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Service Learning Final Paper

This semester I went to Crumpton Elementary school, and tried to teach the students a little something about Japanese. I think I learned a lot, and while I could have done a lot better, especially with some long hours of training from a skilled elementary teacher, it is my hope that the children benefitted from my presence there.

I have answered the corresponding questions as they applied to me and my time at Crumpton. I truly enjoyed working with the students, and although it left me tired each day, it was pleasant work. As a Japanese major, teaching is my most logical job choice after graduation, but until now, I didn't know if it would be a job that really fit me. I have learned that I like doing it, but that I could have really benefitted from some training, and I think I will take some teaching classes toward this end. I owe it to whoever I teach in the future. Here is what else I have learned

1. Self and Social Awareness

- A. The students of Crumpton formed group identities based on their gender. All the children formed groups of friends, 2-5, and tried their best to stay with these groups. Girls and boys formed individual friend groups, and although dialogue between the genders was civil, the children never grouped with the opposite gender of their own volition. Although the children were aware of their own race, and proud of their various cultures, they did not use this as a factor in choosing their friends, and race never came up in a negative way. Teachers were very obviously an out-group, however the service learners were not. With a couple exceptions, the service learners were treated as equals by the children. Oddly

enough, despite the fact that I am male, and friend groups were gender based, the female students were the ones more inclined to connect with me. Often, if a student was misbehaving, one of the girls would shoot me a look that silently said “dude, what’s up with this guy?” Letting me know she felt the same way I did about the situation.

Relative wealth and poverty were also inconsequential to how friendships were made. I had no idea which kids were rich and which were poor, and I got the idea that the kids didn’t know either.

- B. Upon entering Crumpton, I held some stereotypes about the kids that I later learned to be false. American (and Japanese) media like to portray children as uninterested sassy evil geniuses. Almost all child characters in all media act this way. As the stereotype is so pervasive, it is quite difficult to see that such is not actually the truth, particularly when one spends essentially no time around children. Far from my conditioned belief, the children, though still intelligent, were fascinated with everything we taught. Out of about one hundred kids, there were about 4 that really qualified as sassy, and I don’t think I could have called any of them bad.

I had also assumed that the children would be more organized and patient. I was quite patient as a child, as was my fiancé, as was our social group, and thus I naturally assumed everyone else would be the same way. Far from it, many of the children had attention spans of about 3 seconds, and those who were patient found themselves out-yelled by their easily bored peers.

2. Service and Social Justice

- A. I think that if the lives of individuals improve, the wellness of society will follow. People with horrible lives often turn to drugs and alcohol in an attempt to ease the pain. They also have

much less to lose. Many turn to crime to feed their habit. Drug dealers come in to feed the market, crime rates rise, employment moves to a better part of town, and society crumbles. If instead people have good lives, they are less likely to try to find society destroying ways of improving their own personal lot in life. We see this in Japan. Because housing is affordable, and good education and college is available to everyone, crime and homeless rates are low and society is peaceful.

- B. I think that good teachers are key. I have been blessed with many good teachers, and I love learning as a result. People who love to learn are naturally much more likely to go to college, and thus are much more likely to succeed.
- C. One of the things I tried very hard to do at Crumpton was to not play favorites. Considering that some children were very intelligent, attentive, and patient; and others were less so, it would have been very easy to have done it. However, if I had done so, I would have lost the respect of the other students, and it was essential to me that I kept that. A teacher has the responsibility to ensure that all students are succeeding to the best of their abilities, and that means equal attention given to all.

3. Community and Social Justice

- A. Crumpton was a melting pot of different races. White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, there seemed to be about equal numbers of everyone. I don't really pay attention to race, so I didn't really think about it too much, but occasionally students would bring up their own culture and ethnic background, and we would talk about it. Social Justice was not really ever an issue, I did not see any racism at Crumpton. None. So we never really had to think about it.

- B. As with A., there were no community issues that I was aware of, and I did not see any man-made inequality.

4. Multicultural Community Building and Civic Engagement

- A. When students mentioned their ethnicity, I used my personal knowledge of it to connect with them. One of the students mentioned that he was Vietnamese, and that their currency was a million to the dollar. I answered: “oh yeah, it’s called the *Dong*, right?” He of course was pleased that I knew at least a little about his homeland. When teaching Japanese, one of the first things I told the children was that the pronunciation was basically identical to Spanish. All the Hispanic children immediately connected with this, and all the others were able to learn from them soon afterward.
- B. There was no systemic injustice that I was able to detect, at least not at Crumpton.
- C. Again, they were unnecessary.

Essentially, I was pleased to discover just how not racist the children were. I think one of the main reasons for this was that the children were mixed ethnicity. There was no large racial group for any of the kids to be part of or not part of, so kids were instead free to befriend whoever they liked. Although they were treated equally, and got along fine when they were required to, it troubled me that the boys and girls did not befriend each other. Because their interests are different, and they develop maturity at different rates, evolution seems to have set it up such that boys and girls don’t have much in common as children, and I think this is a huge problem. I think the fact that boys and girls don’t want to be friends with each other as children is probably the root of the world’s sexism problem, and I don’t know what can be done about it. The differences between genders are real, not superficial, as skin color is, so gender-blindness is not as easily feasible as color-blindness is. I really am not the person to figure out

the solution to this, and I really am unhappy to end this essay on a negative note, but this is the conclusion I've come to.