

## **A synergistic, sustainable approach in Service-Learning : School-Community-Corporate Partnership**

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### **1. Introduction**

Canberra Secondary School, Singapore, partnered the Grassroots Residential Committee, and various corporate companies to meet the needs of community in caring for the elderly, disadvantaged children residing in the neighbourhood near the school. Through this synergistic and sustainable approach, the school is able to provide an authentic learning experience for youth and develop them to be community youth leaders; while the companies are able to fulfil their corporate social responsibility.

### **2. Canberra Secondary School**

Canberra Secondary School is a neighbourhood school in Singapore which opened its doors to students on 3rd January 2000. The school flourished under the leadership of 3 principals. In January 2017, Mr Ng Tiong Nam took over the helm as the fourth principal of Canberra Secondary School. Building on the strong foundation created by his predecessors, he has provided focus and synergy to the school's efforts through his strong belief in achieving excellence through cultivating strong character, and in so doing, developing students who will make meaningful contributions to society. He has refined the school's direction to focus on the three values of Gratitude, Respect and Compassion, which are essential in today's VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world where ungratefulness, disrespect and indifference are rampant. These values are also central to our staff development plans, which aim to equip and support all staff to develop

these values in our students. The words 'Grateful, Respectful and Compassionate' were unveiled in 2018 on our school wall and on Blk 462, Sembawang Drive.

Our Learning for Life Programme taps on our strengths as a health promoting school to train our students in Community Leadership through service learning. Through it, we hope to nurture our students to be responsible and concerned citizens who will willingly take on active roles at home, in school and the community to contribute towards building a healthier environment and society. Students would also develop leadership qualities through leading and mentoring their juniors. The school's Values-in-Action (VIA) framework, centered on the '3Es' approach - Enrich Minds, Encourage Hearts and Engage Hands, formalises the approach the school undertakes to involve students and staff in fulfilling its responsibility to the community. The school's signature programme, the Global Canberra Programme continues to be one of the key programmes in moulding students' character. It allows students to practice the values of Gratitude, Respect and Compassion at a deeper level through carrying out Service Learning Projects overseas.

### **VISION: Grateful, Respectful and Compassionate Canberrans**

In Canberra Secondary School, we believe in a world class education which prepares us to meet the challenges of an ever-changing world. This education is rooted first and foremost in developing strong character. We show gratitude to the people around us and for the good things we have. We treat others with respect, embracing and celebrating diversity, and likewise show self-respect by working hard to fulfil our potential. We are compassionate to the less fortunate in the community, showing empathy through our actions. These values enable us to achieve our life aspirations, and to be active contributors to our society and loyal citizens who make our country and world better.

**MISSION: Care. Aspire. Nurture.**

We pride ourselves on our dedication to our students, community, our profession and to continuous learning. We care for our students as if they were our own children, guiding and encouraging them to discover what they can achieve and do. We motivate them to aim high and achieve their academic aspirations. Through challenging academic programmes and a holistic character development programme, Canberrans are readied to explore and even exceed their potential, and guided to serve the school, community and society selflessly. We also seek continuous professional growth to better nurture our students so that they may develop holistically and achieve their goals. [Arial 11]

**SCHOOL VALUES: Living with Gratitude, Learning with Respect, Serving with Compassion.**

**STRATEGIC THRUSTS:** Our students, staff, parents, community and other stakeholders form the foundation of our school's vision and mission.

**ST1: Cultivating Good Character**

**ST2: Achieving Academic Aspirations**

**ST3: Nurturing Competent Staff**

### **3. Building A Culture of Service**

As we approach the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world where ungratefulness, disrespect and indifference are rampant, it is common to see many efforts in community service from various schools and organizations. However, not all such community services are anchored based on service learning, though many have developed the misconception to think so. It is crucial to understand the intricacies of service learning before one can embark on it as an approach in community service.

