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# Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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**Pema Choki**

## **My Biography: What I am Bringing to AHRC New York City**

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*I was born and raised in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. Ever since I was young I loved singing and music that my ambition was to be a singer. However, that ambition slowly faded away as I grew and I became more interested in money. After about 12 years of pampering being the youngest in the family, I was sent to a boarding school. For my middle and high school education, I was in an international school in India for about 6 years. Being in an international boarding school was a lot of fun. Getting to know many different cultures and living with them was all a great learning experience. After getting my high school diploma I got accepted into Pace University and I decided to join the Pace community with a goal to major and excell in Finance.*

*All my life, i was very interested in community service and doing good deeds for the environment and for the needy community. This is partly an inspiration from my mother who does a lot of community service herself at home. I was very engaged in all the community service activities that my high school organized and was the top three students with the highest community service hours several semesters. Some of the community service i was very engaged in was "The Green Team". By being a part of this team, we would plant trees do gardening at plant nurseries, etc. Another one was caring for the senior citizens at "Mercy Home". Here we would sometimes cook for them, change their sheets and clean their rooms every two weeks, entertain them and sometime we even used to do general health check ups like checking their weight, blood pressure, eyesight etc.*

*I haven't really done much community service at Pace yet so I'm really looking forward to working with AHRC New York city and getting credits for it! =)*

**Me!**

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**Friend in this course - Steven**

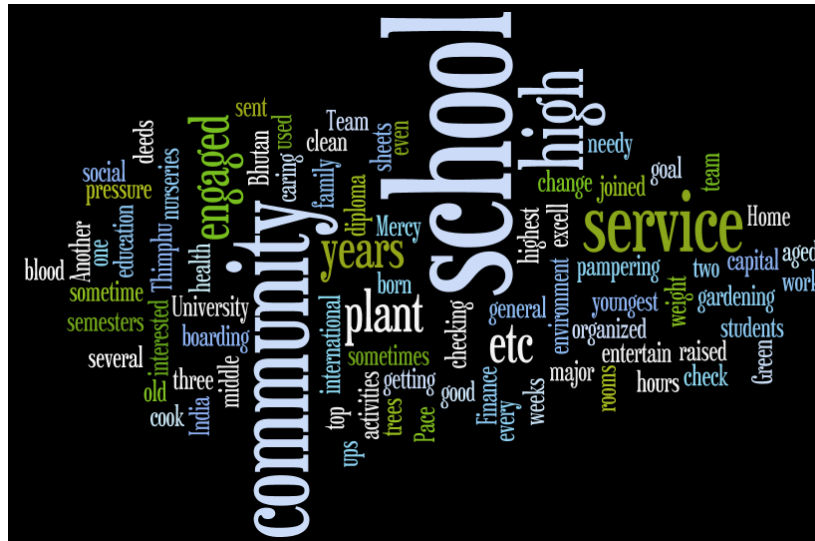
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**Friend in this course – Aziz**

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“The toughest thing about being disabled is that you’re never perceived as just plain ordinary. Because when you’re disabled, the world always looks at you as someone special, as someone exceptional.” This quote is words from an individual with a disability. It’s interesting because I think that an individual without a disability would have never had that sort of a perspective. DisabilityLand was so interesting and made me realize so many things that I would have never understood myself. In this journal, I will explain some parts of the book and my experiences with an individual that has a disability.

It's funny how the book has these short stories of how people have no common sense sometimes. For instance, the story about the how some retarded young adults were chewing on rugs and causing damage. The institutions solution was to have all of his or her teeth removed. I mean do they think that an individual with a disability has no feelings? The book mentions another incident where a bathroom was renovated to accommodate the handicapped by making the stalls bigger, having aluminum bars to assist in balance, and lowering the sinks for those on wheel chairs. However, they don't lower the mirrors. This was probably not intended but like Alan Brightman says, it seemed as though a message like "the mirrors, of course, are only there for aesthetic purposes, so we figured there'd be no reason to lower them" was conveyed. I think even a child would think of lowering the mirror if the sink was lowered. However, the main point with these stories I think is that the lessons never end.

The first time I ever encountered individuals with disabilities was during my high school years in India. We were on a field trip for community service and an activity involved helping a group of Christian nuns look after mostly children who were abandoned by their parents because of they were physically or mentally challenged. Ever since, I always

wondered how life was for people like them and I'm not afraid to say that I thought that they didn't fit in in this world and sort of hesitated to help in the beginning. However, once we began interacting with them I felt a little sorry and thought it would be best if I pretended not to notice.

After the first session for this class, I was a little nervous when the syllabus was handed to me. After reading the "Disability Etiquette" booklet that was handed to us in class, I was more nervous. Then the day came when we went to AHRC. I kept saying to myself to pretend that I didn't notice. We met with our partners and interacted with many other individuals with a disability and I realized that I wasn't nervous and thought that this is going to be fun.

