

Reframing Service Learning at Geelong Lutheran College

Draft, June 2015

Overview

These are notes from a LEA Service Learning Study Tour on May 31-June 2, 2015, prepared by Jonny Hedt. While Geelong Lutheran College (GLC) has a Service Learning Terms of Reference Document, this the material provided at this tour (summarised below) could form the basis of a service learning strategic plan or framework for the college.

Aim

- 1) A service learning experience – embedded within a solid learning framework – aims to deepen and transform a student’s thinking and bring about lasting attitudinal and values change in their worldview.
- 2) GLC will use existing programs, and look for gaps, to build a sequential service learning pathway from prep to year 12, with the goal of introducing the key concepts below in a solid learning framework to challenge and reframe student views of the world.

Rationale

GLC’s Mission and Ministry statement of service to students: **Our school nurtures and encourages students to grow up into Christ and to equip them for life and service so their God-given talents may shape and enrich the world.**

One of the biggest issues facing the Christian Church is dualism; us-them, win-lose, and especially: faith-life, in the sense that faith is over there while real life is separate and right here. The danger in **Community Service** is that service can be tokenistic and seen as an optional extra of the Christian journey – gold coin donation for this, writing to a pen pal overseas – which reinforces this dualistic mindset; ‘I’ve done my bit for them’ without a change in thinking. **Service Learning**, on the other hand, properly embeds a service experience in learning, reflection, and real relationships – faith in action – which transforms the student’s thinking and brings about a lasting change in attitudes and values. Service Learning is like any learning in that it builds on the learning of previous years. If the seeds are sown in primary years, a student will be the one standing up for refugees at a party when they’re 14 and be the human rights advocate and homeless food van volunteer or organiser as an adult.

Key Biblical Texts

Matthew 25:31-46 ‘I was hungry and you fed me...’

Luke 15:11-32 The Prodigal Son – a God of total acceptance and unconditional love – the innate dignity of all.

Micah 6:8 Act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Romans 12:2 Be transformed by the renewing of your mind

John 13:34 Love one another as I have loved you

Deuteronomy 10:19 Justice for the orphan and widow, welcome the stranger

Luke 24:13-35 Road to Emmaus – Jesus enters host’s house as a guest, blesses them and abides in their home.

Implementation Components: How to travel from shallow thinking, charity-focused community service to transformational thinking through Service Learning with a change-focus for effective social justice

Purpose 1. Service learning is built on our belief in Jesus, the Servant King, lived out through our college values, ethos and key statements and active throughout the curriculum

Preparation 2. Understanding the key concepts including Guest, Innate Dignity, Presence and Reciprocity

Experience 3. Direct relationships with the ‘other’ people. Options for social justice are:

- **Solidarity** - Wearing ribbons or observing a minute's silence.
- **Advocacy** – Being the voice for the voiceless, such as writing letters for Indigenous Australians to be included in the constitution.
- **Action** – Fundraising.
- **Awareness** – Debating the issues.

4. The active presence of mentors

Debrief 5. Reflection on Experience through Key Questions, journaling and discussion

Component 1: Service Learning is built on our belief in Jesus, the Servant King, and lived out through our college values, ethos and key statements and active throughout the curriculum

- See GLC's Mission and Ministry Statement, core values of Wisdom, Honour and Purpose, and our motto 'By Grace Alone'

Component 2: Key Concepts

GUEST

- The Guest comes quietly, slowly and gently, eyes looking respectfully and open to see things we haven't seen before.
- We come as a guest; slowly, expectantly, open, respectfully. We take off our inner shoes for the ground is holy. *'Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on people's dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.'* John V. Taylor, 'The Primal Vision'.
- The guest comes with an open heart and mind.
- Every person has a story. Be aware of this and come as a guest to it.
- We see ourselves as guests invited by 'the other' to stay with them and to discover – in their personalities in their homes, their work, their lives – the **Presence of God** in ways that we could not have discovered in ourselves, our homes, our work and our lives.
- A guest comes with respect (Latin: *respechere* means to take a second look, to look again) to really see them. This look requires

INNATE DIGNITY

- Core to our stance is a belief in the innate dignity of all.

PRESENCE

- I am with you, I am not above you, I am not even for you – I am with you. To be a Christ sent to others is to be a guest presence in their world – we are called to step down and become a guest
- Jesus made a deliberate choice to 'enter into' the lives of others – into that sacred space and holy ground.
- Presence touch is respect filled; it honours and affirms, heals and frees
- In presence, the ears listen for what the heart is saying
- The eyes do much of the work in presence; do we look at the other with honour, compassion and respect?
- A deliberate choice to be in that space totally for the other

RECIPROCITY

- If you have come here to save me, don't come – if you have come here because your liberation is tied up with mine – then come – and we will walk together into our futures as one.' Aboriginal Elder

Component 3: Direct relationships with the 'other' people.

