Service learning & culture
Introduction

This paper ties together my “hands-on” experience at George Marshall Elementary http://itcdland.csumb.edu/~restrada/361/home.html with my study and learning about culture and equity.

In this paper I will:

• Define and describe the concept of culture and compare my own culture with another culture using my conceptual understanding and experience in your Service Learning environment (reflections)
• Processes my own identity within the context of my own culture and recognizes that the same process can be found in individuals across cultures
• Analyze and describe the concepts of power relations, equity, and social justice and provide examples of each concept in the American society and other international societies

My service at George Marshall Elementary

My service learning site is George C. Marshall elementary school and is located in Seaside. This elementary school is part of the previous military installation known as Fort Ord. The schools mission statement is as follows:

*As a small, nurturing, collaborative community school, Marshall Elementary educates all children to realize their highest potential and achieve their personal best through enriching and meaningful learning experiences in a safe and supportive environment. Every school is unique--at Marshall our various populations make up a colorful quilt of experience from which all students draw. We serve students from many branches of the military as well as a substantial local student population. Our Dual Language program attracts native Spanish and English speakers. The texture of our community enriches our purpose and enlivens our daily experience, making our collective Marshall mission a diverse, rewarding effort.*

The community surrounding the school is made up of families with someone in the military, in other words, its military housing. A lot of these military personnel are attending the
Defense Language Institute (DLI) and will be living in this area from a year to three years. In the meantime while they are here, their children attend the George Marshall elementary school. The school serves to young children from kindergarten up to 6th grade. I find that the classrooms have a mix of different ethnicities with different cultures such as Hispanic, Black, White, Asian, Indian, etc… However, no one race dominates any of the classrooms that I’ve been in. I did notice that most of the staff at the elementary is composed of Caucasian middle aged women and they do a great job at teaching. From observations, the economic level of the students is difficult to tell, but all teachers seem to have about the same level of income; made this observation by observing types of vehicles they drive and the way they dressed and I observed that they all live within the same level of income.

My supervisors name was Robert Morgan, who also happens to be the principal of George Marshal elementary school. Upon arriving at the site, Robert gave me a briefing on what was expected on my part and what I would need to accomplish by the end of my service. We concluded that day by agreeing to my original goals for the site. The first goal was to maintain the networking lab throughout my time at the site. I was also tasked with updating all computers and then move the most efficient computers to one side of classroom and the less efficient ones to the other side. Finally I was to provide technical support for any hardware or software issues that may arise at the site. With these goals being said, the overall scope of my work was to provide technical support to the computer lab, troubleshoot any hardware or software issues that may arise at the site, and to educate the staff on proper computer maintenance.

I was fortunate enough to achieve my original goals (as described above) and I was also able to surpass them. As of April 19, 2011, I had completed all my tasks and I still continue to fix any upcoming issues at the site. The reason that I achieved my original goals is because I had Rohit Reddy working with me at this site, and together we were able to tackle each issue that was listed on the ‘computer issues’ sheet. Because of our teamwork effort, I had success at completing my goals. These successes consisted of updating the computer lab & moving all efficient computers to one side of classroom, and also providing tech support for any hardware and software issues. My biggest success was fixing a smart board monitor that been broken for almost a year and no one could fix. The I.T department couldn’t fix it, the previous tech tutors couldn’t fix it, and I fixed it during my time at the site. This was my biggest accomplishment, knowing that I could fix things that no one thought was possible.
The only issue that came up in my mind as being unsuccessful was that we had to deal with two separate campuses. Trying to provide tech support to two different sites (Marshall West & Marshall East) was difficult due to the fact that we were only working 2 hours a day and often, we could not go to both sites to fix issues. As a result, West campus received the most of the tech support; however, we were able to fix all the tech issues at the East campus before our time was done.

The only recommendation that I would recommend is for the next tech tutor to attempt to make the site as self sustainable as possible. The tech tutor should work at making everything that relates to security or updates of the computer to be automated. I made sure that I automated the updates for security software, operating system, & any of the applications that needed update on the system. This would allow the computer to continue to function properly and still get the critical updates that these systems require long after I am gone from the site.

**Cultural comparison**

My definition of the concept of “culture” is as follows: A set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution, organization or group. This also involves an integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for symbolic thought and social learning. There are three concepts that are found in culture, power relations, equity, and social justice.

Power relation: this translates to the power of influence that others may have on you. This concept is applied to both men and women depending on the culture and gender. Depending on the culture that you were born into, you will have a different set of values and opinions than someone with a different culture. We are all influenced by those around us, and that influence defines who we are as an individual.

Equity: One of the main issues that come up with equity in all cultures is the roles that genders play in that society. All societies would like to have a culture that has ideals of being just, impartial and fair to everyone.

Social justice: The idea of creating a society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being. We are calling for equality for all, regardless of the status of an individual.
Since I am second generation Mexican/American, my culture is not the same as my mothers. I believe that I would be classified as Americanized in my family. I differ in a lot of aspects with my family, topics such as music, food, religion, politics, preference, and the list continues. It is not a bad thing that I am very different from my first generation family, in fact it is because of my differences that my family enjoys my company and I enjoy there’s. It is this passing of ideas and information that changes both my way of thinking as well as my mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and all. I enjoy listening to modern music, both English & Spanish and my first generation family only listens to Spanish music from Mexico. I prefer to eat different types of foods from different cultures, and my family only eats traditional Mexican type food, and I must say that it is very delicious. In terms of our language, I speak Spanish and English, however, my Spanish needs a little help and my aunts English needs a little help too, so we often converse and practice speaking the language that we are not good at (Spanish for me).

