Research exercise: Guiding Little Angels: A Literacy Experience at Holy Angels Elementary School

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Guiding Angels
A Social Learning and Living Cohort Community Project
2012 Service Learning Experience

Abstract

The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort (BCSLLC) is committed to the ideal of improving literacy in the Greater Miami Valley. During our first semester, our cohort participated in the first annual Book Buddy Program with Dayton's Cleveland Elementary School. We donated brand new books to students in the fourth and fifth grade and to students in special education. The BCSLLC's community partner, the non-profit organization Project READ, trained us to tutor reading for students in grades K-8 and young adults. Then Project READ placed us in tutoring positions at Holy Angels, a private elementary school. Holy Angels' mission is to guide its students to academic excellence. Our mission was to support the classroom teachers and to assist five and six year-old students with their reading and vocabulary skills. Our tutoring time was spent going over math workbooks, alphabet flashcards, their spelling words, and reading books with students. Throughout the spring we have learned more about the Dayton community and through our service we have learned more about the importance of the Maritain ideals of lead, learn, and serve.

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 a teacher's understanding 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.

A Theory Of Social Justice

John Rawls, a utilitarian philosopher, graduated from Princeton University. He taught at Cornell, Oxford, MIT, and Harvard University. He is known as one of the greatest ethical philosophers of the last 60 years. Other than his teachings, Rawls is known for his best-selling book, A Theory of Justice, published in 1971. Rawls makes many revolutionary concepts throughout his book, but none as significant as his utilitarian principles. Rawls states two different approaches on justice; one which benefits the greater good while the other provides fair treatment for every individual.

Rawls theory, the “Veil of Ignorance,” instructs that one who is in a position of power must cast his vote in favor of the most disadvantaged individual in society. This directly relates to another Rawlsian principle which is the “Difference Principle.” Rawls’ specific theory explores the concept of bringing how successful a decision is by its impact on the least fortunate individuals in society. For example, a politician must cast his vote in favor of the most disadvantaged individual in society. If he focuses on the top-tier of society, the majority of the population will suffer due to the neglect and the ignorance of the elected official towards the lower classes. Another theory provided by Rawls is “Social Contracts,” which is a revised theory of Rousseau’s. Social contracts are unwritten and written rules society abides by in different scenarios. These contracts shape how we react to external factors. For our service learning, we worked one-on-one with students. This work mirrors Rawls’ theory because he believed that Justice and change can only begin at individual levels.

Outcomes

- Encourage students of Holy Angels to enjoy learning
- Improve students' literacy skills
- Build students' math abilities
- Build a sense of community between the students of Holy Angels and the Social Justice LLC at the University of Dayton

Reflection

With our time spent at Holy Angels, we have grown to better understand what it means to provide service to our community. With service projects like these, we are introduced to the Dayton area and ways in which we can work together to create a stronger community.

One element of our service learning that surprised us was the amount of enthusiasm on the students’ part. Even though their school day was over, they demonstrated a tremendous passion towards learning and meeting with us and learning what we had to offer. Throughout the week, the students at Holy Angels became accustomed to us. They learned our names and understood that we care about their learning. They started to open up and look at us not just as a mentor, but as a friend. They talked about their favorite colors, foods, and memories and it allowed for us to have something in common with them and build trust. This helped us to be tanner as well because the students were ready to work and willing to ask questions.

After our involvement with the students at Holy Angels, we came away with the understanding that everyone has an ability to learn and accomplish any goal that they set their mind to. Sometimes the mentorship seemed a little overwhelming, but the students’ resilience and fortitude never allowed them or us to give up. We apply this experience to our lives because we also struggle at times with our decisions. We learn to make our decisions which is a revised theory of Rousseau’s. Social contracts are unwritten and written rules society abides by in different scenarios. These contracts shape how we react to external factors. For our service learning, we worked one-on-one with students. This work mirrors Rawls’ theory because he believed that Justice and change can only begin at individual levels.