- See appendix and notes below on service ideas for GLC

Component 4: The active presence of mentors

- The teacher, or other trusted adults, guides students through the experience and helps them in their reflections

Component 5: Reflection on Experience through Key Questions

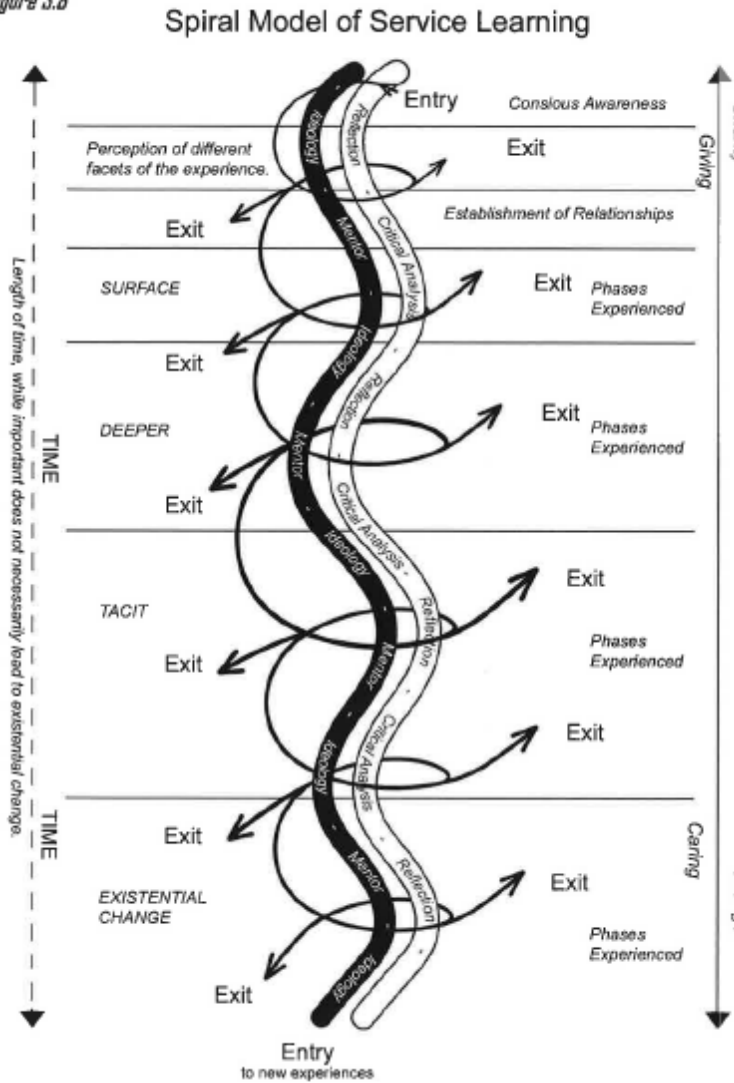
- **KEY QUESTIONS:** Whose needs are being met here? Who is impacted directly by this decision? Who pays? Who really pays? Who sets the agenda? Who wins? Who loses? Who is excluded? Who is included? Who has a seat at the table? Who is voiceless? Whose needs are ignored? Who makes decisions? At what level are decisions made? Who is unseen? Who is 'out of sight and out of mind'? Who has the power? Who influences the media – what we see and know? Whose voice counts?
- **JOURNALING** is an important part of reflection, as it captures a student's thinking in a moment in time. Students are forced to think about what they really think about an issue, and can later go back and discover their change in thinking
- **DISCUSSION** with peers, including sharing their journaling, is important in processing a service learning experience; teenagers in particular learn a lot from their peers through observational learning.

Recommendations for Implementation in 2015

- The college's approach to community service and social justice issues should be driven by a learning focus, not by an event and activity focus.
- Start with the learning you want your students to gain, then figure out how to lead them to it.
- Existing programs should be examined for deeper learning opportunities through reflection, mentoring, establishing relationships.
- New opportunities for should be assessed according to the principles of this document prior to committing to them. For example:
 - What do I want my students to learn out of this experience?
 - How will I work towards changing their thinking?
 - When and how will I reflect on this activity before and after?
 - What's our motivation? Why are we doing it? Is it to make the school look good and get glossy pictures for the newsletter? Is it to tick a box and say we've 'done' our service?
 - Look at the thinking behind fundraising philosophy - we have to break the 'what's in it for me?' culture
 - Are service learning programs only accessible to those who can afford them?
- Overall, GLC should start using the language and concepts of working for change, not charity. For lack of a consistent strategy, we have probably focussed too much on fundraising (Action) as a small part of change and ignored the other options for **Social Justice** such as Advocacy, Solidarity and Awareness.
- Each experience should be connected back to the curriculum – what happens in class – to embed service learning into the **culture** of the college

Meaning Making from Service Learning

Figure 3.8



More harm than good: Spirituality of Crusader or Colonialist: Build, convert from the outside: 'I've got what you need'; dualism: Us vs Them: 'They'll never...'; labels 'Illegal immigrants' which hinders personalisation; and selfishness 'I'm ok - what's it got to do with me?'

