

SPACE: Student Perspectives About Civic Engagement

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Article 2

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Recommended Citation

Palma, Eduardo () "Allow Good and Its Unforeseen Benefits on Teacher Candidates," *SPACE: Student Perspectives About Civic Engagement*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/space/vol4/iss1/2>

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Allow Good and Its Unforeseen Benefits on Teacher Candidates

As a first-year university student majoring in education, I came to Loyola with the expectation that I was to experience a period of growth both academically and personally. With the countless opportunities that the university offered to students, I wanted to be sure that I would be able to take advantage of an opportunity that would provide great benefit to my approach on teaching and education. Fortunately, knowing that Loyola's distinctive teacher preparation curriculum adequately prepares teacher candidates with a substantial degree of theoretical and practical experience, it seemed that I would be fully prepared to teach in a public school by the time I would graduate. However, as sufficient as Loyola's curriculum may be in developing competent educators that understand the profession, I soon learned that an early introduction to student teaching may be what can help accelerate the refinement of a candidate so that they may have the advantage over their peers of experiencing both success and failure in a controlled environment. This is exactly what I experienced through my role in a program named Allow Good.

Allow Good specialized in teaching students through a civics course at Senn High School about local social issues, philanthropy in action, and evaluating organizations in ways that are similar to a philanthropic foundation. While the program mainly comprised of Loyola students and faculty, students from nearby universities also participated. Not all of the student volunteers were involved in education as their main profession. One of the co-instructors who helped me teach the classes I was involved with was in graduate school pursuing a degree in criminal

justice. The lead organizer for the program, Mr. Schmidt, made consistent efforts in supplying the student volunteers with the information necessary to teach the courses, hosting weekly meetings to discuss improvements and reflections relating to the implementation of the program. While many of the student volunteers had little to no experience in teaching, the handbooks we were provided would guide us throughout the entire teaching process along with the assistance of the educator in charge of the class.

In addition to the weekly student led sessions, an array of guest speakers, discussions, and site trips to local organizations supplemented Allow Good's exploration of localized social justice initiatives. Towards the end of the semester, classes participating in Allow Good received an opportunity to donate money to a local organization of their choice with a \$500 grant provided by the program. With a communal decision needed to be made for each class, these supplemental resources guided the students in the decision-making process that would ultimately prioritize the needs of one organization over the rest, with some of the criteria involving an organization's sources of funding, the mission statement, and the resources it provides to the community. It was captivating to note how the decision-making process unfolded throughout the semester, which gradually led up to a classroom debate that highlighted strong arguments from multiple perspectives of students.

Allow Good was more than a simple weekly lecture of initiatives relating to philanthropy and community development, it was an interactive conversation between university students who led the class and high school students who responded with unique outlooks based on their own experiences. In class activities invited the high school students to participate in a broader conversation regarding urban development through the understanding of local community organizations. An examination of what these organizations pursue through their own missions,

beliefs, and understandings of urban issues was demonstrated to the students through discussion, debate, and collaborative exercises. Students would defend their support over a particular local organization that was in contention for a \$500 grant as a class decision. The entire structure of Allow Good provided an educational frame that student teachers would be able to reference so that we would be able to successfully explore the basis of urban social justice while at the same time strongly encouraging student involvement in these important topics.

This model of education, through the exploration of student concerns, community issues and organization, and by engaging in group discussions and classroom activities using decision-making skills, benefited students through a number of key factors. Students were able to identify a key issue within the community by reflecting on their own personal experiences relating to urban issues and comparing it to the objectives of local organizations. This would be strongly dependent on the understanding of lived experience, increasing one's awareness of their own communities with the institutional and social issues that affects them or someone they've seen or known and problem solvers that are actively addressing those issues. An exploration of the community would be a critical step in this development. This was most notable in the school field trips a select number of students took to observe local community organizations responding to local trends in urban neighborhoods. Students who participated in these field trips made a report to their classes about their own thoughts and observations of the experience. These reports would invite in class discussions about what the students observed or experienced and be able to make a better interpretation of their own awareness of the community. Throughout the semester, discussions would be one of the most important factors that improved student awareness and student participation in local initiatives. Finally, decision-making skills would be strongly developed through the selection of one local organization to receive the grant. After debating

over which organizations would be the most deserving of the class grant, students would be expected to choose one organization to be represented by an entire class within a classroom election. All of these factors respected the many perspectives that students possessed about what they thought of their own communities while providing a secure environment where they may be able to express these unique experiences without fear.

