Research exercise: Illuminating the Issue of Literacy

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Abstract

The Building Communities through Social Justice Learning Living Community (BCSJLLC) 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 BCSJLLC 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 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

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 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.

DECA'sfocus on apprehending and addressing issues of Social Justice, encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion, fosters an interdisciplinary approach to fundamental human concerns, such as stewardship, solidarity with those different from us, and dedication to the common good, and encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the experience of service learning.

Illuminating the Issue of Illiteracy

A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project

2012 Service Learning Experience

At DECA, students are encouraged to succeed and consider college to ensure success 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.

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 at 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, 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.

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 friends and I think 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, Lyana. We met each Thursday and worked on Math, Science, English, and Organization. We mainly focused on her basic math skills and projects. Each week Lyana was excited to show me the good grade she got on a test we had studied for or a project we had worked on. Her enthusiasm for learning and she not only was learning from these 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 Weiskittel

During my tutoring at Dayton Early College Academy, I assisted one student, Jaylin, 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 studied the concepts and do work sheets with her to make sure she was learning and understand. Every passing week Jaylin 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.

Expected Outcomes

• Develop relationships with students
• Help students learn various subjects
• Share the importance of schooling and illiteracy
• Use the education we have been privileged with to encourage students into higher education
• See positive results from our tutoring