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Cover Letter

“Shitty First Drafts” was the most beneficial RN reading piece during my initial steps in completing the literacy narrative project. I am my hardest critic, so I always want my first attempt to be my best attempt. However, after reading “Shitty First Drafts” I was comforted by the fact that even the best writers and authors have substandard and immature first attempts. By keeping this information in the back of my mind while drafting my narrative I found my style of writing became much more casual than usual. I’ve always struggled with making writing a casual activity, so I was proud of myself for making an improvement, and I’m surprisingly pleased with what I wrote. I am certain I will use the reading from RN#9 in my future writing endeavors.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge both my mom and the “Deep Focus” playlist on Apple Music for contributing to my writing process. In middle school and high school, I leaned on my mother for support in editing my papers. I trust and value her opinion greatly, and I learned a lot from her during her countless edits. She taught me how to outline my thoughts in a concise way, and her attention to proper grammar and punctuation provided me with skills that helped make me a better writer. The Deep Focus playlist contributes to my understanding of my writing process as it has always allowed me to time out my writing sessions and efficiently jot down my thoughts. Here’s how it works: at the end of two songs, I must have an outline of my thoughts and ideas

written down. Then, at the end of about four more songs, I should have at least 1-1.5 paragraphs roughly complete. This timing process using the Apple music playlist goes on until I have a complete rough draft of my thoughts and ideas. This system allows me to focus better as it inhibits distractions, and also drives quick thinking since it leaves no time for me to over analyze my thoughts.

Language, Lingua, Ururimi

Language = boredom. That's what I always thought growing up, taking various Spanish courses in school solely because it was required. It had no significance to me other than the grade I earned toward my GPA. Graduating from high school in 2020 was the best thing to happen that year because it meant no more Spanish classes, and therefore no more embarrassment of constantly being called on and answering incorrectly. So what changed- why am I now writing an entire 1500 word literacy narrative about language and how impactful it is? Two words: study abroad. This past semester, I had the most incredible experiences in Lugano, Switzerland and Nyamyumba, Rwanda that helped shape my new perspective of language: language is key in unifying people and vital for personal growth.

I woke up on my first day of class in Lugano feeling extremely nervous because I knew I was taking an intro to Italian class, and now that you know my previous thoughts



and emotions towards learning

Spanish, you can understand why I was not looking forward to this.

However, culture shock is real.

Walking around town not being able to understand people's

conversations was enough for me to feel out of place. Did you know dogs

are allowed basically anywhere in

Europe? Don't worry, I didn't either.

You could find furry friends on trains, in malls, in restaurants, in grocery stores- the list goes on and on. Speaking of grocery stores, I had too many experiences not knowing how to read labels since they were all written in Italian, and I didn't know how to ask where products were because of the language barrier. Additionally, because of this obstacle, I was unable to properly order food and drinks at a restaurant. I found myself feeling more embarrassed not knowing how to speak Italian than I did while actually learning a new language. I felt myself *wanting* to learn Italian rather than dreading to learn it solely for the reasons of fitting in and being respectful towards those who lived and worked there.

Italian class started at 1:00 PM and as soon as the clock struck, the feelings inside me felt all too familiar from my very first high school Spanish class. The rush of worry and confusion consumed me, and

every time Alessandra, our teacher, would ask a question, my head would be down in hopes I would not be called on. It worked, by the way, I was never called on. As time marched on, however, I began answering questions, and even answering them *correctly*. My confidence grew and in just weeks I went from wonky hand gestures to “sai dove sono



gli avocado?” (do you know where the avocados are?) in grocery stores, and shamefully pointing on a menu to “per favore, posso avere le lasagne?” (can I please have the

lasagna?). I went from feeling lost in town to feeling comfortable saying “ciao” (hello) to strangers. I went from knowing nothing about Italian to teaching others about the specific rules of the language. I learned to appreciate why we learn language. Language does not = boredom. Language is much more than a class associated with a letter grade. Learning Italian has allowed me to appreciate how language brings people together. I made friends because I learned Italian, I was more respected by locals because I attempted to understand their culture more and truly immerse myself into their lifestyle because I learned Italian, I made *good* memories while learning a language. Language = unity.

