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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 Cavalier 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. This Project READ placed us in tutoring positions at Holy Angels, a private elementary school. Holy Angel’s 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 worksheets, 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 Marianist 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 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.

One-on-one mentorship with the students

John Rawls, a utilitarianism 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. One of his most famous works is A Theory of Justice, published in 1971. Rawls makes many revolutionary concepts throughout his work, 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.

The Cave

A Theory Of Social Justice

Plato was an ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 429 B.C.E until 347 B.C.E. Plato has been regarded as one of the most influential philosophers of all time. One famous piece that comes from Plato is the “ Allegory of the Cave”. The Allegory of the Cave is in book 7 in an even larger book called The Republic, also written by Plato. In this allegory, people are chained up and unable to move inside a cave. The only light comes from a fire that is behind them. A walkway is in front of the fire where people, animals, and various objects can pass while their shadows are projected on the wall. The chained people interpret the shadows on the wall as reality based on the structure of the shadows and the noise that is made behind them. To these prisoners, the shadows are truth because it is the only experience they have.

When a person is forced to leave the cave, however, he is first blinded by the light of the sun. He realizes that the shadows on the wall he had previously perceived as reality were only shadows and there is a completely different world outside the cave. This is true. He then returns to the cave to tell the others of what he has seen and learned. Plato states “It is the duty of the enlightened one to teach others.” This can be applied to our service learning at Holy Angels because, as Plato instructs, it is our duty to bring knowledge and guidance to others.

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 were excited to learn. 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 allowed us to have something in common with them and build trust. This helped us to be tutors 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 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 own school work. We know from our service learning, however, that we have the ability to achieve any goal that we set out to accomplish.

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

Holy Angels School in Dayton, Ohio

Holy Angels School in Uniforms

Elementary School Library Similar to Holy Angels

John Rawls, a utilitarianism 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. One of his most famous works is A Theory of Justice, published in 1971. Rawls makes many revolutionary concepts throughout his work, 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 law making should base his or her decisions blind of his or her social, political, business outcome, class gender, etc. so that their decision will be based on what is good for the entire society. This directly relates to another Rawlsian principle which is the “Difference Principle”. Rawls’ specific theory explores the concept of basing 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 week mirrors Rawls’ theory because he believed that Justice and change can only begin at individual levels.