Final Representation as Practicing Engaged Citizenship

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**My Final Representation**

(Quotes and questions bolded)

**Within video:**

**What happened?**

For ESST 317 I made my pledge to pick up litter, and wasn’t really satisfied with this idea of how to be an engaged citizen at any point in the semester. This is my journey of attempting to be an engaged citizen and what I have learned throughout the process. I will speak about how my feelings towards making a commitment/pledge as well as the alterations of my pledge that lead to these feelings.

**How did it feel to make a commitment/pledge?**

My feelings during my pledge journey changed from the beginning to the end as I came to terms with my pledge, in which my blog posts represent well. Overall, I had a lot of difficulty committing to one action of being engaged. I didn’t realize how much trouble I had during the semester, but looking back, my struggles affected my ability to be fully engaged.

I started feeling uncomfortable on September 21 when I created my pledge; I wrote **“Removing garbage is beneficial for the community members and environment. This is a different perspective than I have previously had in my life as I usually ignore the garbage outside because it does not affect me”** (Zinger, My Active Citizenship Pledge). This feeling was due to not feeling prepared to make a pledge related to engaged citizenship. In Week 2 I was still struggling with my pledge, and attempted to extend my thinking; I wrote **“Imagine a society where the outdoors is as valued as much, or even more than indoor spaces. I think this change of perspective and values would help society to consider themselves as part of nature as oppose to separate from it”** (Zinger, Week 2 – Active Citizenship Pledge). Here, I noticed that I found it was easy to examine my pledge and why it’s important to not litter, but I found it difficult to actually *do* anything that related to my pledge; my pledge seemed too simple to just pick up litter every week, so I tried to think critically about my pledge to make it more meaningful to myself and extend my actions. As my pledge continued, I became more accepting of my efforts to examine the importance of my pledge and made alterations to it, so it became easier at the time to engage, **“After last week's post and thinking about the Tim Horton's "Please be a good neighbour and don't litter" sign, I decided to do my part in not even *​creating* litter/extra garbage in the landfill this past week. I did this by not bringing any lunches (4 during the week) to classes that had garbage. This was easy to do because I brought homemade food, salads and sandwiches, as these foods from home can easily be put in reusable containers”** (Zinger, Week 6 – What about my own waste?). I found it easy to look at littering and cleaning the community through personal means, such as bringing less garbage in my lunch. However, looking back, I was still unsure about my actions, I just felt more comfortable to be unsure and just go with it. I think this could be seen as turning point, but even towards the end part of my journey in Week 8, I felt stuck. I responded to my blog post feedback, **“Lastly, another suggestion is to “deepen what [I] want to do” and I didn’t realize it until now, but I am struggling with that aspect. I think it may be in the nature of my pledge, it isn’t very “deep” but I don’t want to use that as an excuse so I am hoping that I can change this for the last couple weeks of my pledge”** (Zinger, Week 8 – Response to Feedback). I summed up my feelings of practicing being an engaged citizen when I wrote **“I am also surprised that my pledge is understood by others because I am not so sure that I am fully aware of my pledge at times because it can be, and is, more complicated than just picking up litter”** (Week 8 – Response to Feedback). I’ve learned that being an engaged citizen is complicated, with ups and downs, and sometimes it’s difficult to know what exactly I want to do, or can do, to be engaged. This feeling of not knowing makes me hesitant to be engaged in fear of if I’m doing it “right”, but it makes my attempt at engagement even more powerful. These feelings were mostly due to the alterations and confusion that accompanied my pledge over time.

**Did you shift, change, alter your intentions over time?**

In my first blog post I had a few ideas of what my intentions towards engaged citizenship would be, such as **“to pick up litter in my community and surrounding areas, including any recycling and trash that I may see”** (My Active Citizenship Pledge), **“to research about littering”** andto **“encourage others to not litter”** (My Active Citizenship Pledge). But after about a month, I felt like I wasn’t doing enough to make my original pledge happen, so I shifted my focus to **“not even *​[create]* litter/extra garbage in the landfill”** (Week 6 – What about my own waste?). This was an attempt to show my *doing* towards being an active citizen. My intention to gather information as to why littering is wrong and its effects on the environment was consistent, although it did not feel like this until this reflection, and my actions of engagement were inconsistent and need improvement moving forward.

I welcome you to look at my written reflection to have an understanding about my flexibility in this pledge, the results of my actions, the effects of my actions on interactions with others, my sense of self, and participation within the class.

**Additional reflection, not within video:**

**How flexible/forgiving were you?**

With as many alterations as I feel that I had, I had to be flexible and forgiving. I was flexible to alter the focus of my pledge and examine *why* my pledge is important in relation to curriculum outcomes, course readings, Indigenous ways of knowing, etc. and this flexibility allowed me to learn a lot. As well, I was flexible, and willing, to accept constructive criticism from peers because I know that it is for my development.

Sometimes I think I may have been too forgiving or not forgiving enough towards myself, depending on the situation. For example, in Week 2 I wrote, **“I have not picked up litter this week and I think it is because I have not been outside a lot; between classes, working, doing homework, as well as a chilly change of season”** (Week 2 – Active Citizenship Pledge). This is a time where I was too forgiving, because I think that I should have held myself accountable early on to follow through with my pledge, despite my feelings of unsureness, and then perhaps I could have been more consistent throughout the semester. As well, I could explain the thinking behind why my pledge was important and the course readings it connected to, and at times I thought that was good enough to be an engaged citizen. I was too forgiving in that I should have pushed myself to take action. Although the process has impacted my knowledge of engaged citizenship, I could have avoided the alterations by settling on a specific action and going through with it.

