MG – Special Education

Multicultural Minority Experience Paper

Part A:

The first experience that I chose was the Special Populations Halloween dance on October 27. This was a dance held at the Morehead Parks and Recreation center for any people who have special needs. I thought it was such a good idea to hold an event for these people who would not be celebrating Halloween in a traditional way. At first it was very overwhelming to be surrounded by people with special needs.

I was one of the two people who judged the costume contest. It was our job to identify the best duo costume, the cutest costume, the scariest costume, the best adult costume, the best child costume, the funniest costume, and the best overall costume. It put a lot of pressure on us because there were so many great creative costumes. When it was time to announce the winners, people cried when they found out they didn’t win. It broke my heart that people were that upset over the contest.

I met many people while at the dance. One girl, Rachel, told me she loved to dance. She spent the night on the dance floor singing and dancing all night long. I found out that she sings opera for the people in her group home and that she teaches belly-dancing classes to her friends. Her Halloween costume was a pirate looking costume and she told me it was a ‘Carmen’ costume. Another girl I met was Nicole. She is very short and loved to laugh. Her costume was a vampire witch. She is nonverbal and so communicating with her was very tricky. I had a hard time
understanding what it is she wanted. A third person I met was TJ. He was a very big
guy, wearing red footie pajamas and a utility belt. There were many odd things on
his belt, including a plunger, a yoyo, SPAM, and a Nerf gun. He told me his costume
was ‘Super Blanket’ and his costume was completed with a blanket cape. He
introduced me to his fiancé, Bathsheba, who also has special needs. It really warmed
my heart to watch them hold hand and talk about their future together. The entire
night I tried my best to interact with as many people as possible, I talked and danced
with so many people there. I think it was a very successful and beneficial night. I
really enjoyed being exposed to this population and working with them.

The second experience I chose was the Special Olympics. The Special
Olympics was a statewide event, there were over 900 athletes from over 50 counties
playing one of five events. The five sporting events that were held were tennis,
bocce, roller-skating, golf and soccer. I wasn’t just a volunteer; I was a part of the
games management team. I was the information services specialist at the roller
skating venue. This meant that I was running the info table, selling souvenirs,
checking in day of volunteers, and passing out lunches to the different teams. Each
event also had an athlete representative. These were special needs people who were
there to help run the information services table. The athlete representative for
roller-skating was a woman named Dena. I had met Dena at the Special Populations
Dance and was so excited to be spending the weekend with her.

All day Saturday, November 7, and all day November 8, I was at the roller
rink working. It was a blast! I was interacting with many special needs athletes, the
parents, the coaches and the other members of the games management team. Dena
was such a help, and so positive greeting all the athletes as they checked in. I met a lot of athletes from different counties. I recognized a lot of the athletes representing Guilford County from the Special Populations dance. It was so great to watch the different athletes personalities come out and watch them skate. The first day of skating was the preliminaries, where the counties skated individually to see the skills of all the people on the team. The second day was the competition and the awards. The games were broken up into different categories, skills tests and then speed tests. The skills test were for the athletes that were not ready to compete against the very fast people. The skills were tests like skating from one cone to the other. They did not go around and do laps. The speed tests were the people moving very fast doing laps.

The athletes were all so happy to be competing and cheered each other on all day. One athlete I met was Paul, from Pitt County. He was 49 years old and very silly. He would come up the souvenir table and pretend to steal things and then come up and tell me he likes ‘messing with me’ because he likes to hear me laugh. He was so sweet, and even introduced me to the other members of his team. Another person I met had the nickname Lightning, who had lightning bolts on his shoes. Lightning was an older gentleman who was nonverbal. He was very reserved and kept to himself. He competed in the skills set challenge where he had to skate from one cone to another and then back. I was told that he has been competing for over ten years and that his wheels were fused to his skates. I was very confused, but as he competed I noticed that he walked in his skates to the cones. They fused the wheels to make it easier to walk. I thought it was amazing that a competition like this would
allow and accommodate to the athletes like that. Everyone cheered for Lightning while he walked the course. I also met twin ladies who called themselves the Ladybugs. They were identical twins with the same disability and everything. It made me smile to watch the ladybugs cheer each other on. They told me that they love hair and even played with my hair in between events. The stayed together the whole weekend and were simply adorable. I really felt that I was working well with Dena the athlete representative and all the athletes. The entire event was so welcoming. I was so humbled from the experience and cannot wait to volunteer again next year.

