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Research exercise: It Takes a Community to Ensure Equality

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It Takes a Community to Ensure Equality

A Social Justice Learning Living Cohort Community Project

2012 Service Learning Experience

Abstract

The University of Dayton's Building Communities through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSJLLC) strive to help students understand the importance of social justice within communities, specifically through providing students with opportunities to grow as leaders. The BCSJLLC's primary mission has been literacy. All members performed service learning in the community by way of tutoring. All members of BCSJLLC were trained by Project READ, the LLC's community partner, to appropriately tutor students from Kindergarten through 8th grade and young adults. Through Project READ, we personally were then assigned tutoring positions in Dayton, Ohio at Cleveland Public Elementary School and Holy Angels Catholic Grade School. Rachel worked with third graders at Cleveland Elementary by helping them with their reading and vocabulary skills, using a variety of strategies including flashcards. Wei and Mackenzie spent their time at Holy Angels Catholic Grade School and helped students with their reading and vocabulary skills as well as homework in various subjects. We felt our mission was to not only academically tutor but to be encouraging and demonstrate positive attitudes towards education. All of us enjoyed tutoring the student. We came to not only appreciate the opportunity to apply the Marianist principles, to lead, learn, and serve, but we all learned that it takes everyone's contributions within every community to work towards the progress of bettering our nation.



The Cave



A Theory of Social Justice

Social Justice LLC Mission Statement

We are a living learning community that:

- engages in a process of intellectual inquiry
- productively negotiates and creates space for critical listening and the free exchange of ideas
- holistically integrates academic, residential, and co-curricular experiences
- deploys the particular methodologies of the Humanities disciplines, specifically those associated with the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion
- fosters an interdisciplinary approach to fundamental human concerns, e.g., what it means to be human
- focuses on apprehending and addressing issues of Social Justice, such as stewardship, solidarity with those different from us, commitment to the integrity and equality of all human life, and dedication to the common good
- encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the experience of service learning

Service Learning Organization Mission Statement

The mission of the Academy of Holy Angels is to educate and nurture a diverse student population so that each student, as a whole person, may achieve full potential to excel intellectually, to live spiritually, to lead responsibly, to act justly, and to serve selflessly.

The mission of Cleveland Pre-K through 8th School is to provide a quality education according to the standards set by the state of Ohio through effective instruction.

Plato, a student of Socrates and a teacher of Aristotle, was an ancient Greece philosopher from the 5th century B.C. who remains one of the most renowned philosophers of human existence. Plato's "The Allegory of The Cave" appears in his central books of *Plato's Republic*. In this work, there are prisoners who are bound from infancy to a fixed position in a single dark, underground cave. All that they see is the interior of a cave wall where shadowy images are projected and created from a fire. The prisoners believe the life in the cave is reality because it is all that they've known. Then one prisoner is set free. He initially is in denial of facing what he's never seen and it's very hard for him to face a different side of reality. However, once he sees the sun and objects outside of the cave, he gains wisdom of what is real. This enlightened man realizes life as it was in the cave, viewing only cave walls and silhouettes of figures, was untruthful. He finds it is his duty to go back down into the cave and bring the others up to the light outside, despite how difficult it is for him to do and despite their rejection of the foreign idea. Plato's theory suggests we should move beyond what we are fixed on and what we experience daily in order to gain a truthful perspective. The Social Justice LLC values society in a holistic manner. All people should have the freedom of the opportunity of achievement which can rely heavily on education, nationally and globally. Therefore, by moving outside of the view from only what we know – may it be through reaching outside of stereotypes, our age level, our sound education environment, or our general perspectives- we, as members of the LLC and as members of society, can help create a greater contentment for all.

John Rawls was a political philosopher whose work changed the way many people think about justice and society. As found in his published writings, like his most noteworthy piece, *A Theory of Justice* published in 1971, Rawls' work is drawn from several aspects such as philosophy, economics, philosophy, and psychology. His theories give a stimulating outlook on the quality of individual human life in society. The main idea that Rawls explores is that justice is to be fair amongst every individual life, known as "justice as fairness". Rawls believes the distribution of basic goods that are necessary to obtain a comfortable and content lifestyle should be equally accessible to every single member of society. His work proposes that a society is rational when members start at an "original position" standpoint by understanding that each human being is deserving of, what he refers to as, "primary goods" that allow people to succeed in life. These include freedom, equality, opportunity, wealth, power, and income. He also believes those who set social structure should do so in a manner that is based on unawareness to neither the effects on oneself nor favoring oneself, also called the "veil of ignorance". He introduces the idea that social structures should not generate "social contracts" which are held in perceptions of the society's members and are socially bound within the social order in a way that unofficially allows certain setbacks for certain people. Measurements of injustices and inequalities should first and foremost be considered by the examination of society's members who are least advantaged and suffering a lack of Primary Goods. Similar to Rawls, the Social Justice LLC considers a quality education as an essential right. For our service learning, we worked one-on-one with students. This work reflects Rawls theory because he believes that justice and change can only begin at the individual level

Outcomes

- Building long relationships with students
- A set curriculum for each student will be provided.
- I will see personal growth and ease toward any certain subjects for individuals we work with.

Reflections

Mackenzie Barron

The students at Holy Angels School were initially intimidated by the UD mentors. It took extra effort to get them to a parallel comfort level. Often times at our age, we forget how challenging school seemed as younger students. In grade school, I remember I had not yet understood the real value of education in my life. I used that perspective to potentially relate to the students. We were not given a set curriculum as I anticipated either. We had to improvise and encourage extra learning and work with the students. I helped students with their homework in any subjects, helped students write, played academic and brain engaging games, and also helped upkeep the library the students use. We witnessed personal growth toward certain academic related areas of individual students we worked with. I personally learned that genuine actions and hands on effort will be the first thing to make a difference. I understand more for myself that with this attitude, justice in our society can actually come to life, one area at a time.

Wei Guo

I have had a positive experience at Holy Angels School even though the mentoring was not what I expected. The students worked hard on their homework and all subjects' exercises I played Bananagrams word games with the students who enjoyed the game and built a tower with the words we spelled. That was an amazing experience not only because it is fun to play with students but also I learned some words from the students too. Even though I didn't build lasting relationships with the students, I enjoy seeing the students whom I worked with before having a great time with their friends. This experience has taught me that don't look down at people who are younger that you.

Rachel Puslat

I was very lucky to get the opportunity to work with students at Cleveland Pre-K – 8. I was nervous at first because I don't have any younger siblings so I've never really had to work with students, but they were so welcoming and friendly to me from the moment I walked in the door. They were very willing to work with me and actually made an effort during our tutoring sessions. I got the chance to help them with their math and reading skills by training them with flashcards and their homework. I noticed a huge improvement in reading in quite a few of the students I was working with and the kids that were still struggling kept on trying their hardest. Seeing them improve in just a few short weeks made me feel accomplished and I was so excited for them. If I could do it all over again, I would. I learned that I work really well with kids and I enjoy helping other people.