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PASTORAL CARE AND SERVICE LEARNING: A THAI CASE STUDY

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Pastoral care and service learning have been given considerable attention by some schools over the past decade, especially in the United Kingdom, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, in both the private and government sectors. School websites often prominently display pastoral care policies or references to pastoral care. Given the increasing social problems that are affecting student learning in many developed countries, the notion of 'care' or 'caring' has become an important aspect of the mission of schools. While educators who are Christian have long held to the practice of caring as part of their Christian philosophy of education, the needs of the contemporary generation of students present new challenges that require creative strategies and carefully planned effort by schools.

FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

The present study has linked the concepts of pastoral care and service learning because they are perceived to be complementary, particularly when considered from a Christian perspective. A school's pastoral care programme may facilitate or sponsor a service learning activity which, in its turn, not only benefits individual students, but builds up the ethos of the whole school.

Pastoral care

Pastoral care is defined in various ways in the literature. One of the most detailed definitions comes from the UK Department of Education and Science:

> Pastoral care is concerned with promoting pupils' personal and social development and fostering positive attitudes: through the quality of teaching and learning; through the nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers and adults other than teachers; through arrangements for monitoring pupils'

> overall progress, academic, personal and social; through specific pastoral structures and support systems; and through extra-curricular activities and the school ethos. Pastoral care accordingly should help a school to achieve success. In such a context it offers support for the learning, behaviour and welfare of all pupils, and addresses the particular difficulties some individual pupils may be experiencing. It seems to help ensure that all pupils, and particularly girls and members of ethnic minorities, are enabled to benefit from the full range of educational opportunities which a school has available. (DES 1989, pp. 3-4)

A more succinct definition is given by Ron Best: "Pastoral care is a very comprehensive concept, expressing a commitment to the welfare, well-being and fullest development of the individual" (Best 1996, p. 15).

It is interesting that 'pastoral care' is not frequently used in an educational context in the USA, where it tends to be associated mainly with tasks performed by the clergy. Many of the caring functions of schools are more likely to be categorised as 'counselling'. 'Service learning' has a more familiar ring for North American educators. In Australia some government schools prefer the synonym 'student welfare'.

Current literature supports the use of a whole-school approach to pastoral care (Down 2002). It incorporates casework, curriculum, control/ community and management as integral components of an overall program (Best 1996, pp. 11-14). *Casework* represents the school's attempts in guiding, counselling and addressing reactively the problems and concerns of students, *vis à vis curriculum*, which deals proactively with the learning content and experiences of students. The main purpose of the *control/community* component is not to target the behaviour of a misbehaving minority, but the development of the majority of the student body as a harmonious community. This component emphasises constructive cooperation and minimises sanctioning. *Management* represents the structuring and coordinating component that incorporates and allocates the whole range of the school's human resources required for the effective functioning of its pastoral care program.

Service learning

The roots of service learning may be found historically in the educational philosophy of John Dewey, and it is expressed in, *inter alia*, the Peace Corps Movement, the Scouts and Guides Associations, and various community groups such as Rotary, Apex, and Lions. Biblically, it is also seen in the schools of the prophets in ancient Israel, thought to have been established by Samuel (1 Samuel 10:5, 19:20; 2 Kings 6:1-7).

According to James Wilhoit, "service predisposes a person to *learn*" (Wilhoit 1991, p. 58. Emphasis ours), and it provides learners "with the opportunity to discover personal meaning" (p. 108). This is something Wilhoit thinks cannot be handed on by teachers. Furthermore, he sees the Holy Spirit involved in the whole process, working in the students' lives and giving them a desire for active service which in turn will be "... yet another inducement to learning, for it will fill them with questions and concerns" (p. 57). In one sense Wilhoit foreshadowed some of the pedagogical characteristics that have more recently become synonymous with service learning.

