

Tuesday, January 13, 2009

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Morning came and I woke up to take my third cold showers at Four Communities. For our breakfast period, I continue to write in my journal. While I wrote in my journal, I felt water droplets and walked under the roof. Monroe gathered everyone into a room to start another reflection session while it was raining outside. Monroe passed a stuffed snowman. Whoever holds the snowman have the right to talk. In this entry, I will summarize what some students stated:

-Nadia: The importance of doing case studies

-Reiko: suggest the case studies should be done by the Honduran students so they have a sense of ownership and passion for the water treatment in Honduras.

-Lalo: suggest to have a student exchange program from Honduras and Cornell to improve the relationship between the two organizations

-Jeff: points out the language barrier for the student exchange program. Furthermore, the students from Honduras will have to take other classes besides AguaClara. As a result, they will sway away from the original idea of improving the students' knowledge on building a water plant.

-Monroe: talks about the difficulties that Cornell students will have to find equivalent courses in Honduras to transfer back to Cornell.

-Chris: stated that he went to the FOPRIDEH conference meeting without an idea what will be talk about. He stated that at the end of the meeting, he learned a lot from the meeting. He also explain his concern that all operator should get together and collaborate. As a result, they can spread knowledge on how to run a water plant. Furthermore, Chris talked about his past experience that he gave a comprehensive test to the operators. From this test, he found out that a man who worked at a water plant for 18 years did not know how the water flow in the plant. From this, Chris explained that this can occur anywhere even in the states.

-WenQi: expressed/suggested that AguaClara should have an individual who stand by along the operators to collect useful data.

-Kelvin: stated that coming to Honduras gave a grander view of what AguaClara really does.

-Po-Hsun: expressed that he have confidence that the plants will work in the future. In addition, he appreciates his comfortable life in America.

-Amelia: She thanks Monroe for a job well done and for not giving up.

-Sarah: suggested that the students on this trip should assign themselves on a team before the beginning of the spring semester. That's way; the students will carry on what they learn from Honduras. Therefore, students will be more passionate with the work and constantly remind ourselves of the Honduras experience.

Basically, many brought up many valid points and piggyback on each other's ideas. Most of my reflection was already stated in one form or other. In my previous entries, I was pessimistic at first and I wonder what is the purpose of having the students traveling to Honduras. At first, I sort of believe that it was a waste of expense for AguaClara. However, Antonio explained that the Cornell students served as an evaluation of how they are doing. In addition, I believe that this trip really open people's minds and eyes. At the beginning of the trip, I continuously wonder why Monroe spends so much expense to fly students to Honduras. Now, I can say that I see the benefits of bring students to Honduras. Some of the reasons are the following:

-The hope that the students will share the same view as him (Monroe) and help expand and improve the projects of AguaClara.

-Increase the understanding of the Honduran culture and thought process

-Make some contacts and relationship with the Hondurans

-Increase students' knowledge of the Spanish languages.

-Form better connections with Honduran students. Cornell students can connect better with the Honduran students because of the same age.

-Bringing more minds to Honduras will strike some untouch ideas

-Guarantee that continuity of AguaClara involvement with APP the future

-Assure the Hondurans that Cornell University is still involved with the water plants.

There probably more reasons. I believe as the trip continues, I will dig up more reasons.

Back to the students' reflections in the morning:

-Anastasia: mention about establishing a model water plant; the same one at Cornell. Whenever a problem occurs at the plant, Cornell can quickly help solve the issue.

-Henry: agreed and second Anastasia's idea. In addition, he believes that it is a great idea to get UNO involve with the program.

In a way, I agree with Henry to get more organizations involve and promote clean water. I was glad that Monroe had a NGO meeting. In this meeting, Monroe explained how there other water plant system that does not require chemicals except chorine. However, the whole system is huge with vast tanks. In addition, the water plant will cost 20 to 30 times more than the AguaClara plant. Therefore, the AguaClara plant is more suitable for some community. Therefore, Monroe explains that the purpose of the NGO meeting is to determine what type of plant is ideal for what community size.

After a hour of reflection, the rain stopped and six students return to Tamara to finish the construction of the dose controller. While Sarah, Nadia, Lalo, Jeff, Amelia, and Rustom went back to Tamara, the rest of the group stayed in the four communities to work on assembling the lamella in the sedimentation tanks. Before cutting the lamella, John discussed with Monroe and the others about the measurement. In addition, Healey's artistic ability came into use. Haley became the drawer for the Four Communities water plant layout in 3D. While some student help John measure 24 inches wide lamella and cut them. Then they drilled six holes into the lamella to connect all the lamella together.

As time went by time, Haley and Julie sat with Monroe to examine the drawings and questions on how the certain part of water plant should be built. Monroe even suggested that we should make a step by step packet on how to construct certain thing in the plant like the sedimentation tank and lamella. While they discussed about the plant construction, WenQi, Chris, Po-Hsun worked together on connecting the eight lamellas together with plastic pipes. Later, Monroe joined the rest of the group in constructing the lamella. In total, we have to construct 18 sets of this lamella.

Next, Monroe formed a circle with the students and asked students about their experience with AguaClara in the past semester. Julie stated to talk about the time consuming pilot plant. Then Henry expanded with Julie about the difficulties to maintain the plant. Then Heather Reed stated that the plant was not hard to maintain in the summer. That is because her team went to the plant every day. Due to the constant and frequent visits to the plant, the plant was easier to maintain. Overall, I sense that the pilot plant will run better with more experienced students and have their own transportation. The pilot plant need a large team to take turns in the week to travel to the plant.

After the short discussion, the Tamara team came back. As a group, we went to a woman's house to interview the two sweatshop women. One woman has a manager position while the other younger woman sews T-shirts and sweaters. They work from 7 to pm on Mon-Thurs and 7am to 4pm on Friday. For Saturday, it is optional but mandatory to finish a week quota. However, they do receive a bonus for Saturday work. They sometimes have to ask for their salary but they have to be careful. Furthermore, they are not allowed to form union or join union unless they want to lose their job. There is also a health clinic in the factory. Yet, they are limited to visit the doctor when they feel sick. For example, a woman felt sick and she was not allowed to get medical attention. As a result, she died on her way home in Tegucigalpa.

I wondered why these two women have time to talk about their jobs with their hectic schedule. They are available because they are currently having vacation with a possibility of being layoff. Furthermore, their salary is 3000 lempira each month. In addition, they have to provide their own transportation to the factory and lunch. It is also very expensive for the travel expense to Tegucigalpa. Despite knowing the harsh conditions of working in the sweatshops, they chose to work there because they have no other choice. In addition, the sweatshop is only 15 minutes away by a vehicle.

Nadia asked the women about their opinions on the following situation: many people find out about the harshness of sweatshops and they will stop buying clothes from the sweatshop as a solution. The women answered that they rather have work than no work despite the harsh conditions. In a sense, this situation reminds me of my late grandma who worked in a flower decorating factory. My older generations worked so hard for my fortunate situation in the US. I am humble to have a great lifestyle in the states and being able to attend Cornell for my undergraduate studies. After thanking the two women, we went to dinner. During dinner, Sarah and I brought a soccer ball for 350 lempira. Then I made origami cranes for each child in my host family.

Around 9pm, Sarah and I went back to our host family and gave out our gifts. The children were very excited with the soccer ball. While Sarah took photos, I got a workout by playing and kicking the soccer ball with the boy and the girl. Afterward, we talked and drank pineapple juice with our family.