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# Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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by [Erika Wong Zhang](#)



### **My Biography - What I Am Bringing to AHRC New York City**

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Hello, I am Erika Wong, a current freshman student at Pace University, with an undecided major in Dyson School of Arts and Science. I am Panamanian with Chinese parents, lived in Panama for 16 and then came to the United States to study, I still go back during break to visit my parents and family. I like to spend time watching anime, reading manga, listening to music, draw, and play video games.

I graduated from High School at St. Joseph Hill Academy in Staten Island, NY. During my two and a half year in there I did community service such as spending a day in Day Care center taking care of children, also I went to visit an elder and spent time with her. I had also helped in the recent elections, one of the duties was helping recently naturalize people enroll to vote, and my other duty was asking Asian American, the day of the elections, if they had any problems when they voted to make sure if their rights weren't violated because of them being Asians.



want to show and they have the talent to use music to show it to everyone. These artists ranged from singers, composers, writers, and instrument players.

I was also able to see all the support from parents, and other individuals either with a disability or without one, all these supports help them be more confident, and is not like they are not confident, I will say that they are more willing to do and persuade their dreams that a lot of people that think that they are really strong and persuasive and will always follow their dreams, a lot of times those people give up in what they are chasing. But those artists that stood in that little scaffold did work really hard so they were able to stand in there. Simply amazing to see them work so hard to persuade their dreams while half of us would have given up a long time ago if we suddenly became a person with disability.

## **Blog (and News Story) of 2/21/13**

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My experience with my partners

Today meeting with my partners was a really exciting moment. Everyone was really excited to be there and to see their partners. My partners' name is Taskila. She is a really sweet woman, with a lot of dreams and talents. She like everyone help with her community, I learned what her desires are and what she wants to do as a job. The first thing that she asked me to help her look up on the internet was a job. I really thing that this project will be an amazing one.

Stories

<http://www.disabilitycoop.com/2013/01/15/beauty-queen-autism-history/17078/>

Beauty Queen with Autism Makes Miss America History. Alexis Wineman, a 18 year-old teenager with autism participated in a beauty pageant to become Miss America, although she didn't win the crown, she probably won more than the crown. She was able to tell the world that was watching it, that she can do what she likes to do even with a disability.

<http://www.disabilitycoop.com/2013/01/30/girl-locked-cage/17216/>

Girl with Special Needs Found Locked in Cage. In the article the couple neglected the necessities of the girl, because they were tired to deal with the needs of the girl. They locked the girl in cage because they wanted to go and watch a movie. They brought with them their other 3 kids but left her behind. Gave her pills to knock her down and put her in the cage.

<http://www.disabilitycoop.com/2013/02/14/millions-housing-on-way/17305/>

Millions In Disability Housing Aid on Way. The state is getting rental assistance to help people with disabilities to live in a community with the help of the state, housing agencies, Medicaid and Health and Human Services officials. This will help them to live independently, and will cover around 13 states in the country.

## **Blog (and News Story) of 3/7/13**

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News story

Imagine having your mom giving you a hug and you give her a hug back, or imagine holding hands with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or feeling something soft with your hands; is a really nice feeling, now imagine that you can't actually feel because you have a hand that made of metals that can't feel. Well the people in this article have come up with a hand prosthesis that will allow those people that lost their arms and have prosthesis, to give them back the sense of touch.

They developed the prosthesis so when it will be attach to the nervous system so they will be able to sense with that hand what they are touching. It has been tested already but it was only connected to the median and ulnar nerves. They will soon test it in a man that lives in Rome, if everything turns out right, they will have a better version, to fix any minor defects and adding more commodity to it according to the tester feedback of how comfortable he was using it.

<http://media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com/2013/02/new-bionic-hand-prosthesis-called-first.html>

Today's class

For today's class my partner and I were working with our project. We added the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> slide, about the people that support her and are always there for her; also we added some pictures that we took the previous class, into the slides. We planned the week before on going out around lower Manhattan but because the weather, we had to stay indoors. She really likes watching the WWE, every time she comes she will ask me to search on Youtube for some videos of it. She watched a video and then we worked on one slide.