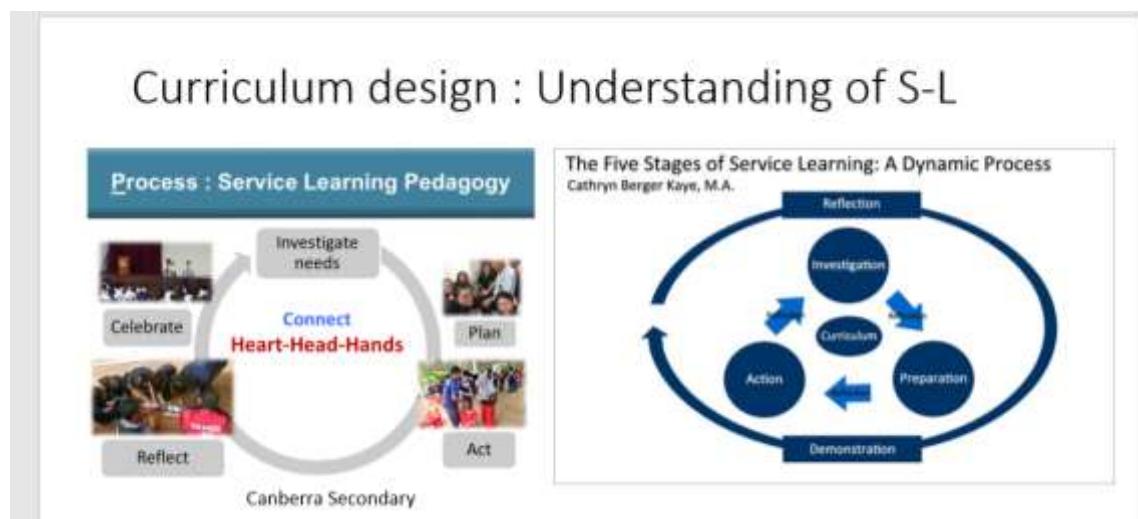
**Service-learning** is an educational approach that combines learning objectives with community service in order to provide a pragmatic, progressive learning experience while meeting societal needs. Author Barbara Jacoby defines service-learning as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities for reflection designed to achieve desired learning outcomes" "Service Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." (The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2005)

Properly implemented, service learning develops citizenship, responsibility, and many other positive character virtues, making it a highly effective character education program in and of itself. (<http://www.goodcharacter.com/SERVICE/service.html>)

After understanding the intricacies of service learning and what it encompasses, our school decided to adopt the service learning approach to carry out our community involvement projects also known as VIA (Values in Action) Projects where we inculcate values through community service.

To promote a school-wide culture of regular service, a movement termed “2:168 Contributors” was launched in 2018. The movement encapsulates the vision of building a sustained, regular commitment towards serving the needy through service learning. Staff and students commit two hours (out of the 168 hours) weekly to serve a community of their choice. These weekly efforts with the community are categorised into three broad areas of need, specifically, the children, the elderly/the sick and the environment. Students and staff work together and serve the community at Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) Level.

Each time the student/staff undergo a service learning project, they undergo a full cycle of the five stages of the service learning curriculum in the school using the Heart-Head-Hands Approach which is based on “The Five Stages of Service Learning : A Dynamic Process” by Cathryn Berger Kaye .



1. **Investigate Needs** : Students/Staff meet the organization that they are going to serve to understand their needs through surveys, conversations with the community partners and pre-service trainings by the partners.
2. **Plan** : Students/Staff work out their plan, clearly stating their learning objectives and service objectives. Our plan and action banks heavily on the concept of service learning is reciprocal learning. J. Herman Blake puts it beautifully that “A service-learner

“listens eloquently””. The students and staff serve with the attitude and mentality of “You accept my service so that you may teach me” & “I serve in order that I may learn from you”

3. Act : Students serve their partners with a humble learning disposition.
4. Reflect : Using the Borton's model for reflection, students and staff carry out their reflection after their service using online platforms.
5. Celebrate : Staff and students celebrate their efforts and learning using platforms such as presentation at the school assembly, social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, school's anniversary dinner, which is attended by various stakeholders including the community partners.



