

Final Report

1. Introduction

Which one sounds more attractive and fun? A trip to Myanmar or a service-learning trip to Myanmar. Well, probably the former one for most of the people, or maybe everyone. To be honest, before my service-learning experience, I would also share the same view. I cannot deny but the major or the only reason for me to apply the experience at the very beginning is because it is a trip, a trip to somewhere that I have never been to. I should also admit that if this service-learning experience is being held somewhere in Hong Kong, most likely, I would have not applied for it. All these confessions have clearly shown that I did not join the trip with good reason or intention, but no bad ones either. For I was very willing to serve and help, just that this was not the very reason for joining. However, why am I admitting all these when the professors and the schools would surely not be happy when hearing or knowing this? That is because after the Myanmar service-learning trip, I have then carried this good cause of solely helping others and joining different service-learning activities and service activities in Hong Kong. Therefore, I would like to share what I have learnt from the service-learning trip to Myanmar and how did it positively changed me.

As I have said, I joined the trip all just because I wanted to go to Myanmar, even though I was not really that interested in the service-learning part. However, that was no longer true after we arrived at Andrew Orphanage School, where our service targets, the kids, live and go to school. The warm greetings by the kids, the smiles on their faces, and their great performance to welcome us, all have melted my heart. We were all very touched by the kids, we could feel how grateful and excited they were about our visits. From that moment onwards, I was no longer just interested in the touristy activities but I was very looking forward to the time that I will be spending with the kids. My passion was no longer about traveling to a new place, but traveling with a new purpose which is to serve the children. I just wanted to be around them and hoped that I could really teach them something useful or that they could feel that people are caring about them and willing to help them out.

2. What I have Learned?

Our main goal of this service was to provide them with knowledge and bring them happiness. At the same time, I, as the student, have also gained knowledge and joyfulness from them.

After this trip, the kids taught me that lack of opportunities or resources is not an excuse for not being able to learn. I was so impressed by the positive attitude and the proactive learning attitude of the kids. Unlike us, they have much fewer learning materials and access to education, therefore they cherish every single opportunity. Throughout our teachings, all of them actively participate in class. I would say even though their education is not as good as ours, it does not mean that their learning ability is weaker. They are more innovative and creative than us. For instance, one of the tasks was to ask them to hold a fork with the use of toothpicks, the kids have come up with loads of methods. While most of us, the

participants, could not even come up with any single idea. This made me realize that a relatively comprehensive education system does not mean that the students must be any better. As I could see their passion and eagerness in learning, which could be rarely seen in Hong Kong students. Sometimes, the learning ability is much better if kids themselves explore and learn on their own instead of being confined to the conventions and being spoon-fed.

Another thing is that I have a wrong perception of the kids' personalities. They are very different from what I thought, as I thought growing up in an orphanage would be like growing up without being loved and cared for. Therefore, the kids will be more likely to be reticent and quiet. However, out of my expectation, the kids are very close to each other that they will take care of and help each other out. I could feel that their growth is full of warmth and love and they are quite content with their growing environment. After a few days, I realized why the kids are with that much love, as the principal of that school is a really nice and loving person. Even though there are nearly one hundred kids, not only does he remembers all their names, but also told us explicitly the strength and personality of each of the kids. This shows that if one really wants others to feel comfortable around you or to feel that they could rely on you, one must treat others wholeheartedly. I think the principal is the reason why the kids are so positive in everything and with great personalities even they have had some unfortunate events in their lives. This has taught me that in the future if I were to serve others, I would have to treat the service targets just like the way the principal takes care of the kids.

3. Difficulties Encountered during the Trip

3.1 Lack of Understanding

Before going on the trip, I, as the leader of the Art Team, believed that we have prepared perfectly for the trip. We prepared all the materials accordingly to the activities and we have come up with two handicrafts for younger and older kids respectively. However, we realized we have underestimated the kids. The YMCA volunteers told us that what we have prepared was too simple for the younger kids and we must figure out some other handicrafts so that the kids will be more interested in it. It was not hard to think of another handicraft for them, but it is extremely difficult to switch to another handicraft as we only have the limited materials we brought to Myanmar and nothing else. We have to make sure that we have sufficient materials for all the kids to make the new handicraft item. Luckily, we managed to amend one of the handicrafts and borrowed some extra materials from another team and did some reallocation of materials. At last, all the kids enjoyed the Arts section a lot.

From this experience, I believe it is important for us to confirm with the volunteers or the schools there before we go on the trip, to ensure that what we prepared or planned should be suitable for the service targets. In turn, the service could then run more smoothly, and we could serve them rightly.

