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Honduras Essay

As I reflect on our experiences in Honduras, one moment in particular is currently coming to mind. Perhaps I remember it vividly because it was near the end of the trip, but also perhaps because it beautifully captures what I took with me back to my “regular” life. While I cannot adequately sum up or reflect on this experience with words alone, I do hope this story finds meaning in your minds as it has in mine.

It was June 28th, a Thursday, our last full day in Honduras. We were scheduled to help out with the Kindergarten in La Cañada. Lindsey and Dave had always been so directive as far as these volunteering projects had gone, but today they left it completely in our hands. I remember personally feeling stunned, a little bit frustrated or upset because I really had no idea what or how I would teach these kindergarteners. I think we all were off kilter and very discouraged as to how we might pull this off. We had become so comfortable and used to Lindsey telling us where to go and how to do things; yet, when given the responsibility ourselves, we froze up. To compound our frustrations, we didn’t have any supplies, as we realized in transit, and we weren’t prepared to lead or translate.

However, amidst this atmosphere of confusion, panic, and nervousness, it was brought to our attention that this event was going to take place, and we were going to lead it, and we were going to have to solve this little dilemma. We all calmed down and got creative. After a quick stop at the gas station, 3 bags of skittles, plastic plates, and a few colored crayons later we had organized a day of fun and learning for the kids! Although it wasn’t perfect, the materials were makeshift, and there was the expected chaos of working with little kids, it happened and it mattered. I left sensing that our time spent there would be a lasting memory in the minds of the kindergarteners and I knew it would be for myself as well.

There are a few things that resonate through this experience for me. Firstly, when faced with a great challenge, how do we overcome the odds? We felt this weight in a small classroom setting but the feelings parallel the bleakness of making a dent in the social/political/economic plight of the world. We each have the capability and ability to affect this world. We cannot be afraid to do it. Be creative, work with what you’re given, be effective by learning how to learn from those with who you are in education. The means for accomplishing this lays in each community, in each family, in each person’s specific need—when we address these issues, the immensity of the large task at hand begins to deflate.

Secondly, no one has a “how-to” guide for participating in active and reciprocal service. We must adapt to new learning and teaching situations. Those who have gone before us and been successful have relied upon their own instinct and knowledge; in fact, I would bet they have relied on a community or network of support as well. We are no different from our predecessors. If we could find the confidence to practice solidarity and implement our own creativity and talents, we would find ourselves presented with opportunities of deep and meaningful exchange with others. We do not need to make this idea of service more difficult; if we learn how to listen, the parameters given to us will serve as our guide. Simply listen and then do with a willing heart and spirit, for one without the other is insufficient.

The third chord this experience struck in me is the reality of fear and apprehension. As individuals devoted to living in communal and reciprocal service on a global scale, we must stretch ourselves outside of our comfort zones. In this realm of unsurity we must take responsibility to listen and learn from our sisters and brothers. We cannot let our fear overpower the immense beauty that results from an authentic relation and intimate exchange. This point especially rings true when I consider how I might have felt if I were in Honduras by myself; without a guide, without a translator, without traveling mates. What if I were the one asked to plan and organize school programs, health services, etc., in which others would find meaning and hope? Could I do it? This experience at La Cañada reminds me that it is entirely possible. I can cast the doubt away because I have come to realize that I'm not the only player. Service is not about me; it is never about one person. Service is a community endeavor. Each experience and each personal exchange is never individualized. It is in this understanding that the idea of "stepping outside my comfort zone" no longer seems like a legitimate reason to fear.

I acknowledge that this essay is not a complete or comprehensive account of our experience in Honduras. It indeed does not even begin to scratch the surface of the personal and communal reflection that occurred (and continues to occur). But I do hope that it conveys a glimmer of what I learned: The opportunity given to us by the Lily Foundation has taught me that the pillar of understanding, doing, and being part of international and lifelong service, is seeking out the situations that make us nervous, uncomfortable, or in this example, frustrated. It is in these moments that we come to realize that striving for a life of worth and service must be founded upon the struggles that propel our learning and growth. What is more, these moments and experiences are the life source of coming to seek and better understand personal vocation.