

# Service learning experience as a tool for development of social responsibility

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Through service learning, one can learn civil responsibility and be involved in the strengthening of the community. I believe that this can reflect on the theme of human faith and the development of faith, specifically in children. Through my service learning project of helping children achieve academically, I believe I was able to make a difference on one of many social issues arising today: giving a quality education for children who grow up in low income communities.

I did my service learning project with Breakthrough Miami. Breakthrough Miami is a tuition-free academic enrichment program that helps thousands of 5th graders- 8th graders in Miami- Dade County. These children come from low income communities/ under-resourced schools and are a part of this program to achieve their academic goals such as applying for and attending college. This program encourages high school students that graduated from this program to take part in volunteering so they can gain experience as a mentor and role model. Other volunteers consist of college students and workers of the CCSI department.

There are five independent school sites that this academic enrichment program takes place at: Ransom Everglades, Miami County Day School, Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart, Palmer Trinity School, and University of Miami. I participated at the one located at Miami County Day School. There were about 100 students at this location. The first time I volunteered here, they had me and another volunteer start off by directing the children from their bus to the multi-purpose room. There, they served breakfast, which gave me the opportunity to interact and get to know the children. At

first glance, these children seemed to only be engrossed with their phones since most of them isolated themselves from the rest of their peers. I would say that this made it difficult to break their shell and try to interact with them. After breakfast, the children then went into group rotations based on their grade level. These rotations each covered a different topic such as geography, science, math, history, and English. I assisted with geography which involved showing a video on the 50 states and then quizzing the students to see how many of them they could retain. After grading all their quizzes, I then took them into another room to watch a video about financial issues within the economy. We then had a discussion afterwards to see their reaction to the video. A few said they knew about the economy and the social classes while others had no idea how the economy even functioned. It was an eye opening experience to see them discuss about a topic so common because that made me realize the small range of topics and resources schools in low income communities have.

The second time I visited they put me in charge of the English rotation. They had to read a passage from a story and answer questions based on what they had read. I would say the biggest challenge with this was to have the students complete the task when they had distractions such as their phone or they would talk with their friends. Once the assistant manager of the program came in and warned them about being on their phones, they immediately got to work. Once they finished, we then had a discussion on what they wished to do for the summer Breakthrough program. Many of them wanted more sports and physical activities. It was shocking to hear

that most of them were athletes but do not have the resources at their school to participate on a team and show off their talent. After the English rotation, I was then assigned to help assist in the science rotation. I got the supplies needed for the children to conduct a lab experiment. They then learned about the different elements and how they would react once mixed together. They then got to apply their knowledge by mixing a catalyst with different types of liquids. All of them admitted that they never done a lab experiment before, which furthered my emotions of utter shock. Growing up in a low income family and attending an under resourced school, I was able to relate to these children because I went through the same thing when I was younger. I was eligible to join a program for above average students, but for a costly amount. Breakthrough enriches these children's academic studies for no cost, which I believe is a program that should be established throughout the world.

The third time I visited is when the Breakthrough workers put together an end of the year celebration with all the activities the students wrote down they wanted to do over the summer. This included activities such as swimming, relay races, scavenger hunts, tug of war, soccer, basketball, etc. I supervised the swimming pool to ensure no injuries and also acted as one of the guides/leaders in the scavenger hunt. These activites allowed the children to get out and socialize with one another in a nonacademic setting, which I believe is necessary for children. Even the most intelligent of kids deserve to go out and act their age.

This service has affected my faith in God and my human faith. On page 9 it states, “ Human faith involves not only knowledge, but also feelings, decisions, and actions.” I decided that I could make a difference and put something that I feel passionate about into action. This could also be an example of authentic faith because my values as a person are translated into action. Our faith is built on “ perceptions, experiences and history of events”(11); through my experience with education opportunities as a child being limited, I was able to connect with these children knowing the struggle they go through economically and academically.

On page 22, it states that “ humans are social by nature, and thus there is a relational dimension of faith. It generally involves a commitment to another individual or to a group/community.” The parents of these children had faith in this program that it would better their child’s academic successes while the workers and volunteers have faith that the children want to better their education and will cooperate so they can grow as a person. This is an example of how faith works as a two-way street. The parents and children have certain expectations of Breakthrough Miami, while we volunteers also expect reciprocal responses.

As a child moving into adolescence, beliefs start to get constructed through their interpretation of how they see the world. John Westerhoff, an expert in religious education, uses the term “ experienced faith” to describe children’s stage of faith development. At this stage, “ children tend to mirror the beliefs and actions of those close to them, and thus reflect the faith life of the significant people in their lives”(70). By putting these children in a safe

environment where they're free to be themselves without any judgement, they can reflect on the actions of their peers or role models. If they see one of their friends focused and on task, then they will most likely mirror that action. They could also mirror the actions of the workers/volunteers of Breakthrough Miami and decide to volunteer once they graduate from the program to create a continuous ripple effect of helping others succeed.

I believe that this service learning experience has also led me to realize the value of social responsibility. The bishops of the United States point out that "all persons have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest medical care, education and employment. Believers, therefore have a responsibility to see to it that these rights are preserved and protected" (110). This means that people have an obligation to look after those who do not have easy access to those rights. I was able to integrate my beliefs and help above average students expand their knowledge in this academic enrichment program that was of no cost due to the majority of them coming from low income communities. This means that they don't have quality resources at the schools they attend. Service learning projects such as this one can help build the faith of children while acting on your own beliefs as an individual.