

**AN EXPLORATION OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF  
THE SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM AT AN  
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOL.**

**Submitted by**

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Damien Faust Price

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores participant experience of the Service Learning Program in the context of an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. The research aims to explore what is happening as adolescent participants engage in working and relating with homeless people over an extended period of time. What are they learning? What sense or meaning are they making of their experiences, and are they deepening their value and belief system towards existential change?

Service Learning is a curriculum initiative that Australian Secondary Schools are implementing to assist in the development of both the ethos of schools and in attempts to meet the needs of Twenty-first Century youth for a relevant education. While the benefits for participants in Service Learning are well documented, the effects upon recipients of the services provided, and whether the benefits for participants are the result of prior learning, family factors, or predispositions to this type of experiential learning, remain unclear. While Service Learning Programs are proving to be increasingly popular for school administrators, there appears to be a lack of clear models for Service Learning, its links to academic curriculum, or clearly articulated goals to assess success and achievement. A real danger of an adhoc approach to Service Learning in schools exists.

The discussion of benefits to participants has not clearly identified links between program elements and hoped for benefits, nor has it examined the process or journey that participants have engaged in. Critical reflection on these issues has informed the purpose of this research and helped to shape the following research questions that focus the conduct of the study:

### Research Question One

What features of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College impact on participant experience?

### Research Question Two

What changes are there in the meanings participants give to their experiences in the Service Learning Program over time?

### Research Question Three

How do participants perceive their Service Learning experience in terms of their personal world view and the world view promoted by the school?

The theoretical framework for this study was that of Constructionism as the criteria for judging that neither 'reality' nor 'validity' are absolute; rather they are derived from community consensus of what is 'real', what is useful, and what has meaning. In exploring participants' experience as they served and related with homeless people 'reality', 'usefulness' and 'meaning' were derived from the student's reflection upon their experience and their communal dialogue. Hence this study used Symbolic Interactionism as the perspective to explore experience. An interpretive approach was utilised, as humans interpret their environment, evaluate beliefs in terms of their usefulness in situations, select what they notice in every situation and focus on human action and interaction. A case study approach was used as it acknowledged the unique setting of a 'van site' for homeless people. Using personal journaling and focus groups data was collected from fifty-three Year 11 students who had volunteered to participate on the van for a period of six months.

All fifty-three participants in the Service Learning Program experienced particular phases regardless of prior service experience, variables linked to family or personality type. These phases were: Expectations, Exposure, Reframing, Disillusionment, Awareness and Agency. This study concluded that within these phases, participant experience was influenced by the length of time of the program, the presence of active mentors facilitating the experience, ongoing reflection upon experience and situating the experience in a clear ideological framework.

While each participant experienced the phases mentioned above no two students derived the same meaning or level of meaning from their experiences. The research concluded that each participant will exit a Service Learning Program with varying levels of internalisation of the core values of the program. Some will exit with a surface appreciation of what the program was about; others deeper, others tacit; some will arrive at a point of existential change.

While acknowledging the influence of family and personality factors in this journey, this research shows that the presence of active mentors, reflection upon experience, a clear

ideological framework and a significant length of time to allow for the maturation of both reflection and experience will move participants further along towards existential change than would otherwise have occurred. A model; the Spiral Model of Service Learning is proposed to support these findings.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS.

- DJ** Daily Journaling. The journal completed by each student upon their return from the van site.
- DJ4** The daily journaling after the student's fourth time on the van.
- FG** Focus Group interview.
- FG, 11.5** The Focus Group that was held on May the 11<sup>th</sup>.
- EJ** Entry Journal
- EX** Exit Journal
- Big Brekky** The Monday to Friday breakfast barbeque conducted by Holy Family College at three venues around the inner city.
- Eddie's Van** The name given to the over all van program that includes both the Big Brekky and the Night Van program also held in the inner city.
- (NN, FG, 11.5)** The input from Nick Nagle [or other participants] during the Focus Group held on May the 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Beatification** A part of the process by which a person becomes a saint. Edmund Rice was beatified in 1996
- Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition** From 2004, Christian Brothers' Schools have been renamed as Catholic Schools in the Edmund Rice Tradition.
- Christian Brothers' Province** A Canonical term referring to a grouping of Brothers for administrative, community and mission purposes.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE RESEARCH DEFINED**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH**

Service Learning is a relative newcomer to the Australian educational landscape. Service Learning and Community Service have been an important part of both the culture and curriculum of American High Schools and Colleges for many years. American society has a rich tradition of philanthropy and many American political leaders speak of civic pride and responsibility. Since the early years of the Twentieth Century, American educationalists have written extensively about the role of the experiential in education and its responsibility to produce model citizens with a sense of civic pride and responsibility. It is only in the last ten years that Australian Secondary Schools have begun to invest more extensively in Service Learning and especially so in non-Government schools.

There has been and continues to be a gradual movement of students from public to private schooling in Australia (Ryan & Watson, 2004). A time of record enrolments in Catholic schooling in particular, has been paralleled by a growing question about the role Catholic schools play in the process of evangelisation within the faith community that sponsors them (Freund, 2001). Many Catholic schools were founded by Religious Orders with a spiritual tradition or charism linked back to a founder with a particular Gospel insight. In the early years of the twenty-first century these same schools are, in many instances, educating a clientele foreign to that for which they were founded (McLaughlin, 2002). In a society that is proving to be increasingly materialistic, there is little evidence that these same 'elite' Catholic schools are producing graduates that are in any way either a leaven in society nor active participants in the faith community that, in theory at least, sponsors the educational community from which they came (McLaughlin, 2002).

With its direct and active engagement with people suffering the effects of poverty in its many forms, Service Learning has been seen by some as a way forward in giving idealistic youth a chance to serve. This service has provided youth with the opportunity to engage with the ideology that was core to the founding vision of the

communities that provide the context for service (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Service Learning when situated in a strong and clear ideology, when based on reflection and the presence of mentors, when direct and relational, can not only be highly effective in developing a rich partnership between both the serving and the served but also move young adolescents forward on the path of civic and moral identity and engagement (Billig, 2000; Youniss & Yates, 1997; Reilly, 2004; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006). This movement may ultimately lead to levels of deeper personal or existential change that might not otherwise have occurred (Le Cornu, 2006).

Despite this, there have been few empirical studies that have examined the actual experience students are having in a Service Learning Program especially in Secondary Schools and particularly in Catholic Secondary Schools (Moore, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2005). While many studies point to the positive effects of Service Learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Maybach, 1996; Shumer & Belbas, 1996; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006) very few have examined what the participants in these programs are actually experiencing. The aim of this research is to explore the experience participants are having of a Service Learning Program in the context of an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School: what is actually happening to them and within them as they work with the homeless and their peers? In particular, the research aims to explore whether the participant experience, in the context of the ideology of a Catholic Secondary School, was moving students further in the internalisation of values such as empathy, compassion, acceptance and reciprocity (Le Cornu, 2006).

Such research is important because it will assist Secondary Schools in building Service Learning Programs that suit both their educational and ideological aims. With increasing pressures on the education system, it is important that schools make best use of limited resources in people, time and finance. Knowing the potential experience their students may have in similar Service Learning Programs as to the one in this study will assist schools in effective planning. This research is important for Catholic Secondary Schools and other schools aiming to provide a strong values-based education, as it may provide practical ways to engage students in learning situations that enrich their own lives, the communities in which they live and the culture and informal curriculum of their own schools.



## 1.2 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study is situated within the culture of an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School: Holy Family College. Founded in 1875, Holy Family College is a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition. Edmund Rice, a wealthy merchant, born in Callan (Ireland) in 1762 established a system of schools, beginning in Waterford in 1802. Edmund saw the great potential of education to liberate the illiterate poor youth of Ireland and to break the systemic poverty that characterized eighteenth and nineteenth century Ireland. Edmund Rice's vision led to the establishment of a Religious Order of Brothers, the Irish Christian Brothers, and by Edmund's death in 1844 schools were established through much of the English speaking world.

Holy Family College as an Edmund Rice school was founded to provide a Catholic education to poor youth in the City of Brisbane. Over the last 133 years the College has grown to be perhaps Queensland's premier Catholic College whose past students have made significant contributions to the social, cultural, educational, religious, economic, sporting and scientific life of Australia. As the College enters the Twenty-first century its clientele is now made up of many of the professional families of the city and its excellent reputation for a holistic education within the context of academic excellence has led to an extensive waiting list for places.

For most of its history the faculty of Holy Family College was mainly comprised of members of the Christian Brothers order. This has changed dramatically and rapidly since the late 1960's, to the point that within a short period of time there will probably be no member of the order within the faculty. For much of its history the Catholic Church in Australia placed enormous resources, both financially and in people, into its Catholic school system and the work done by Priests, Religious Brothers and Religious Sisters was significant in lifting a predominately Irish populace from the lower to the middle classes (O'Farrell, 1992). Following the beatification of the founder of the Christian Brothers, Edmund Rice, in 1996, there has been a movement to ascertain authentic identity within Christian Brothers schools in the context of their founding Charism. This movement has led to the establishment of a Charter outlining the key characteristics that a Catholic School in the Edmund Rice traditions should display. At the same time many members of the Christian Brothers

Order were encouraged by the outcomes of successive General Chapters to 'move to the margins' and to engage with the poor in more direct and relational ways. This has hastened the withdrawal of Brothers from their traditional school ministries, while at the same time leading to deliberate attempts to renew traditional schools in the spirit and charism of Edmund Rice and the Gospel of Jesus.

Each Religious Order ministers out of its founding charism or special Gospel insight. For many years the Church community and wider society in general, assumed that the members of the Religious Order that conducted the school or hospital would ensure that the institution remained faithful to the founding vision; almost a form of quality assurance. With the rapid loss of Religious from schools from the late 1960s onward, much effort was placed into school renewal to ensure that each Catholic school was faithful to both the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and to the spirit of the founder.

In 1991, in its efforts to renew the College community, Holy Family College initiated both a vertical pastoral care system for students and a Service Learning Program called 'Edmund Rice Action'. Edmund Rice Action involved students from across the year levels of the College in a variety of service activities from visiting soup kitchens, to making sandwiches for homeless people, to coaching sporting teams and more. The program was considered by the College to be a step in the right direction towards renewal in the spirit of the founder.

In 1997 a new Campus Minister was appointed to the College who had had experience in the Catholic Worker Community in the United States of America as well as other Social Justice areas. In 1999 he and the researcher initiated a series of new retreats experiences for the student body of Holy Family, as well as a 'street retreat' to give the students insight into the life of a homeless person. The street retreat in particular was an attempt to move students from talking about justice to an experience of relationship with the poor from which some sort of conversion or value shift may follow.

In the years that followed the initial 28-hour 'street retreat' experience, the Service Learning Program evolved into a five mornings a week, two nights per week, all year

round hospitality van for the homeless of the inner city. A large number of faculty and parents volunteered to work on the van as well as over a hundred older students each year; more volunteers than the roster could cater for. In their years after graduation a small but significant number of past students returned to the College to volunteer especially on the night van. In many ways 'Eddie's Van' took the community by surprise and became part of the day-to-day talked about culture of the school; students, parents and staff were proud of what the van did and felt that it typified and symbolized what Holy Family, as an Edmund Rice school, should be on about. The van experience was often referred to by the College Administration as marking the College as 'Catholic' and held up as representing the core ethos of the school.

### **1.3 IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Having worked with the Holy Family Service Learning Program since 1999 the researcher has had the opportunity to see many students pass through the program and graduate. Some graduates [alumni] have stayed involved with the program, some have involved themselves in other service activities such as Edmund Rice Camps, and many have "done their bit" and moved on. Through conversations with these past students and fellow faculty members involved with the program a number of issues have arisen which beg further exploration.

a. When the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College was established in 1999 the then Campus Minister, the Principal and the researcher [who at that time worked in Post School Formation for the Christian Brothers' Province], were motivated by a desire to enhance the mission credibility of the school as a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition. Beginning with a 'street retreat' program and slowly building to the more comprehensive program in place today, the staff involved with Campus Ministry, inspired by the Gospel of Jesus, sought to develop experiences that would bring the students into direct, respectful, reciprocal relationship with the poor and marginalised in the same way that Edmund Rice did. While in one way the program appears to be highly successful it is unclear whether the program, in the context of the whole school community, is achieving its espoused aims and objectives.

b. The Big Brekky program has now become a valued part of the culture of Holy Family College and many students in their Senior schooling volunteer to be a part of it. While the experience of working on the van is valued by parents, faculty members and students alike, what is unclear is the nature of the experience the participants are having. What also is unclear are the elements in the experience that the participants are valuing and the effect of the experience upon their personal biography.

c. The faculty involved in the Big Brekky program place great emphasis on the Gospel imperative expressed in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, "For I was a stranger and you made me welcome!" The program is wrapped in Catholic Theology and in particular both a Theology of Presence and Theology of Guest that recognise the dignity of every person. The aim of the program is to invite participants into a relationship with the guests of the program that reaches beyond charity to personal change. While the faculty members involved in the program may be working out of this model, what is unclear is whether this is what the participants are actually experiencing. Are their experiences on the van only serving to further enhance prior stereotypes and patronizing attitudes that in the longer term further entrench the divisions between rich and poor within society (Maybach, 1996; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996)?

These issues are not isolated to Holy Family's Service Learning Program and the literature would suggest they, in various forms have been debated for some time within the Service Learning community. The role that such a Service Learning Program as Holy Family's plays in faith development, identity development and in deepening systems of values is unclear, and thus is addressed by this thesis.

#### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

Empirical literature reports that there are substantive benefits for participants in Service Learning Programs (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006) [though the benefit to the clients is less clear and not as researched]. Many studies (Bringle & Hatches, 2005) have focussed on the end result of Service Learning on

participants: growth in self confidence, better communication skills, growth in a sense of agency and more. Other theorists have reflected on the identity growth for adolescents when linked to service in the context of a strong ideology (Youniss & Yates, 1997). What is unclear is the nature of the actual experience participants are having in the context of a prolonged, direct, relational and reflective Service Learning program. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to explore participant experience of such a Service Learning Program, and to do so especially in the context of an Australian all boys Catholic Secondary School. Such an exploration may assist Secondary Schools to better find ways to assist in the identity development of their students, and in doing so serve the core mission of the school as reflected by the ethos.

