

THE UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

**Response to Rev Dr Bruce Winter by Mrs Judith Poole, Headmistress Abbotsleigh**

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Thank you for the introduction and I feel honoured to respond to Dr Winter's address.

I am sure there is not a single educator in this room that didn't feel at least a little thankful that the selection criterion for a teaching position has changed since those first century days in Greece. I am not sure which made me shuffle in my seat more; the physically fit 'bodily presence' expectation or the thought of sage on the stage 'presence' where one is challenged to give an articulate and compelling presentation on a topic nominated by the audience.

the focus from 'me' to 'others', but the challenge

their project and reflect on the impact of the activities on themselves and others. Youth ownership is one of the key elements of our program.

Partnering with the community is essential in building an understanding of the needs of others. By actively engaging with the community the students build relationships that help them grow in their capacity to appreciate diversity. The community partners may be other schools, community social service groups, aid organisations, hospitals or local businesses. Learning takes place in the collaboration of ideas helping to bridge the cultural, generational, intellectual or physical differences.

The service-learning activities are not supplementing our curriculum but rather playing an integral part in our teaching and learning. The experiential nature of the activity helps the learners make connections, often over several subject areas, deepening their understanding of the material. By engaging in an activity that matters to the community students begin to recognise that they can make a difference. This sense of worth empowers young people, giving them a reason to learn.

The projects are real and the impact can be substantial for those involved. Coupled with the concept of youth ownership is the important role of the teacher or mentor of the students. Teachers help to tie the projects to specific curriculum outcomes and act as role models and participants in the learning process. Teachers encourage critical and creative thinking in problem solving solutions with the students and community partners. Reflection activities can help to assess students' understanding, allow them a chance to share their feelings, internalise new concepts and evaluate the impact of the activities. Mentors play a critical role in guiding students in reflection and linking their

As James writes in Chapter 2; 'faith by itself, if not accompanied by action is dead.'

In our Christian schools, we have a reason for service that goes beyond the humanitarian approach. In our efforts to develop the horizontal relationships with other humans on the earth to work together for the good of all we anchor our motivation in our vertical relationship with God. For many students, service-learning starts from the horizontal or earthly relationships which help students grow in compassion and experience the joy of giving. This experience, if done well, can be so great that a window is opened, a heart is softened and an avenue for a vertical relationship with God is paved.

Dr Winter, you comment that schools are the last train stop before students get on board for the journey of life. On this point I disagree, students of any age are already on that journey of life and it is our responsibility to ensure that it is focussed on learning for living in all subjects, at all times. As we send out graduates of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we pray that they will have the strength of character to resist pressures of the secular world in their life-long learning pursuits and become Godly role models and mentors for the future generations.

Dr Winter, you asked 'Am I being overly simplistic or overly optimistic in suggesting that laying the foundation for learning for living is the most important function in Christian schools?' Without a doubt, those of us who work passionately in Christian schools would respond with a resounding 'no', it is the only way.