The Difference We Make is in the Doing
A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project

Abstract
As participants in the Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort, we have the opportunity to help build and improve the community we live in. Our Cohort’s mission is to spread literacy. An opportunity we had to serve the local community was by working with elementary-aged students. We encouraged their learning and helped them strive to reach their educational goals by assisting them with their reading skills. The non-profit agency Project READ taught us necessary techniques to work with younger students K-8th. We were then placed in an afterschool tutoring program at the Holy Angels Elementary School. Our mission there was to help improve the students’ vocabulary and ability to read. By developing personal relationships with our students we were able to encourage their learning and become positive role models. We did a variety of activities with the children to improve their reading. We used blocked letters to spell different words, we read back and forth with each other, we worked through spelling books, and we did letter flash cards. The children seemed to really enjoy the hands on activities.

Reflection
Throughout this semester, our group has been tutoring while simultaneously being positive role models and mentors. We believe that we have learned. The Allegory of the Cave is a timeless lesson. Once the prisoners were released from the Cave, they had the potential of a new and richer understanding of the world that they were free to explore. Our students are like the prisoners. Education can free them from their cave. By being positive role models and mentors, we believe that we are showing them what can be accomplished by staying in school and being life-long learners. If we are sincere in developing personal relationships with the students we encounter, they will remember us and how we behaved. At best, we can encourage them, praise their efforts and acknowledge their progress. We are passing on what we have learned. The Allegory of the Cave is a timeless lesson.

The Cave
Throughout this semester, our group has been tutoring while we have simultaneously been studying Plato’s The Allegory of the Cave. This allegory parallels our work with our students. Our students, like the man in the cave, have been chained down by what they do not know or what they have not experienced. The ultimate goal of education is to learn more than what we have known before. As tutors, our role is to help the students to remove the chains of inequity and model a new understanding of the role of education.

Unlike the prisoners in the cave who do not have an advocate or mentor, we encourage our students to take risks and to move beyond the “cave” of their current experience. Once the prisoners were released from the Cave, they had the potential of a new and richer understanding of the world that they were free to explore. Our students are like the prisoners. Education can free them from their cave. By being positive role models and mentors, we believe that we are showing them what can be accomplished by staying in school and being life-long learners. If we are sincere in developing personal relationships with the students we encounter, they will remember us and how we behaved. At best, we can encourage them, praise their efforts and acknowledge their progress. We are passing on what we have learned. The Allegory of the Cave is a timeless lesson.

Service learning provides a natural way to pass along the wisdom of Plato’s story. By tutoring and performing service learning, we are coming out of the cave as well. This service learning opportunity has created mutual relationships with the students, and it has overall given us a great experience.

A Theory of Justice
John Rawls was one of the most distinguished moral philosophers of the second half of the twentieth century. He is remembered for his theory of justice that was described in his book A Theory of Justice. His two basic ideas were the "original positions" and the "veil of ignorance." Rawls believed first and foremost in "justice as fairness" and that the rights of the individual should never be sacrificed for the greater good of society. The "original position" included the primary goods, freedom, equality, opportunity, wealth, power, and income. Rawls proposed that each person in the society must start in an "original position" which would mean they would have access to freedom, equality, opportunity, wealth, powers, and income. His second concept was the "veil of ignorance." Under this veil, members of society would make the right decisions about justice, opportunity, and access to the primary goods without knowing what position they hold in the societal structure. We were able to apply part of Rawls theory in our service learning experience tutoring students at Holy Angels Elementary School. As tutors, we were applying Rawls concept of fairness. We worked to make sure they could read at a grade appropriate level. The goal would be that they would eventually be able to read at an appropriate level to make informed decisions as voting citizens of the United States. The better these students are able to read and understand the challenges of their democracy the more access they will have to power and the opportunity to obtain wealth. We provided the students with a unique learning environment that best fit their needs and their learning style. Service learning is one way to apply the principles of justice. Everyone needs to be able to read and write in a democracy to have an equal say in the process of governing the country. People want an equal opportunity to access wealth and that comes by being educated and prepared to think critically. Our service is helping the next generation to be prepared by applying part of Rawls theories. Every student deserves equal access to opportunities and by helping to improve their reading we are giving them a chance to succeed and be a productive member of society.

The Holy Angels Elementary School is located at the edge of UD’s campus. Our tutoring experience was organized by Project READ with literacy being the main focus.

2012 Service Learning Experience

Students at Holy Angels used these banana letters as a fun way to practice their spelling words.

Our tutoring experience was organized by Project READ with literacy being the main focus.

Holy Angels Elementary School is 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.

Outcomes
• Students did not only look at us as tutors but we became role models.
• Improved the students reading, writing, and spelling abilities.
• Shared the importance of building a community.
• Stressed the importance of receiving a good education.
• Incorporated Marianist Values in our tutoring techniques.

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