## **1.5 DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH**

The sub-culture of the urban homeless, and the presence of young idealistic school students volunteering to work in this sub-culture, invited a qualitative research design be developed for this study. The study explored participant experience of this sub-culture and of the developing relationship with people whose lives were, in many ways, distant from their own. This exploration invited the participants to articulate the meaning they made of the many dynamics of their growing relationships with the homeless and with each other. This qualitative study invited the researcher to attempt to “see the situation from the actor’s [the student participants] point of view” (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995, p. 326). The study did not set out to prove any theory but to observe human behaviour in a unique setting and to “make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

The epistemology of Constructionism perceives reality as based on mind constructions experienced through social interaction and action and as such is quite local and specific. Elements of these constructions are shared among many individuals and across cultures and “consist of the meaning-making activities of groups and individuals” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 197). The meaning-making activities themselves are of central interest to social constructionists simply because it is the meaning-making, sense-making activities that shape action or inaction.

These constructions are alterable as are their associated 'realities', and as such are not 'true', but rather formed and informed by the content and context of the relationships between homeless and student, student and peers and the student's own personal reflection and meaning-making. Reality for the constructionist is not objectively 'out there', but in the minds and meaning-making of the actors involved. As the student returned from the street, reality was in reflectively making sense of what had just been experienced. The interaction between the participants [both homeless and students] in the van experience invited their own interpretation. This study therefore adopted an interpretivist approach:

The interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural setting, in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (Neuman, 2006, p. 88)

As the study focussed to a large extent on how the students involved in the program defined events or reality, and how they acted in relationship to these events, it was at home within the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interaction (Cherwitz & Swanson, 1986) The world of the street van is rich in language and symbol and the responses of people to specific contexts as they interpret them. Much of what the participants experienced and reflected upon was done through their interaction with verbal symbols: their meaning, interpretation and use. This study sought to understand the human action of adolescents serving and relating with homeless people and their peers. To understand human action, "we must focus on social interaction, human thinking, definition of the situation, the present and the active nature of the human being" (Charon, 2007, p. 30). Symbolic Interaction was chosen as it allowed the researcher and the participants involved to 'see' human action as creating meanings that can be understood as if they were literary texts; "we define motives as important in situations, and so we act as though they are important; motives are the stated reasons for an act, the verbalized cause of human action that assumes intentions on the part of the actor" (Charon, 2007, p. 134). This study aimed to develop an understanding of each participant's meaning-making of their experiences in the context of the van and the fluidity of human interaction.

A case study approach was undertaken for the study in that it allowed the examination of particular phenomena in a unique setting: a hospitality van working with homeless people. The case study was clearly bound as it explored only the

experience that the participants were having as they worked with and related with the homeless. As a case study the many voices present were allowed to be heard, certain events on the van related, stories shared and student reaction to the interactions with the homeless articulated. Case study allowed for a rich and thick description of events within the case: its context and the individual perceptions of actors or groups of actors of what was going on at the van or between players or within themselves.

Within the confines of case study, data was collected through both a pre-and-post van experience personal journaling time. These entry and exit journals recorded participant reflection on their hopes and fears, expectations, goals and sense of agency. Participants were pre-briefed before each van experience as part of the normal van format, but responded to written journal questions upon their return after each of their eight or so times volunteering on the van. After each second van experience, participants took part in a semi-structured focus group discussion with the members of two groups for a period of about one hour. The researcher and the focus group facilitator discussed the dialogue of each focus group and from these discerned the interview guide questions for the next focus group.

Fifty-three Year 11 students [16 years of age] volunteered to be on the van roster for a six month period from January to June, 2006. This period of time paralleled an academic semester for the students and included the Easter holiday period. Students were placed into teams of five and worked on the van once a fortnight and most participants completed between eight and ten van experiences.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

This research is significant for a number of reasons. Service Learning, in its many forms, would appear to be one of the more important new developments, especially in Australia, linking schools and society in an increasingly technological and at time impersonal world. This research therefore contributes to the discussion as to what role schools can take in our twenty-first century world with its loss of identity, search for or abandonment of values, materialism versus morality etc. Youth's search for identity and meaning in today's society can be enhanced through school cultures that

value Service Learning as a key part of curriculum and not an added extra. While many studies have been undertaken that highlight the 'results' of Service Learning in increased self-esteem, better academic performance and increased social skills (Conrad & Hedin, 1989; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Kraft, 1996), few have addressed the role of Service Learning as a vehicle for identity development and meaning. Consequently, this research aimed to address this lacuna identified in the literature by seeking to understand the role that Service Learning, in a direct, relational, prolonged and ideologically rich program, has in increasing youth's sense of civic and moral identity and meaning in their lives.

Secondly, Service Learning in the direct, relational, prolonged and ideologically strong form as undertaken at Holy Family College is quite rare and has attracted few empirical studies to ascertain real or imagined effectiveness. Youniss (2004), one of the key researchers in this field asks:

Can one show effects of service that are greater than self-selection effects, that students who embrace Service Learning are already 'prone' to this type of involvement and whether service does more than make kids feel good? Does it [Service Learning], for example, get them [the students] to think critically about the causes of homelessness and prod them to do something about it politically? (Youniss, J., personal communication, April 28, 2004)

Consequently this study will attempt to identify changes in attitude and values in participants over time and across the whole spectrum of the participant cohort, and therefore across the spectrum of prior interest and readiness for this type of involvement.

Thirdly, Catholic schools are searching for ways to be 'mission effective' in the modern, twenty-first century world. Service Learning in the context of the ideology/ethos of the founding charism would appear to be a key way to make the mission of the school more effective and credible to today's youth. Youth today are searching for 'meaning' and Service Learning Programs such as that undertaken at Holy Family may be a key vehicle for meaning for volunteer participants. Consequently this research may contribute to our understanding of how the quintessential elements of a Service Learning Program are perceived by participants and become part of their concept map from which service and action flows. Furthermore this research may assist in understanding the link between the perceived ethos of the sponsoring institution, and the participant's experience of the program.



Finally few, if any, empirical studies have been undertaken into Service Learning in Secondary Schools in Australia. Service Learning would appear to have an important role in personal, social and civic identity development in adolescence and these need to be explored further, especially in an Australian context. The studies of Lakin and Mahoney (2006), Reilly (2004), Reynolds (1998), Youniss and Yates (1997) and Fenzel and Leary (1997) have all used American College or High School students, and while there are many similarities between American and Australian culture there are also important differences. This study will contribute to our understanding of how Australian youth grow in their sense of self and find meaning through relational Service Learning.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

This research examined participant experience of the Service Learning Program in one Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. As in all case studies generalisation of findings are difficult and fraught with danger. Being a bounded and integrated system the many variables attached to this study [or any case study of Service Learning for that matter] limit the projection of the findings too widely or generally (Merriam, 1998). The study concerned itself with boys in an all boys school; quite a unique, highly contextual culture. The study took place in an Australian urban setting where homelessness takes a very different form to other world cities, because of Australia's socio-political and socio-economic peculiarities related to its extensive social welfare system and relatively homogenous population. The study took place in an elite private school that draws its clientele from relatively wealthy families with their conversant levels of education, expectation and value systems. All of these factors meant that the findings were highly specific to this particular context and population, uncovering the interaction of significant factors characteristic of that phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). All of this does not belittle the value of this case study provided the study does not claim insights and interpretations beyond the scope of the case under study; "Case studies concentrate attention on the way particular groups of people confront specific problems, taking a holistic view of the situation; they are problem centred, small scale, entrepreneurial endeavours" (Shaw, 1978, p. 2 cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

The use of short times of personal reflective journaling and Focus Group discussion in this study, while valuable, made it difficult at times to hear the voices of the quieter students when the dynamics of the group took over. While the Focus Group facilitator and researcher were aware of this it was difficult to counter without interfering in either the group dynamic or the objectivity of the study. Also in the examination of the journaling and Focus Group data the researcher needed to be aware that the data presented but a part of the story that is participant experience and not the whole (Merriam, 1998). In case study it is also important not to “oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 377). The absence of a pre and post quantitative personal values test, also meant that it was difficult to measure objective changes in values and attitudes over the data gathering time. The presence of some quantitative data would have enhanced the ability of the study to place perceived movement in student values and attitudes against a benchmark.

Every Service Learning Program is different. The many facets of Holy Family’s program, voluntary, out of school time, small group, over a six month period and working with a homeless population meant that the very experience that the study attempted to explore would be quite unique. By its very nature the experience of the students in this study would be a different experience to that of students in a different style of program, over a different time period and working with a different client group. While this is the case it is hoped that the underlying journey in personal adolescent identity and meaning would be similar. “Generalizations arising from qualitative research, therefore, will depend very heavily upon the richness and thickness of the data collected and equally, on the context from which the generalizations arise” (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995, p. 326). The size of the participant group, the volume of data gathered and the length of time of the data gathering period would hopefully all provide thick and rich data for this study’s finding to be of value in the discussion of Service Learning and its value to the educational community.

Good qualitative research calls for a strong theory base for:

Conducting research that is not parochial and limited to a particular setting, a combination of circumstances, or a period of time is important to building a substantial knowledge base. In some

cases, there are studies of Service Learning courses in which there is strong emphasis on the empirical data that describes a programme and its outcomes, yet with little or no emphasis on theory. This type of research principally describes what was done in a particular Service Learning course, and what outcomes occurred, without attention as to why there is a connection between the antecedents and consequences. (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005, p. 34)

Consequently the researcher has attempted to place this study within the context of experiential learning theory, the internalisation of values and identity development.

Finally the study was limited by the researcher's own bias and interpretation for "the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 42). Being a faculty member and co-founder of the Service Learning Program meant that the researcher had a vested interest in the program's success and a mixture of relationships with the student participants from mentor, teacher, and disciplinarian to friend. The knowledge gained from case studies is more concrete, more contextual and more "developed by reader interpretation – readers bring to a case study their own experience and understanding, which lead to generalisations when new data for the case are added to old data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 32). This study aimed to examine one cohort's experience of one Service Learning Program and as such "the purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 245).

## **1.8 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

This study was an exploration of participant experience of a Service Learning Program in an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. Chapter One has attempted to place the study within the context of both the world of Service Learning and the community of Holy Family College, and identifies the problem that both justifies the study and has motivated the researcher.

Chapter Two examines the literature pertinent to the purpose of the research. Six key themes were reflected in the literature. Three themes, Social Capital in schools, school culture and ethos, and the role of the Catholic school, informed the discussion about participant experience from the point of view of how the program at Holy Family was structured, its link with the school's mission and the Edmund Rice charism. Literature focusing on experiential education, adolescent identity and the role of ideology and meaning-making in adolescent development, contributed to the

discussion on the role of Service Learning in forming civic, personal, social and moral identity. The final theme in the literature focussed on reflection and its role in leading those involved in Service Learning to possible existential change. The literature demonstrated that Service Learning has potential to link an ideologically based educational culture and young people's desire and search for identity and meaning.

Chapter Three examines the world of the theory of Service Learning with a focus on various models of Service Learning and Experiential Learning and presents a Theoretical Framework. The Chapter then focuses on the model of Progressive Internalisation and its journey of meaning and understanding linked with experience from surface to deeper to tacit to existential change. After the different models of experiential education and Service Learning are examined, a new model, the Spiral Model is proposed to assist practitioners to formulate effective Service Learning Programs.

Chapter Four addresses the design and methodology of the study. Placing this qualitative study within the epistemological position of Constructionism allowed it to focus on how the participants made sense of, and constructed meaning through, their experiences on the van. Chapter Four outlines the data-collecting methods and the processes for the analysis of data. As the world of the 'soup van' is highly particular a case study approach was used. The theoretical approach of Symbolic Interactionism was used to allow for the richest possible description of the thick culture of the world of the homeless and how this culture and context influenced both the homeless and the student volunteers and their interactions.

Chapter Five presents a synthesis of the data gathered and presents them in the form of phases linked to the experience journey that flows from participant observations. This chapter allows the participant voices to speak. The participant journey began with the Expectations and Exposure phases where they were introduced to the world of the homeless, bringing with them their hopes and fears, prior stereotypes and mental constructs. Their initial experiences led to a Reframing of the mental picture that they carried, and in time to Disillusionment, either linked to their own feelings of inadequacy, apparent rejection by the homeless or a struggle to

integrate the van philosophy into their own value system. As the van experience lengthened, participants continued on into an Awareness phase where the values and principles of the program became more real and owned by participants and finally to an Agency phase where to varying extents the students came to a point of sensing that they could and perhaps did, make a difference. Chapter Six centres on a discussion of the findings in the light of the literature. From the phase based presentation of findings outlined in Chapter Five several major issues were identified that are discussed in the light of the literature. Three key factors were identified as being of particular relevance in participant experience: ideology, time and reflection. These factors framed the participant experience that centred on differing levels of conscious awareness, relationship building and the various stages of existential change. The Chapter concludes with a discussion of participant experience in the context of the culture of the school: Holy Family College.

Chapter Seven discusses the findings of the research in the light of the Spiral Model and the various elements of experiential learning linked to Service Learning. Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by summarising the findings of the study and makes recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE REVIEW**

##### **2.1.1 Purpose of the Research**

The research problem represents a need to critically explore the experience that students have in a Service Learning situation in an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. Service Learning, in its many forms, would appear to be one of the more important new developments linking schools and society in this increasingly technological and at times, impersonal world. What is unclear is the nature of the experience that participants are having and what role, if any, this experience has in the development of the culture and in particular the mission effectiveness of the school community. Service Learning, in the 'relational form' undertaken at the Secondary School studied, is quite rare and has been the subject of few empirical studies to ascertain real or imagined effectiveness (Moore, 2000; Bringle & Hatcher, 2005).

Catholic schools are searching for ways to be 'mission effective' in the twenty-first century world. Service Learning in the context of the ideology/ethos of the founding charism may be both a vital part of identity formation for the youth involved, and a key way to make the mission of the school more effective and credible to today's youth. Youth today are searching for meaning, and Service Learning Programs such as that undertaken in the school studied, may be a key vehicle for meaning for volunteer participants. Few, if any, empirical studies have been undertaken into Service Learning in Secondary Schools in Australia. Studies from the United States of America suggest that Service Learning appears to have an important role in personal, moral, social and civic identity development in adolescence, and there needs to be further exploration of this especially in an Australian context. Therefore the purpose of this research is to examine participant experience of the Service Learning Program at a specific Australian Boys' Catholic Secondary School.