3.2 Communication

Another difficulty I encountered is communication with the kids there. Since their first language is Burmese and not all of them know English. Therefore, during the teaching process, I have to spend a lot of effort in explaining myself using some hand gestures or using some very simple way, like a few vocabularies, to give them hints about what I want to

say. Luckily, some of the older kids in my group could speak some simple English. Thereby, whenever I wanted to tell the group something, I will ask him to pass on the message to me. However, I still do think that it would be even much better if I could be the one to speak directly to all the kids.

4. Improvements

Surely, I do think that this trip is quite successful as we were able to keep the attention of the kids regardless of the language barrier and our inadequate. Yet, there is still room for improvement so that the next service-learning trip could be even more successful.

4.1 Before the Trip

As aforementioned, the activities that we have prepared are not exactly suitable for the kids. Therefore, I believe it is better if we could come up with some backup plans during the planning trip so that we would not be that panic on the spot. If not, we could consult with the experienced volunteers or the school, as such there will be more certainty and lower the chance of having some big amendments during the trip.

Besides, it would be better if there are more meetings before the trip for students to get to know each other better so that during the trip we could communicate and cooperate better. Since during the trip, not all the students could bond together, we grouped in different small groups and only chat with that group of people. I believe if all of us could interact with all other students, we would be able to serve the targets much better as we would be more organized and unified.

4.2 During the Trip

For my group, we have prepared a lot of small materials for the handicraft session, such as glitter, beads, wooden sticks, and some tools. We have separated the individual items accordingly to the number of students per group, however, it was in chaos at that time as some groups do not have this or that and some groups got the wrong number of items. In turn, we wasted a bit of the time in settling down all the groups. It would be much better if we could be more organized, like using a large bag to pack all the materials that are prepared for each group.

4.3 After the Trip

To advocate service-learning to other students as one of the goals of service-learning, an exhibition is held to showcase our trip moments and our post-trip reflection. Hoping that the participated students could advocate the benefits of such trips to those who know nothing about service-learning or have yet participated in it, in turn, more students would be willing to participate in such service-learning activities. However, I believe more has to be done for the post-trip.

Organizing an exhibition is surely a great idea to advocate service learning. Yet, how many students would have stopped by the exhibition and spent time reading the lengthy paragraphs? I doubt if anyone is reading the boards. Besides, the content of the exhibition, like the reflections of the students included were nothing deep nor meaningful at all, as we were just talking about how happy we are throughout the trip and how grateful to meet everyone else in the team. Such reflection does not really allow us to reflect on what we

have learnt throughout the trip and hence, other students could not actually know how meaningful service-learning is.

Therefore, to ensure the benefits of service-learning could really be advocated and conveyed to other students, I suggest the participated students can hold an interactive sharing to all students instead. Not only would it be livelier, more attractive, and interactive, students could also ask the participants about some topics that were not covered in the sharing, or something that they are curious about service-learning. I believe having such an interactive sharing would be more effective in advocating and this could better encourage other students to join service-learning, as words, sometimes, could not really explain or show how the participants felt.

In addition, I have also observed that not all the participated students in the service trip have joined the post-trip activities. Since the exhibition was not organized by all of us but just a few. After we came back from the trip, some of the students have disappeared and did not even do the short reflection I mentioned just now. Even though there were debriefing section for us to reflect every night during the trip, it was not that useful or effective. Since everyone was already exhausted and did not really have the effort to reflect on their performance and what they learnt on that day. Besides, after the debriefing section we still have to prepare for the next day's teaching. So, the time for each of us to truly reflect is not enough. Therefore, I suggest the school could hold some post-trip discussions that are mandatory for all the participants and the session is guided by a faculty member. The faculty member will ask a series of questions, and those questions are not just what we have learnt but more specific, like how we learned that from the trip, why it will be useful to us in understanding that, how will this understanding help us in other aspects and how could we allow or advocate this understanding to other people. As such, the students could really reflect on themselves, listen to others' reflections, and see if there is anything that they could not learn about or realize but others could. Throughout the discussion, the students could reflect upon the others and have more comprehensive and thorough thinking about the purposes and the outcomes of the service-learning trip.

5. Conclusion

There is one more thing I have to admit apart from all those mentioned at the beginning. I am really grateful that I have such a great opportunity to participate in one of the service-learning trips with Wu Yee Sun College. I learnt a lot from the kids and also know the true reason why I want to join service-learning activities in the future. It is simple, I want to help the community, therefore I want to serve. My service-learning trip is not just about making memories in Myanmar but making memories with the kids in Myanmar.