#### **4. Demonstrating synergistic efforts to serve the community**

Premised on the many hands approach, the school actively seeks out partners for meaningful collaboration that benefits all parties involved – students, partners, beneficiaries identified. In this synergistic partnership, corporate partners provide the skills, resources, the community partners offer valuable perspectives, authentic service platform, relevant insights on needs, while the school serves as a bridge to effect the change in the next generation. The diagram captures the essence of how the three parties are working together in a synergistic and sustained manner to serve the community.

### School-Community-Corporate



By partnering with the retail companies, corporate partners, the school was able to organise 2 free shopping events in 2018, with one book drive in June 2019. In the first shopping event, about 350 families were gifted with household goods and new clothes while in the second event, sports apparels and shoes were given to about 300 participants. In the latter, the students invited the homeless, needy children and youth for the event. Most recently in June 2019, with 13000 brand new books donated by Marshall Cavendish, the student leaders organised a free books giveaway entitled : Books for L.I.F.E (Learning Ignites Future Endeavours) which targeted 1250 needy families residing in the neighbourhood where the school is located. For all these 3 events, students worked with the Sembawang Grassroots Residential Communities who helped to identify the needy families so that the assistance given reached those who have the most needs.

In line with the school's annual Sports Festival in February, a shoe collection drive was mooted to collect pre-loved shoes for needy families in Bintan and Batam whom we would be visiting as part of our school's Overseas Service Learning, as well as to support the Soles-for-Souls cause. The many hands approach, based on the School-Community-Corporate partnership, helped greatly with this donation drive. From the community, the donation drive benefitted from the many residents in the school's neighbourhood who donated. Community organisations like Canberra Community Centre also stepped forward to help us publicise and collect shoes. Additionally, the school had Corporate partners like Sports Link and McAfee coming onboard. For example, Sports Link donated

100 pairs of brand new shoes and McAfee sent their staff to help the school transport 1000 pairs of shoes to the local partner organisation for Soles-for-Souls.

## **5. Nurturing students as Transformational Community Youth Leaders through Service-Learning**

With learning as its primary focus, the school has structured a 4/5-year developmental programme, with each year having a different focus from serving the school to the communities beyond school. The school's VIA instructional programme is adapted from The Five Stages of Service Learning by Cathryn Berger Kaye (2010). This educational approach is essential for providing both meaningful service and the students' holistic development. Teachers facilitate discussion with students through a 5-stage process : investigate community needs, plan, act, reflect and celebrate. This process ensures that learning is augmented through reflection to engage the hearts and minds of the youth. The ultimate goal would be to equip these students with a service-oriented mindset, others-centeredness and life-long habit of bringing good to the community they live in.

The qualitative findings suggest that both faculty and students develop a heightened sense of civic responsibility and personal effectiveness through participation in service-learning courses.

## **6. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice**

### **(i) Service : On impact on community**

The community as referring to both the beneficiaries and the Grassroot Residential Communities recognises and affirms the school's efforts in engaging the community in this meaningful cause. The event was featured in the local Chinese papers with 2 other beneficiaries celebrating the schools' efforts in their Facebook page, namely, Kampung Sembawang (Sembawang Grassroots Residential Communities), Principal of Riverside

Primary School. Of greater significance was the event being graced by Mr Khaw Boon Wan, MP for Sembawang Group Representation Constituency (GRC), Coordinating Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transport. Such gestures attest to the impact on creating meaning and relevance in serving the community.



Event was featured in the local Chinese newspaper on 1 June 2019.

Album Loving Team Riverside ❤



Sharon Boey added 2 new photos — with Huang WD and 2 others.

40 mins ·

Joy is partnering the community to care for our students and support them in their reading and learning journey! "Books for LIFE" is truly meaningful! ❤



Principal who brought 40 FAS students to the event.