### 2.1.2 Conceptualisation of the Literature

The assumption that in some way participant experience of Service Learning does impact upon Identity and meaning development, guides this review of literature and is reflected in the conceptual framework. A guide to the conceptual framework from the literature review is provided in Figure 2.1. In order to complement this representation, the main inter-related themes that emanated from the research problem are bolded for reasons of clarity in the body of the text that follows.

The Literature Review begins with the **nature of experiential learning** and of **Service Learning Programs**. The **nature of the participant's involvement** is then reviewed. An important question that frames the nature of the participants' experience is should involvement be compulsory or voluntary. Should students volunteer, or are they a participant in a compulsory school program that the school community feels is core to the school ethos and citizenship? Difficulties with terminology; Service Learning or Community Service and philosophical approaches; programs emanating from a charity model or change model, as well as the pedagogical and philosophical stance with which educators approach this field of endeavour are examined.

The literature predominantly comes out of the United States of America with its rich tradition of philanthropy and student involvement in some form of community outreach. Parallel to this discussion are the arguments around extra-curricular activities and their worth in enhancing the curriculum and particularly the academic curriculum. The nature of the participant's involvement has a direct effect on the type of experience that they will encounter in any program; if I freely choose to participate in an experience I will, without even been aware of it, filter the feeling nature of the experience differently to an experience that I am required to have.

As a result of this, literature associated with **participant experience** is reviewed especially as regards the interaction with fellow participants and the guests/recipients of the programs, the inner experience and feeling of participants, values, perceptions, stereotypes before and after particular programs, participant motivation and expectation of the experience. All of this is directly linked to the growth in **identity**, especially in adolescence. Literature looking at the development of **personal, social, civic and**

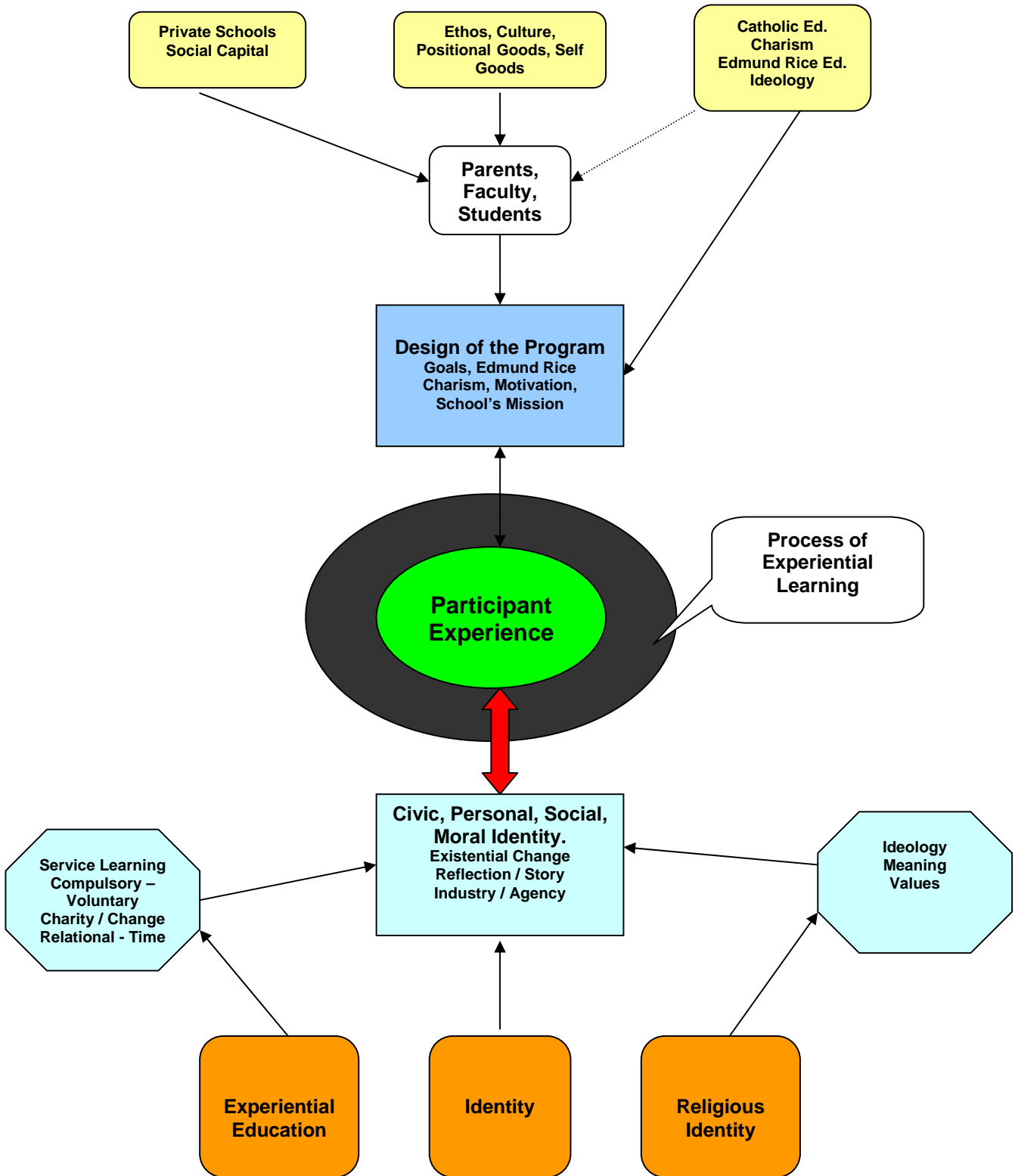
**moral identity** is reviewed particularly in the context of the search for meaning, self awareness and values.

The Literature Review then examines what is done with the experience of participants. Many writers suggest that **reflection upon experience** is important for long term effectiveness in Service Learning, and in this vein the literature review looks at the **process of internalization** and the role of reflection within this. Literature that addresses **ideology or ethos** as a way to 'filter' or 'make sense' of the experience is also examined: finding **meaning** and as a result changing value systems and/or how they relate to society. In the examination of Identity, the Literature Review looks at the link between **identity formation, the role of Religion/Spirituality and Catholic schooling.**

The final part of the Literature Review examines Ethos and Catholic schooling; the context for this and many other Service Learning Programs. Key to this examination is the apparent tension between **ethos/charism** and the many other facets of the **culture** of private schools that are making them attractive for clients at this time. What is unclear and worthy of exploration is whether people are seeking Catholic Education for the **Social Capital** that is common to all good schools, or are they being attracted by the **'core business'** of Catholic schooling: the reason for which the schools were founded?



Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework from Literature Review.



**Figure 2.2 Organisational Sequence of the Literature Review.**

<b>2.1</b>	<b>Introduction to the Review</b>
<b>2.1.1</b>	<b>Purpose of the Research</b>
<b>2.1.2</b>	<b>Conceptualisation of the Literature</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Service Learning Programs</b>
<b>2.2.1</b>	<b>Models of Service Learning and its effects</b>
<b>2.2.2</b>	<b>The Process of Experiential Learning</b>
<b>2.2.3</b>	<b>Nature of the Programs</b>
<b>2.2.4</b>	<b>The Process of Identity Formation</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Participant Experience</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Service Learning and development of meaning</b>
<b>2.4.1</b>	<b>Service Learning: Ideology and Community</b>
<b>2.4.2</b>	<b>Service Learning: Religion, Churches and Schools</b>
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Ethos and the Catholic School</b>
<b>2.5.1</b>	<b>Ethos and Australian Schools</b>
<b>2.5.2</b>	<b>The Catholic school: Core Business</b>
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Conclusion to the Review</b>

## **2.2 SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAMS**

### **2.2.1 Models of Service Learning and its effects.**

Service Learning is not a newcomer to the educational landscape. James (1909), Dunn (1929) and Dewey (1938) all viewed service to the community as a means for instilling social responsibility and promoting civic cohesion among diverse persons within a democratic society (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 414). Dewey, Kolb and Freire all provided theoretical frameworks for the experiential in modern education. In recent years practitioners have worked hard to understand better the philosophical, psychological and social mechanisms that under gird Service-learning practice. A number of constructs are helping to explain the apparently transformational nature of experiential education: concept formation, selective perception, categorization, critical reflection and mediated

learning (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 31). Key to the 'experience' central to a Service Learning educational setting, is a hoped-for change in attitude that will speak to deeply ingrained stereotypes, media images and previous experience. Such change is dependent upon participants viewing their experience from a critical, academically-informed perspective. Most Service Learning Programs lack a strong 'academic component', with the primary focus being on the personal benefits to the participants (Maybach, 1996; Shumer & Belbas, 1996), while many others lack a strong 'reflective' base.

While some question whether the perceived effects of Service Learning are due to family of origin factors or self selection, others have identified the presence of mentors, religious faith, particular transformative experiences and direct or indirect experience of prior hardship as key formative factors leading to involvement in Service Learning (Seider, 2005). Others ask whether the supposed effects of Service Learning are due to the characteristics which individuals bring to the service situation [e.g. heightened sense of altruism] (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005) and not to the service itself. Most research however is identifying service as a factor in personal growth in participants (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 414). Some studies have shown mixed findings across a variety of measures of academic, social and civic development due to Service Learning and Community Service (Newmann & Rutter, 1983; Melchior, 1998; Parker-Gwin & Mabry, 1998). One difficulty across all the research is the variety of uncontrollable variables, difference in terminology, expectation and nature of the programs and significant variation in participant experience to measure effects upon (Metz & Youniss, 2005; Bringle & Hatcher, 2005).

There are many benefits to participants of Service Learning and Community Service programs (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005; Lakin & Mahoney, 2006; Green, 2006). Service Learning does "unlock the potential in young men and unites the values of compassion, honour, responsibility, and enterprise" (Reilly, 2004, p, 4). Service Learning Programs give a "heightened sense of personal and social responsibility, more positive attitudes towards adults and toward those being served, enhanced self-esteem, growth in moral and ego development, and more complex patterns of thought" (Conrad & Hedin, 1989, p. 1). It would appear that "participation in service programs, even when compulsory, heightens future volunteering to help others and to solve civic problems" (Metz &

Youniss, 2005, p. 414), especially for students who would not otherwise have done service. It would appear that despite all the variables involved with quality research into the effects of service upon adolescents,

A consciously designed service program which espouses civic responsibility in the community and offers students opportunities to do service at worthwhile sites at the very least gets students to take their requirement seriously and stimulates their interest in various aspects of the civic domain. A school based service requirement can have its desired impact on students who enter school without a strong civic orientation (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 433).

Despite these positives, especially the increase in the self-esteem of participants (Conrad & Hedin, 1989; Kraft, 1996), there are questions about the effect upon the 'communities they serve' and the institutions/communities the participants come from (Maybach, 1996; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Stukas & Dunlap, 2002; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

For much of the Twentieth Century practitioners and theorists alike have searched for models that could effectively explain best practice in the process of experiential education. Dewey began this process with his six step process of inquiry:

1. Encountering the problem.
2. Formulating a problem or question to be resolved.
3. Gathering information which suggest solutions.
4. Making hypotheses.
5. Testing hypotheses.
6. Making warranted assertions (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 32).

Kolb (1984) conceptualized Dewey's steps as a four stage experiential learning cycle (see Figure 6.2, p. 298). Service Learning approaches acknowledge that the service must 'empower' communities and treat community members with dignity and respect (Freire, 1970; Mayback, 1996; Rhoads, 1997). Freire challenged a 'banking' approach to education which saw the learner as a vessel to be 'filled with knowledge', and endorsed a problem-posing education which affirmed men and women as beings in the process of becoming.

Cone and Harris developed a Lens Model for Service-Learning educators. Beginning with the learner and their own unique set of characteristics [learning styles, skills, histories, philosophies of life, attitudes, values, expectations, perspectives], the model then looks at the academic and pragmatic issues that the learning environment will consider. It is important for the student to be intellectually challenged through pre-service training and theoretical concepts that the student will be expected to apply and

understand in the community. The 'Lens' is the service experience itself; an experience distinct from the students' everyday experiences and so allows for the broadening of perspectives. A holistic approach to reflection involving the student's intellectual and emotional capacities, as well as their written and oral skills then follows the experience. Cone and Harris' model then introduces a fifth component: that reflection is most effective when guided by an educator or mentor who can facilitate the student's learning process. Finally the model returns to the learner as they integrate their experiences into new frameworks, attitudes and mindsets.

Effective Service Learning systematically attempts to help students to use experiences in the community to better build upon, critique, and evaluate knowledge [earlier educational experiences, messages from the mass media, influences of home and community, readings they have done], and move to an intellectually 'higher ground'. The use of mentors in the Lens Model assist in the consideration of differences among students and the communities in which they are placed and provide the structures to help students learn from the experiential opportunities. Without structure and guidance in the service program, students may simply continue to understand their new experiences in the same old ways using the tools of conceptualization that already lie within their grasp. The task of Service Learning instructors is to assist students in identifying problems, formulating questions, and knowing how to go about gathering information before they enter the field and as they continue there (Cone & Harris, 1996). Students enter the field, the community, with a set of clearly explicated theories that offer a systematic way of looking at the world. Each theory or group of concepts take the form of carefully crafted 'Academic Questions' as a basis for observation. The students then define their terms, cite their observations and describe how their observations and experiences support or contradict the theories and concepts presented during the Academic Framework Experience or regular class time.

Service Learning should lead to students asking real and relevant questions as they take responsibility for their own learning process. Learning in a contextual situation increases vocabulary which in turn leads to an increased ability to learn in further contextual situations (Sternberg, 1990). As students placed in contextual situations reflect upon their experiences they develop two key modes of thought: the well-formed argument and the good story (Bruner, 1986). In Service Learning situations these modes are promoted

through intellectual stimuli in the form of 'Academic Questions' and 'Journal Questions'. Students are invited to respond in writing to key questions, cite observations and explain how they support or contradict the theory [e.g. the under-representation or misrepresentation of minority groups in the media, racism, patronizing language]. The more frequently students use abstract concepts in observing, thinking about, describing and talking about the world, the more clearly those concepts become integrated into the thinking processes of the user. As these analytical methods and organizational concepts are acquired, students move one step closer to being able to think critically and defend their points of view. This process needs to be assisted or mediated by a mentor.

