Scholar in Action Experience Reflection

ESL Curriculum

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My sophomore year at Babson, an alum came to the Bernon Center looking to start an English as a Second Language (ESL) program for the Haitian community in Mattapan. This alum, Jean-Marc Nicolas, is originally from Haiti and had to overcome many obstacles coming to the United States and not knowing the English language. He had to go through an ESL program and would not be where he is today if he did not speak the language. Understanding the difficulty of coping with a society that speaks a different language, he wanted to offer these services to the members of his church who are predominately Haitian and don't speak English. With the ESL program, Jean-Marc hoped that it would give this community the opportunity to excel in society and move forward with any goals that they have. Language would no longer be a barrier for them. Once Jean-Marc brought this idea to the Bernon Center, I was eager to take over the program with the help of Amy Mon, another Taylor Scholar. Although we weren’t trained English teachers, we both had skills that we thought would be valuable and determination to make the program succeed.

Starting out the program was very successful and we had a lot of the people that were interested in joining the class. We started out with approximately 30 Haitian adults and eventually were obligated to turn some people away because we were way over capacity. We lacked a significant amount of resources such as teaching materials, but we did the best that we can with what we had. Over time it became more and more difficult to teach because we didn’t have a set curriculum. We
would make out own curriculum on a day by day basis based on what the students wanted to learn and the responses to the previous class. Towards the end of the semester, this became more and more difficult to do because we (the volunteers) started to get overwhelmed with our own class work. Once I realized that this was a frequent issue in the program, I decided that I wanted to create a curriculum in an attempt to tackle this problem. I strongly believe that the curriculum will solve many problems the ESL program struggles with. For one, volunteers won’t have to worry about creating their own lesson plan. It will be all written out for them. In addition, it will help us to better track the improvement of the students. Since there is a structure and sequence, we can see if students are moving up or if they are staying the same with their English speaking ability. Lastly, I feel like it will be more inviting for volunteers to get involved. A lot of volunteers are hesitant about getting involved in the program because they don’t feel comfortable writing their own lesson plans. I am hoping that the curriculum is just one step in solving any doubts that volunteers may have.

Overall, this program has been very successful and I believe that we are really making a difference in the Haitian community’s lives, however, there is always more that can be done. One thing that I would like to see done better in the future is the relationship between Babson and the church in Mattapan. The church is aware of the program and what we are trying to do, but there is rarely any interaction between Babson and the church. Building a stronger relationship will help with communication and the future success of the program. In addition, I would eventually like to help the students acquire jobs. The majority of the students are unemployed because of their lack of speaking ability. I think that it would be very beneficial to establish a partnership with a job agency to help increase the employment rate of our students. If a group of students are interested in acquiring jobs in a certain field, we could help teach terminology for that particular job position. In closing, there has been a lot of growth and success in the ESL program, but there is always room for improvement so that we are making a greater impact in the Haitian community.