Kampung Sembawang

3 Jun at 12:20 ·

The school holidays are here!

Enjoy your break and stay tuned for our June Holidays specials 😊



← Kampung Sembawang



Kampung Sembawang added 11 new photos.

1 Jun at 12:30 ·

Books for LIFE @ Canberra Secondary School

1,250 students from Sembawang GRC have been invited to participate in this event and the students were able to bag home up to 12 books each! We were pleased to have Minister Khaw Boon Wan to join us this Saturday morning for this meaningful community project.

Thank you Canberra Secondary School teachers and students for

## **(ii) Learning : On adopting S-L as pedagogy**

The student leaders who have been involved in organising all the 3 events have evidently grown in confidence, conviction and competency, thus, fulfilling the school's desire to nurture them as GRC Canberrans. This could be seen in the reflections documented from students, teachers, parents, alumni representative.

### **Students' reflection**

***Lim Jia Pei, who was a sub-committee member in 2018 and in the recent event 2019, became the overall student leader IC.***

2018

We have made them feel happy by letting them to choose what they really need. They feel grateful for us in giving things that they really need. I learned how to interact with people we are not familiar with. Furthermore, teamwork is very important; without your teammates, you will not be able to organise an event smoothly. I feel happy because we have done a good deed even though the thing maybe be small. There would be smiles on the peoples' faces after they come to the school. We were very tired, as we have to stand for a long time and have to serve people with a smile.

2019

I learned that teamwork is very important. If you want the event to run smoothly, you have to ensure you have cooperative team members. Every member is important. Furthermore, a good planning is essential. If you have a plan, you will be able to know what to do if you meet with any problems. For the next round, we need to know how many types of books there are together. This time round, there were many books but few varieties, thus people who come have less choice. Overall, the smiles of the customers hit me most. On the actual day, there were a couple and a child around Primary 1. I was walking around the canteen seeing if anyone need my help. They came toward me and requested for primary

school level books. However, there was not much left. Even though there were not much choice left, they did not grumble and thanked me for helping them. They left the school with smiles on their faces. I feel very contented that I am able to be involved in this event because this allows me to help others and learn to appreciate what I owned now. I realise that not everyone is as fortunate as us to be able to get what we want. I learn not to take things for granted. It is interesting that I have learnt so much from the shoppers. Beginning with a thought of only serving the shoppers and helping the, I now realized that they have taught me something which is being grateful. I am truly indebted to them for teaching this beautiful lesson in a meaningful way.

***Goh Shu Hui, who was a sub-committee member in 2018 and in the recent event 2019, became the overall student leader IC.***

#### **2018**

I have learnt to lay out a plan in the things we are doing so that there will be high efficiency. I have learnt to work as a team and to be cooperative with each other. I have also learnt that every problem has a solution. From the event, I felt satisfied, as the people who came to the apparel section were able to find clothes that they like and were happy with what they received from there. I was also able to do the setting up of the hall and felt how hard it was for the members but how everyone cooperated to complete the task. Our hard work paid off as we served the customers and they complimented us. The leaders also did it together from the start of the project, and overcame many problems; this is also what made me feel satisfied.

#### **2019**

I learned to be able to adapt to changes quickly as there were many changes made before and during the event. The packing up at the end of the event was as tiring as the setting up and we had to think on our feet how to best organize ourselves though we were already very tired. One challenge we faced was that the books were not sorted properly. This made it difficult for us to find and replenish some books. We overcame many challenges by working as one and supporting one another. We helped each other whenever a

problem arose. No one complained or grumbled. Overall, I feel happy to participate in this event as I saw many people leaving with a smile on their face. Some even said thank you to our students as they left. This shows that our initial simple plan is able to bring a change in their lives even though it may be small. One thing that hit me most was when I greet every customer who came; many of them did the same but with a brighter smile than mine. It showed how excited they were to be able to choose books for their children or themselves – that made me feel that the hard work put into this event by everyone was worth it. This event has inspired me to serve the community and I intend to continue efforts of mine to serve the community even after I graduate from Canberra and serve the community in a larger scale through the available organisations in my tertiary institutions.

