Making Active Connections

Community Service in Independent Schools
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Making Active Connections
Community Service in Independent Schools
Preface

Victorian independent schools have a long tradition of building links with their local communities. They have worked to nurture close relationships which benefit both students and wider community group members. In most schools this commitment to community service is embedded in the school ethos, its values and philosophy.

A growing body of literature is connecting community service with a variety of beneficial effects including higher levels of engagement in school, higher academic success, greater self-esteem and ongoing civic engagement. Research also indicates that whole-school ethos affects student engagement, participation and educational aspirations. Levels of education achieved and service during youth also correlate with increased engagement in community service in adulthood.

Schools with a strong ethos of service to the community have a highly positive impact which should be recognised and celebrated. Their students are more likely to have high self-esteem and social aptitude, and to be more aware of their responsibilities towards others in their community.

This publication summarises some of the recent research and its findings. It also celebrates the strong connections formed by our Member Schools in local and international communities. Within these pages you will find stories depicting the deep commitment to service that can be found in Victorian independent schools. In the number and variety of service programmes offered there is a common thread: the desire to provide students with the opportunity to give because they are able, and to know that by their actions they can make a difference in the world.

Independent schools offer a multitude of service programmes which make major contributions to the fabric of their communities. This publication, of necessity, can only highlight a small proportion of those community service programmes operating within our Member Schools.

Michelle Green
Chief Executive
Introduction

Schools are, in essence, communities. They build and nurture communities. They bring together a large number of students and teachers and, in turn, parents and grandparents, local community members and groups, sporting affiliates, specialist organisations and a cross-section of welfare, health and community workers. And these groups coalesce in extraordinary ways, coming together to support one another and to reach out to other members of the local and wider community. In many cases it is the school which is the very centre of the local community and it operates as a connection and intersection point for many community members.

Despite the importance of the school to local communities, there is little in our contemporary educational debate which acknowledges the value of community for students and other members. In reality, much of our educational debate has been hijacked by an economic rationale which is, itself, predicated on a simple economic measurement equation: that the inputs into education (that is, money, resources, teacher salaries, etc.) are quantifiable and therefore should have a direct causal connection with outcomes (generally described in terms of cognitive achievements as measured by formal examinations, particularly end of secondary schooling ‘scores’, or an ENTER score).

This focus on a simple input-equals-output equation reduces education outcomes to an economic activity with a single achievement measure. Most school educators reject this reductionist thinking, arguing that education is more complex, more dependent on relationships, and that there are many outcomes which are valued, but less easily measured. Student growth and development in many areas (ethical, spiritual, physical, emotional and personal) are explicit goals which are designed to complement the academic outcomes. So too, many of the learning outcomes which are seen to be essential for students if they are to be happy and productive members of their adult communities – for example, problem solving, creativity, team collaboration and emotional resilience – are also difficult to assess and we have few reliable and robust instruments to do so. Providing an environment which is safe and where the young are free to take risks, to experiment and explore, is an important dimension of schooling: and these outcomes cannot be reduced to a simple economic measure.

This is not to suggest that schools should not be accountable for the education of those in their care; rather, that schools are engaged in the complex phenomenon of educating young people for an uncertain future and each school espouses its goals in both the cognitive and affective domains of student growth. They
Molly said the project was improving her social skills. She had learned more about the volunteer organisations in her area through contacting them and offering to serve.

Sean was happy that things he already did were recognised as part of the project such as putting out the rubbish or cooking for the family. Cate and Molly also appreciated this aspect and said that they now did more in the home.

Travis Hopgood, Secondary School Coordinator, said that the project came about as a result of one of the staff Professional Learning Teams undertaking a study of the development of Year 9 students (Cole et al., 2006a, 2006b). The aim of the project is "to provide opportunities for students to experience adult-like roles and responsibilities, and to empower them to develop their own set of rules and regulations and subsequent consequences".

Older students assist younger pupils (top) and provide assistance at a neighbouring school (right).
Linking Education to the National Reform Agenda

The National Reform Agenda identifies education as a key priority in helping the nation achieve significant growth in economic activity and national economic well-being. While earlier national reform goals have focussed on physical capital and the deregulation of economic markets, much of the current national reform agenda is focussing on building human capital.

At the state level, Premier Steve Bracks recently highlighted ‘Victoria’s strong commitment to investing in our most precious asset – our people’ (2007). At the national level, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) ‘has identified education and training as central to human capital reform’ (Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Education, & Department of Treasury and Finance, 2007, p. 7).

The nexus with education is clear: improvements in literacy and numeracy, higher retention rates, and smoother transitions to work will lead to higher levels of workplace participation and productivity.

