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BBED 6806 Post-Departure Essay

The Beauty of Experiential Learning

As I sit here trying to piece together the scattered fragments of memory into something coherent, I find myself returning, again and again, not only to the journey itself, but to the very idea of experiential learning that it embodied. There is so much I wish to say, so many moments that have settled deep within me, yet the task of translating feeling into language feels, at times, almost impossible. Because how does one capture the quiet warmth of a genuine smile, or the strange, relentless peace of being so far from home? And how does one articulate what it truly means to learn not from textbooks, but from the raw, unscripted fabric of lived experience? I cannot promise that my words will do justice to any of it. But I will try, as honestly and as fully as I can, to reflect on what this country and its people have given me.

One lesson, in particular, has stayed with me, not because it was new, but because it was finally, viscerally lived. I have always known, in theory, that adaptation is necessary. But in Sri Lanka, adaptation ceased to be a concept and became a survival instinct. For those of us raised in the clockwork predictability of Hong Kong, the constant unpredictability: the tasks that rerouted itself, the plans that dissolved into laughter, all those moments that demanded patience was at first exasperating. And yet, slowly, we learned to let go. We learned to expect nothing and embrace everything. There was a quiet freedom in that surrender.

Throughout this journey, a phrase spoken by a friend echoed in my mind: "Learning is often uncomfortable, and we must unlearn to learn." How true those words remained to our experience as a whole. We came to Sri Lanka expecting to see, but we left having been seen. We came to observe, but we were transformed. And in that transformation, uncomfortable as it was, I found something I did not know I was searching for: a deeper understanding of myself, and a profound gratitude for the beautiful, chaotic, generous world beyond my own.

As a South Asian, I entered Sri Lanka with a certain degree of cultural familiarity—an intuitive grasp of temple etiquette, dining customs, and the nuances of filial piety within a South Asian context. Yet my identity is not so easily defined. The Hongkonger in me was constantly challenged, and I found myself watching with immense pride as my East Asian peers navigated and engaged with a culture so different from their own. There is much discourse today on the South Asian diaspora, but this course gave me something rarer: a sense of pride in my heritage, witnessed through the lens of East meeting South, rather than the conventional narrative of "East meets West." Born and raised in Hong Kong, I have long felt a deep connection to East Asian culture. But here, I was compelled to unearth habits buried beneath years of urban living. Something as simple as eating with my hands had

become unfamiliar to me and in that small, quiet realization, I grieved, just a little, for how Westernised I had become.

Beyond the cultural immersion, I wish to reflect on my time in the local school—particularly as a prospective educator. Though my degree is not directly aligned with education, teaching has always lingered as a possibility, a quiet calling I have never quite dismissed. In Hinduism, teaching is regarded as profoundly sacred, and I have always believed that to educate is to serve. I did not come to Sri Lanka merely to travel or to observe a different way of life. I came with the sincere desire to grow as a person who might one day influence others, to lay the foundation, for when and if, the kind of educator I hope to become.

And what did this trip teach me about teaching? The children we worked with were unlike any I had tutored in Hong Kong. They possessed an innocence that was disarming, and a remarkable ability to find joy in the simplest of things, a skill that feels almost extinct in our relentless capitalist society. They taught me how to adapt, how to cherish small moments, and how to receive love and respect as an older figure in their lives. It was a privilege to witness their delight in our presence, and I truly believe that such cross-cultural encounters can shape young worldviews by exposing them to people of different colours, cultures, and knowledge. I hope this experience was as unforgettable for those wide eyes and tender hearts as it was for me. Spending time with them rekindled something in my own spirit, reminding me of the peace and joy we so often sacrifice in the frantic pace of city life.

I cannot conclude this reflection without acknowledging my roommates, whose journeys were deeply intertwined with my own. First, there is Saadia. Ours was not an immediate or expected friendship; throughout the semester, we had barely interacted beyond necessity. But living together compelled us to truly see one another, to learn each other's habits, struggles, and rhythms. It was beautiful to have gained such a genuine female companion at this stage in our lives, when we are all still finding ourselves. And how better to do that than by leaning on one another for support? I was immensely proud of Saadia for her strength and self-advocacy throughout this trip. Within our team, we discovered an organic rhythm by taking turns leading, supporting, and stepping back when the moment required it.

Then there is Aoi, whose vibrant, full-of-life personality brightened every room she entered. She gives 110% to everything she does, and her drive inspired our group to reach heights we might not have achieved otherwise. Before this trip, we had tried to befriend one another, but it was in Sri Lanka that our friendship truly blossomed. We are different people with different habits, and we challenged each other, bounced off each other, and learned how to compromise even when our views diverged. I am grateful this trip introduced me to someone so strong-willed and compassionate. Watching Aoi step into leadership and support roles with equal grace was a gift, and I was honoured to support her growth in South Asia, knowing that this environment was less familiar to her than it was to Saadia or myself.

Overall, this journey helped me reconnect with my emotions and my deep love for working with people. Hong Kong has a way of isolating its inhabitants; pursuing a degree in a

capitalist environment often leaves one lost in the relentless pursuit of career advancement. I have always considered myself a sociable person, but I had begun to drift away from that part of myself. This trip brought me back. Every interaction felt meaningful and fulfilling, and I want to carry that awareness forward as I navigate my career seeking work that allows me to connect with as many people as possible, for that is where I truly thrive.

One area I hope to continue working on is my tendency toward resentment. I overthink. I question. Why am I being told to lift these heavy bricks? Why are these dishes still coming? Why were we not informed earlier? When things do not go as planned, I need to learn to let go more quickly not just physically, but emotionally. I may adapt my actions swiftly, but I often hold onto frustration long after the moment has passed, and this manifests in a sulking attitude that serves no one, least of all myself.

I recognise that I still have much growing to do—many thoughts to unravel, many layers of myself yet to explore. This trip felt deeply fulfilling, but I know I must look inward to determine what comes next, approaching each endeavour with greater intention and thoughtfulness. I am profoundly grateful to have received this opportunity, even as a non-education student. I wish experiential learning were more accessible or at least more widely advertised to students across all disciplines, for it offers something that textbooks cannot. With a goal in mind and an educational pursuit at heart, one can always gain something meaningful from stepping into a different country. Even before we departed, our pre-departure classes introduced me to the essence of experiential learning, and these revelations are ones I will carry forward. I want to reflect more. I want to experience more. I want to engage more.

Thank you, BBED 6806. And thank you, Sri Lanka for the lessons, the laughter, and the lasting imprint you have left on my heart.