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JAPN 320S

Service Learning Reflection: English

This semester's theme seems to have been about learning about myself and speaking out. This is also a major point in becoming more and more aware of the social issues of this country.

At the beginning of this class, we did a wheel identity worksheet rating what aspects of our identity were important to us. Since my social awareness has broadened, at the time I was very aware of my gender and personal beliefs. That is because, as a woman, we are more vulnerable to violence, being blamed, and receiving little to no support in such matters. As for my beliefs, even though service learning is a "safe zone," I was still aware and uncomfortable sharing for fear of judgment and backlash.

However, as a white person in the United States and being part of the group in power gives me an advantage. I have greater access to education, jobs, and justice, despite no personal desire to marginalize others. Not everyone in this dominant group is trying to marginalize others, however, everyone gains benefits regardless. Also, as part of this group, I know I often don't notice the benefits without being made aware of them, and that my experiences are very different. That is why genuine listening and empathy is important. I can easily admit I fall into assumptions about people, like the danger of men or the Church, but as long as I am not in harm's way, I quickly adjust my initial thinking to focus on humanness; since we're human, we will have different experiences shaping us, however, our basic selves are human and relatable, and I think it is compassionate to try and view the world this way.

The individual is important to bringing new things to the group, while the group provides support and purpose. The community consists of many different groups trying to function together, and usually, raise children. And these many different communities create society as a whole. As the groups become larger and larger, it becomes more difficult to reach a consensus. However, in an ideal world, the individual, in an individualistic society or a group oriented one, would use their skills to the benefit of the society as a whole.

Once you learn something, you can never forget it. This is the same for responsibility and just causes. On an individual level, I have the responsibility to add good to the world. In the community I was working in that means giving the children an opportunities to learn. As an individual, I can be a model for others. As a professional, the quality and sensitivity in the classroom, is key. In the short-term, I am providing a service. In the long-term, I am a model, and I am giving the children tools, interest, and inspiration for their future. As a foreign language teacher, according to the research article we read, by teaching language, we are also improving other subjects.

As a foreign language teacher, for the sake of intercultural and international communication, not only do I need to teach language, but the culture that goes with it. Using the 5 C's, language classes go beyond memorization and vocabulary, and into critical thinking. Since there are benefits to other subjects, foreign language teachers have a need to push for increased curriculum in schools to improve score and international standing and understanding.

The community scan at the beginning of the semester was critical to my understanding of the demographics and potential needs of the community. The fact that CPY accepted us into their program means they believed the community, or at least the children would value our education. Majority of the students spoke Spanish and were of Hispanic background from low income families. As such, these demographics mean they will not be able to access high level education in the system because of lack of money, support, and social and political standing in the United States. Therefore, the work of CPY, giving the children support and opportunities, is important to the community. Despite many of the children being bilingual, because of discrimination, they many not see this skill as an asset, despite objective benefits.

Because I was working in a community very different from my own background, I tried to be respectful throughout my service. The articles of service we read at the very end of class would have been useful in the beginning to frame how sensitively enter a community for service. Not all communities want service or helping from the outside. I wish I had know that before starting. By teaching Japanese culture, we were able to learn about the children's culture and compare the two. At the very beginning we asked what the children knew and wanted to know about Japan. That is what we tried to base our lessons on.

Because I am from the dominant group in a marginalized community, I need to be very sensitive to their feelings. Listening, talking on their level, and always respectful are tools I use in all outside communities. I may not like the lack of fairness and injustice, but I can use my power for their benefit. And that first requires listening to that they want.

Creating social justice in these communities is not an easy task. However, starting with one community is easier than trying to improve everything on a national level. Think globally, act locally. To ease social injustice and create greater equity, even on an institutional level, requires changing assumptions, to value the diverse, international community. One would be to continue supporting CPY. Another way is trying to get more money for the schools. Personally, on a broad scale, I will continue developing understanding and interest in Japanese society, to promote intercultural communication, by creating an afterschool program in my hometown.