

Service Learning 2012

Awladi orphanage



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Reflection Essay

Abdullah Sobhy, Abdullah Naiman, Ashraf, Habiba, Imed, Mahmoud, Mariam, Naser, Sayd, Seif, Sherif, and Sobhy are kids our service-learning group is teaching. This is our third year of working with these kids. I was always surprised with these kids' growth and developments. During this project, I could realize and learn many things. Because these kids are in an orphanage, little difference among kids will create problem. Our group brought colored pencils for drawing and writing. I can see each of the kids wants to get more colored pencils than others. There was at least once fight because of the colored pencil. In the beginning, it seemed like kids do not want to share anything with others because they all held the colored pencils on their hands. But now, they changed a little bit. In some tables, kids put all the colored pencil on the desk and share it all together. Our group always took closer look to make everything equal.

In addition, teaching English was not an easy task because it was hard for us to communicate with these kids. Because of the fight or just because of their naughtiness, learning environment was distracted. Also some kids did not have an interest on learning. However, when I personally encouraged kids and took care of them, they started to see everything differently and started to work with a lot of effort. Our service-learning group decided to divide the kids into groups so that we can take care of them more closely. This helped us to look closer what the individual kids need and also made the kids to be more focused. Even though I am not fluent with speaking Arabic,

it was surprising to observe how kids and I can communicate and actually make them to learn another language.

As I continuously worked with these kids for three years, I could observe changes within myself. First, when I see balloons or other equipment that looks enjoyable to kids, I always think about kids in the orphanage. I was concentrated with the fun activities after teaching English to kids. Also when I walk down the streets and see street kids, I really feel I need to gather them all and teach them something, for example English or mathematics, so that they can have a basic education. However, it seems like parents cannot either afford to send their kids to school or do not know the importance of primary education. I think this is because the parents are also not educated and consider education is not an important issue. This is the problem of Egypt. People should have a better quality of life so that they can seek for education and improve their life. There should be improved policies over the education.

Another problem I observed in the orphanage was hygiene. People in Cairo claim that the Awladi orphanage is in good condition. This is true. Awladi orphanage is in good condition compared to other orphanages. However, I can observe serious problems with the hygiene. Kids' teeth are always yellow or even black in serious situations and stuffy. Boys have a lot of wounds but it is either not treated or cleaned. I personally think this is because of unconsciousness of the guardians. The guardians are either do not care about these kids or do not have medicine to care them or do not know they need treatments. I think this again arises problem of education. People do know what is detrimental to their health and how important hygiene is. The challenge to the Egypt is that how they can improve the consciousness of education and health to the citizens.

Since our group worked on the Awladi orphanage for three years, kids and guardians recognize us and I feel that kids feel comfortable working with us. I can also observe a lot of improvements. Sometimes, teachers were invited to the orphanage and teachers taught karate to the kids. Also I met another service learning group from other schools who wanted to work with this orphanage. I could see Awladi orphanage is becoming more known to other people and other people are now becoming aware of helping others.

I frequently ask this question to myself. Did I really make a difference? Learning alphabets, words, and conversations will not change kids' life immediately but this will be their start and beginning of learning other language, English. As we progress more and also other people continue with this project, kids will be able to learn more advanced English. They now can easily write their names and words in English. I remember when I first met this kids. They had hard time writing alphabets but now they can use these alphabets to form words. I really hope all these efforts by them and us can help their future.

Lastly, the problem of education in Egypt is serious problem that needs an action to improve. Because parents of the street kids do now know why education is important for their life or they cannot afford education for their kids, they leave their kids. When they are educated, they will start to think differently and improve themselves for the future. This will also resolve the problem of health and hygiene. With the education, people will have more awareness toward the health issues and can live healthier life. Education in Egypt is essential and solution to this problem is urgent.