Service Learning, the process of building bridges between classrooms and the community, is a process whereby participants are engaged in a social process of constructing meaning. The culture of the 'sponsoring institution' plays an important role in providing theories that are significant analytical concepts within that community (Moore, 1990; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Within this culture mentors are important in helping participants 'make sense' of their experience. The mentor or instructor plays the role of mediator, facilitator and guide in helping students to develop an understanding of the concepts involved as a necessary prerequisite to investigating and possibly challenging the concepts. These mentors or instructors impact upon student experience of service by on one hand acting as elders transmitting the concepts of the culture and on the other, as agents of change helping students to think critically about the contextual validity of those concepts (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005).

The concepts of the culture and their contextual validity form the academic framework experience that Seider (2005) found to be foundational to longer term commitments to justice by College students. While few question the positive effect Service Learning Programs appear to have upon a whole range of personal, civic and moral facets of adolescent growth, some still question whether these effects are the result of self selection or prior disposition (Seider, 2005). While recognising the importance of parents, role models and other background factors in producing both an ethic of care and disposition for service in College students, Seider (2005, 2007) suggests that none of these factors was the primary contributor to young adult commitment to service. Young College students identified extensive academic framework experiences as providing a core 'why' that impacted upon service and shaped individuals views of

community and their role within it. Academic frameworks help prepare expectations and images in the semantic memory that will both aide reflection and enable worldview change.

As service volunteers emerge into adulthood, academic framework experiences help them replace, modify or specify their worldviews to more fully reflect their experience. Several students in Seider's research critically compared quality framework experiences that 'opened their eyes', were 'revelatory' and 'mind expanding', to high school "clubs that did community service when they weren't doing their primary activity" (Seider, 2005, p. 19). Framework experiences provide the scaffolding for thinking, helped volunteers clarify why they served, and motivated them for future long term commitment. "Framework experience transformed these students' generalised care for others, and a predisposition for performing service-work, into a firm commitment to service and social responsibility" (Seider, 2005, p. 21).

There appears to be a optimum time in the lives of young adults for framework experiences; a "pregnant period, normally in late adolescence as individuals develop their ego identity, the identity derived from their relationships with other persons, institutions, and the social-historical context in which they live" (Seider, 2007, p. 7). As young adults begin to establish their independence from parents, caregivers, and other childhood mentors, they are simultaneously seeking out new values, beliefs, and causes with which they can identify (Erikson, 1968; Youniss & Yates, 1996; Seider, 2007).

### **2.2.2 The Process of Experiential Learning.**

Most studies concerning Service Learning and Experiential education in general, have recognised the central role that reflection upon experience plays if new learning is to occur (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997). Increasingly, research is pointing to the need for quality reflection processes and to the pivotal role of mentors in these processes (Mabry, 1998; Green, 2006). As learning in an experiential context requires or invites the 'letting go' of one set of values or mindsets and adopting another, processes that facilitate this movement are difficult for adolescents to engage with. As learners 'experience' a situation they construct it via a dynamic interplay between the representations of immediate experience that enter the episodic memory, and the expectations and images

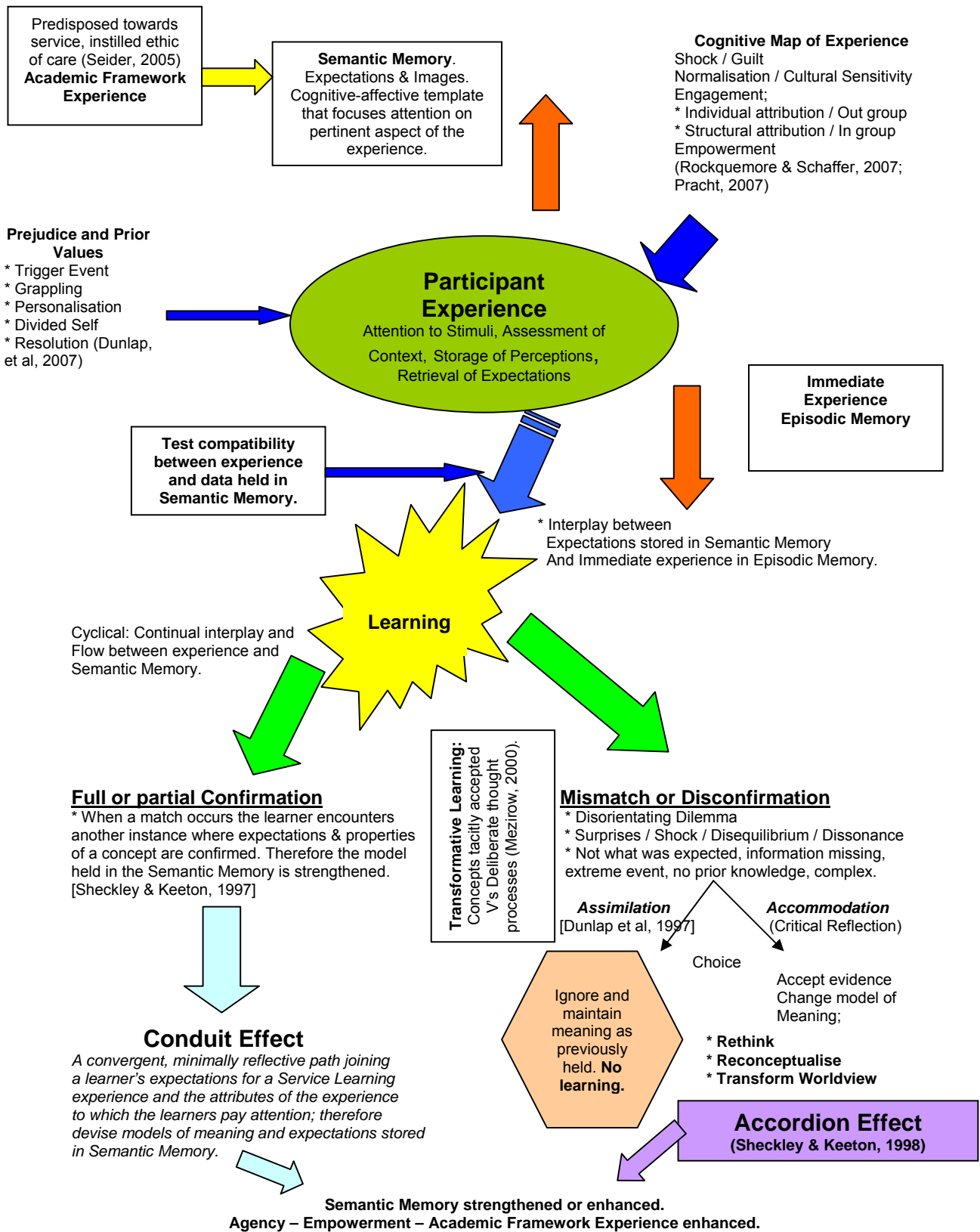
for the experience stored in semantic memory. The outcome of this interplay will determine both whether learning will occur and what its nature will be (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 35). The interplay between the perception of the immediate experience and the expectations for that experience from prior experience, belief systems and concepts, requires the experience to be attended to and reflected upon for learning to occur. A summary of the processes involved in experiential learning in the context of service is outlined diagrammatically in Figure 2.3.

This interplay between experience, expectations and images influenced research into the processes relatively-privileged white students go through as they become more aware of socioeconomic and other advantages in service (Dunlap, Scoggin, Green & Davi, 2007). The findings of this study have wider implications for Service Learning as a whole. The realisation of one's social and economic privilege can be difficult to accept for adolescents, and if denied can be a block for effective engagement in diverse communities. As participants from privileged backgrounds enter into service they may encounter a series of stages that prepare them for deeper learning. This process begins with trigger-events that stimulate awareness of privilege and result in cognitive disequilibrium. As the participant grapples with this disequilibrium the meaning-making process begins. With time, the clients of the program become personalised for the participant leading to possible conflict between their intellectual self and experiential self. Conflicts may develop between their pre-service mind maps and worldview, and the conflicting data from their own experience. At this point of 'divided self', resolution is sought by either assimilation into pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices, or accommodation where the student's socioeconomic and racial stereotypes and prejudices are questioned and revised (Dunlap et al., 2007, p. 20).

Accommodated learning is the 'ah-ha' moment that results in increased awareness and ultimately, new learning. Many 'ah-ha' moments are linked to the disequilibrium or dissonance between what participants thought they knew and what they are finding to be true. The Service Learning facilitator identifies this disequilibrium and assists students to work through it. As this process continues personalisation occurs which allows students to begin to genuinely understand the multiple dimensions of the service dynamic,



**Figure 2.3 Processes in Experiential Learning.**



whether it be homelessness or old age or physical impairment. Through personalisation, issues become contextualised and the guests of service become real people. Through this process meaning-making occurs. The role of mentors is especially important in processing tensions between a participant's intellectual self and experiential self; there may well be clashes between the program theory, their personal biography and personal feeling response.

To understand and incorporate these feelings and ideas into their worldview, the service-learning student must let their Service Learning and personal experiences resonate within them through the critical reflection process to create meaning and therefore close the gap between the academic and experiential self. The result may be a more coherent and fluid concept of their identity as a service-learner. (Dunlap et al., 2007, p. 24)

Strong emotional responses to presenting data would appear to be one of the key entry points to deeper learning in service/experiential situations. Green (2006) refers to epiphanies or an 'a-ha' moment - those "illuminative moments that mark people's lives;"

An epiphany may emerge instantaneously – the 'ah-ha' experience, or the 'light bulb' that enables a person to say 'so that's what is going on' – or it may emerge gradually through a cumulative sense of awareness after an ongoing process of experience and reflection. (Stringer, 2004, p. 99 cited in Green, 2006, p. 104)

Many students reacted initially to the homeless with shock, guilt, fear, anger, joy at acceptance and more. Such interactions with their resultant tension were the epiphanies that opened the door to new understandings, personal stories and personal connections (Green, 2006). This addressing of tension forms a key part of the Engagement Stage in Rockquemore and Schaffer's (2000) descriptive map of the social-psychological stages that occur during Service-Learning. In addressing how students learn in service-learning, three distinct stages of development were identified: shock, normalisation and engagement. Paralleling the disequilibrium identified above (Dunlap et al., 2007), shock is seen to be important to experiential learning as it provides a sharp emotional and psychological jolt to students' perceptions of reality; a cognitive openness towards course material [framework experiences].

Students quickly adapt to new circumstances and move into a stage of 'normalisation' where participants are accustomed to what was foreign presenting data [sights, sounds, smells, reactions], now feel comfortable with their new role and begin to form relationships. 'Other-ness' in the normalisation stage gives way to personal description, and energy associated with pity or fear of the unknown is replaced by a sense of the common bond all humans share (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 18). While the

personalisation of the clients at the service site may enable relationship to form for learning to follow the role of the facilitator or mentor here is crucial. There is a danger that the volunteer, in normalising the situation, may normalise the poverty or disadvantage and refrain from thinking critically about it. This lack of critical thinking may deepen patronizing attitudes, leading to a cognitive assimilation whereby there is little or no change in service-learner attitudes and prejudice, or stereotypes maintained or reinforced (Dunlap et al., 2007, p. 20).

Normalisation is crucial to the learning process as students first understand the importance of service, feel committed to the people they are building relationships with and begin to see the clients as human beings not unlike themselves. This process is not easy as volunteers “bring a variety of life experiences and psychological baggage to the service-learning experience” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 18). The program mentor’s role is to assist the student to accommodate their new experiences into an expanded worldview through critical reflection. Students now become engaged in the learning process, asking causal questions about the ‘why’ and ‘how’ of the poverty of people they now are in relationship with.

Experiential learning transcends personal experience by mediated reflection leading to deeper awareness. If this happens the participants’ worldview will be replaced, modified or specified (Seider, 2007). If this occurs participants will grapple with the disequilibrium they experience, and take it past a divided self to resolution and accommodated learning (Dunlap et al., 2007). If this occurs the participant will so engage with the dissonance within the experience so as to go from individual attributions to structural attributions: individual [e.g. laziness] or structural [e.g. educational inequalities] explanations for poverty (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). As the clients of a program are personalised and reflection upon experience deepens, the relationship between client and volunteer may change from ‘out-group’ to ‘in-group’. As the perception the volunteer has of the people they are serving changes from “groups of which they are not members” (out - groups) to “individuals like themselves” (in-groups) they will begin to look for structural attributions (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19).

Worldview modification and academic experiences (Seider, 2007), assimilated or accommodated learning (Dunlap et al, 2007), social-psychological stages that occur

during Service-Learning (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000) and the stages of privilege awareness (Dunlap et al, 2007), all play a part in the expansion of the conduit through which learning through experience occurs. Core experiential learning processes involve reflective judgment and reflective action that expand the participant's worldview or mind-map; the accordion effect (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997).

The nature of reflection upon experience suggests that worldviews and value systems are not set in stone but spiral and are constantly changing, just as are the experiences that nurture them (Cone & Harris, 1996). Individuals shape [construct] their Service Learning experiences through "an ongoing interplay between attention to pertinent stimuli, assessment of the context within which the experience occurs, storage of perceptions about the experience, and retrieval of expectations based on prior experiences" (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 37). The processes outlined above (Seider, 2007; Dunlap et al, 2007; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000) are all concerned with how attended to experiences can be transformed into durable knowledge about the world via interactive processes.

As students engage, personalise, experience shock, normalise etc., they will either confirm or disconfirm the connection between experience and expectation. Both can be opportunities for learning to occur. Sometimes participants will assimilate the emotional and cognitive responses to their experience into prior mind-maps and continue on in the experience with little or no learning occurring. Sometimes, faced with disconfirmation, learners can "revise the models of meaning and expectations that they use to construct their Service Learning experience and thereby modify the very cognitive/affective representations that they use to structure and make meaning of and pre-shape their world" (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 39).

As learners revise their models of meaning, they expand the capacity of the semantic memory to make sense of what they are experiencing. Before this happens the conduit through which data is interpreted is confirmed time and again through matches between experience and expectation. When disconfirming experiences are then confronted, the participant has the ability to expand, let go of, the prior conduit to allow a wider interpretation or meaning-making schema (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997). While this process has a natural fit with the adolescent's need to make sense of their world through

their own eyes, it still requires the active presence of mentors and a strong ideology to place the experience within boundaries that assist meaning-making. The processes inherent in quality Service Learning Programs continually invite program organisers to examine not just what service their program is performing but more importantly, how they are performing it. The processes of Experiential Learning in a Service Learning setting are outlined diagrammatically in Figure 2.3.