However, recent research has recognised that the knowledge imparted by a good education is not enough to ensure that people obtain good jobs and a high quality of life (Marginson, 1993; Falk, 2001). There is more to a ‘good’ education than end of schooling results and academic goals. Intellectual capacity is not a sufficient outcome in and of itself: young people will need a broad range of skills if they are to be productive members of our community.

Globally, economic policy makers are beginning to identify another term which is now gaining in significance and currency: that of social capital. Essentially, this term is best encapsulated by the phrase ‘it’s not what you know, it’s who you know’ (Woolcock, 2002, p. 23). Social capital is ‘conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust, which are essential for civil society and productive of future collective action or goods, in the manner of other forms of capital’ (Farr, 2004, p. 9). Put more simply, while human capital recognises the knowledge and skills resource represented by individuals, social capital is about the resources created by features of our social lives: it is about knowing and interacting with people from many backgrounds, and about levels of trust and networks within and between communities (Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock, 2002; Halpern, 2005).

Social capital is about making connections. Schools are keenly aware of the need to expose their students to new experiences, to people from diverse cultures and backgrounds, as well as to include social awareness issues within the classroom. These dimensions of the curricular and co-curricular programme are based on a recognition of the need to build student attributes at the relational level:

Riding for the Disabled

Riding for the Disabled (RDA) and Ivanhoe Grammar School provide people with disabilities with the opportunity to participate in horse riding and related activities. RDA Plenty was established in 2001 with the assistance of RDA Victoria and Ivanhoe Grammar School using the equestrian facilities at their Plenty Campus. Two coaches and volunteers drawn from both the local and school community give their time to assist seven riders who attend the programme on a fortnightly basis.

The programme aims to assist riders with controlling a horse as well as their own bodies. This builds self confidence and increases responsibility. Riders learn balance and co-ordination skills while receiving therapeutic muscle stimulation. The activities also stimulate associated

Case Study

Ivanhoe Grammar School

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empathy, understanding, communication, perseverance – and these attributes are best learnt through a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical, lived experiences. It acknowledges the need to integrate education for the head, heart and hand; and has a deep resonance with the educational philosophy of Confucius:

Tell me and I forget.
Show me and I remember.
Let me do and I understand.

This level of awareness is acknowledged at the national level. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), in the Values Education National Framework, acknowledges that ‘education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills’ (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, p. 1). So too, the Adelaide Declaration of National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century includes ‘the goals that students, when they leave school, should:

- have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members, (Goal 1.2) and
- have the capacity to exercise judgement and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice, and the capacity to make sense of their world, to think about how things got to be the way they are, to make rational and informed decisions about their own lives, and to accept responsibility for their own actions (Goal 1.3)’ (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005, p. 2).

Community service is a means by which students can make a valuable contribution to local and international communities. This paper explores the nature of school-based community service and presents some current research evidence highlighting the benefits of participation. Complementing the main text are stories celebrating just a few of the wide-ranging and innovative service programmes provided by independent schools in Victoria.

Year 10 Community Service students at the Plenty Campus have taken an active role, providing valuable support to riders and volunteering their time to ensure the ongoing success of the programme.

areas of speech, language, concentration, memory and leadership skills.
Research and the Nature of Service

[S]chools which are an integral part of community life, nurture high parental involvement, and actively expand the horizons of students, achieve higher test scores (Woolcock, 2002, p. 25).

Community service is primarily an activity in which time is freely given to benefit others. School community service has both social and educational ramifications, and the last few years have seen a considerable number of qualitative and statistical studies undertaken in fields such as volunteering (Wilson, 2000), co-curricular activities (Marsh, 1992), civic engagement (Metz & Youniss, 2003) and service learning (NYLC, 2004). Research into schools and community service is concerned with factors that may improve student engagement and educational outcomes, leading to greater civic engagement and lifelong learning in adulthood.

The literature makes a number of strong claims. Quality community service is beneficial for a variety of educational goals, including greater self-esteem, more positive adult role-models, more satisfaction with school and family life, higher levels of civic engagement, increased commitment to school and school values, higher educational aspirations and higher grades. Schools with an ethos or culture of participation have a strong influence on student engagement. Mandated service can be a positive motivating force, increasing rather than decreasing student engagement.

There are three common terms used in the literature: volunteering, community service and service learning. Community service and volunteering are often used synonymously, and in this paper are considered together. Service learning recognises a variety of intentional educational outcomes linked to community service in a school context and a considerable amount of research is now taking place in this area.

Research into co-curricular activities considers a wider school context and is particularly concerned with participation and engagement. The final section of this paper considers the impact of school ethos, values and the quality of service programmes.

