

## Projecto Oceano Monthly Report – April 2013

Though I arrived last month, April has been my first month of managing the Project ‘on my own’ – well, without Jess the former Project Manager here anyways. To be honest, I actually cannot say that I manage anything on my own as the Project is 100% a team effort and even now Jess and many others are helping me out on a daily basis. Perhaps most directly valuable to me are the ten Project Members, our student teachers and volunteers from the high school who direct and lead every aspect of the Project with my help (and not the other way around). But you get my point, this is my first full month here – and I’ve been loving every minute of it!

The late afternoons are my favourite time in the Project. Starting at three o’clock we have *Clube de Estudo*, or “Study Club,” and I like to open up the doors to the main room and the new library so that everyone feels welcome to come inside and enjoy our space. During these hours we get all sorts of characters coming in – from Project Members or high school students working on homework to young kids coming to read, play games or just hang out. We get a lot of curious looks from people passing by in the street and occasional visitors, who pop in to take a look at this wonderful place called Projecto Oceano, which I’m increasingly learning is really one-of-a-kind on the island.

I love these afternoons because there is always something interesting going on, even if it seems like it’s just a quiet, calm afternoon. Sometimes I look up from my work and I see that several kids have congregated around the blackboard and are busy drawing up huge depictions of things like houses and kitchens – or my favourite was the larger-than-life chickens these kids were drawing the other day! It’s wonderful to see the things they come up with. This has of course prompted some inquiries into art classes, which will potentially be of great interest for these kids.



I never knew Projecto Oceano when the second room was the “Sala de Ping Pong” – for me it has always been the Project Library and it’s hard for me to imagine a better use for this space. With our new furniture – three wooden and reed chairs, a double bench, a table, four bean bags and two little poufs (for lack of a better word) – new paint job, new shelves and new books – it really is looking wonderful! And even better its getting tons of use!



One morning after the 8am learn-to-read classes, the younger students started to pack up their bags, grab their shoes and head to the door – I had to block their path and remind them that after *aulas de explicação* are the *aulas de ingles para crianças*, which I've now taken over as the resident English speaker. One little girl looked at me quite puzzled, "But I have to go do my homework," she said. I figured she couldn't be much past 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and anyways hadn't been to school yet for the day so I asked her what she meant and she pointed to the board, where our Project Member had indeed set aside some homework for the children. I laughed to myself, loving her sincerity and enthusiasm, and told her that she could do it right after our next class.

These young kids (some as young as 5 years old) who come into the Project for these extra classes do so mostly on their own initiative – and though sometimes this means they forget, or more likely come fairly late, it's still very impressive. Just as impressive are the student teachers, the Project Members, who in their time out of school and not spent working, come in and volunteer to teach other kids on the island. If I'm ever feeling like I may have a bad day (does not happen often here I'll tell you that) I almost always feel better sitting in on one of these classes and thinking about how impressive all these young Mozambicans are.

Getting to know the ten Project Members has been a real treat for me. I knew the model of Projecto Oceano was to take the 'best and the brightest' but even so I was happily surprised with how wonderful the kids all are. Not only are they all fun, social and outgoing individuals, despite 8 of the 10 being relatively new members themselves they all get along wonderfully and make a fun group. They are also all very interested in social issues and really delving into diverse topics about the world around them – since I've been here we've had presentations from a psychologist, debates about illiteracy in Mozambique, innovation classes about microcredit, and current affairs centred on South Africa- Mozambique relations, poor attendance in local hospitals, and the problem of obesity in the world.



We have had fun Project-wide picnics on the beach, organised a table for the island's annual Ztoziva food festival, and even managed to make a fun party out of a cleaning day (we called it our *Limp-festa* which is taking the word "limpeza" or cleaning and combining it with "festa" or party). The members are always coming up to me with ideas for new classes or new ways to organise the Project space or schedule, and I've embraced my job as being to encourage them to take as much ownership, responsibility and initiative with the Project as possible!

Everything else on the island has gotten off to a great start for me. One of the former members was asking me the other day how everything was going – they are all so supportive and wonderful, checking in with me often from their respective places outside of Ilha just to make sure I'm settling in okay – and this is how I responded (translated, of course):

Me: "Everything is good; everything is normal!"

Zito: "I don't understand, is it good.... or normal?"

Me: "Both! What is normal here is good also, no?"

Zito: "Haha okay you are already learning the culture of Ilha!"

Anyways, I am trying to learn the culture of Ilha. I am also trying to take advantage of the beautiful, fun and exciting things this place has to offer while also feeling out the ways in which I myself can somehow contribute in a significant and sustainable way. I'm happy and fortunate to have jumped into a project that already had such momentum and was already achieving so much, via the dedicated people both here on the ground and overseas (perhaps further away but no less connected!). These next few months we have some exciting things coming up, so stayed tuned for more fun stories from Ilha de Moçambique!