Contemporary curriculum writers have perceived service learning as a teaching method (Hopkins 1999, p. 1). It spans the educational continuum from elementary school to university (Kilcher & Johns 1997; Pettman 1996; Shull 1995). It has also been described as activities which

> blend community service and learning so that both occur and are enriched by the other. Youth participating in service learning programs perform a needed service that builds, utilises or provides a framework for academic and civic skills, abilities, and competencies. The services can be provided within school walls, or in the community, and would not normally happen if the students were not doing them. (Holt-Otten 1999, p. 1)

Advocates of service learning point to some of its reported benefits: active learning in real-life settings, the formation of values through altruistic service, enhancement of motivation and increased student academic achievement (Kinsley & McPherson 1995, pp. viii-9). The claimed benefits are based, in the main, on anecdotal evidence and reports rather than empirical studies. Recent research conducted by Susan Hunter found that, in general, students felt positive about their service experience, which was enhanced when faculty participated and when aspects of service learning were discussed in class. It was also reported that students who volunteered for service activities scored much better on follow-up tests of civic and democratic knowledge than non-volunteers. Respondents also indicated that they preferred working in teams to working alone (Hunter 2000).

There is no clear consensus on the specific criteria for activities to qualify as service learning. However, five key elements are commonly identified in model service-learning projects:

1. *Clear outcomes* for developing participants' knowledge, skills and values should guide a programme. These components are critical in distinguishing service learning from other forms of service.

2. *Meaningful service* is a function of providers' interests and community needs, a sense of mission, and a cooperative approach to tasks.
3. *Ownership* of the service learning activities occurs when both service providers and recipients are involved in the decision making process.
4. *Reflection* (private and public) is a necessary element, assisting participants to learn from what they do.
5. *Celebration and recognition* contribute significantly to establishing a service ethic, particularly when participants plan their own "festivities" or "commemoration", and when the community recognises their efforts (Holt-Otten 1999, pp. 1-2).

Service learning from a Christian perspective

The "service" component of service learning is of particular interest to some humanitarian groups. But there is also a distinctly Christian perspective on service that deserves attention.

Service is a biblical concept. References to it can be found throughout Scripture, stretching from Genesis ("...where Adam and Eve serve God by caring for His creation" – Gangel 1991, p. 16), to Revelation (where, in the new Jerusalem, "...the throne of God and the Lamb shall be ... and his servants will serve him" – Rev. 22:3, KJV). The incarnation of Jesus Christ speaks of humility (Phil. 2:8) and Jesus' own words testify that "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...." (Matt. 20:28, NIV).

Central to the Gospel is that through grace, the magnanimous and unselfish outpouring of God in Jesus Christ, mankind is offered salvation, as a free gift from God. Unmerited, we cannot add to it, or earn it in any conceivable way. However, in accepting this gift as repentant sinners, with gratitude we can freely respond by loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and loving our neighbour as ourselves (Luke 10:27). Service is thus a free, loving, worshipful response (see also Joshua 24:14-24, where serving is synonymous with worship), and we may become a channel of God's love to others. Furthermore, in serving we not only worship, but – as Jesus highlights in his parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:35-45) – we also personally encounter God. In Jesus' terms, service to others is a tacit recognition of the intrinsic value of human beings (Stott 1999, p. 431).

Service is recognised by many Christian faith communities as undoubtedly a key dimension of the Christian life. It is often taught very early to children, as evidenced by its incorporation in Bible curriculum materials that present grace and worship as the vertical dimension of the Christian life, and service and community as the horizontal dimension (Habida 2002). The consequence and

outcome of salvation and character building should be service (Knight 1998, p. 203), an idea which echoes the contention that "... the three goals of [Christian] education are transformation, formation, and service" (Pazmiño 1988, p. 146).

Scope for Christian service lies not only in the home and the church. Schools, too,

> need to introduce their students to opportunities for serving others both inside and outside of their respective communities. In short, a crucial function of Christian teaching is to help students not only to internalise God's love but also to externalise it. (Knight 1998, p. 204)

Earlier generations of Christian educators have reminded us that externalising God's love has a reciprocal effect. Those who minister to others are blessed themselves, "... for we receive heaven into our hearts" (White 1903, p. 16). M. V. C. Jeffreys (1955, p. 17) pointed out that "devoted service [i.e. given in love, and not coerced] liberates, and fosters personal growth."

Pastoral care and service learning

There is an evident link between pastoral care and service learning. Best has noted that an important aspect of pastoral care in schools is to express commitment to, and facilitate the fullest development of, individuals. Service learning, while it may help develop "the three Rs", also educates participants in a fourth R, 'relationship', and thus helps students to learn what it means to be truly human, authentic persons.