Volunteering and Community Service

In his review of a decade of literature on volunteering, Wilson defined volunteering as any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause. Volunteering is part of a cluster of helping behaviors, entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends (Wilson, 2000, p. 215).

There is some argument over whether intentions should be included in a definition, or whether activity is enough, as in the behavioural view that sees volunteering ‘as an activity that produces goods and services at below market rate’ (Wilson, 2000, p. 216).

Billanook College

Rebuilding in Thailand

A service project which deeply touched Billanook students and staff was their work in Thailand to assist the students of Chiang Dao Province. Local Thai children went to school in a dilapidated, crumbling building which did not protect them from the elements. The conditions were appalling.

Billanook students and staff worked throughout the year to raise the funds to buy the building materials necessary to rebuild the school so that the students of the Province would have adequate shelter. They organised a restaurant night, free dress days and a barbecue. Once the funds were raised, twelve students from years 11 and 12, and staff journeyed to Chiang Dao Province to start the rebuilding.

During their two week stay, Billanook students built a new roof and a retaining wall. The 63 metre-long retaining wall was vital to the local students’ well-being as it protected the school from the regular flooding they had endured previously. This service project provided an immediate benefit for the students and staff of the Chiang Dao Province.

Case Study
Volunteering is perhaps the more relevant term, as community service covers a wider spectrum of activity than is intended here, such as service provided in lieu of a prison sentence. The use of community service as a punitive measure may be problematic in a school environment and is also discussed further below. On the other hand, volunteering is a narrower concept that may exclude some activities. For example, while organising a fundraising event could be considered volunteering, participation in that event might not.

Wilson contended that ‘volunteering is typically proactive rather than reactive and entails some commitment of time and effort’ (2000, p. 216). Such a definition can usefully cover the incredibly wide array of activities found in Victorian independent schools. These activities include (but are not limited to):

- Event fundraising and issue awareness. Specific fundraising activities are commonly linked to and mediated by local, national or international charities. They usually take place annually, are observed by many schools and other groups, and are also a means of raising awareness about issues such as health and welfare. Examples would include the Salvation Army’s Red Shield Appeal, World Vision Australia’s 40 Hour Famine, Children’s Medical Research Institute’s Jeans for Genes day, The Cancer Council of Australia’s Relay for Life, and SIDS and Kids’ Red Nose Day.

community and had a life changing effect on the students and staff of Billanook College. The experience allowed students to be immersed in a different culture, experience severe poverty, and be exposed to a different way of life. They were able to reflect on their own lifestyle and broaden their horizons. More than just offering financial support, the students built an emotional connection to a community in need.
This category also includes student participation in movements like Make Poverty History and the ONE campaign, which may involve students raising awareness within their school about significant global issues, for example poverty and taking actions such as writing to local MPs.

- **School-nominated connections.** Many schools have closer links with a charity or community organisation that go beyond an annual fundraising event and may be a unique connection forged by a particular school, often at a national or international level. Activities are varied and may include (but are not limited to) fundraising. Examples would be schools with connections to indigenous communities in Australia, orphanages in poor areas of various countries, or to communities suffering from natural disaster. These connections are usually ongoing and may involve sending material such as clothes or school books, communications between students including pen pals or reciprocal visits, or visiting another country to take part in building or other forms of aid.

- **Local community participation.** Activities within the local community involve direct student participation and would include visits to homes for the disabled or elderly, assisting with a meals on wheels service, picking up litter or planting trees in a park, collecting blankets for charity, painting a community building, cooking and cleaning in someone’s home, and assisting with teaching or homework in a community centre or another school.

Based on his comprehensive review of volunteering literature, Wilson stated that ‘[l]evel of education is the most consistent predictor of volunteering...because it heightens awareness of problems, increases empathy and builds self-confidence’ (2000, p. 219). Research has found that ‘[c]hildren who volunteer during their high school years develop more pro-social attitudes and are more likely to volunteer in college and later in their adult life’ (Astin, 1993; Damico, Damico, & Conway, 1998). Other research has presented the benefits of community participation from a different perspective: ‘[l]earning to think of citizenship as carrying responsibilities as well as rights encourages teenagers to volunteer when they become adults regardless of whether they volunteered when young’ (Janoski, Musick, & Wilson, 1998; in Wilson, 2000, pp. 218-219).

The notion of context is a little understood aspect of volunteering. Context here refers to ‘ecological factors ranging from units as small as households, residential blocks, workplaces, and schools to those as large as cities, regions, and countries’ (Wilson, 2000, p. 229). Of the two relevant studies Wilson located from the nineties, one found that ‘net of individual differences, the chances a student will volunteer increase if he or she attends a school that requires or encourages community service’ (Sundeen & Raskoff, 1995)
and the other found that ‘students [in America] attending private colleges with a strong religious orientation participate in community service more frequently than students at private colleges with less emphasis on religion or at public universities’ (Serow & Dreyden, 1990). Issues of whole-school environment and service expectations are further considered below.

