

Theory of Change

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CYES 290

“I want to start my own business,” exclaimed Advika. She must have been in her 50’s. She was excited about the prospect of having financial independence from her husband.

The Indian women were smiling and gathered around the table. Several of them were wearing colorful saris: one was turquoise, one yellow. It was a bright room and they were sitting facing me and another volunteer. Last summer, I was in Kochi, in the South of India teaching English to girls of 17 and also older women. The classroom where I was teaching was in the center of Kochi which was quite touristy. A ten minute walk from there, well hidden from the main road, was a slum. Another woman from my group whose name was Ayana was from the slum. As I had asked her why she wanted to learn English, she had explained: “ in order to have my independence and to work, I need to know English.” I understood the significance of her learning it.

I am interested in addressing the issue of lack of education for women as a form of oppression. The reason why I am interested in this is because I have traveled to countries such as Kenya and India, where having an education as a young girl is discouraged due to traditional customs. In many cases girls are married off at a young age and the husband has full control over their every move. I have seen the importance

of education in empowering these girls and allowing them to make something of themselves in a male dominated societies. Many girls that have had an education are able to start a business or work in tourism and sustain themselves and their families. An education not only gives them the freedom but gives them a sense of self worth.

In a previous paper like my first theory of understanding paper was about my identity, I came to realize through my experience with the African Diaspora club at Clark that my racial identity mattered more than I realized. And then on the other hand in my second theory of understanding paper I realized the effect of the lack of resources on teachers and the kids of color in the classroom within the public school. I would like to commit to making the school system better for kids of color. Especially dealing with issues of language, many of these kids speak another language than English at home and I would like to be able to provide them a better understanding of the English language. I would like to help with ESI but also incorporate Spanish when needed so as to help kids. Another interest I would have is helping women of color in prison accessing reproductive rights and resources. I have noticed that girls need to be given more support in school and that having an education would allow them to gain confidence and not end up in jail in the first place. I would really like to contribute to empowering girls and allowing them to be the best they can possibly be.

In terms of my positionality, I think it helps that I am a woman because I understand what it means to have to work twice as hard in a man's world. I also know that being able to get an education as a woman is really going to benefit me in the future and I wish that every girl or woman gets that opportunity. I know that I am a white woman and so I have to be mindful that women of color have different experiences. Another thing I

need to keep in mind is I am a woman who grew up in the West and so my version of being independent as a woman will be different from women in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. In order, to best help women gain more education, I should be open to their different experiences and voices.

I am still learning how this can be done but I would like to teach girls leadership skills through programs and create new educational spaces (it can be schools) to allow girls to acquire the skills they need in the world. A huge role model for me is Malala Yousafzai. She is a Pakistani girl who was shot in the head for defying the Taliban because she wanted to go to school. For her bravery she was given a Nobel peace prize. At 14, she became the youngest person to receive this award. In 2013, she started the Malala Foundation which has the mission to be able to give “12 years of free, safe quality education” and to empower girls' voices. With her foundation, she has been able to create a network where girls can connect and also fund many schools. Malala inspires me because she had all the odds against her. Her role model was her father who in the male dominated society of Pakistan, taught at a girls school. She wanted to continue his legacy and so she decided to defy the Taliban. She was shot in the left side of her forehead. She almost died defending the rights to girls education, including her own. She understood the value of it and had a father figure who supported empowering girls as well. I am inspired by Malala's experience who is 23, only two years older than me. I would like to continue to find ways to bring education to girls and to make them feel that they are worth it. By doing so, the world will be a better place because girls hold together society.