I went to East Timor and it was really hot and I got a bug from something I ate.

I travelled to East Timor on an Immersion Group and the local people were really welcoming and accepting of us. I felt honoured to be among them.

I had three weeks in East Timor; the people were so welcoming and accepting. I could not believe how simple their lives were and yet they were so generous in their sharing. Though they were poor they had great joy.

Our goal for our students: I was privileged to spend time in East Timor. It was an honour to be so welcomed into people's lives. I saw so much poverty and yet so much joy. As I reflected on the people's poverty and yet their generosity in the midst of it – I was reminded of my own inner poverty – and the poverty of spirit back here in Australia – and felt they could teach us much about life.

APPENDIX 1: Case Study – Star of the Sea, Girls Catholic School, Brighton

- Anne Muirhead is the Faith and Mission Coordinator and heads up their Religion And Faith Team (RAFT) fortnightly, while Mary Harmes is Social Justice Co-ordinator and oversees the RE curriculum
- 1100 girls years 7-12, no oval. There's a separate year 9 program for 200 girls. Social-economically consider themselves a down-to-earth school but fairly insular school with a lot of Greek/Italian families.
- Student Leadership Structure: Four house social justice leaders, Four Liturgy Captains, Four Art Captains and Four House Captains. Then there are non-house aligned portfolios in Debating and Sustainability
- The school celebrates a rich heritage - started by Nano Nagel who lived in Ireland during English occupation and saw a lot of poverty when her family sent her to Paris. Motto 'Deeds not words'.
- Revised their fundraising process a while ago. Anne: 'We try not to do fundraising because we are a school and an educational institution. We have had problems with parents why we're not jumping on board with cancer programs etc. We don't support medical charities and we're comfortable with that. The main thing we focus on is the transformative nature of education.... We don't like fundraising. It's coming from a position of power and at the end of the day it doesn't cost the students much – a couple coins in the bottom of their bag.'
- We express faith in diverse ways; tackle it in art shows, and 70 staff members volunteer for service learning activity tutoring newly arrived Australians.
- The school has NGO status with the UN
- When looking at an issue, we ask: whose dignity is being affected? Then we aim to stand alongside them – not patting them on their head, not pushing them forward from behind, and not standing in front of them dragging them along.
- Solidarity – do it quietly without a fanfare. It's important to include people in the conversation – how can we support you? What are they asking for? For example, young Indigenous people are asking for young people to advocate for them to be recognised in the constitution, so we have been writing letters.
- With many charities you can do the fundraising in the day and you haven't changed the head, heart or hands. Charities often have paid promotion people. How much Charities often have paid promotion people? Anything with bandanas or wristbands is a good indication.
- How much of the money goes to the organisation? Also, we don't do year level competitions about who can raise the most money as it could send the wrong message.
- In terms of innate dignity for the people we work with, we don't put photos in the paper or newsletter, because that would be about making us feel good and us being seen to do good works. We have found that many of corporates who come into the soup kitchen do this; they're after something different.

Service Learning Activities

- We've been going to a soup kitchen in St Kilda for 25 years. Four students and two staff members go each week – it's a financial commitment from the school.
- Kids brought food in from home to make the slices at school for the food van
- Set up an asylum seek centre at school and students voluntarily went in with tape over their mouths.
- Staff make up Zonta Birthing Kits for women during one day staff social justice retreat. Staff go on social justice conferences
- School gives away ribbons on awareness days – you don't have to pay for something all the time
- In response to the 4 Corners program on low paid workers in chicken factories, the girls started writing letters to the companies
- We took on the chocolate industry by writing letters to Cadbury about sourcing cocoa sustainably. The CEO called up and said 'I think we've got the point – can you please stop writing letters' and I told the girls. They, of course, started writing more.
- Prayers go in daily bulletin for various social justice issues. We start and end each experience with prayer.
- Our Media Studies class is going to make documentaries of members of aged care facility
- Students are taught how not to take photos in inappropriate circumstances
- The school runs an overseas trip but do not call it a Service Learning Immersion but a Vietnam Study tour. 'Going and build a house or a school in a foreign country is voyeuristic and a form of colonialism.' The people can build homes themselves and it's imposing your will over there's where you imply that you know what they need better than they know themselves. The trips take so much time and energy and money. You don't need to get on a plane to see disadvantage – just look in your local community at refugee kids or the homeless.
- We struggle with the huge hidden curriculum. We have a formal but try to keep it low-key – end of week 1 in term 1. The girls obsessed about it – overall spending on some school's formals is \$100,000