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***Final Reflection Paper***

Reflective Letter - Chiraag Kirpalani - 1290 Words

To be very honest, my purpose of taking this course was simply because I was advised by Ms. Murphy, my advisor that as a transfer student, I needed to start filling out my "AOK" requirements. This class fit my schedule, so I registered. In my past, I have always had a great passion for working with the elderly (Greenwich Hospital Escort) and underpriveledged children (My own charity and years of coaching and instructing basketball). So, needless to say, there was interest in the volunteer requirements of this course.

However, to be even more honest, when I reviewed the course schedule, and saw the work that was expected such as the exams, and the term project, I felt that this course may not be suitable as I was in the midst of an 18 credit semester. I actually scheduled a follow up appointment with Ms. Murphy to withdraw from this course, but I missed that appointment, and retrospectively I'm glad I did.

Before I discuss my experiences at United Hebrew, I first want to acknowledge tremendous maturity and dedication displayed by my classmates throughout the course of this semester, most specifically the folks that worked in the study room with me; Ebony, Syed, Alaina, Melissa, Kitty, Naima, and Emil. There were times when we faced difficult situations, especially at the beginning especially when we were all unaccustomed to our routine, and most importantly our students. I look back with admiration on instances where one "team member" would cover so quickly for another, in the event that he or she was sick that day. Occasionally, there would be a student or two waiting, with their teacher not present due to illness or family emergency, compounded with instances where there were simply not enough computers for use during a specific time slot. Both the aforementioned could be have been disasterous. And as a "veteran" of volunteer work, and having seen it all as far as situations becoming ugly, I am extremely impressed with how efficiently each person reacted.

I spent a lot of my first session, day - dreaming about the irony involved with sitting with these two unknown senior citizens named Edith Blatt and Marion D'Ariano. I found it ironic how much I would be able to have this opportunity to be able to sit down with my own grandmother in India, and work with her on learning objectives that I planned out for my students Marion and Edith. I felt if I could only have this opportunity to teach my grandmother, whom I truly adore, how to use skype or email, perhaps we would be able to communicate daily, as opposed to bi - monthly.

I connected very well with both my students. Edith often called me the jewish word for "child" and "grandchild" throughout the semester. Marion and I shared so much in common, despite our 50 year age difference. Many times I felt I was sitting there, next to my own grandmother. This connection, unfortunately, also played to be a little distracting and disruptive at times. With both students, it turned out they enjoyed my company so much, they would spend a lot of our short sessions talking about rather personal items. I will not disclose specifics of our conversations, out of respect to both of them, but I quickly started to believe that simply being a "listening ear", and just be someone that they could be comfortable "releasing" to, may be more prudent then trying to force structured lessons "down their throat." Sure, I may have not quite been on track with course requirements, but I just felt at the time, it was the correct route to undertake. After 3 sessions, all we had to account for was setting up email addresses, and a thorough introduction to how to use the internet. I had anticipated completing all of that after Week 1.

I was in a little panic, I felt very soon you would start asking me why my students were not progressing as they should. I quickly decided to try to use this comfortability they had with me, to an advantage. I felt, and would later prove to be correct, that I would now be able to push them a little harder, not common to typical strangers had I tried to push them that hard after Week 1. Both Edith and Marion had different learning styles, and enthusiasm levels. (Described thoroughly in my blogs) This proved to be reflective of what I was able to cover with Edith (only email, Google search, and basic internet usage) and Marion (Everything I wanted to teach and more, from knowing how to use her own Facebook account to shopping on Ebay to chatting on Skype). Edith was an extraordinary person, but very stubborn. For example, she wasn't willing to stay a minute after 2:59 pm, because of bingo, regardless of whether we were in the middle of making some huge progress. In the later weeks, I decided to bribe her. I told her that if she practiced using the internet, and collecting email addresses so we can email relatives and friends the following week, I would personally, on my own time join her for Bingo. She loved that idea, and fullfilled her part. I fullfilled my part, and I thank Melissa, Alaina, and Syed for accompanying me for some rather entertaining (a lot of undercover cheating:)) Bingo that afternoon.

Marion was a dream student. She was attentive, enthusiastic, and very hard working. She practiced throughout the week, and asked me questions that enabled my lessons to be extremely productive. She had some tough days, due to personal family matters, when at times she would simply break down and cry after reading a spiritual email from her daughter, or a picture of her grand - daughter on Facebook. With everything that was going on in her life she inspired me on a very deep level. I was watching this 70 year old lady, show true resilience and determination by still coming to these classes, and still showing a sense of poise and dilligence in learning. This touched me, and was inspiring. What I loved the most about working with Marion was the routine we developed, which made working on to new steps so much easier, and also allowing our lessons to be extremely productive. For the first ten minutes every class we quickly checked her emails, then proceeded to covering material from last week, and spent the remaining time (usually 10-15 minutes) on learning new things.

At graduation, I had prepared myself with a written speech for the event. It was soon evident however, that I was the only one (or one of a small number of people) who did this. I didn't want to put the rest of the class out of place, and also put myself out of place by standing up and reading from a paper. In a few words, it would have been weird and excessive under the circumstances. I felt I could accomplish the same effect of expressing how proud I was of the both of them, with an individual conversation. I expressed to both how much I hope they keep in touch.

I am extremely proud of both Edith and Marion, despite their different achievements in this course. I love the both of them, and offer lifelong prayers for them, beyond technology usage, and course requirements. I will always remember the both of them. I feel like this class had one of those effects, where I will look back on it in 40 years and start a conversation with "In college I took this course that....."

Thank you Professor Coppola, and Thank You to all my classmates.