**Teachers' reflection**

***Jenny Soh, Head of Department for Physical Education, Co-Curricular Activities and Aesthetics***

"I feel that our student leaders have grown to be more confident and competent in managing such projects. Case in point is Nicole (Secondary 4 student). I hope that this will translate into better academic results for them, as well as being more rooted in the school values of Gratitude, Respect and Compassion."

I think it is also important for the students to be aware that there are needy people in their neighborhood and they can do their small part to help these people fulfill some basic needs (eg clothing, shoes, books)."

***Whelan Chen, Physical Education Teacher***

The various service-learning projects that the school has embarked on have helped the students to grow. The students involved have shown greater compassion towards each other, as well as the less fortunate people around them. Additionally, post-event

reflections have also seen the students being more grateful for what they have. It remains to be seen if these will be lasting effects. Still, having a multitude of Service-Learning events should help to maintain and improve the cultivation of the GRC values in our students.

**Parents' reflection**

***Parent Support Group Chairman***

This is the third event I have volunteered. This round is more organized and the crowds are smooth. Once again, a meaningful outreach to the community.

***Secondary One parent, first time volunteer with 2 children :***

This event was managed well from school side. I did not see any visitors had question in what to do next. The student leaders had good information of their activity. Every participant was in good spirit and enthusiastic until the end. Volunteers were also well taken care of. It was nice to meet the parent volunteers and chat during breaks. Overall, felt it was a good positive experience.

**Alumni's reflection from perspective of both as an alumni and Boys' Brigade Officer.**

***Canberran Alumni***

As an alumnus, I feel that this is a good opportunity for us to contribute back to the school as part of this VIA project. With the alumni's experience either in tertiary education or work, this is one platform that alumni can value add to the students running the project.

This is an area, which the alumni can work with the school for further projects.

***BB Officer***

As a BB Officer, I was delighted that the BB Boys had this opportunity to collaborate with school to be part of the event. The BB Boys were given the role of the usher and they felt privileged to play a part to bless the underprivileged students from the community.

Overall, this VIA project has helped the boys to not only be more aware of the needs of the community; it also helped them to be more grateful and appreciative of what they have.

The limitation of S-L as an instructional methodology is evident due to the learners' profile and maturity of the programme. While the school seeks to deepen students' growth as community youth leaders, connecting hearts-minds-hands, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the quality of thoughts facilitated through reflection. In Berger's design, reflection encompasses the entire S-L process while the school design is more sequential and reflection, a necessary means to engineer deep learning, is found at the end stage of service. The second limitation to the school design is the absence of explicit link between service and curriculum, which could help students, make meaning of their learning in the classrooms to impact the community they belong to.

## Curriculum design : Understanding of S-L

**Process : Service Learning Pedagogy**

Investigate needs  
Connect  
Heart-Head-Hands  
Plan  
Act  
Reflect

Canberra Secondary

**The Five Stages of Service Learning: A Dynamic Process**  
Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A.

Reflection  
Investigation  
Curriculum  
Action  
Preparation  
Demonstration

School Design : **Limitations due to maturity of programme and students' profile**  
Reflection as end-point.  
Link between curriculum and service is not explicit.

- Key : **Service and Learning Outcomes**
- Reflection encompasses the entire S-L
- **Curriculum-centred**

### (iii) Future directions to enhance partnership

In all community outreach efforts undertaken by the school, the intent for greater synergy, students' growth for the purpose of greater good has been met. What remains to be seen would be how more corporate companies could join in the collaborative efforts. Another enhancement would be how the community partners could do more than identifying and inviting the needy beneficiaries by ensuring more attendance. With all these working in tandem, the synergistic, sustained partnership of the school-community-corporate would reach its full potential and effectiveness.

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