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Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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Gracie Abbiati

"Gracie"

Text Box

My Biography: What I Am Bringing to AHRC New York City

My name is Gracie Abbiati and I'm from a little town called Montville in Connecticut. I was born in Bolivia and came to the U.S. when I was two years old. I just recently transferred to Pace University this Spring semester. For now I'm a Business-Marketing major but I'm also thinking about doing a minor in Communications as well. I attended a multicultural elementary school, which meant that it took kids from the 8 neighboring towns in about a 10 mile radius. I would say that my elementary school was far from the "norm." I knew kids from all different backgrounds and cultures, unlike the public elementary school in my town which was predominantly white. However, in middle school I attended the public school in my town. This is where I would be introduced to the Leo's Club. In middle school I wasn't very involved in it though, it wouldn't be till high school where I would get fully involved in this group. But in middle school I did get involved in Girl Scouts, mostly because my friends did it but I had good intentions. I attended Montville High where I was involved in many after school activities. Such as Student Government, FBLA, Leo's Club, to mention a few. A majority

of these groups had us do some type of community service but none as much as Leo's Club.

The Leo's club main goal was to do community service wherever needed and that's exactly what we did. We would also do a handful of fundraisers and then at the end of the year we would select a few organizations in which we would present them with the money. We would do Halloween, Christmas, and Easter parties for the kids also. As far as the community service part of the club we would go and pick up garbage off our local roads, help pass out water in the local road races, etc. Another group that I was involved in that wasn't necessarily community service but if anything it would inform people. Like I said above I was involved in Girl Scouts and we did this one thing that would help kids understand. I forgot the name of the program but we would do plays with puppets that had disabilities. The main idea of the skit was to teach little kids not to be afraid of them and respect them.

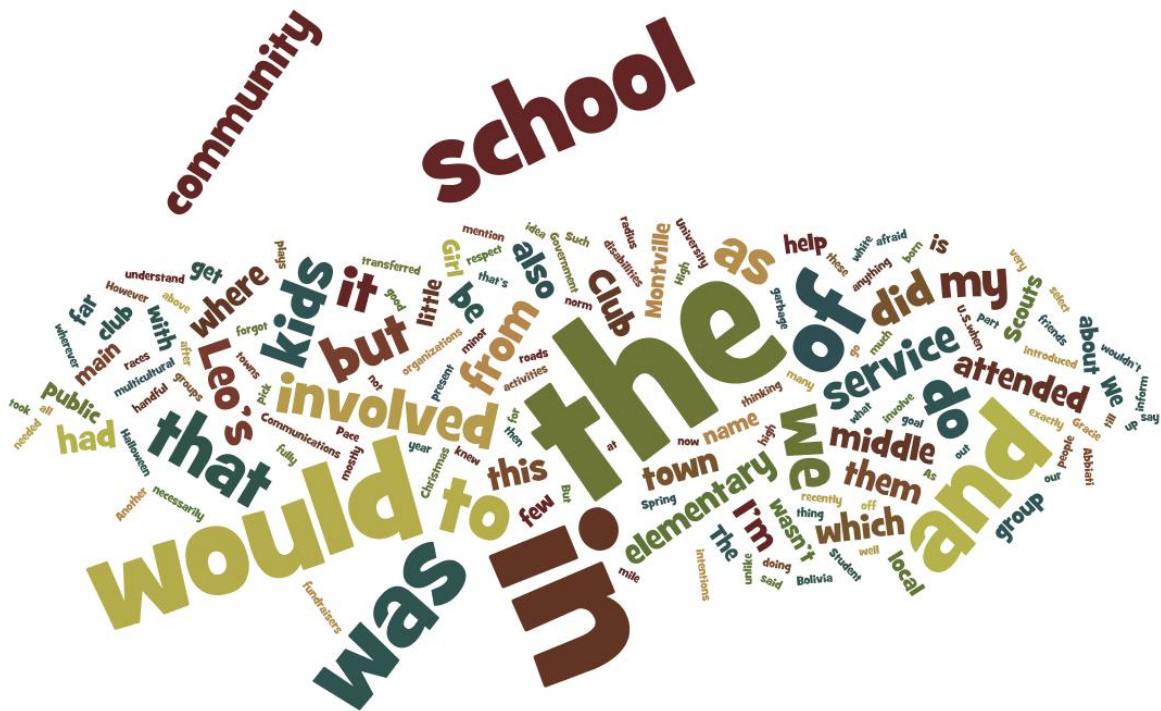
About Me



Me :D



My "Wordle"





What I Like

- I enjoy watching the Disney Channel
 - Favorite Shows: Shake It Up, Wizards of Waverly Place, Good Luck Charlie, Jessie, Ant Farm, Phineas and Ferb, Fish Hooks, So Random and Austin and Ally.



