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Reflection Essay Two

Everyone who has attended, visited, or simply looked at LALA can say that it is unlike any other school. Everything is simply different from the building, student population, and of course our social environment. We are not your average high school. The only experience I had in a public school was from Pre-K all the way up to fifth grade, and I am glad I spent the rest of my school years at LALA. I do not want to imagine how middle and high school would have been for me had I not came to this amazingly, different charter school. It was the best decision I could have ever made.

I can truly say that I enjoyed my experience with attending a public school, which is strictly for elementary school. Being in a school that had sufficient funds for unnecessary field trips, receiving pricey gifts before winter break from Santa, and being able to conduct as many in class projects as we desired was really fun as a child. The priority was always put on activities and events rather than on the education we received. The dream of any elementary school student! Then come middle school, I came to a small charter school where the student population was smaller than the size of my elementary school’s fifth graders.

None of my elementary school friends came to LALA; however, I live right across the street from my elementary school so every once in while I encounter them at the grocery store, sidewalk, church, or the local community center. Those encounters become quick recaps of what has happened in both of our lives. I have since then known of the whereabouts of only ten of the forty-eight students I had in my fifth-grade classroom. One of them will be attending UC Merced starting this fall, another is attending continuation school, another is working to support his wife and child, and another got heavily involved with drugs and gangs and now no one knows if he is alive or not. We all chose different paths, and I know LALA made sure I took the right one.

I could closely compare what could have been of me had I not came to LALA through my best friend of elementary school. We were extremely identical in elementary school and continue to be so that when we visited our elementary school teacher, he constantly mixed up our names. Our taste in music, sports, fashion, academic studies, and involvement in volunteer activities has always been the same. We have always been very similar, but our distinct school environments greatly impacted our decisions through high school. We are both graduating this year, but she will be attending community college because her grade point average was not eligible for any CSU. While I am working on my finals, class projects, and senior events, she is struggling to make up the classes she failed her junior year. To top it all off, I have no current obligations besides work and school, and she has to focus on getting to school on time and doctor check-ups for her pregnancy. We still maintain communication, but I tend to not take her time as much because I know our communication will only lessen when her child is born. I find it difficult at times to believe she is still the girl I used to match my Sketchers Light-Up shoes with. We both became fairly different now, and it is not hard to see what changed between us. Our choice of school of attendance was the turning point of our young lives, and LALA made sure I did not end up like her.

Had I not came to LALA I am certain that my perception of life would have been completely different. I have learned to love diversity and learn about other cultures that are not my own.  I aspire to travel the world and emerge into various cultures and incorporate it in my life. Enhancing my knowledge of other’s beliefs, customs, and arts will allow me to prosper and live my life to the fullest. My time at LALA has allowed me to have an open mind and bond with individuals whose identities are the complete opposite of my own. I can imagine myself being like my close cousins who go to public schools. Due to the large size of the campus, as they put it, everyone separates into groups: the nerdy Asians, the hipster white kids, the techy Middle Eastern kids, the jock/ cheerleader white kids, and, of course, the Hispanics separate into the soccer players, gossip group, *cholos*, and *paisitas*. When I first heard them tell me this, I thought they were joking, but the look on their faces said it all. Their closed minds consisted of segregation and did not consider the possibilities of diversity and mixed cultures. These are my cousins? How could we be so different? What about the people who identify themselves with cultures they were not born into? The physicality of a person does not determine their personality. My point of view on diversity completely changed when I joined LALA in sixth grade. I was able to realize the reality of cultures around the world at an early age and was able to grow from it. For those like my cousins, it will be difficult for them to change at such a mature age but it is possible. If I was able to find my identity and understand the identity of others, they can do it as well.

LALA is different and that is because those who occupy it are different. The teachers all have distinct backgrounds. He may have been a missionary in Korea, had a gazillion other jobs before being a teacher, and have a mild Captain America obsession. The staff are no less different. A principal who had an acting career and gets to know you so much you can easily consider her a second mom. The students are the most interesting of all. Our ethnic backgrounds are mainly Hispanic, but we identify with cultures that our ethnic labels are not categorized in. We are breaking the status quo of what a Mexican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Oaxacan, Puerto Rican, and all other Latino students need to be. The LALA students and staff whom I have worked with for the past seven years have made me into who I am today, and I would never change it.