An analysis of data from the American National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) found that ‘voluntary community service is positively related to academic progress during high school’ (Dávila & Mora, 2007, p. 11).

Volunteering, or community service in schools, then, is an intentional activity where students freely give time and effort to benefit the wider community. In many schools, such activity is often linked to areas of the academic curriculum and includes learning objectives and student reflection on the service activity. It is to this type of service that we now turn.
Community Service Learning

In considering service-learning, Anderson (1998) recognises that it has similarities to other forms of what he calls ‘experiential education’ including internships and community service. He thus offers a definition of community service that has evident similarities to that of Wilson on volunteering:

Community service involves students providing assistance to individuals, organizations, or the community. The assistance can be direct (preparing meals in a shelter for the homeless or picking up trash in a park) or indirect (organizing a food drive or doing clerical work for a social service agency). In all cases, the primary focus is on providing a service and the primary beneficiary is the service recipient (Anderson, 1998).

Butcher et al. (2003) suggest that community service learning can be distinguished from community service by the integration of study with hands-on activity outside the classroom, typically through a collaborative effort to address a community problem. In community service learning programmes, both the service provider and recipient are beneficiaries. There is then a dual focus on the service being provided and the learning that occurs (2003, pp. 111-112).

Billig remarks that ‘practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers simply do not define service-learning in consistent ways’ (2004, p. 14). She suggests that service-learning might include at least one of areas such as ‘clearly identified learning objectives, student involvement in selecting or designing the service activity, a theoretical base, integration of service with academic curriculum, and student reflection’ (2004, p. 13).

Given this kind of focus, it is likely that schools for which community service is part of their culture (as opposed to an add-on, optional extra), provide learning opportunities for their students without any explicit recognition of the service-learning concept. Billig cites a private school study where only nine per cent of respondents considered their programmes to include service-learning, as they understood the term (Pritchard, 2002). However, those who said they were engaged in community service said that the service ‘included curricular integration (62 percent); connection to an academic class (26 percent); student reflection (61 percent); and students designing service projects (61 percent). As such, it is likely that research into service-learning may also apply to much community service undertaken in independent schools in Australia, as it is often set within a formalised curriculum framework.

Schools with Round Square membership or International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) accreditation offer programmes similar to those of service learning. The Round Square organisation includes service as part of its curriculum. Students are ‘encouraged to perform a substantial number of service

Case Study

Australian International Academy

Fundraising for victims of the tsunami, Aceh, Indonesia

The Australian International Academy (formerly King Khalid Islamic School of Victoria) ‘aims to create a future generation who willingly work hard to assist those who are less fortunate’. This is achieved in part through promoting the community and service component of the International Baccalaureate programme. Zahra, a Year 10 student, said of her fundraising efforts, ‘I feel that I’m doing the right thing by helping my fellow brothers and sisters in today’s society’. Sarah, a year 8 student, wrote

Mr Salman [school principal] and Mr Galea went to Benda, Aceh to visit the Tsunami affected areas. After seeing the devastation of what had happened, they decided to help and involve all students in raising money. They chose to assist two badly affected schools. With the Year 12 exams nearing, students in Aceh are left with no books nor facilities to complete their studies.
hours, either in school-sponsored, regional or international projects’ (Round Square, 2005). The IBO curriculum also includes ‘a community service component requiring action and reflection’ (IBO, 2005). Both organisations see service as an educational commitment promoting personal, social and emotional growth as well as intellectual attainment.

For example, at Mowbray College, a member of Round Square, students visit a special school and a retirement village on a weekly basis. They also have international connections. Students have visited an orphanage in Thailand and raised money for the children there, and have also visited a school in Vanuatu, where students undertook service that included teaching locals how to use some donated computers, and replaced toilet seats and shower heads. Billanook College is also a member of Round Square and one of its international projects is described on page 8.

Fifteen independent schools in Victoria offer the International Baccalaureate at years 11 and 12. Their community service activities are not limited to these years, of course. Carey Baptist Grammar school students take a pro-active approach to community service with projects that range from the provision of blankets and food for homeless people and disadvantaged families, to arranging the collection of educational materials for a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory with which the school has an established relationship. Already this year, one of the school Houses has collected and delivered musical instruments for use in therapy at a complex care nursing home, Gardenview House, and students visit the same facility to read to residents. Students at Firbank Grammar School volunteer in
Mother Teresa homes in Calcutta, where they care for orphaned children, the poor, the disabled and the dying. Students at Methodist Ladies’ College embark on study tours in Africa with World Vision, visiting children in schools and orphanages, learning about the people and their culture and gaining first hand experience of the difference they can make by participating in aid programmes. Closer to home, Lauriston Girls’ School has raised money for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and their junior students have a Representative Council responsible for running fundraising projects. Ivanhoe Grammar School and The Australian International Academy are featured on pages 6 and 12 respectively.

