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Research exercise: Developing Each Child Academically: Applying Marianist Ideals

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Developing Each Child Academically: A Social Justice Learning and Living Cohort Community Project 2012 Service Learning Experience

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 cocurricular experiences
- deploys the particular methodologies of the Humanities disciplines in socially and ethically responsible ways associated with the study of English, Philosophy, and Religion
- encourages an integrative, holistic approach to fundamental human concerns, e.g., what it means to be human
- focuses on apprehending and addressing issues of Social Justice, such as neighborhood and community those associated with the study of Education, Philosophy, and Religion
- teaches by a pedagogical approach to fundamental human concerns, e.g., what it means to be human
- encourages undergraduate research that is informed by the experience of service learning

A Theory of Social Justice

John Rawls, a famous American philosopher, wrote about topics related to moral and political philosophy. He earned his Ph. D. from Princeton University and went on to become a professor at Oxford, Cornell, and then Harvard University during the 1960s. One of his most well-known works, Theory of Justice, was published in 1971. This work explores ideas such as the original position, the veil of ignorance, and justice as fairness. The original position describes the original starting point of society in which the designers of the society make certain assumptions about the primary goods that each person in the society must have. These primary goods include freedom, equality, opportunity, wealth, power, and income. The idea of "justice as fairness" is the idea that principles of justice are agreed to at an initial situation that is fair for all who reside in the society. The veil of ignorance is an idea which states that lawmakers should make their decisions about the primary goods without knowing where they themselves would fall into society in terms of sex, race, birth, or talent. This allows everyone to be on the same level so that no law creates favor of one person over others. Overall, Rawls believed that justice must be fair and that each individual in a society must have his or her primary goods. Through his suggested methods the ideal society can be achieved where everyone is treated as an equal. For our service learning, we worked one-on-one with junior high and high school students at Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). This work mirrors Rawls’ theory because he believed that justice and change can only begin at the individual level.

Plato’s Allegory of The Cave

The allegory of The Cave, found in book number seven of The Republic, was written by Plato in 400BC. Plato writes in the form of a dialogue where his mentor, Socrates, has a conversation with Glaucon about the allegory of the cave. Socrates, Glaucon, and Plato were all Greek philosophers. Plato was originally preparing for a life in politics, but the trial and the execution of Socrates for being called the wisest man in Athens caused Plato to become more interested in philosophy.

The cave is a hypothetical situation in which prisoners are chained since childhood and exposed only to shadows projected onto the wall in front of them. Because they have been chained since childhood and have no information about the outside world, they think that the shadows are real. One day a man is released from his chains and goes out into the real world to discover the truth. After seeing the real world for a period of time, he goes back into the cave to tell the others about what he discovered. The allegory of the cave was Plato’s way of symbolically describing in which mankind finds and proposes a way to find salvation. One of Plato’s main ideas is that the real world received by our senses is not the real world, but rather a poor perception of reality which can only be discovered through intellect. Plato also believes that knowledge cannot be transferred from teacher to student but that the path to the answer must be guided so that the student is able to discover the answer himself. According to Plato, educated individuals have duties to help members of their society. As educated individuals at the University of Dayton, we have gone through the stages of leaving the cave and discovering the real world. We are now obligated to return back into the cave through working with students at DECA so that they may have a clearer understanding of the world around them.

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.

Abstract

Through the Building Communities for Social Justice Learning Cohort (BCSJLL) we are placed in social justice themed classes, participate in 12 hours of service, and live in a community with other students. In order to perform the service, we are instructed to tutor at the local high school, the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA). DECA is an alternative school for students in the Dayton area, run by the University of Dayton. This school allows them an opportunity to excel academically so that they are able to achieve their goal of graduating from high school. The school utilizes the DECA model of learning through work. The students work with an adult or a class of students. They work on various assignments, such as helping students write, reading, and reading English papers, practicing vocabulary, developing fundamental math skills, and translating their literacy skills through reading. By working one on one with the students we have become more involved with members of society. As students we have become more involved with other members of society. As students we have also become more involved in our community and have been able to improve literacy and increase student reading ability.

Outcomes

- Develop critical thinking skills
- Help students with organization and the drafting of English papers
- Improve literacy and increase student reading ability
- Improve fundamental math skills

Reflections

Allyssa: I enjoyed working with a holism English classroom as well as one-on-one with a 19 year old student. I was able to help my single student with the organization of her paper on Howler as well as help draft some ideas for her science paper. I worked with the class to help write their works cited and helped to make sure that they were staying on track with their class work for the period. The experience taught me how to effectively communicate and work with not only one student, but a group of students as well.

Emily: Tutoring at DECA has been an immensely rewarding job to become a math teacher in the future, having this experience has increased my love for teaching. I have worked with students and have practiced with their eagerness to learn. The experience taught me how to effectively communicate and work with not only one student, but a group of students as well.

Milo: My service learning project was spent as a tutor at DECA for a young male student in the eighth grade. During my time spent as a tutor, I worked with the student on various reading and comprehension assignments, homework questions in his physical science class, and taught basic geometry skills. My experience at DECA taught me the importance of helping other members of society, as well as the importance of a strong education.

Chase: Tutoring at DECA has allowed me to experience how the Dayton area strives to create a better learning environment for their students. Working one-on-one with students I have learned communicative skills as well as how to stay positive and empathetic when students didn’t always work out as planned. I worked with the students on graphing coordinate planes and also with comprehension of vocabulary words for their English class. This has been a wonderful opportunity and I am glad that I was able to experience it.