**Service Learning at Floreat Education**

**An Introduction**

The idea that schools should have the personal as well as the academic development of their pupils at heart is by now a well-established consensus in mainstream education.  There have been some attempts to embed this more formally in school life.

Service Learning is a classroom approach which embeds service to the community into the school day.  Broadly defined, Service Learning engages learners in a sustained commitment to serving their community. Service Learning projects are carefully planned to complement the curriculum and provide rich opportunities for pupils to apply their ‘virtues literacy’ to real life around them. Crucially, pupils reflect on their experiences throughout the project in order to support knowledge and character development.

There is much debate among academics about whether Service Learning is better defined as a pedagogy, a philosophy, or a curriculum tool.  Despite these differences, it is possible to extrapolate two main aims of Service Learning Projects:

To encourage a spirit of citizenship and social awareness by engaging pupils in meaningful partnerships with their communities.

To complement learning in the classroom by providing opportunities for pupils to experience the knowledge and concepts they have learnt within the context of their local community and social action.

The specific service that pupils undertake will naturally depend on varying factors including the needs of the local community, the age group of pupils involved and the availability of resources.   In the very early stages of setting up a SLP, some careful thought should be given to the specific nature and needs of your school’s local community.  In order for the experience to be authentic and valuable to pupils it is important that the service pupils undertake is designed to address a genuine need.

The service pupils undertake through an SLP will fit into one of the following categories:

**Service Learning is Not…**

*A bolt-on or diversion from the curriculum*

Service learning must be planned to complement the curriculum; it should build on pupils’ prior knowledge and enable them to use and hear topic specific vocabulary in different contexts.  Links to the curriculum must be made explicit for pupils in every stage of the project. 

*A one off trip or experience:*

Service Learning requires a **sustained** effort by pupils which is embedded in the timetable and runs concurrently with the curriculum. Service Learning should be carefully planned to ensure adequate time is devoted to each of the stages of Service Learning when it is delivered in the classroom.

It might be the case that on one occasion, a guest speaker will visit, or pupils might go on an outing, but these things will happen as part of a mapped process taking place over at least six weeks to allow enough time for reflection. It is important to note that projects have the potential to last much longer than this and fruitful Service Learning relationships are likely to endure for years. This affords excellent mutual opportunities for the school and community based partnership.

*Prescriptive*

SLPs should be adapted to fit the themes of an individual school’s community. Teachers guide the delivery of SLPs and can use every stage as an opportunity to make explicit links to the curriculum. The ideas provided are intended to serve as inspiration for projects which can be tailored to the individual needs of each unique school. Likewise, the resources provided are suggested templates which can be used or adapted as appropriate*.*

**What makes SLPs successful?**

Schools which implement Service Learning Projects successfully address the ‘Three Pillars’ of Service Learning.

* Meaningful Engagement
* Academic Enquiry
* Critical Reflection

Meaningful Engagement

Meaningful engagement requires pupils to be involved at every stage and that the pupils’ work should meet a genuine need.  For very young children, or children being introduced to Service Learning for the first time, the need identified could well be a need that exists within their own classroom. Together pupils can identify different

areas of the classroom where a pupil could provide a service to their peers by taking on a helping role, for example as a ‘pencil monitor’.  It is important that pupils take responsibility for their helping role and recognise that they are performing a service to their class community.

We have established that Service Learning should be a sustained commitment.  This is to ensure that pupils adequately complete every stage of the project and understand the importance of what they are doing and why it is important work. Furthermore, as pupils’ projects become more advanced pupils need to understand that although their project has come to an end, the needs of the community persist. To foster an authentic sense of responsibility and to maximise positive relationships with the community, schools might consider a ‘handover’ ritual, whereby responsibility for a particular project is handed from one year group to another.

Academic Enquiry

SLPs provide a great opportunity for pupils to learn about their local community and to widen their experiences. To maximise the impact of these experiences, every opportunity should be taken to make links clear and deliberate links to what children have learnt in the classroom. Teachers should make these links explicit for pupils at every stage of the project, and particularly through the reflection exercises. Through the teachers’ skill, a project on a shared garden presents multiple opportunities for meaningful links to the curriculum. A garden project can, for example,  be a springboard for discussions about photosynthesis, seasons, habitats and calculating how much equipment is needed.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is a process through which pupils are guided to think carefully about the project they are undertaking. It is an opportunity for pupils to come together to talk about their experiences and what they have learnt. There is an opportunity to reinforce curriculum links and for pupils to discuss their responses to their project. Critical reflection should take place before, during and after the project and can be in a variety of forms (see below).

**Service Learning in Floreat Schools**

The Key Principles:

Service is one of the core virtues upon which Floreat was founded. This is based upon the firm belief that human flourishing requires the development of civic virtues and caring for others as well as oneself. SLPs will provide an opportunity for pupils to authentically serve others.

Education should promote democratic citizenship and pupils’ belief in their own responsibility to act and make a positive difference.

As part of Floreat’s Character Curriculum pupils learn what it means to serve others.  Pupils will learn that service is helping others without expecting praise or reward and that helping the people around us is good for everyone in the community. SLPs will foster character virtues such as empathy and leadership as well as recognition that everyone, regardless of age or background can play a valuable role in helping and serving others.

In Floreat Schools Service Learning is an intergral part of the Character curriculum, with weekly sessions taught alongside the core knowledge programmes throughout the school year.  SLPs will not follow strict lesson plans but resources will be made available for teachers to use at every stage of the SLP. These will include resource lists, draft letters to use in community outreach, templates for planning and reflection activities, and suggestions for how SLPs might relate to the knowledge curriculum.

**What does service learning look like at Floreat?**

Reflection

Opportunities for structured reflection should take place throughout the SLP.

Reflection should be both cognitive and affective:

Cognitive:

What knowledge and skills did we use from our lessons?

What new knowledge and skills have been learnt?

Affective:

How did I feel about…?

What most surprised me about…?

Examples could include:

reflective journal

class scrapbook

blog

circle time

display

video diary

newsletter

assembly

performance.

Preparation

Pupils investigate the cause or need within the community.

Pupils plan the action they will take and think about what they need to do to get ready.

Examples could include:  Researching information, writing invitations for guests and speakers, making shopping lists, buying equipment.

Action

This is the part of the project when pupils actively participate in service.

Examples include:  A book or toy drive, gardening, hosting an event, visiting members of the community. (more suggestions below.)

Celebration

There should be a celebration of the pupils’ service. The nature of the celebration will vary depending on the project undertaken.  For example a project working on a school garden might culminate in a garden party where the garden is opened to parents or peers in other year groups.

In some instances, the action itself might double up as a celebration, for example pupils hosting a tea party for their parents would count as both action and celebration.