Among the greatest challenges that I came across throughout my time teaching students at Senn were the outside factors that I had little to no control over. Some of these factors were attributed to the limited time I spent with the students compared to the lead educator in charge of the classroom, including the enforcement of class behavioral policies, student familiarity with the teacher, and understanding what information the students were taught throughout the week. Others were a result of student priorities that affected their level of participation within the session with tardiness being an issue for some students. Despite not having complete control over these circumstances and being limited to weekly classroom sessions, I managed to achieve most of the items on the agenda by the time each session ended.

For the factors that I did possess control over, it was more a matter of personal preparation that determined whether or not the session would go on as anticipated. While a teacher candidate could expect to prepare for a lecture by simply reading assigned articles, as a student teacher for Allow Good, it was more of a rehearsal that required a general understanding of the material being taught to the students. A teacher candidate learning how to become a teacher may easily depend on readings and classroom discussions to substitute practice with theory and not find ways to learn independently without the guidance of those readings or professors, therefore unable to demonstrate self-sufficiency through *generativity*, as the founder of Morningside Academy, Kent Johnson, noted (Johnson, 2015, p. 141). While the topic of

theory should not be ignored, supplementing what one learns in class with early opportunities to actively implement one's learning would be beneficial in the long run when teacher candidates are preparing for a semester of student teaching and subsequently be hired for a teaching position. Allow Good's integration of practice and theory introduced new forms of preparation that enabled me to discover new ways to adapt as an educator and provided a glimpse to what lies ahead in my career.

The comparison made between teacher candidates who have not had opportunities to experiment with their own learning to those who have at an early stage of their educational career makes a critical distinction between how one's college education could be utilized to one's own greatest benefit which could be used to improve extracurricular skills. For the upcoming generation of educators, it is imperative that from an early point in their own learning they feel welcome to test their own abilities in teaching among a diverse group of students, such as the opportunity Allow Good presented to me. Among the list of items that these younger teacher candidates may wish to improve upon includes an emphasis on self-concept which can reaffirm the emotional and social foundation of teacher candidates and develop a greater sense of optimism for young teacher candidates (Woolfolk, 2019, p. 104-105). Although it may be discomfoting to notice some of the flaws in one's own experimentation with teaching, the overall development of self-concept defends the candidate's optimism on their own self-reliance, In general, the applicability of Allow Good to a teacher candidate willing to work with their existing skills would be substantial to the early development of the candidate's practical knowledge with how the profession works and how this comprehension may ascertain new approaches to social justice.

Throughout the duration of the semester with Allow Good, I was able to meet dozens of young high school students who have insisted that they take some of the issues mentioned in the sessions very personally. Through these experiences, new student perspectives broadened my awareness to such sincere responses that desired immediate action to be taken in order to resolve the issues discussed. It became glaringly obvious to me, as a teacher candidate, that similar results could be expected when the educator is able to capture and retain student interest and engagement with the subject by sparking a moment of discourse that sustains itself in its own development of open-ended ideas and real world applications (Woolfolk, 2019, p. 483). Everyone has something to say about themselves and can input a part of their perception in a broader realm that incorporates multiple perceptions. Knowing this would allow me to be able to communicate more effectively with my audience and consider new ways of garnering student interest in a variety of subjects.

Though I was far from ready to be able to effectively instruct an entire class free from the supervision of other teachers, the experience of teaching was engrossing and demanded that I be attentive at all times. Knowing that I would have years to develop my amateur teaching skills reassured me that the countless imperfections I was committing was acceptable. Even if the main objective of Allow Good lay in the purpose it would serve to the civics students of Senn High School, it should not overshadow its utility as an incubator for student teaching. Frankly, I wished that I would have been able to continue my service as a student teacher through more classes that would expand my familiarity with the types of classes that exist. It was fulfilling to achieve a dual purpose through Allow Good that served to demonstrate philanthropy within a local community and actively engage with high school students through the role of an educator.

Allow Good enriched my college experience as a future educator through a practical approach that required me to be outgoing and surpass my personal comfort zones for the benefit of Senn High School and its surrounding communities. Despite it being my own choice to willingly participate as a freshman in a highly engaging educational program, I concluded that it was an advantageous opportunity for me to be able to develop my interpersonal skills for a profession that values communication among students and teachers. As a result of my participation in the program, I feel that I am able to more effectively able to teach with more confidence and gather existing expectations of the profession in order to create wiser choices. While theory alone may be able to explicitly state how to make more informed choices in teaching, an early experience can support existing ideas on the appropriate means to education.

Works Cited

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