The Big Building



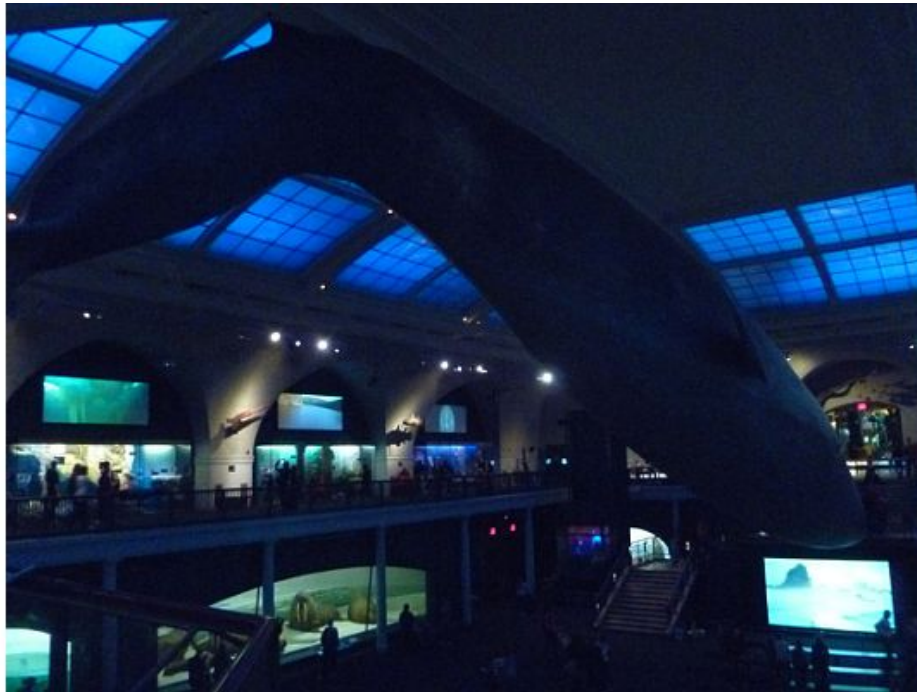
Subway- Museum of Natural History



A Rock Gil Liked



The HUGE Blue Whale!



"Day of Service" Tour Guide



Day of Service





- View My Project

PowerPoint Slide 2



My Mid-Term Reflection Journal on [Book] DisabilityLand and Project

DisabilityLand by Alan Brightman is a story of a man and his experiences with people who have disabilities and everyone in between. From the cream of the crop like Fortune 500 companies to people you have never even heard of or will ever hear of, either way the stories are captivating and it brings light to this situation. Mr. Brightman's book is almost like subtle "how to" book. There are stories of people on both sides and how they had to deal with certain, sometimes awkward, situations. Mr. Brightman divides his book up into three sections. Common Nonsense, Learnings, and Leaps. For this mid-term reflection I will also divide my paper into the same sections as Mr. Brightman Common Nonsense, Learnings, and Leaps; I will also incorporate my experiences thus far with Gil and my other partner Casi and what I've learned in class.

Alan Brightman first "chapter" is Common Nonsense, and as his chapter is titled it really can reflect the stories of which are written in it. From the puppy that was taken back due to its deformity, to Billy the 63 year old who couldn't write his name in script, and to the status of that 5thgraders nails and his parents' good standing and how it wouldn't be by the time Thanksgiving came around. All of these stories really capture what Mr. Brightman was saying when he titled it Common Nonsnese. Each time I would read one of these narratives I would be here shaking my head wondering why people don't just stop and think sometimes, "*common nonsense*." I think that's the reason why people don't stop to think about what they're about to do or say, they act on impulse. They may realize after words that they didn't mean to do or say it, but it's already too late and the damage has been done. When I read the story about the mother taking

away the dog because it was deaf like her son, it was a little hard to read. Not textually but emotionally, this woman whose son was deaf was directly denying this dog from being a part of this family all because of his disability. It's obviously very hypocritical but alarming and upsetting as well. I wonder how she thinks of her son, does she hate him not as a person but solely on the fact that he has a disability? *Nonsense* is what I would call it, common?, I'm not sure hopefully not. While reading this short passage I sat here just shaking my head in disbelief. Why couldn't this mother just accept this dog that was really the same as her son? The next story also had my head shaking in disbelief as well, it was a story about a 63 year old man, who was called Billy. Now already at this point I was shaking my head, because this senior citizen was still being called as if he had turned five recently. Really there is no need for that, he is still human and he is a senior citizen his name should match his age, disability or not. Continuing, Billy was a 63 year old who couldn't write his name in script, or at that at all. The explanation, "He'd never...need to write his name at all. Ever." (pg 9) Just all of this had me really shaking my head in disbelief, the fact that they would say that he wouldn't even need to know how to write his name. One of the things that makes you different is your signature and that freedom was taken away from Billy. It almost seems as if all respect has been lost, they don't address him properly and they don't really encourage him to be himself an individual. To say it lightly it all seems "silly" that really any of this is happening, *Nonsense*. But as I continue to read more of these it seems as if this isn't just a random out of the blue happening, it's most likely happening around the world and on many occasions. To incorporate this with my own experiences I've actually witnessed some "*common nonsense*" not only here but everywhere but this instance in particular was right during this class. When we went to the AHRC building and had a presentation on the Adult Day Services the older lady who had been there a long time was speaking and near the end someone I guess was laughing. I don't know if they were laughing at her or not but it didn't set well with her. She continued and said how throughout her life, time and time again she would get laughed at. While I would call it "*common nonsense*" that people would laugh at those with disabilities for them it's probably more a "common annoyance" if anything. It's just something that they have to deal with on a daily basis and while most times they can forget about it, at times it gets old and they will lash out like this older lady did.