Bridger and Atkinson (1998) have commented that, from this relational perspective, caring can be perceived as removing the barriers that prevent us from authentic human functioning, and at the same time as "enabling one another to grow as persons nearer to what God intends humanity to be" (pp. 144f). In the school setting, pastoral care is thus significant when it guides and directs students, and offers them pathways of learning that will challenge, encourage, and assist them *to become*. Service learning may be seen as one of those pathways. It is rich in potential, *inter alia*, for self to be laid aside; to sympathise, empathise and identify with people; to sacrifice personal resources; to reflect and ponder; to critique, question, investigate and make judgments; and to bond with people.

Such learning experiences and processes may include, but go beyond, knowledge and understandings specific to academic disciplines. They are not about the acquisition of information, but the "getting of wisdom," the actualisation of the individual. They are an expression of the axiom that "to know truth is to do it" (Sire 2000, p. 11). They clearly form and mould character and direct lives into unselfish ministry, especially when participants are open to transformation and renewal in Christ (as the apostle Paul points out in Rom. 12:3).

In short, the link between pastoral care and service learning is somewhat symbiotic. Effective service learning contributes to attaining a major aim of pastoral care, facilitation of the fullest development of individuals. While pastoral care teaches and informs participants about how to treat one other and live meaningfully, service learning is a creative vehicle for applying and testing notions about human needs and relationships in real and everyday settings. The outcomes, in turn, have the capacity to enrich one's understanding of pastoral care.

A CASE STUDY OF A SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

A case study from Thailand illustrates the link between pastoral care and service learning. Bangkok Adventist Church School (BACS) has about 300 students in classes from kindergarten (five year olds) to Grade 10 (15-16 year olds). Most of the students are Thai, but there is also a small group of expatriate children. As a result of some of the school staff and administrators completing a unit of study on pastoral care, the school adopted a more comprehensive pastoral care policy. The policy was based on a whole school approach that sought to integrate the components of casework, curriculum, control/community, and management. The focus is on creating a caring school community which includes "...opportunities to participate in corporate activities (including decision-making) and to develop a positive self-image; and opportunities to feel that one belongs and thus to share in mutual concern for the well-being of one's fellow citizens" (Project Coordinator).

The notion of concern for fellow citizens was put to the test at an unexpected meeting between the school staff and Catherine Riley-Bryan. A passionate educator (and recipient of the prestigious "Tasmanian Business Woman of the Year Award"), Catherine was living in Bon Ti Lung (population 600), a village in Western Thailand, where she has opened an orphanage for refugee children and youth of the Karen tribe. Awareness of the educational deprivation of the Karen (partly due to political complexities and their not having citizenship status) led Catherine to establish Bonti Bamboo School also. A school building – including a dormitory and first aid clinic – had already been constructed, and there was provision for a library. The library's roof and bamboo walls were already constructed, but who could assist with a slab cement floor, shelves and books?

After discussing together and assessing the situation, the BACS teachers decided in principle to help the young refugee students at Bonti as part of BACS' pastoral care programme. The assistance would take the form of a collaborative service learning project involving students and staff (who had an understanding of the essentials of service learning and its potential benefits). It was hoped that the project would not only help Bonti, but also contribute to a more effective

TABLE 1: Schedule of activities, participants, learning outcomes and skills – Bonti Bamboo School library project.

Activities Schedule	Participants	Learning Outcomes	General Life Skills
February • Identifying & selecting project – based on need, "do-ability", safety • Determining of resources – time, funds, people • Assigning responsibilities to coordinators	• Staff, students, general coordinator (Mrs M) • Staff, students, parents, Mission Health Foods Co, ADRA Australia • Mrs BC (book appeal & collection); Mrs KC (typing useful book list); Ms CC (fundraising activities)	• Identifying with people in need • Making a commitment to help people in need	• Analysing situations • Decision-making • Being accountable for actions
March • Writing & distributing appeal letters • Collecting books suitable for library • Fundraising activities	• Assigned teachers • Grade 1 & 2 students, parents • Grade 7 & 8 students, parents	• Constructing a text • Taking responsibility • Sharing resources joyfully	• Using persuasive skills • Developing sales skills • Evaluating books
April • Typing book lists • Fundraising (cont.) • Organising long weekend at project site	• Assigned leaders • Grades 1-2 • Grade 7-10 volunteers	• Demonstrating English literacy skills • Categorising reading materials • Extending computer spreadsheet skills	• Developing perseverance & sacrifice • Planning menus • Completing tasks
Early May • Delivery of books & shelving to Bonti • Laying of library floor • Leading out in a church & youth programme.	• Four teachers, Ms M, truck driver, Mr B, Mr M • 11 student volunteers (from Grades 7,8,10)	• Developing self confidence • Appreciating economic, educational & cultural differences • Demonstrating team spirit & effort • Demonstrating basic building construction skills.	• Preparing food for a group • Coping without city comforts & technology (e.g. electricity & piped water) • Relating to rural people
Mid-May • Post-project evaluation: individual & group • Sharing experiences with school during chapel period	• Grades 7,8,10 student volunteers • Audience participation by the whole school	• Expressing & sharing ideas orally in clear English • Assessing one's personal feelings & attitudes	• Speaking in public • Evaluating ideas & situations • Inspiring others to share