When I met my partner, Sylvana, I was so excited to get to know her because she was so outgoing and friendly. In fact, I admired her courage to talk to me because I myself have a fear of meeting new people and communicating. We both love singing and I was happy at the fact that she loved watching music videos one after the other just like I do. I love the fact that she says everything that pops up in her head. Actually I could say I'm envious of that because I generally keep my emotions and thoughts to myself but sometimes I wish that I could just let it out. A difference between us would be the willingness to write. I despise writing but Sylvana, I think she could spend hours writing whatever comes to her mind. When I made her type under the notes app on the iPad 2, I think she enjoyed it but then I had to stop her as we were running out of time. The sound when typing brought a smile to her face too and that brought a bigger smile to my face because I felt like I made her discover something. But the best is when I see her sing. Apparently, Sylvana used to be a very quiet girl but she changed completely when she started singing. I notice the difference in the whole energy she has when anything related to singing pops up. Singing is so important to her because that always makes her eyes sparkle and her body starts moving to the beat.

A quote that interested me from the book is "Just because I couldn't speak, they thought I had nothing to say." These words are so strong and it opened me up much more. Anyone who meets an individual who cannot speak shouldn't conclude that he or she does not have anything to say. That's why I feel like technology is doing miracles for some people. For example, Lois the tour guide from the video clip we watched in class. His life seems so much better already with that talking device. This situation would be best described by saying "the great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do." Also I feel like pointing out that he or she is disabled is rude. For instance, stereotyping is not such a great thing practice because it affects the people being stereotyped. Similarly, labeling and marking things as "Special" and "Regular" would probably affect the feelings of individuals with disabilities. One might start to wonder why he/she is always treated as special and want to be treated as a regular like the rest. In general, I've learned a lot from the book as well as Sylvana and I hope that I can help Sylvana more with the iPad and singing and I hope my project comes out great.

## My Final Reflection Journal on My Project

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Silvana is 28 years old and she has a passion for singing. With an incredible pitch and an ability to harmonize, she loves to sing songs of her favorite singers Cyndi Lauper, Paramore, and Vitamin C. Silvana also loves fashion and tends to match the things she wears everyday and she loves to shop at Claire's. She also loves all kinds of food and I noticed that she gets excited about eating lunch every Thursday that I visit. Writing and saying anything that comes to her mind is one of my favorite personalities of hers. In general, those were some of the things I got to know about my partner while working with her on a project to make a movie this semester.

When I was first assigned to be partners with Silvana, I was just given a paper with her name and my name and the venue where we would meet every Thursday. I was surely nervous about meeting her and wondered how she would look, what sort of a disability she had and whether it would be easy to get along with her, as I don't have very good communication skills. And since I was partnered with her based on our interests, I was only thinking of ways I could get to know her better in terms of singing or related to singing. However, I got a completely different feeling when I met her for the first time. She was as excited as I was and she was very friendly and spoke to me very comfortably. That, I must say, was a big relief of me because I have trouble communicating with new people. Therefore, the meeting and greeting was an easy process for me and we got to know each other little by little every Thursday.

The technology that we used was the iPad. It was both Silvana and my first time using it but it was very user friendly and we both managed to get around the technology. I was impressed with her when she went on the calendar application and on the date of her birth, April 20<sup>th</sup>, she created an event and started planning her birthday party. Other applications we used to work on the project were the video, notes, and mainly the iMovie. I'll admit that both of us, with great interest in music and singing, slacked a little during our meetings every Thursdays by watching music videos on the iPad of Cyndi Lauper and Vitamin C on YouTube. Therefore, we had only about two and a half days, to be exact, to really finalize on our project and put together everything.

However, I don't regret that we had very little time to do work on the project. Because on all the other days, we spent time getting to know each other more, ate meals together, visited places together, and went window-shopping together. And because I got to know her better, working on the project was easier and I knew what I had to focus on about her life when making the project. Obviously that was singing so both Silvana and I decided that we would invite a Carnegie Hall member so that she could sing with her and record it and use it for the project.

In conclusion, it was a really great experience for me to get to know Silvana. I have volunteered in other places before too but I was never partnered with an individual to work with for an entire semester. I learned to accept things and to be happy with what I have the most. It was always heart warming to see Silvana and even Vincent and Emily to be smiling most of the time and to be so happy to see the Pace students every Thursday. Like someone said

earlier today in the boardroom, this is just like the beginning of our friendships. I know that Silvana likes me and she and I are always exchanging compliments and I think we make each other's day every Thursday. But I'm sad to say that at the end of every class, its lunch time for Silvana and sometimes she forgets to even say bye when her lunch is served. Also, I feel like I have to mention that while I was sitting at Dunkin Doughnuts one day, Vincent, who seemed to be passing by and knocked on the window when he saw me and gave me the biggest smile and said hi. That made me feel very happy and I feel like more people in the world need to be accepting and friendly like Silvana, Vincent, Emily and many more.

## Certification of Completion

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