

A CULTURE OF SERVICE

BY MICHELE MARQUET

OUR CULTURE'S NOTION OF SELF IS INCREASINGLY DRIVEN BY THE IDEA OF 'EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM'. THE TERM WAS FIRST COINED IN THE MID 1980'S BY ROBERT BELLAH AND HIS FELLOW SOCIOLOGISTS IN THEIR SEMINAL WORK, *HABITS OF THE HEART: INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMITMENT IN AMERICAN LIFE*. THE AUTHORS WARNED OF A SIGNIFICANT SOCIETAL SHIFT WHERE TRADITIONAL VIRTUES OF ALTRUISM, SELF-SACRIFICE AND SYMPATHY FOR OTHERS WERE BEING SUBORDINATED BELOW THERAPEUTIC VALUES OF SELF-ACTUALISATION, SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE.

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WHAT DO THESE WARNINGS mean to us as a school with a significant focus on the needs of the individual? After all, the opening statement of Cranbrook's Mission is 'to lead all students to discover and make the most of their talents.' Yet our Mission statement ends with the following desire: that our students 'lead adventurous, courageous and generous lives which contribute to the betterment of society.' A love of oneself and the love of a neighbour need not be opposed to each other.

It's vital that as a school community, we appreciate the difference between *individuality* and celebrating that and *individualism* that promotes the wants and needs of an individual over that of our society. At Cranbrook, we should be trying to instil in our students the idea of knowing who they are, but at the same time how they are going to contribute to the world and create a better society as a result of that.

It is critical to us at Cranbrook that in offering a holistic education, our school community be driven by a culture that fosters a sense of active responsibility and service. When our first headmaster, Reverend 'Polly' Perkins gave his final Chapel service after over a decade of service, he chose to speak to the community on the ideals of service. At Speech Day that year, the Cranbrookian records guest speaker Professor Peden from Sydney University concluded his address on the importance of service noting that this focus 'had already come to be a great part of the ideal of Cranbrook School'.

The idea of service at Cranbrook is deeply influenced by the School's Anglican foundations—again the words of our Mission ask us to 'uphold the character of our Anglican foundation in order to promote the moral and spiritual development of each student and to foster the principles of Service'.

Renowned historian, Tom Holland, refers to these foundations in tracking the making of the Western mind in his sweeping *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. He outlines the revolution that Christ articulated, a revolution in stance, in an attitude towards the world: the exercise of power not for one's own benefit but for the good of others; power deployed in service of the weak and vulnerable. Terry Eagleton, in reviewing Holland's work for *The Guardian* noted that in the New Testament 'love ... is a social practice, not a sentiment ... a love of (the) ruthlessly impersonal kind, which couldn't care less about the gender, rank, skin colour or personality of whoever needs your help'.

As an International Baccalaureate (IB) Continuum School, another driver of our School culture comes from the IB's commitment to

service. At the heart of the IB's educational policies and programmes is the concept of international mindedness: a view of the world in which students see themselves connected to the global community and assume a sense of responsibility towards its members.

'Action' is an essential element of the Primary Year's Programme (PYP) and in the Junior School teachers plan units of work to inspire and support student action. Our youngest Cranbrookians are engaged in action with our Pre-School students participating this year in *Clean Up Australia Day*. With hands-on engagement the best way for young children to learn, Pre-School staff encourage their young charges to always incorporate action into every inquiry they conduct. The Junior School also has a Community Committee who plan and execute more whole-school modelled action, such as the Pre-School – Year 6 collection of toothbrushes and other resources for the dental clinics we help conduct in Nepal as part of our Year 6 CETOP Nepal Tour or our *Toys and Tucker* initiative held each November.

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SERVICE AS ACTION is also a foundational element of the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP), requiring students to engage with their local community through community or personal projects. Our MYP students engage in the Smith Family Reading Buddy programme, a peer student to student programme in which they practise and develop their skills as principled thinkers and communicators.

Finally, service-learning experiences are a fundamental part of the IB Diploma Programme, formally recognised through Creativity, Activity and Service (CAS) activities. Recently, some CAS activities have included the delivery of monthly *Care2Give* Packages to more vulnerable members of the community, cooking meals for the homeless with *KidsGivingBack*, participating in Bushcare or creating a gardening club here at school. Some of these projects have operated in tandem with the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award which is offered to students from Year 8 onwards.

Cranbrook's focus on experiential education also challenges students to look beyond the self. Our Cranbrook in The Field (CITF) programme has been described by experts as the most demanding school programme of its kind within the country. Delivered for the School by Outward Bound Australia, with the important and essential participation of members of our staff, it carries the flag for experiential education as a counterweight to some of the seductive but artificial and misleading elements of contemporary culture. Like the IB, Outward Bound springs from the thinking of educationalist Kurt Hahn who, in a very different time, saw the value of searching within, in order to see beyond,

selfhood. Hahn's own personal experiences — driven out of Nazi Germany because of his fierce criticism of Hitler's regime — led him to pioneer experiential education, incorporating physical fitness, expeditionary travel, service and student-led inquiry. In a speech to the Outward Bound Trust (UK) in 1960 he said, "I regard it as the foremost task of education to ensure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an indefatigable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self-denial, and above all, compassion."

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A PARTICULARLY POWERFUL way of serving others comes through our longstanding Cranbrook Travellers and Overseas Partnership (CETOP) programme, which allows our students and community an authentic and practical experience of what it is to be globally minded. Jeremy Madin, Cranbrook's seventh Headmaster believed that "The work of CETOP is one of the best things about Cranbrook School. It is quintessentially about valuing and serving others, without patronising and with tremendous generosity of spirit." Students at both our Junior School and Senior School can embark on a trip to Nepal or Ladakh in India, respectively, to support disadvantaged communities in rural and remote communities.

Closer to home, the School partners with a number of charitable organisations to develop a range of opportunities that give practical ways for our students to think beyond the self and to give back. These partners include the Smith Family's *Red Shield Appeal*, Amnesty International, Rough Edges, Push up Challenge, and Anglicare's *Toys'n'Tucker*. In our Junior School, to build a deepening appreciation of the impact we all can have on our wider world, the students participate in *Earth Hour*, *World Bee Day* and *World Environment Day*.

It important to remember that Cranbrook's attitude to service is more than about creating opportunities for students. An attitude of service is a community wide venture that comes from a generosity of heart that is lived out by significant role models. So many of our families volunteer in the CSPA, alumni generously return to the School to mentor our students, and our Council members give many hours of their time in service to the School. Lastly, our dedicated staff support our students not only academically, or in co-curricular activities but also pastorally. Having these role models all around them and the structured programmes of service learning aims to set a tone for our students, inspiring them to live adult lives driven by generous contribution. ■