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Citation:

Ashley, M and Elson, A (2011) International Reflections. *Assessment, Teaching & Learning Journal*, 11. pp. 150-151. ISSN 1756-8781

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International Reflections

We conclude the Journal with two short pieces which again bring in the student voice. They are extracted from our web archive of personal reflections on international experiences written by staff, students and friends of Leeds Metropolitan University, and published daily for seven years. These two contributors, like many others, evidence deep engagement and significant personal learning deriving from involvement in international volunteering projects arranged by the University for students and staff.

The full archive is accessible from:

<http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/internat/reflects/index.htm>

International Reflection 18 November 2008

My month spent in Cambodia presented me with various different challenges, some of which I had not faced before. I spent my time working in an orphanage in the capital city Phnom Penh, teaching young and older children English. This was the first time I had done any form of teaching, let alone to non-English speakers. This gave me a chance to put into practice all the skills that I have been taught over my two years on my SPACE modules. However, although I was there to teach the children, I found that they themselves taught me more than I could ever teach them. Through their approaches to life and the warmth they gave, I felt at home straight away and part of the family.

I left the orphanage extremely saddened that I had to leave the children but with happiness in my heart and an even greater appreciation for my life within England. A lot has been taken from my summer travels and many reflections on my country's approach to many things, not just governmental, but also the socialising of day to day life. Just because you don't know each other doesn't mean you can't smile to each other.

Michael Ashley

International Relations & Peace Studies

International Reflection 25 November 2008

Volunteering in a rural Zulu school within the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa has changed me as person, and an educator. I volunteered in South Africa in 2007 and was lucky enough to return this September when we taught Zulu children who barely have a grasp of the English language. The volunteering tested our teaching skills as we had basic facilities, no running water or electricity, but seeing how happy the children were when we organised fun teaching activities was very rewarding and made the hard work worthwhile.

Overall this experience was the most amazing five weeks that I have ever taken part in. I left South Africa feeling I had made a real impact upon the children and the teachers there, and the team had made a real difference to the children's education. The experience has made me reflect on my life and my expectations for the future. To those who may be thinking of doing an international volunteering trip, I would say that although they are hard work, they are the most rewarding experiences you will ever take part in. Nothing I can ever do now will compare to the experience that I had in South Africa.

Amie Elson

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