### **2.2.3 Nature of the Programs.**

One of the current debates in American educational circles centres on the value of 'compulsory' or voluntary community service (Conrad & Hedin, 1989; Mabry & Parker-Gwin, 1998; Campbell, 2000; Metz & Youniss, 2005), while others argue that the more important question is whether the program is integrated into the curriculum (Youniss & McLennan, 2003). An increasing number of studies are showing that when service is integrated into the academic curriculum so that it has a clear rationale, follows from the subject matter and is the focus of reflective discussion, it is much more effective (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Another feature that distinguishes one program from another is to what extent the program brings participants into direct contact with the needy or not, and in a relational or functional way. The value that an institution places upon the program significantly effects how it is perceived by the students. "Youth need to do service within a context in which service is pervasive and respected. Such youth are steeped in an ethos in which service is an expectation that comes with their social and institutional relationship" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 48). If this happens then there is a clear and powerful link to the ideological outlook of the institution.

The influence of the frameworks and ideologically based programs that institutions form Service Learning participants in appears to have a strong flow on effect for long term commitment in service. Much criticism of Service Learning focuses on suggestions that the 'ethic of care' present in many altruistic young adults with a predisposition for service, is linked to the influence of parents and other pre-existing phenomena and not to the Service Learning Program itself (Seider, 2005, p. 21). While acknowledging the role of parents and other factors play in participant predisposition some argue that it is students'

unanticipated participation in a framework experience that led to the development of a worldview in which service-work came to be seen as important, meaningful, and a moral obligation. In short, a

framework experience transformed these students' generalized care for others and a predisposition for performing service-work into a firm commitment to service and social responsibility. (Seider, 2005, p. 21)

By giving quality time and formation to participants before and during service programs, the potential for a shift in one's world view, and an emotional response to this shift, is developed. Strong, clear ideological frameworks give participants a 'why' for service that adds meaning to the experience. A framework experience is "an experience that shapes an individual's view of community and the role that he or she can assume within that community" (Seider, 2005, p. 20). Seider argues that for 'ordinary' participants in particular, framework experiences are needed to fully develop the parent-instilled ethic of care and predisposition for service so it meets its full potential. Frameworks are ideologically based periods of input and reflection that place the service within a context that questions prior assumptions and gives students a strong reason for their service.

Before FUP [a Framework experience at Harvard], I'd say that I was taught to think about community service as an extracurricular activity, as something that would just enrich your high school experience, something that clubs did when they weren't doing their primary activity. It was not presented as a framework of thinking. And, I think, that's what FUP really did for me. I saw people that were integrating their studies and their service, their activism, and how they engage with this community; it was just really powerful for me. (Seider, 2005, p. 19)

The primary educational focus of Service Learning Programs is attracting increased attention, especially the tension as to whether programs should be based on or leads to charity or change (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 594). Is the Service Learning Program about charity or change? Is it on about 'the joy of reaching out to others or altruism? Kahne and Westheimer's study examines the goals of Service Learning Programs in the moral domain, and its two types of relationships, giving and caring. In 'caring' relationships we "try to consider the life and disposition of those for whom we are caring" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 595). Maybach (1996) and others (Cruz, 1994; Maybach, 1995; Morton, 1994; Pollock 1994) challenge Service Learning practitioners to ask, "What is the effect of all this service on the recipients?" Service Learning Programs should be accountable for the results of the service experience on the service recipient, and should be mutually empowering – for both the provider and the recipient (Maybach, 1996). Perhaps the best test, and most difficult to administer, is: "Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13)?

The terms 'Service Learning' and 'Community Service' at times appear to be used interchangeably. Service Learning can be defined as "an interdisciplinary instructional strategy that facilitates the development of knowledge and skills while helping students understand and accept civic and social responsibility" (Burns, 1998, p. 38). Service Learning is not Community Service. Community Service is defined as "a service performed by individuals for the benefit of others, for an organisation, and/or for a community; individuals and/or organisations usually commit their time and energy to a worthy cause without engaging in a structured learning process" (Burns, 1998, p. 38). In Service Learning the focus of activity must be linked to the curriculum. Service Learning may include a community service component but is a structured learning process. The United States National and Community Service Act of 1990 defines Service Learning as:

a method in which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organised service experiences that meet actual community needs; that is integrated into students' academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what that student did and saw during the service activity; that provides students chances to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and that enhances teaching in school by extending student learning into the community and helps foster a sense of caring for others. (Burns, 1998, p. 39)

#### **2.2.4 The Process of Identity formation.**

This study explored the experience students in a boys' secondary school in the Catholic tradition had of the school's Service Learning Program. Service Learning is an important vehicle for 'identity development' in adolescent youth (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.155). Constructing identity is a lifelong developmental process. But adolescence is the usual time when conscious reflection starts in earnest and the person's future is being designed. There is personal identity [reflecting upon one's talents, weaknesses, etc.,] and social identity [one's relationships to other persons and to a social-historical context]. Service Learning engages adolescents' talents by requiring active extension of self into the world via performance, thus providing concrete feedback for self-reflective clarification. It also brings adolescents into contact with the workings of society and reflection upon society's political, moral and historical dimensions; they can experience themselves as 'makers of history' (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 33) by providing meaning beyond the mere accommodation of their lives in passive compliance to society.

There is some debate as to whether the youth of Generation X and Generation Y are as engaged in the political process as their parents may have been. A report by the United States National Association of Secretaries of State concluded that:

Young people are volunteering in much greater numbers, but this activity is distinctly apolitical. Instead, youth participation often takes the form of social service, with the goal of directly helping other people. In the minds of these young volunteers, there is no political end or motivational goal to their volunteer activities. This more personal, one-to-one volunteerism most often takes place in community institutions like soup kitchens, hospitals and schools. (National Association of Secretaries of State, 1999, p. 22)

However the relationship between, and level of participation in, both community service/Service Learning and political involvement, has remained constant since the late 1970's (Campbell, 2000).

Youth at this stage of their lives are involved in an inner struggle to find authentic and satisfying self-definition. "During adolescence, a young man is challenged to ask himself questions of identity, autonomy, morality, and intimacy" (Reilly, 2004, p. 3). Adolescents are seeking to integrate themselves into society's history. "As youth focus inwardly to find self-sameness, they must also look outward to form relationships with society's traditions" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 22). Youth seek to commit to ideals that are worth caring about, criticizing or renewing. Adolescents need to become part of a larger collective that transcends the self's personal biography. This collective has a history and can be projected into the future. Erikson argues that location of self in a social-historical context is essential to identity development (Erikson, 1968, cited in Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.29). In constructing identity, adolescents look outside themselves for meaning that has historical stability and future promise, and in doing so, adolescents seek to become part of places, institutions, ethnic groups, ideologies and the like, which carry such meaning. Erikson argues that a lasting identity could not be constructed with reference to personal experience alone; identity partakes of relationships with other persons and society.

The period of late adolescence is often marked by "an identity crisis – a period in which young adults cease to adhere blindly to their parents' beliefs and values and, instead, seek out alternative ideological systems through which to view the world and their role in it" (Seider, 2007, p. 11). Young adults seeking "alternative ideological systems" in the context of Service Learning will often build upon a predisposition for service that came from a variety of factors: parents, early service experience, significant mentors and



more. Young adults, in engaging with a world view and their role in it that gives meaning, often respond to academic experiences or frame-changing experiences. Frame-changing experiences, unfolding over days or weeks, lead first to a shift in one's world view and/or self-concept, followed perhaps by an emotional response to this shift (Seider, 2007). Selected readings, social analysis techniques, listening to personal stories from service sites, input on 'isms' (sexism, racism, ageism) and their effects and group discussions leading to participants being able to engage in cause/effect thinking, all served to "alter the frame" through which participants view their community. Late adolescence and early adulthood provide a key window where reframing meaning systems can tap into the desire for "independence from parents, caregivers, and other childhood mentors as they seek out new values, beliefs and causes with which they can identify" (Seider, 2007, p. 7). Service work and social action can be key areas of framing that are seen to be both necessary and worthy.

Youth want to be involved in activities that have a sense of purpose, of meaning. "Youth is a formative period for cultivating a sense of purpose. Identity theorists from Erikson to Loewinger, have marked adolescence as the period in the life-span when people first begin to dedicate themselves to systems of belief that reflect compelling purposes" (Damon, Menon & Cotton Bronk, 2003, p. 120). One area in which this independence and sense of purpose is sought is in the political and moral sphere. Purpose, as interpreted as non-selfish and other-orientated, is salient for youth (Fry, 1998). As youth develop their own identity they engage, in varying ways, with the political and moral world. Political and moral activities during youth have a positive effect on long-range political and moral outlooks (Campbell, 2000). These in turn are passed onto their children. Youth will often report being "part of a historical movement. You were making history. You were in some way utterly selfless and yet found yourself" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.33). An often-expressed rationale for encouraging participation in service in high schools is to stimulate thinking that will establish a basis for students' civic identity (Boyte, 1991; Flacks, 1988; Campbell, 2000). By civic identity we mean a clear sense of political agency, awareness of how to be an effective person in a larger political community, and responsibility to keep that community functioning well. In this process we are not seeking for youth to 'feel good about them selves', but rather invite them to "grasp their political agency and needs to generate a sense of responsibility for society. The experience of service should help individuals incorporate political orientations into

the self, to an extent that politics becomes a habit of the heart” (Boyte, p. 766 cited in Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 69).

As an adolescent develops the capacity for abstract thinking, affective responses towards ideas [justice, liberty, freedom] and the various dimensions of social reality [poverty, capitalism, social issues] unfold, setting the stage for a cognitive leap in the adolescent’s thinking patterns; a change or modification of world view. Service Learning can assist in the development of one’s ‘moral identity’; in establishing one’s capacity as a social agent who has responsibility to secure a better, more just and compassionate society. As students begin to imagine being able to help others and become part of a solution to social problems, they are beginning to integrate morality into their emerging definitions of self. Identity advances when youth can experience themselves doing things well and doing them together, and when the doing serves a transcendent purpose. The work of identity is to form a self that integrates these dimensions when this requires locating the self within respected ideological traditions. This task involves going beyond one’s personal experiences to find transcendent meaning that provides ideal perspectives that can be taken toward the future of society and self. Individuals need to look beyond the boundaries of personal experience for collective realities from which a worthwhile identification can be made (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.23).

Young people need to have a sense that they are ‘making a difference’, making history. We should not look at service as ‘charity and maintaining the status quo’, but see it as being about justice and social change. Service ought to be a means to form citizens who understand the struggle and rewards, energy and exhilaration that make up the actual political process (Reynolds, 1998). Youth are invited into socially meaningful situations; sponsoring institutions seek to nurture youth who will ‘make history’ (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 17). Meaning and purpose are important for adolescents.

Young people who express purpose, in the sense of a dedication to causes great than the self, show high degrees of religiosity, consolidated identities, and deeper sense of meaning than those who do not experience purpose. In addition, the value of purpose to the self continues well beyond the adolescent period – indeed, throughout the rest of the life-span. All of this suggests that purpose plays a positive role in self development as well as a generative one for the person’s contribution to society. (Damon et al, 2003, p. 126)

Service Learning must be undertaken in relationship to some clearly defined ideology. There is a great advantage in directing reflection to ideological alternatives by which youth can connect themselves to history. In doing so, youth discover the power of their

agency, but even more significantly they see their agency coupled with that of previous generations: eg. the Edmund Rice story, Amnesty International, Greenpeace or the Catholic Worker Community. This provides access to the transcendent dimension that is necessary for identity to gain respect and have stable meaning. Identity cannot be founded on personal experience alone - this is ephemeral and subject to emotional fluctuations. By partaking in ideological positions that have historical legitimacy, youth can come to share in collective meanings that ground identity in a truly social way.

Another facet of identity formation through Service Learning is the need for youth to work hard, to commit their energies to a worthy goal. Erikson predicates identity development on a prior sense of industry through which individuals experience themselves as actors capable of meeting goals through performance. Actions that count affect the social domain. Youth believe that society's leaders have actually earned their positions by being the best at what they do; by collective effort. Adolescents need to believe that, in principle, deeds brought individuals to leadership and that youth, through their own deeds, will ascend to their rightful leadership roles in the next generation. Thus social identity, in contrast to personal identity, is based on employing one's agency collaboratively in constructing a better world. Choosing an ideology and working to bring it to fruition flows from industry and moves the identity process forward (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 24).

There would appear to be little doubt that involvement in service assists moral development as well as the development of civic identity. Moral identity unifies the self's basic orientation to society by combining cognitive, emotional, and behavioural elements. Social Justice Courses and programs should encourage the moral process to be 'part of a person's make up' and not some judgment or behaviour process entered into (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 84). Experiences in a service situation can lead to reflections on the moral aspects of homelessness [or whatever the issue addressed is], with the search for transcendence based in elemental acts such as giving and being tolerant. Through involvement in service, students will discover 'the other'; people so foreign to one's experience that consciousness of one's presupposition about life are jostled and thrown open to inspection. The ideology of the sponsoring institution can play a pivotal role in challenging these presuppositions and putting forward alternatives.

## 2.3 PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

The type of experience the participant has [in the Service Learning situation] is very much dependent upon the nature of the Service Learning Program itself. The student who volunteers once to cook meals at an aged care facility will have a significantly different experience to the person who volunteers to work with homeless people once a week over a twelve month period. The effect of the direct, relational and more prolonged experience appears to be significant (Mabry, 1998). Adolescents value being a 'participatory servant', "it is firsthand encounter they want. They do not want it second, third or fourth or even fifth hand. They want it as directly as possible. They want to know it, handle it, interpret it, put it into play in their lives themselves. They want to feel it at work in them" (Taylor, 2000, p. 100 cited in Reilly, 2004, p. 2). The effects of experience of service upon youth are varied:

From the feeling of accomplishment; from knowing they have achieved goals; from the rewards of giving and realizing how much they have received; from knowing they have made a difference in someone's life or in the community; from discovering their special talents; from having fun and learning at the same time; from the tears shed at the end of the service experience; from knowing they are part of their community and will perform service in some form for the rest of their lives. (Krystal, 1999, p. 61 cited in Reilly, 2004, p. 3)

Direct involvement with the homeless led to a high degree of personalisation which in turn led to increased understanding of the homeless and their life situation.

