

Jakob Leichtman
Supporting Kids in Peru (SKIP)
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Reflection Paper

This past spring I was fortunate to work for the organization Supporting Kids in Peru or SKIP for short. I was an English, Science, Math, and Sports teacher. While the job was unpaid, the experience definitely made up for it, and no I wouldn't trade my experience there for any monetary value. It wasn't that much of a struggle to manage living down in Trujillo, since their currency is a 1/3 of the value compared to 1 USD. While I ended up paying for a semester's worth of tuition there, I still believe and always will believe that it was worth it. It was a co-op where students had gone before. I did not apply to receive any funding or scholarships. Had this not co-op listing not been sent to me, I probably would never have found it. It wasn't listed on the co-op database (NEU Cool) but the website was emailed to me. I read up on the organization and their mission. I looked at the opening positions they had and decided that I liked what they offered and applied. I heard back very quickly and was accepted mid-October.

My 4 months with this organization were split up between two different curriculums/school years. January and February were the final months of their program called "Club Vaccacional". The best way this program can be described as is as a after school summer program. With this program, I met with the same primary groups 4 times a week, and then met with the secondary groups twice a week. During this program I was an assistant English teacher for group 2, tutored a mentally-handicapped student with her math studies, and co-taught sports for primary. With my secondary groups, I co-taught science with two other teachers. After the week vacation for the students and the regular school curriculum started, I became a solo English teacher for 3 groups that I saw twice a week, co-taught 5 English classes in a row with another volunteer at a separate school which met twice a week. I still co-taught sports two separate days (each day with a different teacher) and with different groups. I saw each group once a week for sports. Finally, on Wednesday's I taught English and then managed a multiage class with two other teachers for students who were only available to meet on this day due to their other school schedules. During my first two months I felt like I wasn't contributing enough to the team because I was hiding behind the other teachers, letting them take charge due to my embarrassment from the lack of Spanish I felt that I was expected to know, along with having no prior teaching knowledge before. However, when I got thrown into teaching on my own and then co-teaching at the other school, I gained a lot of confidence and really found my stride. That's when I started to see change in myself and how the students were retaining the information I was teaching to them. I could tell I was making a difference and it definitely felt better. Once the new school year started, I felt like a more vital role to the volunteer team and my duties certainly evolved and grew. More students were dependent on me and I had more responsibilities.

What I was hoping to learn on this co-op was to gain a better understanding of what type of job I would want in the future. I had never thought of teaching prior to this and now that I've returned and had some time to reflect on the matter, I can say that I enjoy teaching and could see myself in the field, but I don't want to commit just yet. I also wanted to see how I'd do on my first co-op, regardless of the type of work, just me going to work for 4-6 months internationally. Finally, being abroad for this amount of

time, I was hoping to find out, what I want for the rest of my life, who I want to be, and what I want to do. I know that's a lot to ask from a co-op but it delivered. I feel now that I have a better sense of what I want to do, where I want to go, what I want to do, and most importantly, what kind of people I want to surround myself with.

What surprised me the most about my co-op is close I'd become with all the other volunteers and how much I'd enjoy teaching. Not that I have problems with either, let me make that clear, I just wasn't expecting either. I thought that because I'd only be there for a short length of time that maybe my impact wouldn't resonate as much or that I wouldn't connect with the others as much. I later learned that would become false because there were many volunteers who were there for an even shorter period of time and made an even more remarkable impact. The people I volunteered with are people I honestly and confidently can say are the closest and most important people in my life today. As for teaching, I had previously never pictured myself in this field of work. I always looked at teachers as special and unique beings with specialized knowledge in their respective fields, providing students with the secrets they've learned over the years. I know, a little different perspective but because of that idea, I never thought that I could be one. I won't lie, when I started out, it was really tough, being responsible for all these student's well-beings, teaching them, monitoring them, and on top of that, all of it being in Spanish, a language I have had an on and off relationship with.

On this co-op and from the freedom I was given, I learned that I like knowing what the end goal should be but not necessarily having to reach the end goal. With SKIP, we had a curriculum that we followed but the timing of how we taught, how much we taught, and when we taught were up to us and I think that was a big factor as to why I enjoyed this co-op. I had to make lesson plans almost every night and I knew what had to be taught, but how the information was presented was completely up to me and I found that very helpful. Early on, I was able to discover what teaching methods worked with certain groups and was able to capitalize on that so I could make the most of each class and genuinely know that my teaching was getting through the students and that they were in fact learning.

The most exciting and meaningful part of my co-op was the teaching. I know it's broad but growing up having such a high respect for the individuals who taught me what I know and then being able to be the person teaching someone else is truly a remarkable feeling like no other. I felt that I could have been more prepared if I had teaching experience prior to this co-op but then I feel like it would have taken away from my learning experience and made it less special. I'm very glad with how this co-op turned out, especially for my first one and I couldn't have asked for a better one.

I have always been a pretty chilled out person, just enjoying life, going with the flow, not too stressed about things. Obviously I have my own problems that I have to deal with and new ones that arise but that's a part of life and I've made it this far so I can't be doing too bad. I know how to have fun while finishing what needs to get done. As cliché as it sounds, this co-op has made me for appreciative and grateful of the life I have and the opportunities I have and will gain in the future. Teaching these children and knowing what their "best life" could be and knowing that they don't know their future is a little depressing. When I was talking with some of the students and they asked how I got there, to Trujillo, Peru, when I said I flew down by airplane, it's as if I showed them water for the first time. They were surprised and in disbelief. These kids learn about everyday objects and such, but not seeing them in

person definitely has an effect on them. It's like learning about imaginary objects, people telling you they exist but you never get the chance to see them. As a result, I have become me just an updated/evolved version. I'm still very relaxed, don't let the little things phase me, and of course, enjoying life. When you break things down into simpler forms and appreciate the little things, I've realized I'm a happier person and I believe that can make others happy as well. At the end of the day, I know that I want to be helping, someone or some group, somewhere. It's part of who I am and always will be.