

Charles Hwang

John Ortiz

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Engaged Learning Prompt

The Engaged Learning experience helped me connect to the mission of Loyola University Chicago in several ways. The most important way was through service: I was able to directly give back to the community and the public school system as well as help children excel and succeed in physical education. Another way was through learning: through assisting the instructors, I was able to acquire new leadership skills in being a role model for the children.

The experience I was assigned for my Engaged Learning course was to volunteer for at least twenty hours in physical education classes at Kilmer Elementary School. At first, the assignment and the position seemed to be very informal, as there was no prior communication between the instructors and myself or any training needed to begin. However, I quickly learned how large of a role that I would be playing for the next eight weeks. It became clear from the aging equipment and classrooms that the school was underfunded and understaffed, often with other parent volunteers greeting me upon my entrance to the school. Many of the children were a part of one or more identifiable marginalized groups; some did not have athletic shoes, possibly because of financial hardship or parental neglect. I realized the significance of Kilmer's high demand for volunteers, especially those from Loyola, to help the instructors with already-large class sizes.

My Engaged Learning experience impacted my development greatly. Before enrolling in the course, I had volunteered in a multitude of capacities: through tutoring, at my local library,

and on political campaigns. However, none of these directly influenced the recipients of my service as much as this experience did. I personally rediscovered the power of volunteerism and how much just one person's efforts can impact a community. I was personally touched by many of the children's reactions and emotions and humbled when I made myself aware of the fact that their backgrounds were much different and more diverse than mine. I realized how smart many of the children were, even in first grade, strengthening my hope for the future of education. After a few weeks, I knew that how strapped Kilmer was for helping hands and that, by dedicating myself to the school's efforts of education and advancement that I was playing a significant role in, I was going above and beyond the traditional definitions of "civic duty" as it related to voting and public activism and awareness and actively engaging with the community as if it were my own. Additionally, the instructors counted on my attendance, both physically and mentally, in the gymnasium. They rightfully held me to a high standard of excellence and I conducted myself in a professional manner around them, the children, and the few parents I was lucky enough to encounter. Often in school and around campus, I find myself engaging and working with students, faculty, and staff older than myself on a daily basis. By being able to work with children of all ages, from first grade through fifth, I was exposed to a diverse audience in all definitions and facets of the word and gained valuable experience in working with those younger than myself.

Overall, I was touched by the impact I was able to make at Kilmer and the value of my Engaged Learning course as well as the Engaged Learning curriculum. Through the help of the instructors at Kilmer, I was able to gain priceless experience and valuable skills in working not only in a public school, but also with children—a skill that many people who have already secured their own employment and career path may not be fortunate enough to acquire.