

Post-EL Reflection

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On the first day after I returned to Hong Kong when my friends heard that I had been to Sri Lanka, their initial reaction was to comment "They are so miserable." In fact, at the time I was unable to confirm whether this statement was right or not because after I visited, I found that the children there were actually very happy. Even Sam told me that the children here are very fortunate. In contrast to the children in the city, even though they have many convenient facilities, comfortable learning environments and high-quality education, the children here have a much lower depression rate. In this comparison, it's hard to say which group of children is more "pitiful".

At the time, I thought this so-called "compassionate" mentality of concluding that "the children in Sri Lanka are so miserable" was a kind of superiority complex from city people, because rural and urban areas are just two different social states, not opposing classes.

But later I had a new reflection. When I opened the bottle of ketchup I brought back from Sri Lanka and ate the ketchup made by Uncle in Inspired Village, I recalled the conversation I had with him. He told me that when he was young, he had also traveled worldwide for work, going to England and France, but in the end, he chose to stay in Sri Lanka. Being able to prepare a sumptuous dinner for the volunteers and seeing their grateful smiles was the greatest happiness for him. I suddenly realized that Uncle's happiness was a choice - he could have chosen to stay and develop in the big city, but he chose to stay in the countryside and cook dinner. But for the children in Sri Lanka, the limited educational resources and environment have greatly constrained their growth and choices. We can see their carefree happiness running barefoot, but they also have survival pressures that we cannot see, and this lack of choice is their tragedy.

I remember before the course started, I asked about the meaning of this program. After all, there are other places in the world that need to understand the concept of "sustainable development" more than Sri Lanka, and what qualifications do we who live in developed cities and overuse resources have to "teach" the children here? They are closer to and understand nature better than us. Vivien gave me an answer at the time: we are not here as educators, but as sharers, to share the skills we know and help them build this environment better.

And now, I have a new answer: we came to Sri Lanka to provide more choices for the children. Although we cannot help them continuously or for a long time, I feel that our arrival has shown them what the outside world is like, telling them that the world can develop into a concrete jungle, but can also be in harmony with nature. We must not forget to protect nature while building cities. The disasters caused by the over-exploitation of resources in developed countries have served as a lesson for third-world countries. I also hope that our arrival can inspire them to learn, allowing them to see more of the outside world and then build and contribute to their own country. Just like why many universities have international students - they need to bring the knowledge they have learned back to their own countries. Since the children of Sri Lanka cannot come to us, we come to them, and this is the meaning of our trip to Sri Lanka.

However, this sounds too grand. In my actual teaching, our theme is "sustainable development", and even though we had prepared for all the difficulties and challenges in our previous teaching plan, I still couldn't effectively convey the theme to the students. It is difficult to convey the concept of 'sustainable development' because I was only exposed to it during my university days and I know little about it, so it is difficult to ask primary school students to understand it. However, it also reminds me that in my future teaching, I must make complicated concepts more concrete and implement them to the children. On the first day of my participation in the teaching, I felt very discouraged because of the language barrier, the students' energetic behavior, and the lack of classroom discipline, which prevented my teaching plan from proceeding as smoothly as I had envisioned in my mind. On the day the class ended, I even doubted the meaning of my coming here. "What can I really bring to them?" "Am I just wasting their time?" "Is volunteering just a way for me to gild my own experience?"

I greedily wanted to do more, but Sam comforted me, saying that the fact that we were willing to speak English to them was already good enough. I was fortunate to encounter this group of pure, selfless, and tolerant children. When I doubted myself, Pinidi, a second-grade girl, presented me with a paper rose she had folded herself. When I was tired from teaching, Ilmi wove me a snake out of coconut leaves. Minnie recognized it and told me that a French sister had taught them this weaving. At that moment, I regained a little confidence. They really could know and remember the things we taught them, and these things would become a way for them to interact with us, with others, or with the world in some unexpected moments in the future. I wonder what new stories the words we taught them or the hats we wove with them

will create between them and the future volunteers here. This is the true meaning of education.

I am thankful for the people at inspired village, my teachers and my students who have been willing to give me the time to grow. I feel that after I have returned to Hong Kong, my speeches in class have become more firm and powerful. These changes have come about because of my growing experience of teaching in Sri Lanka.

Education is not about filling up a bottle, but about igniting a flame and planting a seed. It is not about preaching pompously, but about providing one's own experiences to offer or create more choices for others. I feel this is the greatest insight I have gained from this journey.