

Wrapping Up the Four Summer Immersions

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ABSTRACT

Reflection papers of four Regionalization Program students representing Region VI of the UP College of Medicine were reviewed. Common themes and patterns were noted that showed how their immersion experiences have changed their initial feelings and ideas when they started four years ago. Reflections have been an effective learning process in gaining new meaning and perspective of their past experiences.

Key Words: community immersion, reflection, regionalization program

Introduction

Reflection has been defined as *“a conscious and intentional examination of the behaviour, ideas and feelings generated by a learning experience with the purpose of increasing the experience’s usefulness to the learner”*.¹ As such, reflecting is a fundamental aspect in a learning process. Doing reflection and putting it into writing is part of the summer community immersion output of the medical students under the Regionalization Program (RP) of the University of the Philippines-College of Medicine. RP medical students write their reflection after undergoing a 1 to 2 week immersion in the communities of their home regions. The value of a reflective process is in gaining new insights and understanding about themselves and their environment.² Reflection also opens the possibility for personal growth and professional development.² Through the reflections of a group of RP students, this paper aims to analyze the common themes and patterns arising from their experiences.

Methods

Reflection papers of four RP medical students from Region VI who conducted their summer immersion in a community in Capiz were reviewed. This group of students started doing their community immersion as one group last

summer of 2005. Younger batches of students added to the group every year with a total of eleven members comprising the immersion group during their last immersion in 2009. The reflection papers that were reviewed were written after the medical students underwent four years of annual community immersion. Common themes and patterns from the reflection papers were noted. Consent has been sought from the students in reviewing their reflection papers.

Results and Discussion

Looking Back at the First Time

Common among the reflections of the students is the recollection of their experiences the first time they set foot in their chosen community to conduct their immersion. Although these initial experiences were expressed in varied terms, the reflections have allowed them to recall these experiences four years ago.

“Everything starts as a dream. It has been four years since we started our community work in Capiz. At that time, there were just four of us—young and green. All we had were ideas accompanied by little hope. I can still remember the day when we first set foot in the community. We were welcomed by unfamiliar faces, indifferant smiles, and strange greetings. We were like young soldiers who were sent to a battlefield where the war is about social change.”

“After four years of patiently going back to Capiz, I can say that we have just begun—at least a footstep ahead. I can still vividly recall our first days in the community.”

“When we started planning for our community immersion 4 years ago, we only had a tiny inkling of how to go about it. With our limited experience in community work, we only knew one thing - that the key word for our community immersion would be sustainability.”

“During the time that the group consisted of just four post-first year medical students looking for a community to do the immersion in, we were looking for a small, compact community that may derive benefit in terms of health from our possible yearly visits.”

Their initial feelings and ideas when they started their immersion four years ago have surfaced through their reflections. Indeed the significance of gaining new insights and understanding by doing reflection can be noted here when this group of students pondered upon their past experiences. These past experiences years ago have been

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enriched through the reflective process they have undergone. New perspectives have been formed from these experiences, making them more meaningful.

In looking back at their first year of doing their immersion, also consistent is how they perceived their succeeding immersions. The metaphor of a soldier to describe themselves to mean that it is a serious battle they have to deal with during their immersion. Explicitly mentioned at the very start is the thrust for sustainability. Another hinted to a possible continuous interaction yearly with the community. All of these are indicative that, at the very start, they have committed themselves to the community for the succeeding years. True enough, that for four summers they have been returning to this community to fulfil a "dream" that one of them pondered which started it all.

From Small Beginnings

It is also notable that expressions of "starting from little" at first are common as indicated by the phrases like "there were just four of us – young and green", "all we had were ideas accompanied by little hope", "we only had a tiny inkling of how to go about it", and "we were looking for a small, compact community". These feelings may have surfaced as they slowly felt their way in their immersion.

The following phrases that express a significant development from when they all started four years ago directly contrast with the initial expressions of their small beginnings.

"My group, now composed of ten members, went back to our community." "I saw how far we've come from our original group of 4 to one composed of 11 people."

"Then our projects got bigger and bigger every year, with the addition of more and more members of succeeding batches – more minds with great ideas, and more hands willing to work and to help out."

"Through the years we have come to include other members of Barangay Pawa, the larger community to which the sitio (sub-barrio) belongs to, and have come to conduct activities that may be of good not only to the sitio, but also to the rest of the barangay (village) and maybe beyond."

Through their reflections, they were able to highlight the development that occurred allowing them to realize that

their initial worries and concerns were completely addressed as they ended their summer immersion.

Hope for the Future

Aside from reminiscing on the early parts of their immersion experience, the students also expressed how their stay in the community may have had an impact not only on the present but may also have a lasting effect on the future. All of them have reflected with high hopes for their experiences with the community.

"I thought to myself that here was at least one community whose future would be more secure."

"Thus the importance of having programs and activities that leave behind a community that is empowered to take care of itself, and as we move on and the immersion program in the community comes to a close, we can count on the people of Barangay Pawa to do just this."

"I may not be able to see our dreams fulfilled, but I know that our dreams will be alive in the heart of some people who continuously believe that there is always a good future once hope is being treasured and lived."

Conclusion

Reflections have helped the students ponder upon their community immersion experiences for the past four years. Common themes and patterns as expressed by their feelings and ideas have been identified. It is notable through their reflections how their initial expressions of their humble beginnings in their immersion have changed into great hopes for the future as they immersed with the community.

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