The second “chapter” is called *Learnings*, Mr. Brightman incorporates his own stories with the reader and how not only he himself but how some of the smartest people in the world could learn a little about those with disabilities. I feel as if this “chapter” is more about the curiosity of the common people and how it can inform us and also inspire us to do more. It goes through stories of innocent children asking simple questions to “the right word” to the Apple Engineers scratching their heads to a definition of handicapped from one who is from that group to the mean blind guy. All of these stories stuck out to me as ones that really from both sides they learn something. The children simply asking these questions that seem blunt but as adults we don’t even consider we just ignore and forget about it. When they don’t know something children are the first to ask and yes they might be offensive they don’t know that they just want to know. They have no filter but society as a whole takes their harsh questions and sometimes ignores them. Like in this passage their questions are easily forgotten there are other important things to be learned. I’ve learned that society tries to ignore those with disabilities and handicaps, I’m not sure why but I think it might be due to the fact that we’re too scared to know. Unlike the children we’re too scared to know the “unknown” its “safer” just not to stare or not to know. While reading this book it seemed as if that bothered them the most was the staring. I don’t blame them, being looked at constantly because you’re different, it must get old quick. Something else that gets people uncomfortable is what to call “them” and what’s the “right word” to call “them.” Charles made a good point to the panel of experts saying how he should be called by his name not a label given to him by society. Why should he be given such a harsh name by us and have to live with it, Charles makes his own decision as to what he’s being called and I applaud that. Charles really gave me and the panel of experts some insight as to how it really is and how it should be, *Learnings*. It’s easy for us (people with no disabilities) to forget about how easy our life is, we don’t have to wonder if there will be handicapped ramps or if the school provides special education courses. Same thing happened to the Engineers of the Apple computer, they simply didn’t know and forgot about them. But when Mr. Brightman came in to test out their skills they easily failed the handicapped test, nothing from their innovative computer which could almost do everything failed to those who need help the most. But something happened, *Learnings*, this opened their eyes to things that they never would’ve considered if Mr. Brightman and his crew came to them to discover the flaws. With

people like Mr. Brightman to inform us we can continue to make a change in the perceptions that these people face on a daily basis. To apply this to Gil, my partner for this project, when I do see him he's teaching me things that I don't think I could get from anyone else. Like his likability towards everyone, he doesn't judge, while I know people out on the streets will always judge him, he's one to not judge. Gil has taught me not to judge people, as humans though we're prone to this it's in our nature. But recently I've noticed when I meet new people I've had open mind and I try to get to know the person before making any kind of judgment. Not only Gil but this class, including this book, has taught me so much about what these people go through, how they deal with it, and how they continue to live their lives like everyone else.

The last "chapter" of Mr. Brightman's book is called Leaps, when looking at that title is pretty much self explanatory. Where chance and putting yourself out there were some of the themes in these stories. The idea that if you put your mind to it you have a chance and you can accomplish it. One of the stories that was captivating was the one about Marcus the doctor that had gotten Lou Gehrig's disease and wrote a letter to Apple for their help. The disease would attack his motor skills so he would have to find a new way to use their computer. What I think is amazing about this story is instead of being miserable and thinking about how this horrible disease is going to kill him he did the opposite. Being a doctor he knew what it would do to him so he prepared himself, still wanting to use his computer he would need the help of the Apple Engineers. He put himself out there to this big company and they listened, *Leaps*. "You don't know until you try." This can be easily attached to the list of very successful people who have learning disabilities some include Einstein, Eisenhower, and Walt Disney to name a few. While we labeled these people those who couldn't do it, they defied the odds and succeeded, *Leaps*. We as a society need to take that *leap* and believe in these people that they can do more than what we expect from them. In many cases these people have extraordinary abilities but we don't give them the chance. The last story I will share is when Mr. Brightman was invited to go to Denmark to look at their system and how they treat those with disabilities. Both countries have to prove to the government that the money they're using is going towards helpful programs for the handicapped. But the way both countries do this is very different, the U.S. simply showing documentation of where the money goes and

