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# Research exercise: Enhancing Adolescent Development through Service Learning

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# Enhancing Adolescent Development

## A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project

Liam Buckley  
Tom Cipiti  
Jacob Ewing  
Travis Venanzi  
Zach Wisniewski

### 2012 Service Learning Experience

#### Abstract

As members of the Building Community through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSJLLC) our first experience was meeting each other and becoming more than just neighbors. Living in a community and attending classes together has provided us a unique educational experience. As members of the BCSJLLC, we are committed to improving literacy rates in the Miami Valley. We pursued this ideal by donating new books to the children in fourth and fifth grade at the Cleveland Elementary School, a Dayton inner city school. As a part of our service learning commitment, we were trained to help students in grades K-8 learn to read through the tutor training program provided by Project READ. After our training, we were placed in tutoring positions at Holy Angels and DECA. By tutoring these children, our goal was to encourage educational growth in their literacy studies. As we helped these students, we felt we were emerging as leaders in the community. By being transformational leaders, we empowered these children with the knowledge to become leaders themselves. In this presentation, we will reflect upon building community and as leaders how we can affect the surrounding community.



#### Outcomes

- Integrate ourselves into the community
- Help integrate others into the community
- Learn what we can do to help others
- Better the community
- Become leaders that are socially aware of problems in society
- Take the concepts learned in English, Philosophy, and Religion and apply them to our lives
- Apply the concepts of equality and common good

#### Reflection

At the beginning of the year none of us had any idea what we were getting in too. Living in the same hall allowed us to create special bonds that made all of the work we did together really enjoyable. As an LLC we accomplished things that will be useful for the next four years and for the rest of our lives. As a whole we improved our writing skills and learned how to achieve a final goal by working together. Tutoring the children at the different elementary schools allowed us to see life through a different perspective and had a large impact on us. We learned how to be role models and someone that the kids could look up too as a good example. The bookmarks that we made and the books we donated was an experience for us because we didn't know that such a small gesture could go such a long way. Being in the social justice LLC, helped us open our eyes to many different life experiences that will be unforgettable. The friendships and life experiences that were involved in this great program, is something that will never be forgotten and will always have an impact on our lives one way or another.

#### Social Justice LLC Mission Statement

We are a living 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

#### Holy Angels Mission Statement

We are a vibrant education ministry of the Parish committed to challenging our students to grow in faith and excel in academics within a caring Christian environment.

#### The Cave

In the Allegory of the Cave in The Republic, Socrates tells a story about philosophy. After analyzing the text, one can find that our mission statement is outlined quite well in the Allegory of the Cave. The story is about an individual that ascends to enlightenment by discovering a world outside of the cave. After gaining sight of the world he begins to finally contemplate himself as a being. He realizes that the "world" inside of the cave is fickle compared to the intellect of the real world. He realizes this fact when he steps back into the cave with the other beings. He then felt obligated to free them from the prison of the cave in which they live their lives, and bring them into the world of enlightenment outside of the cave.

We as students are becoming enlightened by attending the University of Dayton and learning about not only the world around us but also ourselves as beings. We are also part of a community that promotes intellectual and spiritual growth. As our sight becomes clearer to the light outside of the cave, we are called to reach out to those whom are not enlightened. So as individuals we help serve the community.

As we are still learning and ascending to new levels of knowledge, we are still stuck in the cave in some aspects of our life. By providing service to the community, they also teach us and pull us up to their levels of enlightenment.

#### A Theory of Social Justice

John Rawls, a philosopher who wrote *A Theory of Justice* introduced us to the idea of the veil of ignorance. This idea ensures that no one person is at an advantage or disadvantage in a situation. This theoretical idea was used by us in our adventures of student learning by not judging or putting anyone one of the students higher than one another during tutoring. This was possible because we were able to tutor a new student every session, also going in on a daily basis we were able to meet a new student with a different background so you could not pre-judge the kids. We also used the veil of ignorance when we were giving back to the Dayton community when giving books to elementary school students. We did not know the kids race, age, or interests we were only given a name and the reading level they were at and told to pick out a book for them. Due to us not knowing their interests we needed to pick out a book that would be suitable for all types of readers, which would put no one at advantage or disadvantage. Through John Rawls work we have learned more in depth about how with not judging someone and using the veil of ignorance you are able to open up to a broader range of people.