A considerable body of research on community service learning has been undertaken in the US under the auspices of the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC, 2004; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2004; NYLC, 2005, 2006). Much of this research considers the relationship between community service in schools (of any kind, not just service learning, as it is commonly termed in the literature) and a range of contexts and benefits, including SES levels, academic outcomes and increased community engagement (Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006). For example, a study by Scales and Roehlkepartain found that ‘[i]nvolvement in service appears to contribute to lessening the achievement gap, with low income students who serve doing better academically than students who do not serve’ (2005, p. 10).

Billig usefully separates service research into four areas of impact: academic or cognitive domains, civic domains, personal and social domains, and career exploration skills (2004, p. 14). Studies into the academic impact of service learning are increasing but are generally on a small scale. Trends are positive, with studies finding that students participating in service learning have scored higher than non-participants in social studies, writing and English/ language arts. They were more cognitively engaged and more motivated to learn, though not necessarily more engaged behaviourally. There have been noticeable increases in cognitive complexity and other aspects of problem-solving (Billig, 2004, pp. 16-17).

Studies into civic engagement had mixed results. While service learning did have a positive impact in areas such as political involvement, community attachment, environmental awareness, voting and service on public boards, longitudinal and replicable research is in its early stages. One primary finding in this area was that positive outcomes were strongly linked to the quality of the programme and a clear recognition of its aims (Billig, 2004, p. 20).

Personal and social domains show the greatest evidence of the positive impact service learning can have (Billig, 2000, 2004).
and broaden their understanding of what it means to lend a hand and to be part of the community. The school feels this is a vital tool that they will take with them which will enhance the people they become and guide strongly the roles they will play as young adult citizens.

Girton Grammar Junior School students are heavily involved in the MSReadathon, for which students have to find sponsors and read to raise money for the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Nine year old Year 5 student Rachael (above) was the highest individual fundraiser in Victoria in 2006, raising over $3,000. This type of community service provides the younger students with a safer environment in which to support the community whilst still teaching them the values and importance of actively doing something or giving something of themselves to support others less fortunate.

Areas benefiting include ‘pro-social behaviors, acceptance of diversity, connection to cultural heritage, development of ethics, and... resilience’ (Billig, 2004, p. 22).

Martin et al. (2006) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 3,123 US residents aged 18-28. They found that ‘[s]tudents attending private or parochial schools seem to have the greatest access to service opportunities, with Service-Learning and Service Only participation each reported at 45 percent, and No Service reported at only 10 percent’ (2006, p. 6). While service-learning scored consistently higher than service only, those who experienced some form of service scored higher than those who did not in reporting having more positive adult role models, being more engaged within their local communities, being more satisfied with work, school, family life and friendships, having higher educational aspirations, and showing higher levels of civic engagement (e.g. voting, community leadership, treating others with respect and keeping informed of current events).
Co-curricular Activities and Student Engagement

Participation in extracurricular activities – even those not obviously associated with academic achievement – apparently leads to increased commitment to school and school values, which leads indirectly to increased academic success (Marsh, 1992, p. 560).

One area of statistically measured research which is only partially focussed on the outcomes of community service is student engagement in co-curricular activities. Finn argued that participation in co-curricular activities develops a sense of belonging, and that participation can be a measure of student engagement in school (Finn, 1989, 1993). Community service is one aspect of such activities, which also include participation in sports, music, art and drama, school governance, academic and vocational clubs. Participation in co-curricular activities has been correlated with decreasing dropout rates (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Dávila & Mora, 2007), higher levels of self-esteem, higher educational aspirations and higher academic achievement (Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1992; Fullarton, 2002).

Camp’s (1990) study found that students’ co-curricular participation ‘produced a significant positive effect on achievement’ and Marsh (1992) ‘found that significant effects of total extracurricular activity participation were small but consistently positive... facilitated academic outcomes rather than detracted from them, and that these positive effects were generalisable across a variety of student backgrounds’ (Fullarton, 2002, pp. 2-3).

In her Australian study using data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), Fullarton found whole-school engagement to be the strongest influence on individual student engagement. Whole-school engagement, for Fullarton, is ‘a school “ethos” of participation’ (2002, p. vi), and is an attempt to take into account the influence of the school environment on participation as opposed to individual levels. Fullarton recognises the limitations of her data in providing this construct and does not clearly define what is meant, though she appears to be referring to the variety of activities provided within a school and the levels of student participation in these activities. Given the data constraints, Fullarton found that ‘[t]he level of engagement within a school was found to vary significantly between schools, and was found to be higher in single-sex schools, small schools, and in schools with higher levels of socioeconomic status’ (2002, p. 32).

