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JAPN 301 SL

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Final Reflection

Shelby, you’re doing this reflection on time for once, and this is what you have learned and gained by participating in service learning this semester.

Having to complete the audio reflections was initially very unsettling for you because addressing your personal opinions vocally and then having to listen to them again seriously caused you to question what it was you had gained, or didn’t gain from this experience. However, after listening to both recordings, you did notice a difference in how you spoke and what you said; in your voice you sounded more confident, more sure of yourself, and even a little determined to become more of an asset to your community. Nearing the end of this semester and of the service learning course, you have come to really appreciate the children that you’re serving and it is obvious that you have learned a lot about them and from them. In the future, you will miss them, but you hope that what you’ve done and taught in the classroom will be remembered by them and will leave a lasting impression. The most important thing you’ve learned from this semester-long lesson was through the children at your service site rather than your teachers in the classroom. By taking the time to talk to and understand each individual child from your site, you’ve come to “treat them with more respect”, and you recognize that you “really want them to succeed and to remember what you and your group have taught them.” It is a genuine sentiment that you care about what they learn and their ability to use that knowledge to succeed in a way that they might not have been able to do before. Intellectually, you grew through first-hand experience and patience when trying to understand the needs of the children through literary texts provided by your teachers. The papers that you read that left the greatest impact on you were, “Helping, Fixing, or Serving” and “To Hell with Good Intentions” because they really made you question what you were doing and why you thought you were doing it. In the beginning of the class, all it was was college credit and a passing grade; you did not think about the children you would be serving. Now, while the importance of a good grade still stands in your head, you feel honest concern for the kids that you served, and these papers helped you to understand what you were doing for them, and also what they did for you.

Still, you are not completely sure of some of the topics addressed, for instance, how to clearly define racism, sexism, classism, or heterosexism, but you have learned more about the internalized institution and education system, and what their issues are. One of the biggest problems you identified for the school of Del Rey Woods was of the teachers and how they view and care for their students. That is not to say that the children are treated poorly, but they are not always treated fairly; for example, when your group was being assigned, Sylvia (the ASA director there) told you and your group that you would be teaching the 4th graders by process of elimination; her reasoning was that the 1st and 2nd graders were too immature to handle Japanese topics, and the 3rd graders simply behaved too poorly so they ,”did not deserve these lessons.” You and your group found this to be so extremely unfair to the kids because every Friday when you guys showed up, all of the kids would be excited to see you, and many of them then became sad because they weren’t being taught what we had to offer. I felt that they were marginalized by their teachers and by Sylvia simply for being children and it was assumed that they would not be able to handle our lessons or appreciate them. While this might have been true, it was unfair to assume to without even giving them, or your group, a chance to try.

As far as your self and social awareness, you have indeed become more aware of yourself within your community and while you are still unsure of what you can do, you better understand how your privileged identity has affected your views. You felt that, because you were an ordinary white, middle-class female that you did not really belong in your community, which is dominated by Latin Americans, and you simply did not grow up here. While it is true that you did grow up in a different setting, you’ve come to feel less judgmental of the area that you live and of the people who live around you because of the kids at Del Rey Woods; they proved you and your assumptions wrong, and so it is only fair to allow others to do the same. It is because of this that your understanding of social justice and privilege has improved, as well as a growth in your understanding of class, race, ability, and nationality related issues. The kids that you taught were faced with all of these issues; class, because they grew up and are attending a school in a lower-income area and so the funding for their school is depleted. For example, this last Friday, the rain fell so hard on an old building that a hole was created through the plaster ceiling and some books, desks, a projector, and carpet space were heavily damaged by water; that classroom is unable to be used now. Racial and nationality issues constantly circle these children because of their Hispanic background; many of them feel that, because they are Hispanic, they can not learn another language because they will not have the opportunity through their education; this also addresses the issue of language.

In your first reflection, you rated yourself a 5 for having a “…strong sense of responsibility to contribute to the well being of [your] community or society.” Now, you feel that you would rate yourself a 7 or 8 because you have come to care about the kids within the community of Seaside. While this is not *your* community necessarily, because of the experience and information you gained from the children at Del Rey Woods, you want to help the kids in other communities, including your own. The goals of service you had at the beginning of the course were very vague, but now you feel a responsibility to your community, but not as though it was an obligation. While it is still unclear to you as to what you can do, the want is there and you have come to understand that before you were being part of the problem within your community by not contributing, and now you will become part of the solution by continuing to preform service at different school in different communities. It is important to you that you ask the children of those school what they want to learn instead of assuming to know, often like their teachers do.

Even nearing the end of the semester, you still want to learn more about the structural causes of inequality, but you understand a little clearer where or who they come from and how to address those issues. Working in the classroom setting as a teacher of, not just Japanese culture and language, but also as a teacher of equality deepened your understanding of the issues that feed inequality. Assumptions, like those you made at the beginning of the class, increase the gap between inequality and equality, and by teaching and learning from the kids you realized that you must seriously commit yourself to making little to no assumptions about a person before you meet them. While you knew and know that this is both necessary and difficult to do simply because it is a human tendency, it will be through you and what you taught in those lesson that equality will be able to grow.

The rating you gave yourself for question 8 in the first reflection was poor, about a 5 out of 10 for “having the power to bring about change in the social conditions of [your] community, society, nation and/or the world” because you felt that “you did not belong there,” and you “felt no civic responsibility to a community that [you] don’t consider [your] home.” However, while the fact that you still left this course feeling that this was not your home, you understand now that thoughts like the ones you had are what prevents people from committing change, and from helping their community. You realize now that you do not want to prolong the development of change by having an apathetic attitude, but by performing somehow in a way that will improve the community, even if it is as simply as a culture lesson; the interactions you had with the students at Del Rey Woods, in addition to your interactions with your group, allowed for you to better communicate with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; your experiences through communication and trial and error in the classroom engaged your feeling of civic duty; the articles you read in class also contributed to this because they forced you to ask yourself questions that you’ve never had to answer, for instance, issues regarding cross cultural ethics and bilingual education; these are issues you’ve never really had to take a stance on, until this class made you.

Finally, the most meaningful part of this class that you gained came from Del Rey Woods; while the information that was provided to you by your teachers helped to broaden your mind and educate you about societal issues and inequalities within communities, your real accomplishments came from the 4th graders that you taught. Every week when your group showed up, the children were always excited to see you, to learn more, to gain information about a place that was so opposite their own; not only did you feel prideful because you were able to teach this, but you were and are proud of the students for taking such an interest, for listening to what you had to teach, and for remembering the material. It was and is your hope that they take what they have learned and use it somehow in the present or in the future to benefit themselves, but also their friends; hopefully, they will take what they have learned from you and teach it to someone else; this is how you and your group have started an “educational and cultural fire” if you will and hopefully, through the kids, it will catch on.

I hope that you continue to use this information in your own future, Shelby.

-Your past self, Shelby