and safer BACS by engaging students who often feel disconnected in a city of twelve million people (as Bangkok is) in constructive and rewarding activities that build community.

Implementation

The first step in the service learning project had been taken by the staff. Next, the staff appealed to the students, and there was an encouraging response. An initial planning session resulted in a rationale and schedule for the project, and this is summarised in Table 1.

Essentially, the plan consisted of two main phases. In Bangkok, discarded books from the BACS library, together with those donated by parents and friends, were collected, sorted and packed, while library shelving was donated by our sister school. The various items were transported to Bonti where, over a long weekend in early May, the student team under the direction of staff laid the 4m x 8m cement floor, erected the shelving and stacked the books. All students were involved in aspects of the project (fundraising, encouragement, and support) in Bangkok, while eleven students and four staff travelled to Bonti.

Selected logbook entries by the project coordinator provide an interesting record of the development of the programme:

Feb 6: Today the first e-mail was sent to Catherine asking for official information about the school in order to prepare the appeal letter.

Feb 21: Information about Bonti was received today. It took so long because Bonti doesn't have access to e-mail services. (The nearest communication site apparently is at the end of a 28 km motorbike ride.)

March 12: After several editings, the appeal letters "went out" this afternoon.

March 19: Further e-mail communications – availability of materials and transport were discussed and we settled on May 3-6 for the implementation at Bonti.

April 3: Catherine came to see us at BACS. She showed us pictures of the location, school buildings and also the students. Some 'finer' details were dealt with: shelving measurements, cementing, food, clothing, bedding requirements, transportation: as well as a tentative program for the May 3-6 weekend.

April 9: Today the project was promoted again during School Assembly and also Chapel. A group of 12 secondary students initially volunteered for the weekend implementation trip. The coordinator met with the students, who volunteered to care for various aspects of the planned trip. One group of

four will care for the menu and food purchases, another group of five will care for the Church worship programme, and one group will assist with supply, purchases and transportation.

April 17: During the last two weeks the Grade 1 & 2 students were particularly involved in collecting the discarded books and in raising funds for purchasing a new set of *The Bible Story* and two sets of *My Bible Friends* for the Bonti school. They enthusiastically assisted carrying discarded books from the collection point to the room assigned for listing the books on the computer. Four Grade 7 & 8 girls volunteered to work several afternoons after school in order to list all the books by title and author on the computer. (Bonti school does not have electricity or a computer.) A roster was established and students worked happily to complete the job.

April 19: A nasty set-back: plans were laid for the BACS's maintenance person to prepare the shelving with the assistance of volunteer student labour after school. Unfortunately today he met with a serious accident when the grinder he was using flew apart, badly damaging his left arm and right hand. Because the materials had not yet been purchased and Ekamai International School, a sister institution, had some spare metal library shelving, they donated it for the project.

May 2: Last minute preparations have been completed. Tomorrow we travel to Bonti. (P.S. Our maintenance person is O.K. again. Praise God.)

Some of the spirit of the May weekend's events at Bonti are recalled by the project coordinator:

> Friday afternoon at 2.00 p.m. , eleven students and four staff, plus the administrator's husband, headed for Bonti Bamboo School, arriving at 6.30 p.m. [We] had organised a truck to take the thirty boxes of books, metal shelving, and tools, plus a donated door, and window frame to the project location. Under the protection of plastic sheets, the boxes of books were unloaded amidst a tropical downpour... Evenings were spent sharing and singing together with the local students. A roster for food preparation and clean-up was adhered to throughout the weekend. The students led out in two of the Church worship programmes, which provided a welcomed change for the local worshipers. Commencing around 7.30 am, the students worked hard all of next day mixing gravel, sand and cement with shovels, pouring and smoothing the cement under the supervision of the Associate ADRA Director for the region. Half the floor area was completed by the end of the day. Students were sore and tired but happy with their accomplishments. hey were anxious to start early the next morning in order to complete the task before midday, so were busy working by 5.30 a.m. The eight resident students from Bonti School bonded with BACS students as they worked

together laying the cement floor and digging out the floor for a classroom next door. By 12.00 noon, the job was complete, river baths were then taken, lunch eaten and an exhilarated group of students returned to Bangkok.

REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Reflection and evaluation are important aspects of service learning projects. Initial project evaluation, personal reflection and sharing was done informally in the vans during the return trip from Bonti to Bangkok and also through the completion of a written student reflective log. More formal reflection and evaluation happened through a student survey, and in an interview and PowerPoint photo presentation during a school chapel period in mid-May. The chapel presentation was significant on two counts: it reported on the implementation and progress of the project to all students and staff; and it represented an inclusive occasion at which the successful completion of the project was owned by the whole school.

Students reported learning a wide range of new skills from the project – including cementing, being an effective team member, taking on leadership responsibilities, and learning to sing a song in the Karen language. Furthermore, learning occurred at an empathetic, relational level, as expressed by one student participant: "These people [at Bonti] have the right to learn about life and God. They deserve proper education which includes books to read and rooms to keep their materials." The students came to the conclusion that rural people are less selfish. They expressed the idea that although city dwellers often tend to look down on the rural poor, their visit to Bonti had helped them to respect people, no matter how poor. "We also discovered that people in the country are friendly, nice, very polite"; "...they speak quietly and not rough" (student participant).

Some of the students gained a new appreciation for their classmates and learned to abandon some of their gender stereotypes when they saw middle-class Thai girls busily digging, shovelling, carrying sand, gravel and water, and mixing and smoothing cement. Also significant was what they claimed to have learned about themselves. They were surprised that they didn't get bored, but rather enjoyed the simple existence away from Bangkok's busy city life where visiting shopping malls, TV and computers generally occupy their free time. This was reflected in such comments as: "I enjoyed having a bath in the stream"; "shovelling sand was good fun"; and "I loved the bright night sky – all the stars! You don't see them like that in Bangkok."

Did students' thinking change as a result of participating in the service learning project? The students' most striking insight from their participation in this

service learning project was that helping others can actually be fun. As team members persevered, they felt a sense of pride and accomplishment. A frequently expressed idea among the participants was that the project had helped them to appreciate how well off they were in contrast to others. The students and staff had made a difference to the lives of others, who in turn may also have been deeply affected by their visitors.

Students also learned about the stark realities of life in dangerous border areas. A week after the chapel presentation, joy turned to sadness when students and staff heard that one of their new-found friends from Bonti, a young refugee student, had been shot by soldiers when he had tried to run away while being questioned. This was a time for grieving, for everyone and not just those who had visited Bonti.

From an administrative perspective, the service learning project was a success. It achieved its stated objectives. It enhanced student motivation to participate, to take responsibility and to contribute to a team effort. Students acquired a range of new skills, and gained an appreciation for simple lifestyle and the intrinsic value of human beings. They gained valuable insights about life, and respect for the community they came to serve. Perhaps the most significant impact of the project was in the area of relationship building. As girls and boys worked together on tasks which would normally be considered gender-specific, they learned to appreciate one another. Student/teacher relationships were also enhanced as they interacted on a new level, cooperating with each other to achieve a common goal.

A key component of service learning projects is to promote students' personal and social development, and this was clearly a valuable outcome of the project. The school ethos was enhanced as students were given the opportunity to direct their energies in a positive direction. By encouraging the practical expression of a spirit of caring and helpfulness, students' self-esteem was raised and they were helped to discover greater personal meaning in their lives. The inner satisfaction gained has motivated them to excel in other areas of endeavour, such as academic performance and interpersonal relationships.

Since the completion of the project, several of the student participants have repeatedly asked when the school would visit and assist the Bonti community again. These students provide a role model for the remainder of the school and have encouraged others to join in reaching out to their community. This is a heartening development for the future and speaks of youthful hope along with interest in, and commitment to, challenging activities that combine both learning and service as part of the school's wider pastoral care programme.

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