Case Study

Fitzroy Community School

Raising money for children in China

Fitzroy Community School has links with Enling Primary School, a sister school in Kunming, China. Fitzroy’s Principal, Tim Berryman, told the students about Mrs Wu and her three children. They were very poor and moved to Kunming from Guizhou where Mrs Wu made a precarious living collecting rubbish. Soon after they arrived in Kunming Mrs Wu’s husband was killed in a car accident. Xiao Li was 12 and her sister Xiao Man was 8. Neither of them had spent much time in school. The youngest child was just one and a half.

After hearing this story, the students in Year 6 coordinated a fete. They decided what stalls to run and were responsible for everything, including organising younger students to help them, bringing in unwanted items for trash and treasure, and setting up the tables. Parents and younger students also got involved, donating food and spending money at the stalls. They raised enough money to send both girls to their sister school in China for a year.

This year’s Year 6 students were continuing the support with another fete, where they hoped to raise enough money to keep the girls in school for another year.
Levels of engagement in school life, measured by participation in co-curricular activities (from LSAY data), have also been shown to have an impact on student retention to Year 12 (Marks, Fleming, Long, & McMillan, 2000).

A report on the learning needs of Year 9 students from the Victorian Department of Education and Training (Cole, Mahar, & Vindurampulle, 2006a) highlights research in several domains, including neuroscience, cognitive science and cognitive and social development psychology, that seek to shed light on adolescent behaviour, motivation and engagement, and thus student learning needs. In the report’s Implications for Policy and Practice (Cole, Mahar, & Vindurampulle, 2006b), many of the suggestions about which others live, the lack of opportunity, and the discrepancy with their own lives.

The school has always advocated that everyone can make a difference, and in organising the fete and raising the money, the children saw that they themselves could make an enormous difference. Through the change they effected in the lives of these two girls, our children also gained, by experiencing their own power to better the lives of others.

Rudy – a current Year 6 student – said it felt good to be able to help people and James said it made him ‘feel more part of the world community’. James also said being involved in the fete helped ‘big kids relate to little kids’. The students went on to reflect on the importance of schooling, neatly summed up by Lily: ‘if you have a good education you can get a good job’, and Rudy: ‘sometimes you hate school but when you’re not at school you wish you were there’. Mr Berryman said of the experience, the children were engaged by the poverty in which others live, the lack of opportunity, and the discrepancy with their own lives.

The Principal of St John’s Lutheran Primary School in Portland, Mr Les Seiffert, has linked up his Grade 6 students with Meals on Wheels. The town’s senior citizens now receive a young smile with their dinner when the children come knocking at the door. Every fortnight, one of the teachers drives two students to the Portland District Health Hospital to collect food cooked for the elderly. Students are responsible for making up the trays, paying careful attention to detail as many of their clients have special dietary requirements. They deliver food to 10 or 12 homes each time. It is a new experience for most students as they do not have much contact with elderly people.

The students enjoy interesting stories shared with them by the elderly people they meet, about the history of the area and the people who have lived there. It has been a great experience for students and the clients who receive this invaluable service.
learning and teaching characteristics that may increase student engagement are based on the provision of service activities. These include ‘assisting students to become involved in community based projects’, ‘supporting students to become involved in youth action programs and youth development programs’, ‘establishing a philanthropic trust managed by students and supported by student fundraising efforts’ and ‘training students to meet the role requirements for positions such as...student mentors, student counsellors, student tutors, sports coaches...and so on’ (2006b, p. 25).

Interestingly, other recent research has found that separating co-curricular activities into different streams led to different findings. McNeal (1995) separated activities into four categories: sports clubs, fine arts, academic clubs and vocational clubs. Of these, only participation in sports clubs and fine arts activities were significantly related to a reduction in dropout levels. Broh (2002) went further, separating interscholastic and intramural sports. His data (which are based on US schools) showed that of the two, only interscholastic sports participation benefited students’ self-esteem, educational outcomes and relationships. Broh also found that participation in music had significant positive benefits as, to a lesser extent, did school drama, student council and school magazines (2002, p. 84).

Thus, multidisciplinary research into adolescent development as well as student participation and engagement in schools generally agree on the benefits of co-curricular activities, while debate continues as to levels of benefit and the benefits of different activity types. Interestingly, while McNeal and Broh do not identify community service as part of co-curricular activity, Marsh (1992, p. 556) does include community service activities (as one of 16 activity types, aggregated) and Lindsay (1984) found that co-curricular participation was significantly correlated with high participation rates among young adults in voluntary social activities (Fullarton, 2002, p. 3). These results appear to agree with similar studies undertaken as part of the service-learning research agenda.

