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Borders in Play

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Scout Crowell Reflection 3

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Spanish 380

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Reflection #3: In Light of My Learning

From understanding the value of a role model to gaining insight into the mind of a young person, my experience at Columbia Elementary through the community engaged learning program taught me so much. At the core of my learning, I gained a more rounded knowledge of the complex array of borders that young children face and how these individual experiences can be brought to light through children's literature, which allows for the vocalization of personal borders and borderlands.

Throughout my time with Team Horizon, we read a variety of short stories, such as *All Summer in a Day*, and a wide spread of poems, such as *Legal Alien*, all of which addressed themes of loneliness, exclusion, and the differences that sometimes separate us. With the reading of each poem and short story, the children of Team Horizon began to vocalize their personal connections to the stories through characters with whom they identified or situations that reflected their individual experiences. With the vocalization of these adversities, I came to understand the vastness of the borders that even young children face, conceptualizing my learning of borders in a very real sense.

One piece of literature that truly engaged our students and encouraged them to voice their life experiences was the poem, "The Bully." This poem captures the experience of a young boy whose father encourages him to face a bully, but in doing so, bullies the boy himself. Following our reading of the poem, we asked our students, "have you ever had an experience with a bully?"

The depth of responses was overwhelming. Every single child in Team horizon shared their experiences with bullies ranging from mean older siblings to frightening encounters with older neighborhood boys. Every child felt that they could, in some way, relate to the boy in the poem who expressed shame and sadness within his bullying experience. Through the emotional openness that the poem evoked in the children, I felt that I was able to connect with them on a deeper level.

At the crux of my learning, I learned that the best way to understand a child, and thereby form connection with them, is through children's literature. Stories about fictional characters with real life experiences allow young people to understand that they are not alone in the hardships that they face. It is through stories and poems that our kids were able to open up and vocalize the borders that they faced within their everyday lives, facilitating learning and social connections. Through their vocalized experiences, I was able to understand that the complexity of borders is not a concept reserved for academic texts or an issue that only plagues adult lives, but that borders play an active role in the young minds all around us.

This learning is immensely valuable in that it not only allowed me to form connections with the children in my group but also in its applicability for my future endeavors. I hope to one day become a child psychologist and to work side by side with children who have various borders acting in their lives, ranging from mental disabilities to damaging home lives. My newly gained knowledge of the power of children's literature to help young people express their feelings and adversities will be immensely helpful in my future careers.

More immediately, my understanding of how deeply borders can impact young lives will allow me to grow my relationships with the students in the youth group which I help to lead. Many of the kids that I work with are in pivotal points in their psychological development and

have faced borders of many kinds ranging from foster care to self-harm to confidence issues and struggles with their identity. With the knowledge that I have gained from this program, I feel that I will better be able to connect with them and give them a platform to voice their personal borders without fearing judgement or condemnation.

In the near future, my learning from Columbia elementary will come into play as a take on an active leadership role in the Open Doors College Prep Program. Many of the kids in this program come from disadvantaged families and backgrounds that have led them to face borders of many kinds. With my newfound understanding of how shared experiences can aid in the formation of relationships between students and teachers, I feel that I will be better equipped to connect with these students in the years to come. I am ecstatic to form relationships with these young people and help them not only prepare for their academic future, but gain an understanding of their own borders using the knowledge that the CEL project has given me.

In light of this learning, I will seek to be more open about the borders that I face within my personal life, as I have learned that the vocalization of these difficulties can impact those around me. Whether discussing the difficulties that my socioeconomic status has led me to face, or being open with my personal experiences with mental illness, I feel that making the borders that we all face more visible will allow myself and those around me to embrace the borders that separate us and empower ourselves in the process. Everyone has a story and every story deserves to be heard.