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Essay

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Staying Interconnected: Cherishing Perspectives

Thinking back to decisions, and experiences that I have had, makes me realize that many things have led me to become more open-minded, reflective, and it has broadened my perspective for what goes on in my everyday life. There has been such a wide variety of things that have led me to become more globally competent and to be able to use this to strive for a more interconnected world. Something that comes to mind for being immersed in different perspectives, worldviews, and different cultures was when I traveled to Italy and lived there for three months.

During my time in Italy, I lived with a host family. I attended school and started to follow along with the Italian way of living. Being only immersed in different cultures a handful of times on family vacations before this trip did not prepare me for the culture shock that I was met with. Having been born and raised in Canada and then suddenly finding myself in a different country, culture, and just general way of living was something that I had never experienced before. But as I started to take each day as it came, it made me realize that different ways of living were quite beautiful. One thing that comes to mind here was mealtimes. Every single meal, breakfast, lunch, and dinner there was almost like a sacred time. Everyone in the household came and joined each other with the table nice and set, where we would start with a prayer, a meal that usually consisted of pasta, and then a discussion afterward.

This was a major contrast to what I was used to. In Canada, mealtimes usually consisted of convenience, and not taking time to slow down and catch up with the ones around you. This was something that I learned and carried on with me when I came back to Canada. I try to make a conscious effort on taking time to process things going on around me, slow down and be present, and not try and force myself to rush through moments, but rather enjoy the things and busyness going on around me.

Another thing that I have found to be beneficial in becoming more globally competent is being fluent in French. This has allowed me to develop more communication skills across different countries, and to help me stay interconnected with the world around me. When I was in Italy, there was a language barrier. I was not fluent in Italian, and it was taking me some time to develop a strong form of communication. Having had experience in French beforehand, allowed me to recognize the similarities between the languages, and helped me connect to how to phrase sentences in past/present/future because the two languages have very similar verb conjugations. Another thing that I found to be very useful was that a lot of Italians were able to speak French, so if I was having a hard time communicating, I could use French in some instances.

When I was younger, I volunteered as a candy striper at our local hospital. During this time, I would have conversations with each of the patients, watered their plants, bring fresh water, and deliver their dinners. In this situation, some instances were hard because it made me feel sad seeing and being around sick people, and individuals who were by themselves for days on end. This volunteer work made me recognize the value of human interaction, and the importance of being in a situation to have discussions and conversations with each of the patients. There was one patient that was there for the extent of my volunteer work. I would visit with her each time I volunteered, and she always seemed to be teaching me new things. One day when I came in to see her, she was a little down that she had not seen her family in a while. She had pictures surrounding her room of her family members, and every time she looked at them, her face brightened up. She looked at me and said something along the lines of, it’s been too long since someone has come to visit, and I am starting to forget what it feels like to be surrounded by my people. She also expressed that she understood everyone was busy and had their own lives to live. This moment stuck with me the past years. It made me recognize the importance of human connection, but it also made me think of the general premise of what life is like in Canada sometimes.

This instance showed an elderly woman in a hospital, sick, and yearning for her family. But looking around, it is easy to see people are very caught up in making money, establishing themselves, and are focused on the future, that being present is sometimes slipped through the cracks. This whole instance makes me see my experience in Italy, at mealtimes. How everything slows down, and you just be present in that moment. What I learned from the combination, and reflection of these things, is recognizing that depending on where you are living, there are different priorities, perspectives, and this can be very dependent on individuals’ culture, or even where they live. Through my experience of being immersed in different cultures, ethnicities, and countries, I have learned the importance of creating a multi-dimensional construct of a variety of things and learn how to use this in my everyday life. Moving forward, I want to continue to learn life lessons from other cultures and ways of living from a variety of people and places. I will strive to be as inclusive and use these lessons to continuously shape my mindset and stay interconnected. I feel this will enrich my life and those I connect with by always focusing on my connection with others, versus feeling rushed and focusing on material possessions.