This process of personalisation, allowed students to understand the multiple dimensions of the homeless situation. As students observed and talked with the individuals in a homeless situation, they humanized the individual and related to them on a personal level. This is indicative of the need for service-learning experiences to include direct contact with people in order to engage students in personalisation. (Green, 2006, p. 221)

The more prolonged the service experience and the more relational it is, the more effective it appears to be. Ongoing service experiences offer students the opportunity to see benefits of their service, to establish personal relationships, and to provide more assistance for an organization (Reynolds, 1998, p. 117). A real danger exists if students exit a service program either during the 'shock' or 'normalisation' stages, as the participant experience needs time for sense to be made of the dissonance and newly found awareness. Following normalisation, service participants, through guided reflection upon their experience, will make cognitive connections to class content and possible world view changes as they engage with what they have experienced (Green, 2006, p. 58).

At times participants question the value of Service Learning (Seider, 2007). Invariably this is when the service experience is brief, such as a one day experience, and there is a “lack of personal interaction between students and those being served in many projects....It is not surprising that the students who had ongoing service experiences expressed more concrete examples of how they helped their community because they saw progression in their work and in their relationships with the community” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 120).

Adolescent males need to do, to be involved in a practical, hands on way; their brains need more physical activity and physical play than do females at the same period of development (Gurian, 1998, p. 99). “Adolescence is the time for intensive service training because that is when a boy’s testosterone-based energy level is rising and needs channels, and his cognitive abilities are expanding exponentially and need direction” (Gurian, 1998, p. 52). Adolescence is the last ‘best’ opportunity for the discovery of self and self as a man, as youth begin to adopt patterns of thought and behaviour that will accompany them for years to come. In this process service can be a powerful means of self-revelation and self-awareness. This cognitive development is revealed in a movement from a focus on charitable activities to concerns for social justice.

With their first exposure to poverty, students may tend to see the issues in terms of individual feelings or misfortunes. With more experience, information, and thought, some begin to see the complexity of factors surrounding these problems. Where programs engage students in important work in the community and provide continuous opportunities for reflection, [service] may be a catalyst for a dramatic redirection of their lives. (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 18)

Memorable service experiences of participants from privileged private schools were the focus of Reynolds’ study. Reynolds studied two elite private schools and their Service Learning Programs. One school [Elite Academy] had an excellent academic reputation and a wide extra-curricular program with “performing arts and social service club activities more central to the culture of the school than the athletics program” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 36). This school gained a reputation in its community for encouraging service through its curriculum and extracurricular programs. The second school, Christian Academy, was a interdenominational Christian school which offered a traditional college preparatory curriculum with an emphasis upon evangelical Christian principles. Elite Academy offered voluntary and mandatory service opportunities while Christian Academy sponsored only voluntary service projects. In both instances the Service

Learning Programs included a wide variety of activities from one off collections of canned food for poor families, to regular tutoring of disadvantaged youth through an assortment of clubs, associations and volunteer groups.

Reilly's (2004) study explored and described the effects of service on male adolescent development in the context of a Catholic school culture. Reilly looked for common themes, categories, typologies or concepts concerning service from among the interviews and observations of the male adolescents at a Catholic high school as well as some of its recent graduates. In short, Reilly listened to their stories. Again, like Reynolds' study the participants were involved in a variety of activities from one off events to week long programs. With regard to participant experience of Service Learning, seven themes emerged as common voices:

- Family influence and support of service
- Feeling called to service
- Service as an eye-opening experience
- Service and identity formation
- Service and growth into commitment
- Service and the value of community
- Passion V's ambition or Vocation V's occupation (Reilly, 2004, p. 70).

Many participants were motivated to involve themselves in Service Learning because of the example set at home. Often their parents had been involved with service in some form; service was valued, spoken about favourably and encouraged (Beckman & Trozzolo, 2002; Reilly, 2004; Reynolds, 1998; Seider, 2007). For some, families were credited with teaching them responsibility to the community through their service (Reynolds, 1998, p. 51). Participants appear to have a common sense of feeling of being called to do service. Hearing stories of former participants, hearing stories from the service site, and being caught up in a school culture that valued service, all led participants to experience a sense of being called, to be involved (Reynolds, 1998, p. 83). In several instances the sense of call was linked to an inner questioning or searching as to what it means to be human, moral and just (Reilly, 2004, p. 78). Sometimes this sense was expressed quite strongly as something that participants just 'had to do'. "The notion of the experience of service being something that the young men 'had to do' was a common element as well. As much as they felt drawn to it, the feeling was that it was something they could not escape. It was almost if it were compulsory – not from outside them, but from within" (Reilly, 2004, p, 79).

One theme that surfaced often for participants was that of 'eye-opening'. "Over and over, in one way or another, they came back to this phrase. These two words came to encompass a new awareness of the significance of service to the individual himself, an inner consciousness, a developing understanding of global issues and concerns outside of himself, but now seen as connected to him" (Reilly, 2004, p. 79). For participants, their experiences seemed to open their eyes and make them grow in self awareness and in a realisation of the importance of connection and a sense of direction; they began to see things differently, from a new point of view (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000; Seider, 2007).

This growing self awareness was another common experience participants seemed to share (Reynolds, 1998, p. 25). Participants seemed to develop awareness of change taking place within them; they were maturing and were growing in their sense of responsibility to do their part in changing the world. Service experiences often broaden the participant's perspective, give the opportunity to interact, serve and appreciate their diverse world. "Students learn about diversity and themselves, maybe what their prejudices and ignorance are" (Reynolds, 1998, p. 73). Each participant appeared to have a strong sense of the self and that this awareness was intimately linked to their service experience.

I saw this trip [service program] as important for me to develop as a person. I saw it as helping to form my identity as a person. I realized that life is more than just looking out for myself, but looking for a sense of fulfilment. This sense of fulfilment can only be discovered by helping others. I can't fulfil myself. I need others for this, which is exactly the opposite of what modern society tells us. It says, 'focus on me!' that leads to self-destruction, not to fulfilment or happiness. (Reilly, 2004, p. 87)

Participants often experienced Service Learning as a great opportunity to 'make a difference'; a small step towards improving the lives of others. This sense of agency, sense of accomplishment, helped the participants realise "that we can make a difference in the lives of others just by donating a little bit of ourselves to others" (Reynolds, 1998, p. 81). For many Elite and Christian Academy students and alumni, service changed them personally and aroused their emotions. Service experiences helped participants find shared solutions to their own problems, a more mature perspective on issues, an appreciation of their own life situation, an increased self-esteem and growth in their awareness of what they could contribute to the life of others (Reynolds, 1998, p. 82).

Participants in Service Learning Programs constantly reflect that “they learned more or much more than they did in their regular classes” (Conrad & Hedin, 1989, p. 26), value being in new roles, in new relationships, having their worlds broadened, valued new knowledge, experiences and understandings that changed the way they looked at their own lives, and the new way of knowing and new processes of thinking associated with this (Conrad & Hedin, 1989, p. 27).

Adolescence can be a time a great fluctuation. At times, adolescents vacillate in deciding what is important and what they value. However, young men who are very involved in Service Learning opportunities appear to have a growing willingness and ability to make more lasting commitments, especially as regards looking to the future.

In high school, all of the things I was doing were one-time things: National Honor Society, Habitat trip, Tomorrow’s Children Fund, and our Youth Group. I started to realize that service was not just benefiting others, but me as well. I got a kind of spiritual energy from it. All these things I was doing, there was not a lot of consistent stuff. It was in college that I found the consistency. (Reilly, 2004, p. 88)

Youth love to be involved in activities that have and or give meaning and love to do this with other youth; youth love to form community. For each of the participants in Reilly’s study “forming community was an integral and valuable dimension of their service experience” (Reilly, 2004, p. 93). A key element in this formation of community was the development of relationship with the recipients, the local people involved in the Service Learning projects, as well as with their peers in the Service Learning teams. Through their Service Learning experience the participants “grew closer together because of their common experience and common desire to help people out” (Reilly, 2004, p. 94).

Another key element to the formation of a sense of community was the reciprocal nature of service, the give and take of being part of a community: “it’s more of a reciprocal exchange; the person in need has something to offer as well” (Reilly, 2004, p. 94). For some, the reciprocal nature of service was a surprise to them, a new attitude or perspective. “Carol probably forgot me soon after she left the Special Olympics, but I will never forget her. She helped me more than I helped her. I left that day with a whole new attitude towards how to treat people. I really believe that my experiences with Carol at the Special Olympics made me a better person” (Reynolds, 1998, p. 68). For others, the reciprocal nature of the Service Learning relationship took time; time for the relationship



to build. As participants really get to 'know' the recipients they see them differently, see their beauty and dignity.

As the morning came to an end I began to deeply ponder the reason for my parents telling me to respect my elders. Honestly, I thought, I doubt if I can respect these people that wear diapers, drool gallons of saliva a day, speak totally incoherently and are totally dependent on a youth. Finally, the first week passed. I became very attached to the residents. I think those insecurities you feel when you start working with elderly people disappear when you begin to really love them. (Conrad & Hedin, 1989, p. 27)

It is often difficult to develop a truly reciprocal spirit to the service relationship in a short period of time. Research is showing that direct, sustained contact with the clients [recipients] in Service Learning situations leads to more robust outcomes (Billig, 2000, p. 662). When Service Learning meets an authentic community need and includes meaningful planning, service, reflection, and celebration, it typically succeeds in engaging students in the learning task. A high degree of direct contact with the service recipient and high-quality reflection are key to truly engaging students (Billig, 2000, p. 662).

Through their experience of community, Service Learning participants grew in their notion of one human family, the worth of each member, a sense of connection with others, a deep sense of mutual support and a previously unknown awareness of the impact each and every individual can have on others. "It was awesome connecting with others in such a noble effort" (Reilly, 2004, p. 124). As a result of their experience of Service Learning, the participants recognized the importance of connecting with others in community, a desire to be a contributing member of a community and the need to be nurtured by the experience of being part of a community. This interdependence was a theme that many from Elite and Christian Academies reflected upon; "through service, students create an atmosphere of respect for others and accept the realization of human beings' dependence upon one another" (Reynolds, 1998, p. 67). For students and alumni alike at Elite and Christian Academies their experiences in service situations "taught them the dependence of humans upon one another and showed them how community is a way of life. They experienced the levels of need and the diversity of people and cultures within their community" (Reynolds, 1998, p. 66).

The participants in several of the studies examined here were from private schools with selective enrolments. Most of these schools espoused a 'religious ethos'. Hence it is noteworthy that a tension was identified between ambition, career and occupation on

one hand, and passion and a sense of vocation on the other. There was almost a “universally expressed theme from the participants of a need to make a difference in the world and not simply to make money and have a job” (Reilly, 2004, p. 97); each felt that there was more both to life and to what they wanted from life (Reynolds, 1998, p. 26). While participants certainly appreciated all that they had and had been given, they also became more aware of their potential for selfishness. “You can get a degree so you can make money and buy a new car. It [money] takes over. It almost overwhelms you. With this attitude you don’t have to look out for others. It’s all about me. But service says something different. It reminds you making someone smile is more important than making money” (Reilly, 2004, p. 98). The experience of service helped give the participants a sense of self, a sense of purpose and direction in life. This sense of purpose was important. As they contemplated careers, several participants had an increased awareness of needing to help people in some way: “I want what I do to matter” (Reilly, 2004, p. 100). Some participants saw their experiences as ‘life changing’, others ‘enlightening and directive’, but all of them “wanted to become better, not better than others, but better for others” (Reilly, 2004, p. 130).

In many ways it is difficult to compare Yates and Youniss’ (1997) study of Catholic High School youth from Washington DC and their experience of service with Reilly and Reynolds’ reflections. The Washington Service Learning experience was relational, regular and deeply integrated into the curriculum and the focus of prolonged reflection and sharing. Reilly’s study did require participants to have spent time in an extended service opportunity. While reflecting upon the Habitat for Humanity project in Appalachia he observed, “It is the most effective experience because it is a profound immersion for them. It can have a sense of accomplishment and a sense of awakening for them, which smaller projects lack; it is very powerful” (Reilly, 2004, p. 106). While Reilly’s study addressed the impact of such service upon participants, Pracht examined the cognitive stages experienced by students in such programs.

To examine the participant students’ cognitive processes in Service Learning, Pracht’s research looked at the experience of students in a College level Social Problems course. Students in this course participated in a twenty hour Service Learning experience with homeless people. Over the course of the program most students progressed through six stages of cognitive development: shock, guilt, normalization, cultural sensitivity,

engagement and empowerment, with varying levels of feeling response to these stages depending upon ethnicity, socio-economic standing, length of time volunteering and prior program experience of Service Learning (Pracht, 2007).

Youniss and Yates' study centred on St. Francis School a Catholic High School with a predominately black American population. The Service Learning Program operated out of a Junior High school Social Justice Unit and involved working in a soup kitchen with homeless people. Initially, students involved in this program reflected upon their preconceptions of homelessness and then almost immediately noted "a shift in perceptions after making their first visit. As time went on students' perceptions became, on the one hand, more realistic and, on the other hand, more conceptually textured as they met and interacted with particular homeless individuals" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 51). The reflections of the participants resulted in many of them exploring homelessness as a social problem and their own responsibility towards it. Others reflected on the role of the media, the conditions behind homelessness and apparent contradictions [such as the well dressed homeless or those with mobile phones].

As the year progressed and participants in the Washington study had visited the soup kitchen several times and engaged in reflection, more sophisticated levels of social analysis began to take place. In turn, this led students to reflect upon their own involvement in homelessness: did they have a responsibility to do something about it? Initial visits to the soup kitchen resulted in many experiences that did not back up their expectations and stereotypes. "Students expected them to be 'dirty', 'smelly', 'mean spirited', 'unappreciative', 'grumpy', and 'disagreeable'. While some of the diners satisfied these anticipations, others did not" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 52). In time the participants experienced the shift to seeing the homeless as "ordinary people in difficult straits" or as one student said, "They seemed like everyday people. They just had problems" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 53). By their second or third visit participants felt more at ease with the homeless, and their descriptions became more realistic and particular, often as the result of hearing them share their story. In time participants began to know the names of some of the regulars, and quickly the labels began to disappear as they "heard simple stories that showed that the homeless could be caring people who, despite their problems, were concerned about students' well-being" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 55).

The in-class discussion groups that followed visits to the soup kitchen were instrumental, along with the journaling, in leading students to deeper reflections on the causes of homelessness. Issues of laziness, drug abuse, unemployment, violence, depression and mental illness, welfare and personal responsibility were canvassed and led participants to canvas strategies to solve problems, consider specific political action and develop moral stands. “They [the participants] were willing to make an individual choice that involved diagnosing the problem and assigning responsibility to themselves to be part of the solution” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 59).