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**Case Study**

**Christian College Geelong**

**Year 11 connecting with the Salvation Army’s Project 614**

The Salvation Army’s Project 614 is a programme that supports and connects with marginalised urban youth through a purpose built bus and at the 614 Life Centre, which manages an extensive programme of welfare relief and support to disadvantaged people in the city of Melbourne. The programme aims to rebuild, restore and renew broken lives, providing practical plans to give hope and a future for those involved.

As part of their studies in Religion, Society and Ethics, Year 11 students at Christian College Geelong were recently visited by former world leader of the Salvation Army, Retired General Eva Burrows, and Major Brendan Nottle, Project Leader of Project 614. Mr Glen McKeeman, Head of the Senior School at Christian College, said, as a result of the success of General Burrows and The Salvation Army staff visiting us our students have responded enthusiastically to this

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**Mandated Service, School Ethos and Quality Programmes**

In 1999 it was estimated that for 19 per cent of public high schools in America, community service was a requirement and a given number of hours must be completed for a student to graduate (Chapman & Kleiner, 1999, in Metz & Youniss, 2003, p. 281). While this is not a form of punishment, at first sight it does remove choice (required volunteering is an obvious oxymoron) and could potentially lead to resentment. Metz and Youniss noted that, on the one hand, ‘[s]tudies show that service and activism during youth are associated with life-long civic engagement involving voting, trust in government, and involvement in voluntary organizations’ while, on the other hand, ‘required service can take away youths’ intrinsic motivation, provoking the question
as to whether such policies lessen the quality of the service experiences or even turn youth off to future volunteerism altogether’ (2003, p. 281).

Metz and Youniss studied a single school where 40 hours of mandated service was introduced, and found that students who were more inclined to volunteer:

- completed their requirement quickly and then went on to do volunteer service at high rates in their remaining years in school without the added motivation of a service requisite. At the same time, the less inclined students who waited until grade 12 to finish the requirement responded to that experience with increased intentions to volunteer after their high school graduation. There is no evidence that the programme. Students will now visit Melbourne regularly to support this project on an ongoing basis.

On their visit to Melbourne, students get involved in a number of activities. They converse with people and workers at the Life Centre, providing a listening ear and support, playing board games and assisting with cleaning. They are involved in the distribution of welfare to the needy, the preparation, distribution and clean-up of a three-course meal at the centre, and joining a Salvation Army worker following up on people who live on the streets.

The students’ active participation gives them the opportunity to see and hear personally the stories of disadvantaged people and the people who work with them. The service experience also forms part of their course in ethics and requires students to reflect on societal issues, moral values and how they are expressed, and to examine the void between wealth and poverty and the response of a significant religious tradition in Australia.

Case Study Snapshot

**Melbourne Grammar School**

**Ronald McDonald House**

Students of Hone House, Melbourne Grammar School, have developed an ongoing relationship with the Ronald McDonald House in Melbourne. Twice per term up to eight students from years 9 to 11 go to the five terraced houses that comprise the Ronald McDonald House to offer their services to the 30 or so families usually living there at the time. The families are living away from home often with a seriously ill child in hospital. The students cook dinner for the residents. They are able to interact with and assist a community in difficult circumstances, and gain much insight from the experience.
requirement turned students off to service, but quite a bit of support for the notion that required service was a positive motivating force (2003, p. 285).

The values implicit in many common approaches to community service have at their base punitive measures, or conditions and prerequisites. That is, service is sometimes used as a consequence when rules and regulations are breached. While it could be argued that doing community service has the potential to raise awareness about community issues and ethical values, that argument would seem to be undermined when the notion of service is conflated with that of punishment, or with a graduation requirement.

In comparison, the prospectus of Geelong Grammar School presents a quite different view of community service, in a section titled Generosity: ‘Community service enriches the experience of our girls and boys, helping them to learn more about the larger community and their potential in it. More importantly, it teaches them to give because they can, to be compassionate and active in public life, and to respect the environment’ (2003, p. 18). Christian College Geelong has a similar philosophy, where students are ‘encouraged to recognise that they belong to a world society, and to acknowledge their responsibility to positively contribute to the relief of the less privileged in this global community’ (2007).

