.

She's now more aware of how people use their resources and how it affects others around the world.

“I've never had to endure hardship,” she said. “Some of the kids had very difficult lives before they came to the orphanage. It was hard to face that, but it was an incredible experience.”

— Laura Davis

Emily Pierce '05 playing with a child.

