

Final Paper

When I was told I had to take a Linguistics course, immediately my heart plummeted as I thought about the various dialects and phonetic sounds that I would have to learn. Little did I know that there was more involved in the study of Linguistics. When I found Linguistics 386, I was a little skeptical about a class that actually sounded like fun but also could be considered a Linguistic course. However, I decided to sign up for it. The decision to take this course has significantly altered my career pathway as well as my outlook on service learning.

Once I started attending discussion and realized that this class may actually be as cool as I thought it would be, I was ready to find my site placement. Immediately after hearing I had the option of working with children, I knew without a doubt what site I was interested in volunteering with. After attending the volunteer informational and meeting Heather Simms, I was ecstatic to start working in the classroom. However, after volunteering at the Northwood ELI classroom for over 13 weeks, there are still things that I find puzzling within the ELI classroom. Some examples include the politics of the classroom, the role volunteer's play and the importance of the magic box.

When I interviewed Heather about working as a language instructor, the conversation started getting strained as we began to talk about the politics of the classroom and loss of financial aid to the classroom. This confuses me because the University is known for its commitment to diversity and for them to cut back on a superb ELI program like this one does not back up their commitment. I am also

puzzled by the role volunteers play within this program. Obviously, as a volunteer we are there to help out with the students in the classroom as well as support Heather as she teaches; my confusion comes from what happens after we leave. These students have gotten use to certain volunteers and for them to have to start working with new people disturbs me because I wonder if that disrupts their learning process. Finally, the last puzzler of my site placement is the magic box. As discussed in class and various reflection papers, the magic box is a game used in circle time to allow the students to practice their English as well as act as a guessing game. This box confuses me because I am unable to understand how such a simple game elicits such joy from the students. One of the things I like most about the box is that not only do the kids enjoy the activity but little do they know how much they are learning while playing the game.

Throughout my experience at the Northwood center, my perceptions on language have changed drastically. Ever since I got back from Argentina this summer, I knew that I missed out on my experience but I wasn't sure where this feeling came from. While volunteering at Northwood and participating in discussions within the classroom, I realize that the process of learning a foreign language requires not only patience as I previously thought but confidence as well. I pride myself on being a confident person no matter what but I realize now that when I spoke Spanish, my confidence goes away. Interestingly enough, in Argentina I had the opportunity to build my confidence up, but instead I shrank into a shell and stayed in my comfort zone and in a sense refused to learn the language. However, I learned the exact opposite about language teaching, a career path I am interested in learning more about

after taking this class. I learned that it is definitely important to be patient while teaching but it is even more important to have fun. I honestly believe that if the games and activities were not fun then most of the Northwood students would still be at a beginning level of English.

As a result of my service-learning experience, I feel that I have significantly changed my view on people who are learning English as a second language. As Americans, we take it for granted because it is an item in our privilege backpack, but in fact English is a difficult language to learn. I also think more positively about the term service learning because I used to think of it as just community service but I feel that with service learning, volunteers take away a piece of the site with themselves as well as give back to the site. However, with community service you are simply giving back to the site.

As an overall assessment of the classroom atmosphere, I would have to say that I am very impressed. Sometimes we discussed sensitive issues such as whether or not we were really making a difference as volunteers because eventually we would just leave the students and go back to our own lives. Carolyn and Elizabeth allowed us to talk/work our way through this topic while adding their comments that would further discussion. I also liked the monthly individual meetings because we were able to discuss readings with them as well as talk about our site placement. I think these meetings helped me more than discussion because it was one-on-one and we could discuss whatever it was that we were having difficulty with. I think that this was the best part of the class and should be implemented into all classrooms.