

Service Learning Reflection

HN111 Spring Semester

Theater for Young America

For the second semester of the Honors Program's service learning partnership I chose to continue working with the teachers and students at Theater for Young America, at Wonderscope. I had such an enjoyable experience my first semester working with them which made my decision very easy to stay for another semester. The director of the program was very excited to hear that my sister and I would be returning this semester to see the kids through a full year of their class. Much of my experiences in this semester will reflect what happened in the previous semester, but there were many new experiences to share as well, including new students and a wonderful finale to the class.

The three class levels remained the same this semester. The youngest being the first class and the older more mature being the last of the three, one hour classes that I went through every Tuesday. Probably the most noticeable change out of all of the classes was that of the youngest group. They ranged from the ages of four to six years old, and the class grew in size compared with the first semester and many new faces would become quite familiar with me. There were also a few kids who did not return to the program, and two of those kids were the twins that I had written a small segment about last time. It was very much the same environment, but with a much more diverse class than what I experienced before the winter break. The director was still the main teacher of the class, but she received some help from the teacher of the second class; however, it was the students that changed the class more than anything else. In the original class,

the girls outnumbered the boys three to two. In the new class, two of the three girls returned and not one boy returned, but five new boys would join the class. Compared to last semester, this new class was much more vocal and a lot of fun to be around. Due to a scheduling conflict I would typically arrive to the first class about 15 minutes late, and every time I walked in the kids welcomed me with smiles and chants of my name. But they were a very active group, and very curious. Fortunately, the scarf dance that was a regular occurrence in the first semester was rarely a part of class, so there was a little less embarrassment this time around. I definitely felt like more of an authority figure, however. These little kids would come to me with questions, or they would look up to me as an example of what we were doing and I really felt as though I connected a lot with the youngest class.

The second class hardly changed at all. It remained the biggest class, with about 17 students if I remember correctly, and there were a few additions and one or two students did not return from the first semester. Since most of the kids were familiar with each other, that class ran pretty smoothly. My sister and I were worthy assistants for the two teachers. This class had the most interesting group of kids, and it was a great example of how people, who seem so different but share one simple interest, can get along so well. There was never any fighting and there only seemed to be encouragement throughout the class. It was so interesting to watch and guide these kids. I may have mentioned this in my previous reflection, but watching this class, it was very clear what these kids were turning into. What I mean, is that, if there were cliques in this class, you could easily point them out. There were the gossip girls, the quiet kids, the intelligent, mature kids, and there were the wild, athletic kids, but put them all in one class and

you have a bunch of little actors. It was fun to watch these kids develop over one school year together.

The oldest class had two new students, and everyone else, with the exception of one girl, returned from the previous semester. Most of these kids were nearing the high school age and they were all very mature. The two new kids came and fit right in with the rest of the class. Steve, my sister, and I were the leaders of this class. This was the easiest bunch of students to handle, as you could imagine. They are at the age where they are comfortable talking with adults, and they were just able to have a really good time out of the class. Much like the previous class I discussed, they were all very supportive and kind to one another. They all worked very well together, and there were never any complaints.

All of these classes worked for the entire semester, to build up to the grand finale of the class. The youngest class did warm up drills and practiced to perform the story of “Chicken Little” for their final performance. Each kid was a character and each one of them got to say a couple of lines in the play. They made costumes and practiced being little chickens, and geese, and roosters, etc. and finally they got to perform on our last class meeting in front of an audience which included their parents and other family and friends. I was able to participate in the play as well, being the narrator for the play. The play went very well and the kids were so excited to get up on stage and show what they had learned. They even got to participate in the chicken dance in the finale as well. Remember earlier when I said I wasn’t as embarrassed to do things this time around? The chicken dance made all of that go away. I did the chicken dance in front of a large audience of adults and others, and I can’t say it was the best part of the night. Besides that their final performance couldn’t have gone any better.

The second class, for their finale, memorized and practiced doing monologues. This class is based around the teachings of improvisation so it was very exciting to watch each of these kids learn their monologues, and practice them in front of the class. When the final show came around I was a little worried that everyone wasn't going to have their monologues memorized. Sure enough, when we first got there, one of the students was trying to cram the monologue into his head. He was so worried about it he started crying and it was in question as to whether he would get up and perform his piece or not. Everyone was going up and performing their monologues almost perfectly and the kid who had been worried all night, stands up and starts his monologue. All I could think about was him forgetting his lines and being embarrassed, and before I knew it, he had completed his monologue flawlessly. This feeling of relief and joy came over and I can only imagine how good he felt. The second class ended in just as good of fashion as the young class.

Finally, there were the oldest of the classes. They had been working on monologues just as the class before them had. But they were also going to be doing some other skits that I was looking forward to. I never expected a problem with this classes monologues, and sure enough, there were none. They performed them at a much higher skill level and in a more mature way and you could definitely see the difference between the few years that separated them from the class below them. But what I was really looking forward to was the improvisational games that this older class was going to perform. These game are similar to what you might find on the television show "Who's Line is it Anyway?". They had done some practice games in the previous weeks and they were cracking me up every time. When they finally performed these games, the crowd absolutely loved them.

What I have learned about teaching, which is the main reason I chose this service learning partner, is to always encourage, and don't discourage children, students and the things they want to accomplish. One kid in the second class always seemed to be a little off in my mind. He was loud and hyper, but he was a good kid. After the final show I talked with his parents, and they told me that he had the time of his life in this class. He felt very comfortable there, and they just thanked me for what I was doing and they wished me good luck on my future. These were two very down to earth, kind hearted people, whose son suffered from turrets syndrome. I learned this after I had talked with them from Steve, one of the head instructors, who himself, had just learned about it minutes before he told me. I never would have guessed that the kid had this problem.

Overall, this experience that I went through, not only for the semester, but for the whole year, was a very rewarding one. When I was younger I always thought that I would become an actor or a comedian because I was such an active little kid and I enjoyed entertaining people. Watching these kids do what I once dreamed of doing, made me feel really good, but it also made me think; what if I would have followed this dream when I was their age. Obviously I'm not at a point in my life where it is still not a possibility, but I think my priorities have changed since the days of that little boys' dream. I will definitely keep an open mind thanks to this experience.