

## **Community Engagement and Adolescent Psychology: Infusing Ignatian Values**

Anne K. Fuller, Ph.D. (Psychology)

Mentor: Linda Schoenstedt, Ed.D. (Sport Management, Marketing & Administration)

### **Background**

Adolescent psychology (PSYC 233) is an elective course that focuses on the development of adolescents and emerging adults (18-25-year-olds) across a broad range of contexts.

The course includes the following learning objectives:

SLO 1: Students will be able to identify key principles and themes of adolescent development across biological, psychological, and social domains.

SLO 2: Students will be able to analyze connections between principles and themes of adolescent psychology and the trends, strengths, and challenges of contemporary adolescent development.

SLO 3: Students will create informational materials regarding contemporary adolescent development to be disseminated to community stakeholders (e.g., youth organization staff, parents of adolescents).

When I began preparing to teach this course for the first time, I enrolled in the Eigel Center's Academy for Community-Engaged Faculty in order to incorporate service learning into the course objectives and assignments. I partnered with WordPlay Cincy, a local organization that offers programs in reading, writing, storytelling, and the arts for children, adolescents, and young adults.

### **The Service Learning Project**

Given ongoing concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, I worked with WordPlay to develop a service learning project that could be completed remotely. The project involved creating educational brochures regarding adolescent development. Students worked in small groups to identify a topic (e.g., mental

health, confidence, sense of connection, positive habits) and intended audience for their brochure (i.e., adolescents participating in WordPlay programs, their caregivers, or the teaching artists working with the youth). Each student wrote a literature review to familiarize themselves with their topic.

Subsequently, students worked in their groups to create brochures that incorporated research on their topic while presenting the material in an engaging and accessible manner. Following completion of the project, the brochures were provided to WordPlay for distribution. Throughout the semester, students completed reflection papers which encouraged synthesis of their service learning experiences.

### **Incorporating Ignatian Values**

The service learning project and collaboration with WordPlay Cincy facilitated the infusion of several Ignatian values into the adolescent psychology course.

- Service rooted in justice and love
  - Students' work on the brochures promoted Xavier's value of service rooted in justice and love through serving the Cincinnati community and collaboration with a community partner. Students worked to create materials that met the needs of WordPlay Cincy and the families this organization serves. Moreover, they had the opportunity to develop empathy as they determined what information from their research would be most relevant and beneficial to the adolescents and caregivers who would receive their brochures.
- Solidarity and kinship
  - Students demonstrated the value of solidarity and kinship both through their collaboration with each other and through their connections to the broader community. Their projects enabled them to extend their learning beyond the classroom to connect with Cincinnati youth and families through their contributions to WordPlay Cincy.

Moreover, by working in small groups to create their brochures, students were able to incorporate each group member's unique skills and perspectives. In doing so, they had the opportunity to enhance their service to the community by drawing upon their peers' strengths in order to optimize the benefits of their work.

- *Cura personalis*
  - *Cura personalis* refers to “care for the whole person.” Students engaged with this value in selecting the topics for their brochures. As they determined which aspect of adolescent development to focus on, they reflected on what community members need to promote healthy development. The notion of *cura personalis* is evident in the topics students selected. Rather than focusing on a single developmental domain or a marker of success that could be measured objectively (e.g., academic performance), students chose to explore a wide range of topics that integrated multiple components of adolescents' well-being. For instance, brochure topics included stress reduction, nature as a resource for promoting mental health, coping and connection, and managing adversity. These topics reflect the many ways in which adolescents and the adults in their lives can care for young people as whole individuals.
  
- Reflection
  - The value of reflection offers students an opportunity to think about how they fit into the world in addition to considering how their work impacts others. Throughout the semester, students had opportunities to reflect on both their work and that of their peers. After conducting their literature reviews, students completed reflection papers in which they were asked to identify the key facts about their topics that they wanted to share with the audiences for their brochures. Students shared their work with other students through peer review of their brochures and in-class presentations of their

projects. These interactions enabled students to provide feedback and learn from each other. After completing their brochures and sharing their work with their peers, students engaged in further written reflection in which they were asked to consider how their perspective regarding the most important issues facing adolescents had changed and/or remained the same since the beginning of the semester. They also reflected on their own ideas for developing a service learning project that would benefit adolescents. Thus, students used reflection to look back on the work they had completed while also looking ahead to next steps in serving the community beyond Xavier's campus.

### **Student Feedback**

Student comments point to their appreciation of the service learning project:

- "Making brochures was a really cool and useful way to implement what we were learning in class in a meaningful way."
- "I really found that the brochure enabled me to meet the course objectives, especially since it allowed us to combine course material with outside sources for something informative to benefit adolescents."
- "I also loved the service learning project and making the brochures."

### **References**

[https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/xaviers-mission/documents/A-](https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/xaviers-mission/documents/A-DGIIconceptualvaluemodellrevised4.pdf)

[DGIIconceptualvaluemodellrevised4.pdf](https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/xaviers-mission/documents/A-DGIIconceptualvaluemodellrevised4.pdf)

<https://www.xavier.edu/mission-identity/xaviers-mission/xaviers-values>