Today when working with the slide, she suggested putting on the slides a family tree. She asked her mom if she could and when we were doing the slide on the people that supported her. So that's what we did. We added a small family tree in the slides. We also planned to visit the library to see photography books but we didn't so we might go next week. We are also planning that I can visit one day the AHRC office at Brooklyn and we can work a little bit in there and maybe take some pictures around the area, but we still have to see how the weather is for that day. She told me about her love story, which is really cute, and she wanted to put a picture of her boyfriend and her on the slides, so I will try to see when I can go to AHRC on Brooklyn.

## Blog (and News Story) of 4/4/13

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### News story

Books of Hope, Found in Newtown Gunman's Home. The article main idea is that books that inspire individuals with disabilities to have a different idea of themselves might have been involve with what happened at Sandy Hook Elementary School. These books were found in the residence of Mr. Lanza. The finding of these books and the idea of Mr. Lanza to might be an individual affected by Asperger's syndrome created great controversy among the media.

In Mr. Dunlap article, he used a post that Mr. Robison the author of "Look Me in the Eye" in his blog. In it he state that the way the media wrote about this case is not acceptable. The mass media have matched together the idea that autism is involved with cases of mass murder. These tag people with autism as potential murderers.

I agree with Mr. Robison, we cannot try to match together relations that easily even thought that what we have learned to match causes and effects. These are not the case of a cause and effect relation, autism is not the cause and murders the effects of it. What the media have done wrong is that by releasing these information the way they did, they have created a though to the society that murderers are related to autism, while they don't have any strong base that they idea is true.

I really can't see the relations of these two books with what happen, how can books that teach about hope can make a person turn totally different to actually do what Mr. Lanza did, if he really did had autism, these books shouldn't made him do what he did. We can't judge and generalize because of the act of one individual, it will affect everyone.

### Today's class

This morning when they arrive to the class she fooled me, she said they were waiting for me, and I really thought they were because we were supposed to go out to take the pictures, and I got really concern. After getting really upset of making them wait she said: April's Fool.

For today, we were suppose to go outside to take pictures, so my partner can show her skills in photography, but it was a little bit too cold so we stayed inside, so we will be heading out next week, so we can take the pictures. Since we stayed inside we started to put animations to our presentation, made some re-arrangement of pictures and changed a little some of the slides. Meanwhile when we were doing the projects we were talking about how was our little week of break. Nothing new really, she went to her programs has usual. So we only worked on our project and talk in between.

## Blog (and News Story) of 4/18/13

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### News Story

A kid that is not able to read, not because they didn't learn their alphabet and words right, but because they have learning disability can be a hard for them. These kids might be seen as defective by other classmates and their parents, and they will also fill frustrated because they can't read and understand what is going in on in class and do their homework properly. But thanks to Brian Meersma, who also have the same problem, a lot of parents with children that have this problem, are able to overcome this difficulty.

Meersma after discovering his condition he used several assisting technology that helped him to read faster and comprehend what he was reading. After having good results using these programs, Meersma is sharing all his knowledge to help other kids that have the same disability that he have, and have become a role model for them. The programs have a huge library that help them take notes, highlight text, and of course reproduce the as an audio file.

Besides helping other people with reading, writing and communicating, he also want us to remember to keep or planet clean, and not destroying it with garbage, emphasizing on plastics bags. He want us to keep our planet clean and not polluting it more, because we only have one place to live, and we should not destroy it. Meersma have been a role model and he have been honored several awards already.

### Today's Class

For today's class we went and review our project, finished with animation on all the slides. The only thing left for our slideshow presentation is add background music to it. We also have a short movie that we made in iMovie showing my partner skills at taking pictures. The pictures were taken around the school and at City Hall the week before. She also wrote a poem last week, so we included that in the movie, we added it as a sound. So the iMovie is composed of pictures that my partner took and reciting the poem that she wrote. For next week, after we finish everything we might go out to the Sea Port and take a walk around.