There can be no doubt that participants in this regular, relational, prolonged and reflective Service Learning situation were emotionally engaged. Participants often identified experiencing sadness, anger or personal fulfilment. As the study progressed, more and more participants reported reflecting at a higher level about their experiences in their journaling and class discussions (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 65). Participant engagement, both at the cognitive and emotional level, led to an exploration of the transcendent meaning of the soup-kitchen experience. “Research shows that the potential of service to meet important educational goals is maximized when challenging experiences are combined with systematic reflection such as can be provided when service is part of the curriculum” (Conrad & Hedin, 1989, p. 30).

**The literature concerning the experience participants have in Service Learning Programs generated the following Research Questions:**

**Research Question 1:       What features of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College impact on participant experience?**

**Research Question 2:       What changes are there in the meanings participants give to their experiences in the Service Learning Program over time?**

## **2.4                   SERVICE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING**

### **2.4.1               Service Learning: Ideology and Community**

It is important for the ‘sponsoring institution’ that any Service Learning Program operates out of to have a strong ideology and ethos to help provide the context for core identity

development in adolescents. For Erikson, 'Ideology and ethos' meant "a universal psychological need for a system of ideas that provides a convincing world image" (Erikson, 1968, cited in Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 23). Sources of ideology can be economic theory, religion, political beliefs etc. Ideology provides the social glue that allows identity to transcend individuality and become synthesized within a collective. Identity and ideology are complementary; ideology precedes identity in giving youth a means for organizing experience. Youth want to share ideals with others so that they can join in historical realities from which these ideals sprang. By identifying with ideologies, youth become distinguished as members of particular groups, and this gives them ego-strength they could not acquire on their own, no matter how authentic these isolated individuals may be. When students participate in a program that comes out of a clear ideology that invites them to reflect on their experiences in the context of that ideology, there is movement in moral and political identity (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 36). This is in keeping with the kind of ideology that Erikson believes the younger generation needs in order to move ahead in the identity process. Youth need to have ideals that transcend themselves and promise to link an incomplete but hopeful past with an attainable and better future. In Youniss and Yates' study the students studied a course framed in a clear ideology that combined liberal politics with Christian activism.

Often in Catholic schools this identity development is focused within the context of the 'mission' of the Catholic school and thus its ethos (Treston, 2001). "For a High school to be effective it must have a clear and vital mission; students, teachers, administrators and parents at the institution should have a shared vision of what, together, they are trying to accomplish" (Casey, 2002, p. 11); the charism should give a sense of direction and meaning to a school. In this development of identity within the context of ethos and charism, religion plays a significant role.

Religion has a key role to play in the formation of identity. Religion provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a community, a sense of identity as an integral part of a broader collectivity of individuals who share similar beliefs and who have, to some extent, a common history and a collective fate. (Youniss, Yates & McLellan, 1999, p. 243)

This sense of community in schools has a high correlation to the school's effectiveness. Schools embedded in functional communities, communities in which people interact regularly, produce students rich in social capital which fosters superior academic performance (Campbell, 2000, p. 642). There is a second kind of community as well which if present constitutes social capital for the young. This is "the community of

parents, that is, adults who know not only their own child, but know each other, know each others' children. Such a community is a strong resource for the school, and a strong resource for the students" (Coleman, 1988, p. 15).

Many Catholic schools in the United States are considered to be rich in Social Capital resulting in higher rates of volunteering among their student populations (O'Keefe, 2001). The 1996 National Household Education Survey identified that 75% of ninth through to twelfth grade students in Catholic schools were engaged in voluntary service, compared to 48% of students from public schools. This greater participation in service leading to a norm of generalized reciprocity is seen to be not so much a result of a religious emphasis in the school, as the thick networks of social connectedness among students and students and adults within their communities (Campbell, 2000; O'Keefe, 2001).

In 'Catholic Schools and the Common Good', Bryk, Lee and Holland build upon this sense of the importance of the school as a community of meaning. Their study named the four key elements of an effective school: delimited technical core, communal organization, decentralized governance and an inspirational ideology (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 297). While there can be little doubt that 'ethos' or charism or culture plays an important role in identity development and effectiveness in schools, there is still doubt whether there is any strong linkage to religion or religious faith in the context of the Catholic school as it is experienced today (Devlin, 1998; Freund, 2001).

#### **2.4.2 Service Learning; Religion, Churches and Schools**

The early years of the Twentieth Century saw a significant move away from any link between 'Religion' and 'identity development'. Hall (Adolescence, 1904, p. 301, cited in Youniss et al, 1999, p. 243) devoted an entire chapter to adolescent religious conversion which he believed was "natural, normal, universal and necessary", but things quickly changed as religion began to be viewed as an anachronism that stood in the way of science and a rational approach to living. In recent years religion has made a significant comeback with research avoiding simplistic, narrow definitions of both religion and spirituality; moving beyond seeing religiosity and spirituality primarily as social controls for problem or deviant behaviours (Benson, 2004). Significantly one gap in the literature

and research is any examination of the dynamics and influence of the social institutions that much 'religious and spiritual' development occurs in; religious schools (Benson, 2004, p. 48).

For many American and Australian youth, religion is an important facet of their identity development. Interviews with high school students identified churches and schools as the most common means that encouraged involvement in service with its flow on effect upon identity development (Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007, p. 296). Empirical research showed that: 1. Youth are heavily involved in volunteer service. 2. Many youth view religion as important, and those who do so are more likely to undertake service than youth who do not believe that religion is important in their lives. 3. Involvement in church-sponsored service makes it more likely that youth will adopt the religious rationale in which service is couched. 4. Youth who do church-sponsored service are neither service 'nerds' nor single-issue tunnel-visioned adolescents (Youniss et al., 1999, p. 244). Studies of College age students who volunteered for extensive [eight week] service programs over the summer holidays showed that religion seemed to exert a stronger influence in the lives of those volunteers, compared to the normal College population. For these same students religion provided more day-to-day guidance; there was a strong link back to High school service; parents exerted a more dominant influence, and their parents were nearly three times more likely to be 'very active' in community service (Beckman & Trozzolo, 2002).

Indeed, contemporary youth, especially American youth who take religion seriously, are vibrantly engaged in their schooling, in the betterment of communities, and the development of identities which presage healthy lives (Beckman & Trozzolo, 2002). A more recent study compared youth at the beginning of their sophomore year to the end of their senior year on a Low to High scale identifying religious development, civic integration, participation in extracurricular activities/participation in volunteer service and risk taking behaviours (Kerestes, Youniss & Metz, 2004). The survey instrument allowed for quite a wide-ranging view of what could be regarded as 'religious', recognising both vertical [personal prayer, piety, other-worldly dimensions] and horizontal [this-worldly, socially oriented, social justice, helping others] beliefs. The study found that while attendance at religious services significantly decreased, the importance of religion in their lives remained high. Adolescents for whom religion is highly salient are less likely to

be involved with risk-taking behaviours. Denominational factors did not appear to be of any significance, supporting the view that “an individual does not have to be formally identified with a particular denomination to be highly religious or spiritual” (Kerestes et al., 2004, p.44).

The study found that the high-high group [those for whom religious matters were significant in their younger years and again in Senior], who started with and maintained a high religious perspective, showed strong proclivity for participating in extracurricular activities and civic engagement, and were the least likely to engage in alcohol or marijuana use. This finding is noteworthy as it would suggest that “the avoidance of risk-taking is not so much driven by disengagement from the youth culture as by engagement in the more positive aspects of the youth culture and of the larger society” (Kerestes et al., 2004, p.44). The data showed that religion and spirituality play a significant role in the lives of adolescents. Religion provides a medium for integrating youth into church, civic, and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, it provides a network of positive relationships that expose youth to pro-social attitudes and behaviours while discouraging risk-taking behaviours. For youth who are trying to make sense of a potentially disordered and confusing world, religion and spirituality provide a possible framework for meaning among others such as political philosophies, ethnic traditions, and cultural symbols. Religious youth tend to be well-integrated members of their community (Kerestes et al., 2004, p. 45). Religion and spirituality are significant factors in the development of adolescent identity, help promote personal meaning and give an orientation toward pro-social concerns (Furrow, King & White, 2004, p.17).

Apart from the parent/child relationship, most researchers have concentrated on personality, emotions and stages in the religious development of the individual and virtually ignored the social context of this development (Regnerus, Smith, B., & Smith, C., 2004). As religion is a social phenomenon, it is important to examine the role of families, friendships, church communities and schools in the religious development of youth. One key school of thought is that of channelling, where parents are thought to socialize their children religiously by channelling them into groups, settings, and experiences [such as friendships and schools] that reinforce the parents’ efforts at religious socialization (Himmelfarb, 1980; Martin et al., 2003). Others (King & Mueller, cited in Regnerus et al., 2004, p. 29) look at spiritual modelling where youth are thought



to model the religious behaviour of respected others, often parents or mentors. In terms of church attendance, parental influence is far stronger than that of peers or school, but when one addresses spirituality school and peer factors became stronger; “social relationships matter for the development of religiosity in adolescence” (Regnerus, et al., 2004, p. 34).

Much Service Learning is provided or sponsored by or takes place in Church organizations (Mason et al., 2007, p. 294). In the case of schools, when churches deliver or endorse a service, they give it interpretative value or meaning.

A Church that sponsors a soup kitchen is apt to justify that service in religious-moral terms, such as a Biblical reference to feed the hungry or a principle of social justice and equitable distribution of wealth. It would not be surprising that volunteers who partake in service delivery would also reflect on these justifications as potential meanings for their actions. These established meanings, with their historical richness and picturing of an ideal future, may readily be seen as nourishment for youths’ identity development. Insofar as youth seek meaning for their lives which is transcendent, formal justifications are occasions for promoting the development of youth’s relationship towards society as it is and could be. (Youniss et al., 1999, p.244)

Many studies show the frequency with which American youth engage in community service. School and church were the two most frequent means of getting involved in service and 66% of students who attended church-affiliated schools undertook service compared to 47% of public school students (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1997; Nolin et al, 1997 cited in Youniss et al., 1999, p. 246). Students at church schools were much more likely than those in public schools to serve regularly. The ‘Monitoring the Future Survey’, (1993) found that the more important religion was in the lives of high school seniors, the more likely that they had been involved in service. Some 74% of students who said that religion was important to them were involved in service, while only about 25% of their non-religion peers were (Bachman et al, 1993; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Oesterle et al, 1998, cited in Youniss et al., 1999, p. 246). Much research linking reflection with quality Service Learning Programs, appears to ignore any link with spiritual reflection (Eyler, Giles & Schmiede, 1996; Goldsmith, 1995). In contrast there appears to be a strong link between spirituality and long term involvement in public service for adults (Damon & Colby, 1992; Daloz, Keen, Keen & Parks, 1996; Seider, 2005). This has led some Service Learning practitioners to reflect that:

Ignoring the connection between service-learning and spirituality cripples the potential of the service-learning movement to foster long-term commitments to public service. Combining a strong spiritual element with service-learning reflection has the capacity to explicitly help students in several ways: the opportunity to explore questions of spiritual meaning connected with service, embrace new perspective and perhaps cultivate a deeper sense of spirituality. (Koth, 2003, p.6)

This connection between spirituality and service is further explored by Koth when he suggests that a “repeated cycle of spiritual reflection and service involvement can lead students to stronger long term commitments to service where students are steered towards intentionally examining the deeper meaning of their experiences and their lives” (Koth, 2003, p. 6).

Religious organizations that sponsor service present rationales for service that are grounded in religious belief systems (Youniss et al., 1999, p. 247). There are parallels in the Civil Rights movement in the American South during the 1950s and 1960s. This movement, aimed at political and cultural change, was based on religious ideology that justified demonstrations, protests, sit-ins, marches and political lobbying. Participants in the Civil Rights movement were exposed to a rationale [individual freedom, dignity and contesting of social injustices] that they could employ in order to make sense of their life experiences; thus, political action offered access to religious traditions which gave behaviour transcendent meaning. Parallels in School Service Learning Programs are important. The research of Youniss and Yates (1996, 1997) looked at service within the context of a high school religion course on Social Justice. The course was organized around reflections on religious teachings on social justice, Christian duty, seeing God in the lives of the poor and homeless, Scripture, judging others, exposure to key historical events and the lives of people such as Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Dorothy Day. Students were told that they too had a responsibility to promote social justice by helping others who were in need, and to become aware of the conditions that produced injustices in our society. The students were given the opportunity to experience themselves as actors on behalf of justice by their work in a soup kitchen. “The references to the religious foundation of the course allowed the students to frame their actions within a meaning system with historical depth that commanded their serious consideration” (Youniss et al., 1999, p. 248).

Youth in this context, without even knowing it, are immediately engaged in the process of forming identity. The meaning systems mentioned above are key to this process. A second study observed 300 suburban high school students who volunteered to participate at work camps, organized through Catholic parishes and schools in Washington DC, rehabilitating the homes of poor rural citizens. Reflective essays submitted by the students at the end of the period talked about the value of “finding God

in the faces of the poor, fulfilment of one's Christian duty of helping the needy, the issue of justice in the disparity between their own wealth and the destitution of the people they served" (Youniss et al., 1999, p. 240). Put simply, the structure in which the students performed service became a means for interpreting their experience and giving it religious significance.

Adolescents are far more engaged with spirituality and religion than may be generally believed. "In adolescence, many youth turn toward religion and greater civic involvement and yet many others who turn away from religion join either gangs or hate groups, or become anti-social in other ways. Adolescence is an age-period of intense ideological hunger, a striving for meaning and purpose, and desire for relationship and connectedness" (Boyatzis & King, 2004, p.2). During adolescence youth move beyond concrete childhood impressions of religion to reflect on issues and concepts that are embedded in existential and transcendental realms (Markstrom, 1999, p. 205).

By late adolescence, individuals are beginning to take more responsibility for their own commitments, beliefs and attitudes as they struggle for identity. In terms of Fowler's 'Stages of Faith' many youth are moving from stage 3, where one's identity and worth, one's sense of self, is heavily keyed to the approval and affirmation of significant others, relationships and roles, to stage 4, a time of personal ownership of 'their' faith (Fowler, 1995). Reflection upon life experience in the context of a Service Learning situation could be one important vehicle for this movement.

