

PSL Student

Perry Service Learning

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### Good Citizen Essay

Most, if not all, people would agree that helping others is rarely ever a bad thing. Providing assistance--whether that is food, clothing, or getting a job-- to those who are less fortunate can be good not only for them but for those providing the service. However, tossing money or food at a problem only works to a certain extent. While few organizations would turn away a check or cans of food, oftentimes what people really need is someone to care about them. Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahn argue that it is important to not just try and fix the problem but understand why it initially arose. Morrie Schwartz, the older man in *Tuesdays with Morrie*, was a prime example of someone who knew how to help people. Yet, he never provided them with anything other than an ear that would listen and wise mind that could offer sage advice. Just like Morrie, good citizens do not just seek to resolve the problem; they attempt to understand *why* the problem arose in the first place, and how to solve it without it returning.

According to Westheimer and Kahne, in their article "Educating the 'Good' Citizen: Political Choices and Pedagogical Goals," there are three levels of citizenship: personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens, and justice-oriented citizens. Personally responsible citizens are "law-abiding members of the community" (Westheimer and Kahn, 2). They are people that would donate to a charity. Participatory citizens "actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures" (Westheimer and

Kahn, 2). They may organize a clothing drive or take charge of an event to raise money for a particular charity. Justice-oriented citizens “question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time” (Westheimer and Kahn, 2). They will question why a certain injustices are happening and seek to solve them permanently. Rather than providing what they *think* will help, justice-oriented citizens listen so that they understand exactly what the problem is and how it can be solved on fundamental level not just a material level. Morrie does not just offer Mitch Albom, the author of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, advice; he asks Mitch to pick a variety of matters that he needs advice on. They settle on topics that range from family to death. Morrie allows Mitch to determine what needs solving and does not just force ideas on him.

Much of what we do in the Perry Service Learning (PSL) classroom is learning about and comprehending a variety of different issues in our community. We also participate in fundraising, such as the Holiday Food Drive, that we use to help provide food for members of the local community. However, “one of the most critical parts of the class is the relationships we form during our service” (Soeder and Trentanelli). We are encouraged to help others by not only providing people with basic needs, clothes from the Perry Clothing Room or food from the Giving Garden, but form relationships with the people we serve. Investing time in people is a true marker of a good citizen. A key component of survival for humans is emotional contact and support. People are social creature and without love and contact, they may be alive, but they are not truly living. Allowing other to love them and loving others is what differentiates people from animals.

In the act of questioning why certain problems arise, we must allow those who are most affected by it to inform the outside world what they most need. Listening to people makes them feel as though they are cared for and establishes a sense of trust. Without that trust, the person cannot be truly helped because no one will know exactly what is wrong or exactly how to help them.

Works Cited:

Albom, Mitch. *Tuesdays with Morrie: an Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson*.  
Sphere, 2017.

“Educating the ‘Good’ Citizen: Political Choices and Pedagogical Goals,” by Joel Westheimer  
and Joseph Kahn