such. But Mr. Brightman learned that they do it very differently, they would let these people go around and show them the facilities. They would have them there for the weekend to show them exactly where the money was going. Its moments like this where Mr. Brightman will take this all in a possibly bring this information back to the U.S. This is where we can take *leaps* to a better system here as well. Showing those people what these programs are really about and putting them right into the setting. This all leads to the next step and this could lead to more grants and more money if they know exactly where the money is going. In relation to my partner, Gil, he loves Disney Channel and a majority of the shows that they run on that network. I remember watching Disney when I was younger but as I got older I drifted away from it. But in order to understand my partner more and to be able to have a conversation I've recently watched the Disney Channel, *Leaps*. While the shows on here are silly I wanted to furthermore understand Gil and his personality and what he enjoys. The class is kind of *aleap* for me, it's something that I've never really been a part of. To be honest I was a little nervous when I heard what it was all about, I have never been around someone with a disability. I didn't know how I would react to them and vice versa, but I took that leap, and I'm glad I did. I've learned so much from this program so far and we still have weeks to go. *DisabilityLand* is a fun place where we can all come together and forget about our differences and embrace about our similarities.

Final Reflection Journal

My Final Reflection Journal on Impacts of Semester

Not only has my partner made a huge impact on me this semester but this whole course in general has make a big impact on me. As a result I feel as if I have made a big impact on my partner, Gil, also throughout this semester. He has taught me things that I feel like no one else could teach me but him. Gil is such an interesting individual that has so much to offer, I feel like we all need a Gil in our lives, he keeps things balanced and exciting.

The first day I walked into the “classroom” beforehand I had never really been around someone with disabilities let alone working closely with someone with disabilities. When we went over what was expected over the next several weeks I was a little nervous. Because like I had said before I had never really talked to or been around people with disabilities. But something that both this program and Gil taught me was to be more open to anything and accepting. I think that Gil also learned a little of this from Casi and I. When we all first met we were all a bit shy, like during any new meeting we all didn’t know each other and were a little hesitant in the beginning. But within the first class Gil would tell us his interests and things he enjoyed to do. That’s something that I think I’ve attained from Gil. I know I’m extremely shy when I first meet anyone but being with Gil these last couple weeks I’ve learned to let that shy barrier down and just be open to everyone. Something I notice from Gil is that he’s very happy to say hi to anyone with a big smile on his face. Another thing is that he doesn’t judge people, he isn’t the type of person to look at another individual and see them by their “cover,” he first gets to know them. This is something that I’ve slowly been learning from him as well. Today, it’s so easy to judge people by the way they look and/or act and by those judgments we’ll bypass some amazing people. I feel as if I have been able to become more accepting of all people and open to what they have to offer because I know they could offer up a lot, just like Gil.

Something I think that Gil might’ve learned from Casi and I was to be a little more patient. As we all know Gil loves computers and Radio Disney and when he sees a computer he’s the first one to jump on it and start browsing the web. This became a challenge during the semester for Gil, especially during the first couple weeks we would ask questions about him. At first he would give us quick answers that would be it and he’d be back to the internet, but during the semester we were able to get Gil to answer our questions with full sentences. Also there was another instance where everyone was going to the Brooklyn Bridge and Gil wasn’t sure if he wanted to go or not because he would have to leave his computer. But Casi and I convinced him that it would be a good idea and that he would come back to his computer after we got back. Luckily, he had a blast walking around the bridge and raved about how much of a good time he had. It’s these little steps that we were able to make Gil comfortable with us and trust us enough to go out on the bridge. I feel like it was the first week of the program he

would've been very reluctant to have gone and would've rather stayed in class. It's these little things that will make a difference in his life as he gets older as well.

This course has really taught me lessons that I will be able to use down the road in life. While these students, like Gil have to have "disabilities", I think of him as a different way now, he's just a normal kid with many, even more abilities. Abilities that have taught me lessons that I felt no one else could've taught me. He can do things that these so called "normal" kids can't do, he has so many abilities that really impressed me and that I've never seen in anyone before. Gil is someone I will never forget he is someone who I wish has many success in his future. I'm so thankful to have chosen this class, it really blew my expectations out of the water, and I know I will walk away from this course with so much insight and how I view people and life. Which for me at least, I can't say happens to me in all my classes. I would just like to say Thank you and that this course is amazing and you should continue to do it. I've learned so much and I feel as if others will too, it's an amazing program and I thank you for all your efforts towards this class.

My Certificate!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Certificate of Service Learning Participation

This is to certify that

Gracie Abbiati

*In recognition of your exceptional participation in the
AHRC New York City and PACE University Partnership*

Spring Semester 2012

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