Part B:

When I was in high school I was in a club that worked with the foreign exchange students in our school. Our school had about 300 exchange students out of the 1,000-student body. Most of the exchanged students were from Asia, some were Swedish, Spanish, Italian and German. We would host events at or near the school to help the exchange students feel more welcomed.

One event we had was a trip to the bowling alley. Most of the exchange students had never been bowling before and the trip was a bit of a disaster. People were throwing the bowling ball like a football across multiple lanes and one person even through the ball up and broke a light on the ceiling. Another trip that we took was to New York City. We went as a Christmas trip and visited the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. We also went ice-skating at in Central Park and visited the Empire State Building. It was a good trip and the exchange students loved it.
I became very close to one exchange student from Spain. Her name is Valle de Maria. She was in many of my classes including chorus, physics and theology. She was so sweet and we became very attached. During the year her boyfriend from back home broke up with her and her and I cried together. She talked to me about everything. The last week of our senior year she had an unexpected heart problem and had to leave and go back home. She missed prom and graduation. She reached out to me online and told me what had happened and we again cried together. I have not seen her since but we still keep in contact and I hope to visit her soon.

This club made me a minority. I was surrounded by lots of people from different countries that barely spoke English. I really loved being a part of the club and meeting new people. The issue I noticed was that most of the exchanged students formed clicks of friends and would prefer to talk to the other exchange students then the American students.

This experience is similar to my current experiences. Some of the exchange students did not speak English and the language barrier was difficult. At the Special Populations Dance and the Special Olympics there were many nonverbal people. Finding a way to communicate was a struggle for me. I didn’t want to come off as superior or snobby talking to the nonverbal people. I had to find a way to communicate in a positive and productive manner.

The experience was also very different than my current experiences. The exchange students were not very welcoming. They seemed closed off to people outside their culture. It took a lot of effort to have fun with this group. They seemed like they didn't want us to bother, and wanted to be left with their own group of
friends. The people from the Special Populations Dance and the Special Olympics were completely different. These people welcomed me with open arms. They all came up to talk or interact with me. Many wanted photos with me. It was such a friendly, positive and inviting experience.

Part C:

These experiences have been so incredible. I am so thankful and fortunate to have experienced both of these events. I have learned that if you look past people’s disabilities you will be welcomed and loved by them. You can have just as much fun with people who are different than you, as you can with people who are just like you. Even as a minority if you are open to the experience it will be worthwhile. I have also learned that I work really well with people with special needs.

I plan to be a resource teacher, so these experiences were excellent exposure to me. The events have impacted the way I plan to teach because they really showed me that I need to treat all people equally. I cannot expect people with special needs to perform lower than other students. If I set the bar high for all of my students they will strive to reach that goal. I understand some students need differentiation in instruction, but I think that keeping it positive is the best way to handle it. Just like everyone cheered on Lightning who was different, walking not skating, everyone encouraged his efforts and cheered him on. No one laughed because he was different, and that is how it should be in the classroom. Everyone in the classroom should feel welcomed and comfortable. I am a huge advocate for stopping discrimination and I think that if people are informed and exposed to other
minorities at an early age they will grow up accepting other people. I plan to educate my students about many minorities, I believe that exposure is key.

It is important to experience being a minority so that you can relate to how some of your students might feel. If you are put in a position where you are the outlier you can help guide your students who could be struggling with the same issue. I also think it is important to teach your students how it feels to be the minority. Some students are raised in very sheltered communities and they might not be exposed to situations like that, exposing them to life outside their own is so eye opening. I left both events with a smile on my face and happiness in my heart. I cannot wait until the Special Populations Christmas Dance to see the familiar faces and help provide a safe and enjoyable celebration to the special needs community. I think that my key takeaway is that I am happy helping others. I have always felt this way about helping others, but I think that these experiences have reaffirmed my career path decision.
Artifacts

Special Populations Dance:
This picture is with Rachel, dressed up as Carmen.

Special Olympics:
Maggie and Dena having fun:

Picture from high school with Valle de Maria, on our trip in NYC: