Research exercise: Developing Each Child Academically: Applying Marianist Ideals

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Developing Each Child Academically: A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project 2012 Service Learning Experience

Abstract

Through the Building Communities for Social Justice Learning Cohort (BCLC) we are placed in social justice themed classes, pursue 40 hours of service, and focus on a community with other students. In order to pursue the service learning component we were required to take part in a Community Based Learning (CBL) class. As the group we were placed in focused on social justice through the service at the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA), a high school within the school system in Dayton, Ohio funded by the University of Dayton. This school offers an opportunity to socialize academically so that they are able to achieve their goal of graduating from high school and furthering their education at the University of Dayton. We were able to work with students on various assignments, such as drafting and revising English papers, practicing vocabulary, developing fundamental math skills, and improving their literacy skills through reading. By working one-on-one with the students we have become more involved with our community of society. As student tutors we are spending 12 hours a week on campus working with students in the DECA. We are receiving these experiences of learning, teaching, and serving since our daily lives.

Social Justice 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 discipline as they are relevant to the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion
- Encourages a participatory, analytical 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

The Dayton Early College Academy is a unique high school in that it provides an educational environment for students to gain a head start on their college career. The Dayton Early College Academy (DECA) is a school in the school district of Dayton, Ohio, that offers a unique opportunity to students who are interested in pursuing a career in business. The DECA is a magnet school for students who have expressed an interest in pursuing a career in business. The DECA offers a variety of courses that are designed to help students prepare for their future careers. The DECA Mission Statement

The Dayton Early College Academy is singularly focused on preparing urban learners from the Dayton Public School District to go to college and be the first in their families to graduate.

A Theory of Social Justice

John Rawls, a famous American philosopher, wrote about topics related to moral and political philosophy. He earned his Ph. D from Princeton University and went on to become a professor at Oxford, Cornell, and the Harvard University during the 1960's. One of his most well-known works, Theory of Justice, was published in 1971. This work explores ideas such as the original position, the veil of ignorance, and justice as fairness. The original position describes the original starting point of society in which the designer of the society make certain assumptions about the primary goods that each person in the society must have. These primary goods include freedom, equality, opportunity, wealth, power, and income. The idea of "justice as fairness" is the idea that principles of justice are agreed to an initial situation that is fair for all who reside in the society. The veil of ignorance is an idea which states that lawmakers should make their decisions about the primary goods without knowing where they themselves would fall into society in terms of sex, race, birth, or talent. This allows everyone to be on the same level so that no law creates favor for one person over others. Overall, Rawls believed that justice must be fair and that each individual in a society must have his or her primary goods. Through his suggested methods the ideal society can be achieved where everyone is treated as an equal. For our service learning, we worked one-on-one with junior high and high school students at Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). This work mirrors Rawls' theory because he believed that justice and change can only begin at the individual level.

Plato’s Allegory of The Cave

The allegory of The Cave, found in book number seven of The Republic, was written by Plato in 400BC. Plato was in the form of a dialogue where his mentor, Socrates, has a conversation with Glaucon about the allegory of the cave. Socrates, Glaucon, and Plato were all Greek philosophers. Plato was originally preparing for a life in politics, but the trial and the execution of Socrates for being called the wisest man in Athens caused Plato to become more interested in philosophy.

The cave is a hypothetical situation in which prisoners are chained since childhood and exposed only to shadows projected onto the wall in front of them. Because they have been chained since childhood and have no information about the outside world, they think that the shadows are reality. One day a man is released from his chains and goes out into the real world to discover the truth. After residing in the real world for a period of time, he goes back into the cave to tell the others about what he discovered. The allegory of the cave was Plato's way of symbolically describing in which mankind resides on the 3rd floor of the main lobby of the College Park Center where DECA resides on the 3rd floor. The main lobby of the College Park Center where one must obtain a pass to enter DECA.

Outcomes

- Develop critical thinking skills
- Help students with organization and the drafting of English papers
- Improve literacy and increase student reading ability
- Improve fundamental math skills

Reflections

Alyse - I enjoyed working with a homeroom English classroom as well as one-on-one with a 19 year old student. I was able to help my single student with the organization of her paper on Beowulf as well as help draft ideas for her science paper. I worked with the class as well to write their works cited and helped to make sure that they were staying on track with their in class work for the period. The experience taught me how to effectively communicate and work with not only one student, but a group of students as well.

Emily - Tutoring at DECA has been an immensely rewarding. I plan to become a math teacher in the future, so having this experience has reassured my love for teaching. I have worked with the students I can relate with, and their eagerness to work with me. This experience has taught me how to establish rapport with younger students and translate my criticisms constructively in a way that promotes holistic learning.

Scott - As DECA tutor is assigned to work with a seventh grade student. Together we developed fundamental science skills and his math skills. He helped understood and complete the algebra homework as well as science homework. Enjoying working with the student and it was a great experience. DECA tutoring at DECA has allowed me to experience what the Dayton area strives to create a better learning environment for that student. Working one-on-one with students I have learned communicative skills as well as how to stay positive and enthusiastic when student pairings didn't always work out as planned. I worked with the student on graphing coordinate planes and also with comprehension of vocabulary words for their English homework.

Chelsea - Tutoring at DECA was a wonderful opportunity and I am glad that I was able to experience it.