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Teaching and Learning to Make a Difference

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2012 Service Learning Experience



Abstract

The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSJLLC) helps students understand the importance of social justice and its impact on communities while providing students with opportunities to grow as leaders. Its primary mission is literacy and many BCSJLLC members tutored students in the community. Members were trained by our community partner, Project READ, to tutor students in K-8 and young adults. Our service included helping students with the homework that is most difficult for them. Plunges at UD are also a way of civic engagement. The Immigration and Refugee Plunge allowed us to see and experience first-hand the problems associated with the immigration application process for those seeking to enter the United States. The time we spent performing service in our community and learning about the ways we can impact legislation regarding the issues around immigration all reinforces our commitment to social justice and epitomizes and employs the Marianist ideals of lead learn, and serve.

The Allegory of the Cave

In the Allegory of the Cave, Plato likens undedicated people to prisoners chained in a cave, unable to turn their heads. The only thing they can see is the wall of the cave. Behind them is a group of puppeteers that cast shadows on the wall of the cave. The prisoners are not able to turn their heads and see the real objects that cast the shadows. The reality becomes nothing more than echoes and shadows cast on a wall.

Our work with Dayton Early College Academy allows us to free the prisoners chained in the cave. By acting as a tutor and a mentor to struggling students, we are giving them the tools to “turn their heads” and develop a deeper understanding of their academic courses. They are able to see beyond the “shadows” of just barely understanding their course work and able to delve into the “real objects” behind those shadows such as complete comprehension of difficult concepts.

In the Cave, the overarching goal of the city is to educate the people so that they can use this knowledge for good. At DECA we hope to not only educate but inspire students to seek a higher level of education so that one day they will be able to fully harness the gift of knowledge that they were given.

Those in the cave were freed by the knowledge of the real objects behind the shadows and allowed to contemplate good. However, they cannot remain contemplating good forever, completely disregarding the path that led them to this enlightenment. They must occasionally return to the cave and rule there and help other prisoners. We understand that we were once those prisoners in need of the help of teachers, parents, and tutors to get to where we are now. It is important that we share our knowledge so that the cycle of enlightenment can continue.

With just a few hours of tutoring every week, we are able to free the students of DECA from their own personal caves of bewilderment and allow them to push forward towards a brighter future where they will one day give back to the community all the knowledge they have received.

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.

Outcomes

- To better the world through interactions in our Dayton community.
- To build relationships with the greater Dayton community.
- To be able to relate what we learned through our service project with what we learned in the classroom.
- To help young students reach the best of their ability.
- To be role models to young students.

Reflection and Synthesis

As tutors at Dayton Early College Academy we get the privilege of helping junior high-level students with all subjects of their studies. It is a reward to see how much we are really helping these students achieve academic success. As students ourselves, we know what it is like to be frustrated by our lack of understanding in certain subjects. It is our job and pleasure to alleviate that sense of frustration for the students of DECA. As tutors at Holy Angels School, we were given the opportunity to spend time with the younger generation, helping them realize their full academic potential. Not only did we help them with their homework, but we also built relationships with them and showed them the wonders of pursuing higher education. We were role models to these young kids, and it was an incredibly rewarding experience to see how much our presence affected their day. While at UD, being given the opportunity to get involved in Social Justice and service was an amazing opportunity. I participated in the Immigration and Refugee plunge, where we traveled to St. Mary’s church in Dayton and heard from speakers with experience immigrating into the US and how difficult that transition and trip was for them and their families. I learned what I can do to change the immigration laws and how to get involved by emailing congressmen and senators and higher people in politics to spread the word for those trying to start better lives out of their homelands. I was able to connect that to social justice teachings of an equal society and everyone having the right to the life they want for them and their families. Hearing from those who have experienced immigration was hard because it’s a very emotional subject, and I want to help as much as I can with passing laws that make the process of becoming legal immigrants easier for those who come to the US to escape from war and conflict. I learned that I can be the change I want to see in the world.

John Rawls (1921-2002) was an American philosopher who studied at Princeton University. Rawls taught Political Philosophy at Cornell, Oxford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard. During his time teaching at Harvard Rawls wrote his most influential book, the Theory of Justice. The Theory of Justice (1971) was groundbreaking in the philosophical community because it was original and new. This theory was much different than the earlier centralized view of utilitarianism. Rawls changed the method of justice from a system that used to benefit the greatest number of people for the greatest good to a system that benefited everyone equally based on fairness. In The Theory of Justice, Rawls suggested three theories that would change the problems in society to create a more equality-based system. Rawls’s first theory, the “original position” examines the basic rights of each person in a society. His second theory, the “veil of ignorance” goes off of his first theory arguing that the people who decide the basic rights of humans within their society must not know their societal rank. This is fair because people who don’t know their social rank will make unbiased decisions for the greatest good of all people. Rawls third theory, the “difference principle” states that differences in a social structure or organization must be measured by the effect it has on the least advantaged people in the situation. Rawls recommended that every person has an equal right for achievement and should have an equal chance with the rest of society. By offering help to others we are creating a more equal learning environment for students in the Dayton area. According to Rawls, learning should be equal for all students to succeed.

Building Communities for 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