

Meagan Wentworth

Professor Kristi Hendricks

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Service Learning Reflection Paper

My service learning placement was a great experience. I spent my twenty hours of service learning, here on campus in the HAB, as a tutor for Homework Helpers. Students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade would come to a classroom where we met them to assist them with their assignments. These students were all part of the Somali community. I chose this site for my service learning because it worked with all ages, including high schoolers, which is the age group that I ultimately want to end up working with. I also chose this site because I did not have a car on campus and I was on the dance team, so I needed something close by that would work with my busy schedule.

One of the Standards of Effective Practice or SEPs that I saw in my service learning was SEP 10: Collaboration, Ethics, and Relationships. This SEP means “the teacher communicates and interacts with parents/guardians, families, school colleagues, and the community in ways that support student learning and well-being.” The sub-SEP that I chose was 10.11B, which states, “understand the influence of factors outside of school and how they affect student life and learning.” My understanding of this SEP is that the teacher makes an effort to engage with many people that play a role in the students’ education. My knowledge of the sub-SEP is that the teacher must recognize that there are things outside of the classroom that play a role in the students’ educational life. One example from my service learning site was of a student I was helping tutor. She is part of the Somali community and takes her religion very seriously. She

took a few minutes out of our tutoring session to go pray, as that is part of practicing her religion. This proves that her culture affects how she handles her schoolwork. This was definitely not a negative thing, but rather very positive. She is able to practice her religion but still, do very well in school. This was a new experience for me, as I come from a non-diverse school and had not ever seen anything like that while I was in school. It made me realize that I may have students in the future who do have different cultural traditions from my own and that is okay. In fact, it will help me to become a more well-rounded person and educator. Because of this experience, in my future classroom, I plan to allow students to be the most genuine version of themselves possible. If that means allowing a student to step out of the classroom to go pray for ten minutes, that is what I will do. I care about my religion and I want other students to be able to fully express their true selves and their religions as they wish. Each of us is unique and deserves to be 100% ourselves with no judgment from others.

Another SEP that I encountered at my service learning site was SEP 9: Reflection and Professional Development, which states, “the teacher continually reflects upon and evaluates the effects of his/her choices and action on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community), and who actively pursues opportunities for professional growth.” My own understanding of this SEP is that it is our job as educators to always be looking for ways to improve our teaching. As teachers, we should constantly be reflecting on lessons and interactions with students. The sub-SEP that I looked at was 9.10B which states, “understand methods of inquiry, self-assessment, and problem-solving strategies of use in professional self-assessment.” I have come to understand that this means as teachers, we need to always be doing self-assessments and thinking about how we can better serve our students. This may require on the spot problem-solving skills if a lesson isn’t working. This also means that we should always be

asking questions of ourselves to work towards improving each and every day. One day, I was helping a young girl with some geography homework. However, she had forgotten her textbook at school, and I had not taken a geography class in five years. Having a job to still do, I pulled out my laptop and together we did a Google search and found maps that helped us complete the assignment. I simply could have told her that it was not possible to complete the assignment without her textbook, but as a tutor, I felt the need to serve her and her needs. Also, because technology is so readily available it makes situations like these much more manageable. As I reflected on this experience, I realized the importance of technology. Yes, it can have negative effects at times, but it also can be very useful. I also have realized that some students may not have access to technology or the internet at home, so as a future educator, I must keep in mind that when I give assignments, there must be a way for all students to be able to complete it in some capacity. In my future classroom, I want to be sure to serve the needs of all my students. If that means using more paper, so that my students are able to do assignments out of the classroom, then that is what I will do. If that means giving more in-class time to work on projects because of a variety of reasons, then that is what I will do. I want to put my students' needs first. I want to be able to set them up for success so that if they put in hard work and effort, they will have the ability to do well.

The third SEP that I noticed while at my site was SEP 6: Communication, which states, “a teacher incorporates principles of effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques into fostering active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction among students.” I have come to understand that this means a teacher should use many different forms of communication within a classroom to get students to work together and interact with one another. The sub-SEP that I identified is 6.7B, which states, “understand how cultural and gender

differences can affect communication in the classroom.” I think that this means a teacher must be aware that within a diverse classroom, communication may be affected. The example of this that I have seen happens almost every day. Although all of the students that I worked with speak English, they still have a heavy accent that can make it hard to decipher exactly what they are trying to say. As I reflect on this, I have come to understand that it can sometimes seem annoying to keep asking students to repeat themselves. However, it is beneficial to their success that I truly understand what they are trying to say, even if this means having them repeat themselves multiple times. In my future classroom, I think it is important to build relationships with students so that I can communicate effectively with them. When I get to know them, I want to know where they come from, so that I can learn who they truly are as people. This is important in ensuring that we will be able to communicate with one another, regardless of a language barrier.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my service learning experience. I loved the variety that I was able to experience. I worked with kids of all ages in a variety of subject areas. As much as I did enjoy working with all of the students, the older kids and the math classes were still by far my favorite. This conclusion that I have reached makes me excited to continue on my secondary education path. Also, through working with students of the Somali community, I was able to bring some diversity into my life. This was important to me because there is a very good chance that I will work with students of ethnicities other than my own in the future. It was interesting to see students from a different perspective. This experience confirms my belief that regardless of a person’s background, they are still special and deserve a quality education. These students were different from myself in many ways, but that did not change how I treated them. This belief of mine is one that I will continue to believe for the rest of my life, in and out of the classroom. I

am grateful for the time I spent with these students and I am thankful that they helped me continue to grow on my path to becoming a teacher.