

Service-Learning Blog Posts

Two Northeastern Human Services reflect on their time with service-learning:

Ariana Matos (Section 2)

My initial intentions for joining Strong Women Strong Girls (SWSG) were fueled by the desire to give back to the Boston community especially to young girls who face distinct forms of adversity. Challenges pertaining to identity, social life, self-esteem and academic success are all difficulties that I had a hard time managing or understanding between the age of nine and fourteen (and quite frankly I continue to at times). Therefore, I decided to help those in similar positions during the detrimental time of pre-adolescence.

Once service learning began, many experiences with the girls brought up applications of class knowledge. Because of this I decided to apply the DEAL model to critically reflect my service-learning experience.

1. Describe: Strong Women Strong Girls is a Boston based student organization.

Relationships are developed between mentees who are young girls, in grades third to fifth, and college students from the surrounding areas. A curriculum-based program is created and implemented which is carried out during mentoring sessions once a week.

The weekly curriculum consists of: a get active, the reading of an empowering woman's biography, an activity based on the lesson and a reflection of the session. We do this and a semesterly field trip with the girls in hopes of establishing a mutual relationship in which the mentees are exposed to valuable lessons and opportunities. While the mentors are able to learn from the girls and their experiences.

2. Examine (Academic Enhancement Category): I grew to learn that the mentoring sessions will not always go smoothly. Depending on the mood of the classroom prior to starting the session, what the girls are receptive too can vary. Their energy and treatment of others can take a toll on the effectiveness and quality of the session as the behaviors of one can affect another. During one mentoring visit there was a bullying incident that did not allow of the girls to enjoy themselves or even the mentors. As a Communication Studies major and Human Services minor, I was able to apply some skills and knowledge from class to the situation. Interpersonal communication and reflective listening can change the dynamic of a conversation with a child and can demonstrate to the mentee that what they say to you matters and that you act as a supportive outlet to them. Being perceived as a confidant who listens to their emotions and needs can do wonders to the mentor-mentee relationship resolve many issues that may affect the rest of the group.
3. Articulate Learning: Ultimately, I learned the harsh realities of pre-adolescence and that common attitudes and behaviors leading to bullying can be mediated through tools that I have been exposed to in a classroom setting. When working with children you have to think and act on the spot, especially during SWSG sessions that are limited to a certain time. In order to ensure that the bullying does not lessen the value of the session or that anyone leaves feeling hurt, communication and counseling skills are effective during these scenarios. Moving forward, I will look for more skills from my counseling class, to apply valuable skills in a real-world practice that is important to me as it involves the empowerment of young women who should uplift one another.

Ana De-Niz (Section 1):

My service-learning took place at Hurley School, where we played and interacted with kids that were in 1st grade. The school coordinator in my group, Callee, helped to lead the activities with the kids as well as coordinated with the school administration to set up all of the initial things with getting placed with the school. In our weekly M3 meetings we would prepare our activity for the coming week based on the weekly theme that varied from community to celebrating differences.

The goal of Peace through Play is to promote non-violence and empower students through play, which I was able to witness firsthand in our classroom every week. When a conflict arose between two of the kids in our classroom, we would explain to them why it was important to apologize and further mediating the conflict by having them do an activity together. Throughout my service-learning, I realized that individually my strengths lied with one-on-one attention with the students and I could improve on my communication with them as a group. As a group, we could've improved with using the amount of volunteers we had effectively because there were 5 of us for only 19 kids, thus there was a lot of potential of utilizing our volunteers to their greatest potential. Sometimes we tended to clump to the same cluster of kids in our group and thus we could've improved on giving equal attention to everybody.

Throughout my semester of service-learning, I strengthened my skills of communication and leadership which I believe are translatable qualities that are needed in many activities. In particular, these qualities will aid me in the classrooms that I will participate in the coming semesters as I am continuing to participate in the organization as well as in future co-op placements. I also learned in my service-learning about the different methods and forms of play

with children such as free-play, where they are more open to do whatever they want with very minimal restrictions so as to express their creativity and freedom. I will be able to further explore the different methods of play and their effectiveness in coming semesters with the organization.