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Ethnic/Gender Diversity

Service Learning Reflection

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I have included two artifacts with this Service Learning Report, a picture with the group I worked with at Jonestown Elementary school, and a journal that I kept while there the entire week. The standard that I am aligning with these artifacts and reflective report is: **Standard 3: Diversity (Teachers understand that children learn differently.)** I am aligning my artifacts with this standard because many of the children I was working with came from environments where they did not receive help outside of the classroom, this set them back academically. Due to this unfortunate situation I had to alter the way I worked with students and the material that I helped them with. I had to understand that the children worked and learned differently. I realized that although many of them were not at the academic levels they should be, I could still make a difference in helping them learn and be excited to learn. I could also align this experience with

Standard 9: Reflection (Teachers are able to evaluate themselves). *The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his or her choices and actions on pupils, parents, professionals in the learning community and others and who actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally.* My experience could also fit under this standard because I had to do some serious reflecting after the first day in order to relate and help the students I was working with. I saw many interactions between the students and their parents as well as their teachers that certainly had an impact on me and the way I plan to teach.

Describe:

I began my service learning with a 5th grade English class at Jonestown Elementary School, located in Jonestown Mississippi. The town was predominantly African American so all of the students I worked with were as well. While at the school I also worked with a 6th grade English class and a 1st grade class. What I noticed at the upper age level was how behind the students were academically. Over half of the 6th grade class was writing at a 1st grade level. After spending time with the first graders I thought I might see a correlation, but in fact the first graders were extremely intelligent for the most part and eager to learn. My biggest question that I still am uncertain of is when are these children falling off academically, when do they begin to struggle? I saw several things while working at the school that I believe could be big factors in the learning deficit these students face.

Although I was working in the poorest town in the Nation, the elementary school was extremely well equipped to help students get a good education. There were smart boards in every classroom, new desks and computers as well as good school supplies and books. The teacher I

worked with in the 5th and 6th grade classrooms was well liked by the students and she tried her best to spark their interest. She was white and from Wyoming, and truly loved the students. As I worked with the kids in writing and reading, I was always very respected by all of the students. It was clear though, that many of them had experienced things in their lives far beyond their maturity level, so learning about adverbs was something they didn't care to know.

The first grade classroom I worked in was much different than working with the older kids, simply because the children are still young and innocent to the outside world. They were learning to read and count, they were so full of life and excitement to learn, so different from the children who were only five or six years older than them. The one thing I witnessed in the first grade classroom that truly impacted me and the way I approached teaching was the thought of corporal punishment in schools. We were told that in many parts of the south it is still legal for teachers to hit their students. I had not seen it in the 5th and 6th grade classrooms I was in, but I did witness it in the 1st grade classroom, which for me was extremely emotionally disturbing. Thankfully my group members were able to console me and we were able to discuss our feelings about it, which truly helped me grow as a person and prospective educator.

I am not a mother, but I think that as a teacher it's important to use a mother's intuition in a classroom sometimes. Children need that caring and understanding, no matter what age they are. They need to be encouraged and motivated, and although I was not able to work with these students for more than a week, I was able to realize that. There are going to be kids who come from a home that lacks support, and it is our job as teachers to do our best to keep those students on the right track in school and in life.

Analyze:

I learned so much on how to approach children from a completely different culture than myself. I know now how important it is to relate to your students before you even begin teaching. I happen to love Rap music and my favorite rapper is Lil' Wayne, who most of the students knew and idolized as well. As soon as they could relate to me on something, they saw me as a friend, not just a teacher. Building trust with these children was essential to helping them learn anything. When they trusted me, they would begin to raise their hands and ask for help, knowing I was not going to judge them or hurt them, but help them.

I tried very hard to reach out to every student that I could while I was there, but I did really make an effort to encourage the students in the classroom who were really trying to learn. I gave them helpful hints on their grammar assignments and told them what good books they should try reading. Many people would probably wonder why I didn't give more attention the students who were struggling. I tried at the beginning, but so many of them are beyond the encouragement need. They truly are in desperate need of special education and counseling. Unfortunately, those are two things that the school lacked in. So because I was only there a week, I tried to impact the students that wanted to learn.

Appraise:

I grew up extremely blessed and privileged to have a family that supported me getting a good education and helping me become a good student. This trip was so eye opening for me because I witnessed children at age six with this great desire to learn like any normal six year old, and then I saw them as they hit adolescence, and only about 25 percent of the class was truly retaining information from day to day. Educating a child is something that many feel should be done by a teacher. This experience taught me how important it is to have education from other

people and places. So much of what we know, comes from home. That can either be a great thing or a terrible thing. Unfortunately for the majority of the children I worked with, it was a terrible thing. But it forced me as a teacher to step up to a huge challenge and change my way of teaching.

I no longer feel naive, or ignorant to the world around me. I feel like after working with these truly amazing children, I can walk into any classroom and accept the challenged put forth in front of me. Teaching is about making constant adjustments so that your students get the best education possible, and that is the absolute truth! I feel so blessed and thankful to have had the opportunity to work with students from a different cultural background than myself and what I am used to, because I now feel like I can relate to a bigger part of the world.

Transform

I know I did not expect to receive the amount of experience I got with this service learning project. It was one of the most emotional things I have ever done in my entire life. I was able to laugh and cry and converse with others to open my mind to new areas of teaching that I had never thought I would have to deal with. I learned that children need to know they are loved and accepted in a classroom. All children need that! I also learned how important it is for your students to relate to you so that they can gain trust in you. Positivity is a wonderful trait to have as a teacher, because your attitude is contagious to your students.

I feel so much more informed, not only as a future educator, but as a member of society. A fellow group member of mine said something that I love, he said this isn't a matter of volunteering, or getting a grade for a class, it's a matter of humanity. It is our job as humans to help those in need. My favorite quote that I took from the trip was from the Civil Right Museum,

and it truly summed up my experience over the course of the week, it stated “The greatest debt to humanity is not hatred, it is indifference.” Elie Wiesel. Life, teaching, and helping others does not come down to whether or not we love or hate what we are doing, but how badly we want to change something that is not right.