Reflective Journaling and Discussion Groups

This journal will include reflections and interpretations about your learning on the field trips and interactions with practicing social workers, policy advocates, field workers, healthcare professionals, government officials and eminent Ecuadorian scholars and researchers. You may want to also incorporate reflections from some of your readings.

Reflective journaling can be an extremely helpful tool. If you are not familiar with this technique, you are not alone. Reflective journaling — used as a therapeutic technique in social work practice, doing research, clinical training and the field of education — is a useful technique for influencing self-discovery, and personal and professional growth. The act of journaling involves the regular practice of recording activities and/or situations on paper or electronically with the goal of reflecting on those experiences in order to learn from them and grow personally and professionally. Paper journaling has the advantage of portability on the study tour.

Journaling is useful in providing insight into self-awareness – what you do (behaviors), why you do it (values, assumptions, aspirations), how you feel (emotions), and how you think. Journaling can expose contradictions, misconceptions, and conflict. Regular journaling need not be lengthy to be meaningful. In general it turns every incident into a potential learning experience. The journaling should indicate that the student has read some of the readings and should be reflective, showing depth of thinking and/or feelings about the readings and topics under consideration. These journals/Logs are not to be summaries, but rather reflections of your ideas and feelings about what you are studying. Journaling should not take place during the visits in India. Instead you can journal when you are not visiting but later in the day or evening.

The journal may include the following elements:

- description of the social and educational institutions visited
- description of the contrasts between practices in India with the US
- reflection on the interaction with practicing professionals
- discussion on observational and didactic components
- where relevant, personal commentary on the learning experiences in the field.
Other samples of useful questions for Reflective Journaling:

1. Why have I chosen to participate in this travel and study abroad to India seminar?
2. What do I expect to encounter in this seminar?
3. What do I want to learn from this experience?
4. How will I allow myself to be present and open to this experience? Can I be open to sharing thoughts?
5. How do I anticipate my life will change from this experience?

OR

1. Briefly state a situation that occurred in the seminar today or in your readings that affected you as an individual or your group as a whole.
2. Why am I describing this incident – was I challenged? Did I exhibit strengths? Did I learn something?
3. Is there an overarching issue or problem here? What is the potential value of the issue?
4. What was I feeling at the time of the incident?
5. What was I thinking at the time of the incident? Did I have any preconceived ideas? New insights?
6. What was good or bad about the situation?
7. How did the experience challenge my assumptions, prejudices or biases?
8. What specific possible solutions have I been able to identify?
9. How will this experience alter my future behavior, attitudes or career?

Informal Journal Discussion Times

This journal will not be collected as this is a personal account of your experience. However, there is an expectation that from your journal you will be able to participate in discussion groups with others so as to share some of your reflections. While on the study tour we will discuss some of your journaling insights. You will not have to share anything that is personal. You can share only what you feel comfortable sharing with other group members. This will be an opportunity for all of us to validate some of our feelings and thoughts about what we are experiencing and also to provide support for each other in our learning together.

Deb Jacobson