I realize that my partner might have some problems reading, I never ask her what is her disability, I don't think is good to ask, and not even to write it in this post, but after reading the article for today and seeing her having trouble to read the poem when we were recording today, I understood better, that like her, a lot of people that can't read are afraid of telling others that they can't read. Of course she might not have that disability and might just be because something else. I felt like helping her, is not her fault that she wasn't able to read but she was afraid to tell me. But it turns out good. I read the poem and she was repeating it, and that's how we recorded her reciting her poem.

## My Mid-Term Reflection Journal on [Book] Miracle Boy and on My Project

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The day were assigned what we were supposed to do in the class, to be honest, was something I didn't expect at all. Having hands on the work of spending time with a person with disability wasn't what I expected from the class, and I guess I reacted like a lot of people that don't want to deal with individuals with disabilities, which I really regret. For me, I never thought of them to be a burden to others because in this world everyone depends on others, is just that they need extra help, and is not like they wanted to be the way they are, because nobody wish to not be able to move freely and do the most simple task without having to ask some to help. In fact I was more scared that I wouldn't be able to help my partner at all, that having a partner with a disability.

For me these individuals are amazing, just like the miracle boy, Ben. They are strong people because they were able to face all the difficulties that a lot of us, people without disabilities, have to face. Not only they but their families are strong and impressive, I wouldn't imagine how will be my reaction if my son or daughter have a disabilities that will make her dependent on others.

Has weeks pass by and we had our weekly meetings with our partners, to work on our projects, chat about life, and concerns I start to get more into knowing about my partner and the others in the program. My partner and I get along pretty well, I get to know more about her, and I was able to reassure that she wasn't different for everyone else. She has a name, a family, talents, dreams and aspirations like anyone else. The only difference is that she lacks a physical ability, or so do I think since I never asked what is her disability because I don't want to offend her, and this is noticeable although not really because I can't tell just from interacting with her what is it, but everyone lacks a lot of things either physically and mentally, is just that the degree of it doesn't affect our daily life. Like Ben's family, his dad and his brother they both had the gen that carried his disorder, but it was in Ben which actually showed up. There are so many things we don't really know about ourselves that make us fools to judge others.

One of the topics on our project is about the dreams that Taskila have, and they are the same dreams as any other women in the world will want. She wants to get marry, have children, a mansion, and a job. Ben also had these dreams but he was able to accomplish them, I really want her to accomplish hers also. People might see them as silly, especially in the love part; even I think it will be hard but not impossible. Ben said "I wonder now how I'd feel if my daughter brought home a quadriplegic paramour. Wouldn't I worry whether she knew what she was getting into?" (Mattlin Page 111), even being in these with the knowledge and acceptance in large of the disable population, there is still thinking and feelings that cannot be hidden. A lot of people might accept people with disabilities, but I don't think they might not want their sons and daughters to go out, date, or marry a person with disability. But Ben and Taskila had prove me wrong, Ben got marry, and Taskila have a boyfriend, so when we say that love is blind and have no boundaries it is true, if there is love there is nothing that can really stop them from sharing their affections.

Taskila can do what she wants to, and there is nothing stopping her. She likes to play basketball and she played in the school, we have pictures and videos showing that she don't lack anything to go ahead and play basketball. And who say that disable people have a low brain functionality in which they can't actually think by themselves? And when going into a restaurant they are not asked what they want but what he/she wants. Taskila writes poetry, a task that requires people to think on how to express their feelings in this beautiful way using words to express her feelings.

For people like her pursuing their dreams can be hard sometimes, Ben even after graduating from Harvard, getting a job was hard mostly because of accommodations, and people stereotyping disable people as not helpful. Even now that most of the places are accessible for people with disability, the stereotype of them being helpless still remain. I sometimes can help it but I will start to treat a person with a disability like a little child, because I am afraid that they don't speak up and ask for what they really want, so I ask a lot of questions, like a mother taking care of a child that don't know what else to say besides yes, or no. Is not thinking of them as unable to think for themselves but more about the idea that they don't want to say what is in their minds.

