Research exercise: Illuminating the Issue of Literacy

Alexis Niekamp  
*University of Dayton*, stander@udayton.edu

Kilee A. Weiskittel  
*University of Dayton*, stander@udayton.edu

Meghan A. Winter  
*University of Dayton*, stander@udayton.edu

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The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning Living Community (BCSLLC) is a first-year program at the University of Dayton whose mission is to promote literacy and the advocacy of social justice through service learning in the Greater Dayton/Miami Valley neighborhoods. To help promote literacy in the community, we participated in the first annual Book Buddy Program with the Cleveland Elementary School. The BCSLLC community partner, Project READ, trained the LLC students as tutors and then placed us with students in the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). DECA’s mission is to assist high school students to graduate and then attend college. At DECA, we worked with seventh-grade students to help improve their skills in basic math, reading and vocabulary skills, fundamentals of science, and organizational skills. We found that as our service learning gave us the opportunity to develop personal relationships with the students and to provide much-needed assistance to the DECA teachers. Through this experience and the application of what we have learned in our cohort classes and tutoring training, we have gained a better understanding of the Marxist ideals of lead, learn, and serve.

**Expected Outcomes**
- Develop relations with students
- Help students learn various subjects
- Share the importance of schooling and literacy
- Use the education we have been privileged with to encourage students into higher education
- See positive results from our tutoring

**Reflections**
Alexis Niekamp
After spending a few hours a week tutoring Jasmine, a seventh grader, I realized that sometimes the things that you are reluctant to do can turn out being not as bad as you think. She and I ended up being very good friends and partners. I learned many things from her while she was hopefully learning from me. Jasmine learned how to be organized through using her planner to write down homework and tests. I learned, through non-related discussions between her and I that I am fortunate to have the stable upbringing that I did.

Meghan Winter
During the Project READ tutoring experience at Dayton Early College Academy I worked with a seventh grade girl, Iyana. We met each Thursday and worked on Math, Science, English, and organization. We mainly focused on her basic math skills and projects. Each week Iyana was excited to show me the good grade she got on a test we had studied for or a project we had been working on. Her enthusiasm for learning and not only was getting help in study from this tutoring sessions, but enjoying them too. The experience was very rewarding because I had the opportunity to bring excitement into learning for a young student.

Kilee Weickelst
During my tutoring at Dayton Early College Academy, I assisted one student, Jayln, every week. We worked on science, math, reading, and social studies together. We mainly focused on reading and vocabulary. I made flashcards for her to study her weekly vocabulary words. We also read passages from her book that she was assigned. At first she didn’t like to read in front of me, but soon she warmed up. For her science work I would study the concepts and do work sheets with her to make sure I was learning and understand. With every passing week Jayln opened up and was willing to participate in working together. Helping her was a rewarding experience and we both learned from each other. I learned how to be patient with her and how much of an impact I can make on someone. This experience was very rewarding because I learned that my time and attention can really help someone else.

**Abstract**

The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning Living Community (BCSLLC) is a first-year program at the University of Dayton whose mission is to promote literacy and the advocacy of social justice through service learning in the Greater Dayton/Miami Valley neighborhoods. To help promote literacy in the community, we participated in the first annual Book Buddy Program with the Cleveland Elementary School. The BCSLLC community partner, Project READ, trained the LLC students as tutors and then placed us with students in the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). DECA’s mission is to assist high school students to graduate and then attend college. At DECA, we worked with seventh-grade students to help improve their skills in basic math, reading and vocabulary skills, fundamentals of science, and organizational skills. We found that as our service learning gave us the opportunity to develop personal relationships with the students and to provide much-needed assistance to the DECA teachers. Through this experience and the application of what we have learned in our cohort classes and tutoring training, we have gained a better understanding of the Marxist ideals of lead, learn, and serve.

**Social Justice Mission Statement**

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

**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. DECA is an early college high school that offers Dayton Public School students a one-of-a-kind opportunity to excel academically and succeed in their goal of graduating from college. We offer a high-performing alternative to Dayton’s urban learners who want a bright future and are willing to work hard to achieve it. What distinguishes DECA from most urban high schools is the “we go to college” mindset of our students.

**Illuminating the Issue of Illiteracy**

**Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project**

**2012 Service Learning Experience**

In the College Park Center, Dayton Early College Academy is located on the third floor.

At DECA, students are encouraged to succeed and consider college to ensure succeed in their future.

Meghan helps students stay organized, an important factor at DECA to ensure success.

Entry into DECA houses many signs that encourage the students to succeed and go to college.

**Plato**

Plato, a Greek philosopher and a student of Socrates, born around 428 BC and died in 328 BC, developed a western philosophy and a science. Plato believed that a world seen through our senses is not actually the genuine world, but an unclear replica of it. The Republic, one of Plato’s writings set out to prove how the sun shows the Form of Good. The sun represents someone’s ultimate experiences and the application of what we have learned in our cohort.

**John Rawls**

John Rawls was a famous American Philosopher who was born in 1921 and died in 2002. He was known as a leading figure in political and moral philosophy and was arguably the most important. He graduated from Princeton with a PhD and taught there for 2 years. He taught at Oxford University, Cornell University, and finally ended up and Harvard University where he taught for almost forty years. His most significant work, A Theory of Justice, was first published in 1971 and is based on the belief that a society should contain equality, freedom, and fairness for all. Some of Rawls’ major theories include the difference principle of social justice, the veil of ignorance, and the social contract theory. John Rawls concept of social contract is based off of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory that the will of people as a whole give direction and power to the state. The difference principle declares that there is no success in a society unless the least advantaged are all supported and helped.

This means that inequalities in the distribution of goods are only allowed if these differences benefit the least advantaged members of the society. The veil of ignorance states that decisions should be made to benefit the whole society, without taking into account a person’s social status, race, gender, IQ, and background. The reality of the veil of ignorance is that it can never be used because people have always and will always base decisions on different factors in society. Rawls’ social contract is based off the notion that individuals in a society unite by a process of forming mutual agreement, consent to abide by certain rules and to accept duties to protect one another from violence, fraud, or neglect. If a person does not participate in this consent, they are not a true part of the society. These theories as a whole explain Rawls beliefs on equality and justice and how it should be put to use in a society. 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 the individual level.