**What was the result of your actions?**

I felt that because of my many alterations, and trouble to move past being a personally responsible citizen because I got so caught up in my actions, the result of my actions has mostly impacted my idea of what an engaged citizen is, and has not impacted others’ views and/or society. I now know that being an engaged citizen is complicated, takes small steps and should reflect what each person is able to do, instead of trying to do too many actions at once. I think that if my pledge is presented in different levels of citizenship, as in Westheimer’s (2004) article, a wider range of more in-depth results may occur. I explained what this pledge might look like at each level in my Week 10 blog post. I did not expect that I was going to change many views of others about littering, if any at all, but I did expect the process to impact me, so I am happy with the personal results that I see even if my pledge was a confusing process.

**Effects of Pledge**

**How did practicing being an actively engaged citizen (& class member) affect your daily interactions in the classroom & beyond (ie. with family, friends, etc)?**

Throughout my engaged citizenship with this pledge, I noticed how my pledge impacted my interactions with others. Because I wanted to be engaged this semester, but apparently struggled *how* to do this, I looked for other ways, even if unrelated to my pledge because I felt like I had to make up for my struggles. For example, in Week 4 I seemed to be very interested in my community involvement and engagement. I wrote, **“Unrelated to picking up litter, I donated to the Terry Fox walk when 2 middle years students rang my doorbell. My first question was if it was for W.S. Hawrylak, because it’s near my house, I work there, and I went to school there, so I may have been more willing to donate to a place that I am familiar with that has people that I know. I silently questioned myself right after I asked that because it doesn’t matter, and I donated anyways”** (Week 4 – Litter and More). I wanted to redeem myself for struggling with my littering pledge, so I donated. Furthermore, my interactions with others in my community were enhanced because of my engagement. Again, in Week 4, I wrote **“I supervised lunchroom this week at W.S. Hawrylak, and a few students asked for a Ziploc bag to put their craft in from lunch, but I didn’t know where they were kept in the classroom so I couldn't give them bags. At recess, one student found a Ziploc bag on the playground and used it for her craft. She did this without any prompting by teachers or students that I know of. I thought this was a good step for a grade 3 student to be an active citizen in the community by picking up and reusing what she found that didn't belong on the ground. I think that if I wasn’t doing this pledge, I would not think highly of this student’s act”** (Week 4 – Litter and More). My thoughts here affected how I responded to the student reusing a plastic bag from the ground, otherwise I would have asked her to throw it in the garbage because it was dirty.

Within class, I have been able to connect to course readings and extend my knowledge because of practicing engaged citizenship. For example, when discussing levels of citizenship, Westheimer (2004) used picking up litter as an example of a personally responsible citizen action. I could relate to this because I have participated at this level of citizenship. As well, making this direct connection to the article helped me to examine and explain what further actions I could take to enhance my engagement.

**How does this engaged practice contribute to your sense of self?**

My engaged citizenship practice contributed to my sense of self too. I have become very critical of my actions regarding engagement as this reflection shows. As well, I am critical towards society’s contributions to litter in the landfill and water ways, as a way to **“[look] at things from a variety of perspectives”** (Week 6 – What about my own waste?) due to my pledge. By knowing the importance of my pledge and how I, and others, can affect the environment by what they throw on the ground, or in garbage bins, I have insight into the importance of my actions.

This pledge has contributed to my awareness and engagement in the places and spaces that I occupy. In Week 4 **“I took a walk around Wascana Lake with a friend during the Thanksgiving weekend and I picked up some of the garbage that was near the shore line. I held onto the garbage for about a block until I approached the next garbage can; it was almost inconvenient to pick it up … Surprisingly, my friend did not judge my choice to pick up the litter because she also agreed that it made the area around the lake look better for viewers.”** Likely, I would not have picked up the litter I saw, especially when with a friend, if it wasn’t for this pledge. I felt motivated to continue on with my pledge after seeing the teachers at Balfour picking up litter just a few days prior to walking around Wascana Lake. Another space that I occupy is my cabin. In Week 7 I was **“curious as to if the location someone is in determines if, or makes them more likely, to litter. For example, I think I would be less likely to litter at my cabin, where it feels like I am in the environment more so than when I am in the city”** (Week 7 – Check In). Making connections to and ensuring how I treat my surroundings, including my community, contributes to my sense of belonging and increased respectfulness for the land.

**How did your social positions (identities) affect how you were able to participate as an engaged citizen and understand certain interactions?**

Being a white settler and having a Western perspective on nature, put me at a disadvantage compared to Indigenous peoples’ ways of knowing and appreciation of the land. However, this may have pushed me even more to engage as much as Iam able to. This part of my identity also may have made me more sympathetic, but not rightfully so, to justify others’ actions of littering, because I lack a relationship with the land and know that many others do too, as Westerners, another moment when I was, again, too forgiving.

My identity as a white settler also contributed to my ability to participate as an engaged citizen in my community in comparison to other spaces that I am part of, such as my cabin. I am privileged to have a cabin in which I can compare the litter in the city to litter at my cabin, a rural setting. It was suggested by a peer in their feedback to **“[collect] data and [observe] litter in rural vs. urban areas … [At my cabin,] I noticed there is a lot less garbage than in the city. In the city, the garbage may not be obvious in some areas other than the odd plastic bag swirling in the wind, but litter is actually hidden in every corner, dimple, crevice and crook on the streets, between buildings, behind houses, etc… At my cabin there is less people [and] the environment is more desirable by many (calm, relaxed, chose to be there) which aligns with less garbage. Perhaps the instinctual connection to the environment at my cabin, perhaps due to value and farming encourages people to not litter or litter less”** (Week 8 – Response to Feedback). Having another space to examine litter at allows me to engage at a deeper level than someone who only sees either urban or rural areas.

That is all for my reflection of my active citizenship pledge for this semester for ESST 317. Thanks for your attention!