The class have been really helpful, interacting and having hands on with people with disability is a experience you can't have that easily, I had taken care of little kids in day care center and taken care of elderly but not people with disabilities. I think is a great experience, and this helps to solidify the idea that they are not only capable but independents in their own way. Every time I feel like

not doing anything such as homework or going to school because of my laziness, I think about Taskila and all the individuals with disabilities, how they wish they had a choice, a full time job or going to school, and I think to myself that I have a choice I am really lucky and I am just wasting my life by not appreciating everything I have, because there are people that lack physical and mental skills to help them do what they want. So every time I feel like a task is too hard for me, or giving up I think about her and everyone in her position and I try my best, I don't want to be part of the society that just go to work because they have to, or skip class because they feel lazy, or not try hard because you have to enjoy life, I want to be what I what I am and not make people that don't have half of what I have been given to feel that you are really lucky why are you wasting it like this. I have been also in the position of them, people that have been blessed with more than I have and just wasting it, I feel that they are so lucky and not realize that, making me want to be that person because I would make better use of what they have. We need to appreciate more what we have, and never look down at someone because they might be different because they are also people and everyone have the same rights and same value.

## My Final Reflection Journal on My Project

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Helping others is something that a lot of people might think is annoying and time consuming. For me helping others is something that I enjoy, if I volunteer in doing something, is because I really enjoy what I am doing. Even though I had volunteered for a lot of different things I never really volunteer to help people with a disability, and CIS102W class was one of the best experiences that inducted me into this higher level of volunteering.

At the beginning of the semester when I heard what the goal of the class was, I was a little bit doubtful if I should take the class. I have nothing against the people we were going to work with, but I was more concern if I was going to be able to handle it. But I gave it a try, and it turn out to be a really good experience.

The first time I had contact with the group that we were going to take care was at the Valentine concert that they held. It was beautiful, all the hard work that they put into the concert. And then the next week after the concert I finally was able to meet my partner and buddy. We start to know more about each other, and we started to build a relationship in which she will feel comfortable being with me around, and I think it really worked because she will stay away from others that try to talk to her and she don't really know, I think as a way to protect herself. We got along pretty well, and I helped her build a little bit more confidence. She is a really shy person and she at the beginning will just go along with whatever I say for the project and they I start telling her that this was also her project so she also needs to tell me what she wants. She started to tell me if she liked how the project looks and if she liked it. And as she said at the end of our project, she was really happy of her presentation.

Being surrounded by people with a disability, makes me really know better about them and proof false the rumors from society that they are just people that are taking the working class taxes, and that they are just people that are not providing anything to the society. And for sure it really makes me think differently about people with disabilities. At the beginning I thought they will be like kids that need help to do things around, but they are not they are growing up adults that know what they want, where they want to get, and they have dreams and goals that they work hard to get them. They taught me the lesson that they can overlook what people say and keep going, for me it was a big lesson because I am so drag into the society in which I will care so much about what they think about me, even with the little things like, how my hair looks, how do I dress, how do I talk, walk, etc..., that there are more important thinks that we should think about, that we want to overcome than the just outside appearance and fitting into the society. We don't have to fit into society, we should just do what we like and what we want, not care what society want from us.

I think that for me having Taskila and being in this class is something that I should have went thru; education and hands-on experience make us less ignorant and less prone to say something that is not from a smart person. Knowing her really opened my eyes and so next time I hear a person saying something bad about a person with a disability, I can say something bad. The individuals that bully and make fun of these wonderful people wouldn't be able to bear all the problems that people with disability suffer, such as bullying because are way stronger that everyone else, and they have accepted themselves.

We should take them as role models for our lives, to persuade our dreams no matter how hard the road is, and never give up, accept our weakness and learn how to take advantage of them to push us and help us get going in our goals.

Thank you to Taskila, Matt, Professor Lawler, Yuliya, and everyone from AHRC. This was a wonderful experince.

My Certificate of Recognition by AHRC New York City

