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Fostering Literacy in Dayton City Schools

A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project

Presenters: Ellie McCormick, Libby Harbaugh, John Buerschen, David Titus

Advisors: Lori Phillips-Young, MonaLisa Mullins

Abstract

As participants in the Building Community through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSJLLC) our goal is to advance the cause of literacy in the Miami Valley through service learning. The BCSJLLC's community partner, the non-profit organization, Project READ, trained us to tutor students in grades K-3 and young adults. Members of our group were then placed by Project READ in tutoring assignments in DECA with high school students and in Cleveland Elementary School with first and third grade students. Our mission was to help improve the student's vocabulary and ability to read. We were consistently challenged by the different ages and skill levels of the individuals we were instructing; and the challenge to encourage and not direct our students. We found that developing personal relationships with our students helped us to encourage their overall learning and specifically helped them to gain confidence in their ability to improve their reading and vocabulary skills. Working with students in Dayton's inner city schools allowed us to see firsthand the education disparities that exist in America. As students, we believe that all people in a just society should be able to read and write. In our presentation we will reflect on how the combination of our service learning, the classes we have taken in our cohort, and our training by Project READ worked to advance the common good of the students we tutored. We will also explore the importance of our work in the context of the Marianist ideals of Lead, Learn, and Serve.

The Allegory of Cave

Our service learning experience relates to Plato's "The allegory of the Cave" in many ways through what we as tutors learned during the experience. We all went outside our comfort levels, or our "caves" by tutoring and mentoring children of a different economic standing than us. We now can see that there is a different reality outside the UD "bubble" that many students get caught up in. We will take these experiences with us because we now have a different outlook on the Dayton community and people with different economic standing than us.

Outcomes

- Deepened our realizations of the issues of literacy
- Became role models to Dayton students
- Made friends with the students we tutored
- Learned about ourselves as teachers
- Exercised our abilities to encourage and support others in something greater than ourselves
- Realized how lucky we are to be literate students
- Gained a greater appreciation for the education we have had
- Realized the importance of being advocates against



The Building Communities for Social Justice Learning and Living Community: 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

A Theory of Social Justice

John Rawls

Our work with Project Read utilized John Rawls' Theory of Social Justice because we emphasized a focus on the education of disadvantaged members of society. Often the education of disadvantaged students is neglected and overlooked by a hierarchal system where everyone is not always considered and included in the realm of high-standard schooling. The individuals in power of public-education generally assume that the structure of modern-education will include all levels of society, when in reality, it does not.