Arguably, there is potentially a considerable difference between a school that expects its students to give to their community and a school that requires and enforces it. A school that tells its students to complete 40 hours of community service as a mandatory requirement for graduation is surely building a value culture that is quite different from a school that expects its students to take part in community service because they have the ability and the responsibility to do so. As such, a mandatory requirement is not negative in itself, but rather reactions to that requirement may depend on the values placed on it, the reasons given to the student and the manner in which they are presented. Casey Grammar School’s story on page 4 is an example of a mandatory programme set within a curriculum framework and a whole-school ethos that is proving popular and successful with its Year 9 students and their parents.

The quality of community service programmes has also been stressed as a significant factor relating to student engagement and participation. In particular, Billig (2004) cites communication and interaction with community members as having the greatest influence on outcomes. Ammon (2002) found that dialogue between teacher and student about programme goals was important and for Covitt (2002), the quality of implementation affected results.

Quality would seem to be particularly important in a school setting. Schools have a responsibility to provide a safe environment and to provide experiences that are both
Recently, students who have visited the Marree-Arabunna indigenous community have donated their time to work as research assistants for a legal group formed to assist the community with issues surrounding native title and water rights.

Peter Razos, the Head of Science at Trinity Grammar, also travels to the Oenpelli School in Arnhem Land twice a year. A couple of students go with him and together they assist the local teachers with their science programme. The Trinity students also get involved with the after-school sports activities and have worked in the Injulak Craft Centre.

challenging and rewarding, and encourage personal development. The integration of community service activities as part of a wider school ethos valuing community connectedness and encouraging students to use their abilities to benefit others would appear to be an effective way of ensuring enthusiasm and maintaining quality programmes.
Xavier College

Assisting migrant children with their homework at the Friday Night School

The Friday Night School, coordinated by Margaret Gurry through St Vincent de Paul, is a programme that provides homework assistance to children from non-English speaking backgrounds, particularly children from third world countries. Every Friday night, students from Xavier College (and several other schools, including Loreto Mandeville Hall and Strathcona Baptist Girls’ Grammar School) arrive to tutor the children. As well as helping with homework, the students offer friendship and support, regularly giving up their leisure time to assist at the school.

Xavier students also take part in a weekend camp once a year. Students from the Friday Night School attend the camp at the Xavier Buxton Outdoor Education Centre where they take part in various outdoor activities. In the week after the camp, Xavier students visit the homes of some of the Friday Night students who attended the camp, to give them further assistance with study. Xavier students who want to take part in the camp are required to write a brief application reflecting on the reasons why they would like to participate; an opportunity for them to consider the role they can play in the lives of migrant youth.

One Year 10 Xavier student said of his experience,

there has never been anything that has made me realise so clearly how lucky I am than the tutoring programme. Before this experience I think I had a very narrow view of the world. Now I have seen children who have gone through more hardship in their short lifetime than I ever will and have so little, and the thing that always hits me about these kids is they come along to the tutoring programme every week smiling.

Conclusion

A growing body of literature is connecting community service with a variety of beneficial effects including higher levels of engagement in school, higher academic success, greater self-esteem and ongoing civic engagement. Research also indicates that whole-school ‘ethos’ affects student engagement, participation and educational aspirations, as does parental expectation and volunteerism.

Levels of education achieved and service during youth also correlate with adult community engagement.

Research into volunteering, service-learning and co-curricular activities provides a broad academic base from which to argue that community service has a significantly positive effect on youth at school. Schools with a strong ethos of service to the community have a highly positive impact, which should rightly be celebrated. Their students are more likely to have high self-esteem and social aptitude, and to be more aware of their responsibilities towards others in their community.

The aims and quality of a service experience, as well as student perceptions of quality, are a highly significant indicator of its benefit levels. This would also seem to apply, to an extent, to other factors such as the amount of time spent in service and the values placed on it by those involved. Such contextual concerns have not been explored in-depth in the literature; however, the generally positive outcomes of most of the research do suggest that school-mediated service experiences are seldom negative.

The case studies presented throughout this publication provide a brief glimpse into the activities of some of Victoria’s independent schools. In all cases, the stories of service in local communities and internationally form only a small part of the wide-ranging commitments present in each school. Further stories can be found on the AISV website as part of our ongoing project Making Active Connections, and our Member Schools would be pleased to talk further about their programmes and the connections they nurture within and beyond their communities.
Acknowledgements

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More stories can be found as part of the Making Active Connections project on our website, at www.ais.vic.edu.au/independent/community/connections.htm

Kathryn Browne, AISV Marketing and Communications Officer, researched the stories and photographs contained in this publication.

Kathryn also manages the Making Active Connections project which showcases stories about community connections from our Member Schools. If you would like more information about this project, or if you have a story you would like to contribute, please contact AISV via aisv@ais.vic.edu.au

Online versions of our Research Series publications (in PDF format), including this one, can also be found on our website, at www.ais.vic.edu.au/schools/research/