



A Teacher's Story – Yunzhu Zhou

Before I had come to ACCESS, I was a video editor intern at Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) in downtown Boston. My task was to put all the raw footages into a polished video. These videos showcased some of the major events and social services that ABCD has been doing for years for lower income residents in and around Boston. While I was editing the footage and interviews, I was deeply touched by their stories about giving support, volunteering, and how troubling it was to see people do not have access to resources. The more videos I made, the more I realized that I was blinded by the pursuit of academic achievement and the American Dream, and I did not see the needs of this city.

At the end of March, one of my friends knew that I was entering Lesley's Community Arts and Education program with a concentration in Multicultural Education. She recommended ACCESS where she was doing her internship as an administrative assistant. She said it might be helpful with my study on education if I went there for some time. I took a brief tour in ACCESS on a rainy day in May before the children's arrival for their after school program. While I was there, I met Pasang Drolma, the Executive Director of ACCESS. She told me that some of the children came to the United States just a few years ago. They do not speak English well. Most of the families are immigrants and they speak limited English. Walking into the classrooms, I was amazed by how colorful the classrooms were, the number of books, study materials, and puzzles, and how happily the children smiled in their photos. I felt the welcoming and the closeness of this place. Unlike my memories of being in my aunt's summer camp in the New York City when I was 12 years old, which were merely loneliness.

When I was 12, my mom had a conference meeting in Boston at that time, so she dropped me off to my aunt's place, stayed with me for a week, flew to Boston for the conference, and rejoined me back in New York after two weeks. My mom agreed with my aunt's suggestion of taking me to the summer camp for the purpose of what they called, "experiencing the American school life and the English-speaking environment". For me, that three weeks were merely daycare. I had never met my aunt's family before that, and I had a tough time of blending into the other children. There was a language gap as well and I could not understand what the teacher said. All the children had known each other, and I was the outsider. My aunt was busy with overseeing the entire camp, so she did not have enough attention on what I needed. Instead, she put me into elementary classes instead because she thought that would be easier for me to learn things.

I applied for volunteer work earlier this summer not only because I was interested in who ACCESS is and what ACCESS does, but also to complete my case study that explored the relationship between arts integrated learning and community-based education. Through my interviews with the staff members and my volunteer work, I saw ACCESS' strengths and its needs.

Strengths

- Creating a sense of home and belonging for immigrant families and seniors in Tai Tung Village by preserving Chinese holiday traditions, food, and decorations. Meanwhile, helping families understand and blend in American culture by bringing American holidays into teaching environment.



- Teaching children Christianity as a guideline for daily interactions with each other, that everyone deserves to be loved and teachers should seek to understand the children first before anyone communicate any disciplinary action.
- Cooperating with other organizations to share resources and help each other. The unity amongst the Asian community is more important than merchant competitions.

Limitations

- Arts integrated learning is limited with crafts, coloring, and drawing.
- There is not enough participation from parents due to their busy work schedule.
- Lack of professional education or a counselor for children with developmental disorders.
- Lack of diversity in ethnicity and race.
- ACCESS is not visible enough outside Tai Tung Village.

My experiences at ACCESS this summer changed the displeasing impression from my aunt's summer camp when I was little. The staff members genuinely welcomed and cared about the new students, and the old students accepted new faces by inviting them to their recess games. ACCESS may be a small organization, but it has a big and nurturing heart. Staff members put their heart and soul into the children's development, family communications, and community relationships. ACCESS not only values its own culture but appreciates American culture, which helps the community to acclimate to this country.

When the Summer Enrichment Program was nearing its end, I received an email from Ji-Sun Ham, Director of Children and Families, asking me if I would like to teach for their After School Program. I was thrilled. I missed the children, this small but compassionate place, and I could practice teaching for my academic study. After an enjoyable professional training and lengthy paperwork, I became a group leader for the younger children, whom I had been working with since summer. I felt so blessed for this opportunity and I was so glad that I had the same children from the summer; most of the children had gotten to know me so there was some trust built between us. The atmosphere was easy for me to blend in as a volunteer, and it was pleasant to see the growth of each child and see their world while talking with the children and seeing them play. Becoming a teacher of ACCESS is even more rewarding for me because I can be closer to the children. I have gotten to know about their school life, their families, their interests, their funny friends, and even more. I see the need for improving miscommunication within one family, more resources and connections, and people who would like to contribute and support. Yet, in my opinion, most importantly is the need for teachers who are compassionate, nurturing, able to understand ACCESS's mission, passion, and belief, and be able to carry that belief and put into one's work in the children, families, and community.

ACCESS plays a vital role in the Chinese immigrant community. Families need ACCESS, and ACCESS supports this community with a full heart. Boston needs this place where Asian immigrants can find a sense of belonging.