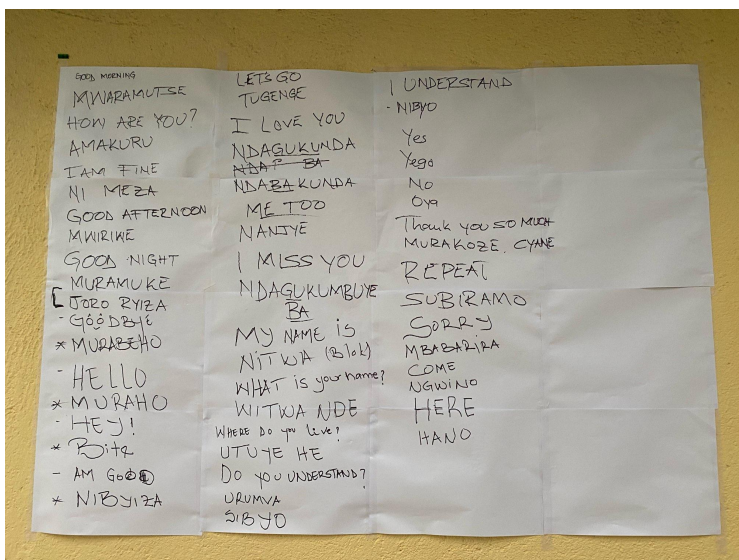
During my time abroad, I also had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Nyamyumba, Rwanda teaching second graders English, while also learning some Kinyarwandan myself. I took a very short and simple Kinyarwandan lesson before arriving in Rwanda to help myself adjust to their language and culture, and I knew this was going to be a hard language to both learn and understand. Spanish and Italian, for the most part, are very similar languages, so Italian was much easier to comprehend, using context clues to navigate my way through the confusion. Kinyarwandan was



just... hard. During my two weeks in Nyamyumba, I slowly implemented what I had learned such as “muraho!” (Hello!) and “witkuande?” (what is your name?). One of my students, Tuyi, and I became very good friends, and oftentimes Tuyi would come up to me during recess to help teach me different words in

Kinyarwanda. For example he would point to my hair tie on my wrist and shrug his shoulders to say, “what is that?” and I would slowly and clearly pronounce ‘hair-tie’. He would reply with “yes” as to say he understood and then proceeded to say the word in Kinyarwanda. I would repeat what he said and ask “yego?”, which means “yes?” in English, asking Tuyi if I said the word correctly in Kinyarwandan.

I enjoyed these interactions with Tuyi and wanted to learn more to help myself create better relationships with my students. In Nyamyumba, we had four translators, Shema, Adeline, Leon, and Alice, whom I loved. I asked them if they could teach me more Kinyarwandan and reiterate the basics of what I had previously learned before arriving, and they happily agreed. We all sat outside and using multiple pieces of paper, we created an at-home “white-board”. They wrote down both the Kinyarwandan and



English versions of some common phrases and words I could use during the school days. I remember asking Tuyi “utuye he?” (where do you live?) one day and his eyes widened in excitement and surprise. I then everyday would go to him with something new to say or ask and it

became our little recess ritual. I became closer with my students, translators, and the Rwandan culture because of learning Kinyarwanda. Language = unity.

Moving into the teaching and personal growth aspect of language, I went into my first day of teaching in Nyamyumba with the mindset of 'repeat after me'. It worked for me during my small lessons of learning Kinyarwanda before traveling to Rwanda, so why wouldn't this method work for the kids with English? I quickly learned that although the pronunciation of the words and spelling of the words were being understood, the class didn't truly understand the meaning of what they were taught. This became prominent after my lesson I taught about foods. More specifically, the class and I were going over the word 'banana', and I had the kids repeat after me at different volumes, as they seemed to enjoy the fun in screaming vs whispering a word. I drew a banana on the chalkboard for reference. The next day in class, I brought a banana in from breakfast and had the translator ask them "what food is this?". None of them could answer the question. I didn't understand how they couldn't remember after all of the review we did just the day before. I went back to the compound where we lived thinking about how I could adjust my teaching style so that the children would grasp and *understand* the English being taught.

After thinking back to how engaged the students were about shouting vs. whispering the word 'banana', I knew games and interactive lessons would work better. Using 4 fruits from breakfast (apple, passion fruit, banana, and orange) and two sticks from the nearby woods, I created the stick race game to help the students learn and understand fruits and foods more. The game is as follows: I put all four fruits at the front of the class in different locations and divide the students into two groups. Both groups

line up separately in the back of the class and each team has a stick. One person from each team would compete as I shouted one of the four fruits at the front of the classroom. The first person to run and touch the correct fruit with their stick got a point for their team. The first team to get to 10 points won! The engagement levels were

clearly higher as students were shouting, jumping, running, and laughing, and the competitiveness this game brought to the classroom had the students begging for more. The next day after playing the stick race game, I once again asked the translator if he could please ask the class what I was holding (a banana). This time, very loudly, I heard “BANANA”! It



was clear that interactive games were engaging and effective while teaching English.

From this teaching experience, I learned that it wasn't the students creating the gap between knowing and understanding, rather it was me as the teacher and how I presented the material to them. Reflecting on my approach to teaching, I had to adjust my perspective from the ease of teaching topics, to the ease of students understanding

the topics. I went from being driven by simplicity for myself to being driven by the students' excitement in learning and comprehending. Although some lessons were harder to conduct, it was easier for the second graders to grasp the concepts, and that is what I found more valuable. Personal growth was evident throughout my two weeks in Rwanda as seen through my change in perspective and position on what is valuable. I am certain that if I had the opportunity to return to Rwanda at some point in the future, I would grow from the use and education of language in many more ways than I can think of. Ndagukumbuye (I miss you) Nyamyumba.