I did observe the culture at my service learning site, and I observed that most of the staff is Caucasian and they all speaks Spanish. I was amazed that they spoke Spanish so well, and they explained that it’s because there are a lot of Spanish speaking students, but the classes did look to have the same amount of different types of students of different types of cultures. I believe that because it was a work environment, everyone acted respectful and professional, and I was not able to observe any other difference in culture amongst the staff. The only noticeable difference is that they were not tech savvy as Rohit and myself are.

Through my understanding and appreciation about the different types of cultures I observed at the school, I learned to be more understanding and patient with students and staff. Patience is the one thing I have learned by observing how the teachers interact with the students. If the students don’t understand the material they are learning, the teachers show patience and try other ways to explain the material to the students. I also apply the concept of patience when I am dealing with a staff member and their computer issues. Often they may be frustrated because their computer might not be working, and by showing patience and explaining to them why it’s broken and how I’m going to fix it, I find that I get better interactions and results. This patience pays off because teachers don’t have a good understanding of the technology, and taking the time to listen to them makes my job a bit easier in narrowing down the issue.

The act of disciplining your child varies depending on the culture. Me being Hispanic, If I did something wrong, it was very often that we would get disciplined by getting hit with an
object (i.e. belts, shoes, hangers, branches etc..) and rest assure that I would always think twice if
I knew what I was about to do was wrong. However, it is common in the American culture not to
hit your child; in my case, it would be seen as child abuse. However, I turned out well, and
believe that part of my ‘wellness’ is because I was disciplined by sometimes getting hit. Some
would argue that kids might grow up to be angry against their parents, however this happens in
all families regardless if they get disciplined the way I did or not.

It is widely believed that universal access to information technology will promote
economic development, global interaction, and learning that can in turn enhance standards of
living and improve social welfare (Pee & Kankanhalli, 2010). Lacking equity can be seen in the
poor communities, which are often composed of minorities. One of the prevalent feelings is that
there tends to be little concern for the people in that community. There may be very little police
presence and often there is a lot of inequality towards the treatment of people in these
communities. There tends to be a lack of funding towards these poorer communities, funding for
things such as roads, lights, maintenance, community projects and so on. Richer communities
tend to have a lot more investment made into them; police presence is welcomed. This example
is prevalent throughout the U.S. and often is encountered around border areas between the rich
and the poor communities. If people could have access to information technology, they would be
able to enhance their standards of living and improve their social welfare by seeking information
that was not readily available before.

Throughout the course of history, one group (or more) has had better access to computer
and information technology than another faction (McMurtrey & McCaughey, 2011). I believe
that everyone lives closed off into their own little bubble. People seem to not care or be too
distracted to care about what is going on around them. "Unless everybody (in a country) has an
opportunity to be online, the nation will fall behind" (McGuire, 2011). If people opened their
minds and actually observed what was happening in their communities, their countries and the
world and actually do something about it; then we could move towards a society that can be
based on principles of equality, a society that understands and values human rights. We would
live in a society that recognizes the dignity of every human being and we would not be living in
such a corrupt and materialistic society where people are judged by their gender or the way they
look or whatever faults one believes another to posses. This is what I believe is needed for social
justice to prevail.
Conclusion

At the beginning of the semester I was expecting to do a lot of writing and also volunteer work my site. I did work for a recreational facility during high school, and part of my job was to interact with kids from kinder through 6th grade. I did understand that there aren’t that many people that are willing to give up a few hours of their day in order to help out their communities. I must say that I am guilty of feeling this way before participating with service learning. But after doing my service learning at the George Marshall elementary school, I’ve realized that they are a bit behind in terms of using technology to teach students. Rather than simply focusing on access as the quick fix for the Digital Divide, we need to concentrate on information technology integration and training (McGuire, 2011). Technology is supposed to be the future, yet the staff is not very knowledgeable with the technology at hand and they can’t pass the knowledge that they don’t have to their students. That’s why user training was one of the objectives that I was working on, since fixing a problem won’t solve anything else but the problem. This has made me want to continue to provide technical support to this school after I am done with my service learning. It also has changed my mind about what career field should I pursue, should I stick with networking type jobs for the government? Or try to work for a school district and attempt to bring education to another level by making technology available.

Before this class, I really never put that much thought into digital divide in the society. After taking this class, I realized that my family is part of a digital divide. I have access to technology while most of my family has no access to technology. I understand now, the importance of having access to technology and the advantage that it brings to an individual who has access and understands how to use it.

I enjoyed going to George Marshall and fixing every computer issue I ran into. I enjoyed getting thanked by the staff, teachers and students, and I most definitely enjoyed the applause I would receive from the students after I fixed a tech related issue. I also enjoyed meeting new people and establishing network connections. I recommend for everyone to try volunteering at least once, you are positively influencing the community and it also makes you feel good in your core.
Bibliography