

Realising the Vision of 334

The Role of “Community Service” in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum: Kindle the Life of Serving Others

Martin Luther King, Jr., a famous American, once said, “Everyone can be great, because everyone can serve.” In fact, everyone should participate in and support “community service” irrespective of their abilities, age, aptitude, occupation and status. Besides, the habit of providing community service should be developed from an early age to support continuous whole-person development.

Under a balanced and broad curriculum of basic education (P1 to S3), “community service” has been included in the five Essential Learning Experiences and has been further extended to become part of “Other Learning Experiences” (OLEs) in the NSS curriculum to enhance students’ sense of social responsibility and caring for others.

The “community service” in the NSS curriculum is different from ordinary volunteer service. Apart from being a service volunteered by individuals or groups to meet different needs in society, community service also aims to provide students with opportunities for **learning** and **personal development** in organising activities and in the course of participation. In view of this, many schools arrange for students to provide a wide range of “community service” so that the latter can assist communities in need of support (e.g. the elderly and the children) as well as engage in volunteer work related to the protection of the environment and ecology (e.g. planting or weeding and beautification of municipal facilities), the promotion of culture and arts (e.g. to act as “junior tour guides” at museums and heritage trails), etc. Through these “community services” and reflection, students do not only gain knowledge that cannot be acquired in classroom, but also develop effectively the empathy, social concern and respect for different groups in society, as well as the core values and attitudes (e.g. respect and caring for others, social responsibility) for Moral and Civic Education. “Community service” does not only bring joy and harmonious atmosphere to those “being served” and the community, but also brings joy to students. Through participation and experience, students will learn to treasure everything that they have and understand that nothing can be taken for granted. These good experiences will very often help students to become positive and responsible citizens in future.

Actually, “community service” is not a novel idea to schools. However, there may be a misconception that “community service” must be provided outside the school. As a matter of fact, a school is also a small community. Students may start with providing community service in school to obtain opportunities to serve in daily life and learn the meaning and skills of serving others, and then extend their service to communities outside the school. By doing

so, students will understand that “community service” indeed can be provided anywhere. Some schools have now accumulated a lot of good experiences. Some of them arrange for students to perform singing, dancing or dramas in school to entertain the elderly while some arrange for students to teach parents how to make good use of the Internet in their computer rooms. This enables students to develop positive attitudes and habits of serving the community in different real contexts.

According to past experiences, the success of “community service” also hinged on how positive teachers and parents were in guiding students to participate in these OLEs. Therefore, it is absolutely inappropriate to urge students to participate in community service just for fulfilling the curriculum requirements, nor should community service be regarded as a means of punishment. The essence of community service is to “kindle” in students their long-term self-motivation and interest in serving others. Under the principle of “quality outweighs quantity”, teachers should organise various types of community service activities and tasks flexibly to cater for the different needs of students so that every student can have an opportunity to learn.

Finally, someone may ask, “Aren’t those senior secondary students busy at preparing their examinations? Can’t they engage in community service until they have finished school education and lead a stable life?” According to a lot of school experiences, OLEs gained beyond class do have a positive impact on learning in class and it is also true the other way round. Many students participating in community service have become more proactive and dedicated in personal growth and learning than before. Besides, their participation in community service will also bring tremendous benefit to the community for they will serve as a fresh impetus to help build a harmonious society. As a result, students will gradually understand that even though their future life is very busy, they still could enhance their living through active participation in suitable community service. This is exactly what Sir Winston Churchill said, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

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