## **2.5 ETHOS AND THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

### **2.5.1 Ethos and Australian Catholic Schools**

Many of the program features central to the above studies would be linked to the particular character of the sponsoring institution. The term 'ethos' or 'charism' is frequently used within the Catholic community and refers to a unique 'spirit' or 'character' that a particular community has (Youniss, Convey & McLellan, 2000, p. 39). Usually the term 'charism' is assigned to a particular Religious Order or its founder. The term 'ethos' is more widely used in educational circles. "Catholic schools have a particular ethos, an element that gives them a specific identity, that is said to provide an educational

environment that is distinct and unique” (Freund, 2001, p. 1), while others call ethos the “special character or spirit of the school” (O’Donnell, 1986, p. 6). This ‘special character’ is very important because it would seem to be the defining factor in school climate which in turn creates difference; difference both in the everyday reality of school life and in the macro social world of markets and school choice. It is this difference created by the ethos of Catholic schools which provides a form of social capital and opportunities for the acquisition of positional goods (Hirsch, 1976) and self goods, the purchase of education in order to fashion identity and a sense of self (Freund, 2001).

At present there is much debate as to whether Australian Catholic schools are ‘private schools with connotations of prestige and material or social advantage’ or whether they are ‘independent religious schools’ (Anderson, 1988; Hallinan, 2000). Are they “elite schools reproducing the ruling strata of society, socializing the young in values of traditional leadership and conservative citizenship, or community schools serving the children of a particular locality or parish – often in places of socio-cultural deprivation” (Anderson, 1992, p. 218)? Across this wide spectrum, all Catholic schools would still call themselves just that, ‘Catholic’ in terms of ethos and culture.

Australian Catholicism had a particular identity that was essentially poor, working class and Irish (O’Farrell, 1992), tribal (McLaughlin, 2000), a ‘ghetto’ and subculture whose membership was loyal to the group (Campion, 1982). The Catholic school was central to the maintenance of this identity. Perhaps the role of the Catholic school has not changed in that it still helps to maintain the identity of the group while the identity has moved on. The Pre-Vatican II ethos of Catholic schools was essentially derived from the traditions and ethos of the various religious orders that ran the schools. These traditions were not just religious, but included a particular culture and pedagogy that aimed at the social mobility and social advancement of Catholics.

The Twentieth Century witnessed the ‘arrival of the Australian Catholic community’ into the middle class (Dixon, 1996; O’Farrell, 1992). With this arrival and the subsequent loss of old religious certainties, Australian Catholics were less concerned with religious participation and observance (Collins, 1991) and now saw themselves as ‘Cultural Catholics’; they maintain an understanding of themselves as Catholic but are perhaps alienated from various church teachings on contraception, divorce or homosexuality and

are not involved in Catholic practice. Despite very few Catholics attending Church regularly, Catholics still want their children to be educated in Catholic schools just as they were, and for many the only Church institution they have contact with is the Catholic school (McLaughlin, 2005). All of this leads some to pose the question; Just how 'Catholic' are Catholic schools since the old religious absolutes that were an essential part of Australian Catholic schools when they were the schools for a beleaguered ethnic and religious sub group are gone (Hurley, 1997)? Catholic Schools need to engage with issues of identity in the early years of the Twenty-first Century.

Some would suggest that the religious certainty, strict religious participation and a sense of separation from the rest of Australian society (Freund, 2001, p. 3) has given way to a focus on 'ethos'. Initially much of the focus on ethos was linked to the rapidly decreasing number of Religious in the schools, and of ways to maintain some sort of link with the founding 'charism' (Devlin, 1998; Youniss, Convey & McLellan, 2000). Even the Vatican document, 'The Catholic School' called for a new school environment where schools would act as 'the leaven of the community', actively engaged with the community and should "teach the message of hope, build community, and serve all mankind so that above all, schools should be instruments of social justice" (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 53). The vision statement put out by the National Commission of Catholic Education (2001) used the metaphor of the journey with an emphasis on community, the search for truth and social needs as key to the mission of the Catholic school. Thus Catholic ethos is not only seen in terms of spirituality [the search for meaning], but is a form of social capital that gives Catholic schools a different spirit/climate to public and even non-Catholic private schools.

Australian studies have followed on from the work of Coleman and Hoffer (1988) arguing that Catholic ethos and pastoral care provide a form of social capital. In New South Wales, Catholic students in the Higher School Certificate performed better than their socio-economic background would have indicated (Mok & Flynn, 1998). Both students and parents in this study claimed that it was the supportive milieu and the emphasis on pastoral care, as well as the perceived quality of school life, that were important factors in this success. Longitudinal studies of Australian Catholic schools between 1972 and 1993 found that parents chose Catholic schools because of this emphasis on community and pastoral care (Flynn, 1993). Like the parents in the Coleman and Hoffer study in the

United States, these Australian parents saw Catholic ethos as a way of acquiring positional and self-goods for their children, despite obvious declines in the religious dimension of the schools. Ninety-three percent of parents named academic achievement as key to their choice of school while the importance of values in education, pastoral care and interactions between the school and students were all of greater importance than 'catholicity' (Canavan, 1995; Quillian & Ryan, 1994, Sultmann, 2003). Often the Catholic school's ethos equates, at least in parental eyes, to a culture of learning that along with the emphasis on pastoral care, the inculcation of social norms and values, a sense of community, discipline and behaviour, meant that the students would acquire the social and academic skills necessary to succeed in life (Van Eyk, 2002).

Australian Catholic schools have, in general, become private schools providing a particular form of social capital with connotations of prestige and material advantage that is quite marketable. Like private schools in the United States they have become part of a process whereby as private schools, they are presented as the 'ideal' (Chubb & Moe, 1990). There is much to suggest that Catholic schools now fit into a situation of parentocracy (Brown, 1990), where a child's education is increasingly dependent on the wealth and wishes of the parents (Freund, 2001). The changing parent population "wants the Catholic school to welcome a grammar-type school culture and that the financial tail could well wag the Catholic dog up the semi-elitist path" (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 6).

Some would suggest that the failure of Catholic schools to really address and discuss this tension between the growth of semi-elitism and the core business of Catholic schooling, and the fact that they prefer to talk about something as nebulous as 'ethos' is part of the current Catholic cultural cringe (Hurley, 1997). "We now talk about culture outcomes, environment, climate, vision and ethos. Many of these terms are translated from an industry or management model and perhaps we now see Catholic education as an industry" (Hurley, 1997, p.6). The Catholic cultural identity and religiosity of the past that many sought in Catholic education, has now given way to a steady stream of parents wanting a 'religious atmosphere' and ethos where ethos equates to attitudes to discipline, academic success and achievement, spirit and a sense of community all of which give a certain warmth to the place (Hurley, 1997, p.6) and are the attributes, the hallmarks of any good school (Freund, 2001). McLaughlin asks, "Are Catholic schools

the only ones who claim to offer a holistic education? Are Catholic schools the only ones who say they nurture a caring environment? Are Catholic schools the only ones who are up front about the importance of values” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 5)? Perhaps Catholic schools have been seduced by the secular culture and succeeded within it (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 23), and entrepreneurship, enterprise and pecuniary interests that characterize many up-market Catholic schools are creating an upwardly mobile Catholic middle class that is undistinguishable from the rest of society (Pring, 1996, p. 69).

In her 2001 study Freund examined ‘Blessed Family’ Catholic school in Western Sydney. The parents at Blessed Family, like so many others choosing Catholic schools “were making their school choice around the acquisition of positional and self goods, since these are what Catholic schools, through Catholic ethos and pastoral care, are seen to provide. Positional goods in education provide students with relative advantage in the competition for jobs, income, social standing and prestige” (Freund, 2001, p. 6). Another word for positional goods could be ‘status goods’ as parents and past students gain social status when they enrol their children or are alumni of certain schools. In describing parental choice for the type of Catholic education offered at Blessed Family, Freund’s interviews with parents, teachers and administrators came up with terms such as conscious respectability, social aspiration, protecting our children and their future, not wanting to be left behind, and frequent reference to ‘the others’: Catholic and Public schools not as ‘good’ as Blessed Family. The parents of Blessed Family, many describing themselves as cultural Catholics, were making a market choice for self goods and making this choice within a community with particular values and traditions and ‘ethos’; an ethos that separates Catholic schools from other private schools within the market. Like so many within the wider ‘Catholic community’, the parents of Blessed Family were quite happy for their child to have five hours of religious instruction each week, most have had their children baptized [ensuring their place within the cultural traditions of the Catholic Church], and see their commitment to Catholicism as a form of social capital rather than religious faith. Freund quotes one teacher as saying, “they are as Catholic as they need to be to get the kid in here” (Freund, 2001, p. 9)!

In Freund’s work there are many overtones of Coleman’s study of American Catholic schools. Like Coleman, Freund identifies the importance of community for parents and for the ‘success of schools’. Blessed Family, as part of a bigger Catholic community

incorporating a parish centre, child care centre, care and concern outreach offers a sense of community and a sense of belonging. Parents were keen to identify that they wanted a school that had 'a nice atmosphere'. "Parents wanted to ensure that their children would be cared for and respected and that the school had a 'nice feeling', would prepare them for life and teach them values" (Freund, 2001, p. 8). Ultimately Blessed Family is a school community that has created a sense of difference; a difference that when seen in the context of social capital gave it market value. Thus it becomes a place of choice.

This discussion brings a sharp focus to the question about Catholic school identity. "How do we define an authentically Catholic school these days? What is it? What constitutes the specifically Catholic identity of a school" (Hurley, 1997, p.6)? There appears to be great divergence as to who the 'we' are. Who are the 'we' and 'our' when we speak about the community, the school, the school system and what 'we' want? Hurley appears to be articulating what could be called the 'Catholic plus' approach; that Catholic schools should be 'good' schools in terms of warm climate, pastoral care etc., but go further into the world of "spiritual values in a school that will assume flesh in various tangible manifestations – verbal, visual and behavioural" (Gleeson cited in Hurley, 1997, p.8).

Others in this debate place great value on the Catholic school as a community of warmth, welcome, acceptance and care. This approach questions equating success for Catholic schools with increased participation in the sacramental life of the Church. For some the evangelizing vision of the Church and Catholic school offers a lifestyle to our troubled world; it invites people to the reign of God (Quillinan & Ryan, 1994, p.95). Central to this thesis is the attainment of a set of values by the young that will change and challenge our world.

Foundational to an assimilation of that set of values is the young person's own search for meaning – the on-going attempt to identify what is important, to discover what drives life, to find what drives the young person's own life. That search for meaning we call the faith experience. The role of the school is to foster that faith search. Until that journey, that search for meaning, is embarked upon by the student in real and meaningful ways, the values that are so central to our Gospel cannot be effectively integrated into life. Thus, we hear reflected the message of the Catholic School document: 'The specific mission of the Catholic school then, is a critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith and the bringing forth of the power of Christian virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living'. (Quillinan & Ryan, 1994, p. 93 and Gravissimum Educationis, #49)



While not disagreeing that Catholic schools “offer a lifestyle to our troubled world”, Hurley would argue that Catholic schools must value add, “shaping that whole lifestyle of loving with the wisdom and nurturing sacramental life of the Catholic Church” (Hurley, 1997, p.8).

There can be no doubt that Catholic schools’ expectations are in a state of flux (McLaughlin, 2002). While some see this as allowing for new and exciting dimensions, the struggle would lie in the confusion and uncertainty as to just what Catholic schooling is at this period in time. It may be said to be a crisis for Catholic schools as they are in the process of letting go one set of expectations and desired outcomes without having articulated another. “Do we know what we are aiming for? There is no clear evidence that we do” (Quillinan & Ryan, 1994, p.91). There appears to be a real blurring of the difference between a Catholic school and any other good school in terms of Service Learning. The importance of a strong sponsoring ideology for the growth and development of identity has important ramifications (Sultmann, 2003). The dilemma facing Catholic education may be less about social capital and more about an authenticity linked to ethos. Ultimately,

we may well foster the dialectic of maintaining Catholic schools and systems operating as ends in themselves, ‘for the good of the College’, rather than as a means to an end. Australian Catholic education then adopts the current class divisions operating in many private schools systems. Instead of being counter cultural, alternative or creative, the Catholic school system replicates the status quo and then says it’s different. (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 7)

### **2.5.2 The Catholic School: Core Mission**

For schools like Holy Family College, where the Service Learning Program at the centre of this study is situated, the debate about good school or Catholic school, ethos or charism is particularly relevant. Holy Family College is a boys’ school in the Edmund Rice tradition. As such it faces the authenticity debate as does any other.

Educators who claim to follow the Rice tradition justly enquire about the meaning of such terms as the ‘Founder’s Charism’ or the Edmund Rice ethos or what constitutes an Edmund Rice education. To be manifestly authentic, Edmund Rice education must be able to state what its purpose or mission is in Catholic evangelization, its vision about achieving that mission and the strategies needed to implement that mission. (McLaughlin, 2004, p.2)

Rice’s approach to education was deeply pragmatic and yet relational, finding its genesis within the matrices of relationships embedded in his own life story (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 36). Rice, like all religious founders, had a particular approach to bringing about the Kingdom of God. His practical concern for his daughter, his concern that his pupils be

fed and clothed, his visitation of prisons and hospitals, his awareness of particular family circumstances and his frequent visits to the poor in their own homes (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 21), suggested a deep and growing awareness of the dignity of all people, especially the poor, and Rice's desire for their liberation in all its forms. The many difficult times in his life and Rice's continual turning towards the poor, "indicate that he had undergone gradually a developmental kenosis, and accompanying it, a heightened appreciation and a unique sensitivity to the reality of the Incarnation, that Christ is imaged in every human, especially in the poorest and most distorted and camouflaged of humans" (McLaughlin, 2000, p.22). Rice was quite clear as to the nature of the education he hoped to provide for the poor youth of Ireland. The 'charism' or special spirit of Rice, led him "to provide a liberatory education, which did not merely alleviate the poor but attacked the untouchable cultural fabric that created that poverty. Edmund's vision to achieve his mission was through the development within his schools of a family-like culture, in which the relationship between teacher and child was akin to a wholesome family" (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 37). Rice, unknowingly, was perhaps a pioneer in his appreciation of the value of 'social capital.'

Edmund Rice's vision is certainly not alien to the espoused theory as to the core business of the Catholic school. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States in 'Renewing the Vision' challenged Catholic schools "To Teach as Jesus Did". With reference to Service Learning the Bishops asserted:

The ministry of justice and service nurtures in young people a social consciousness and a commitment to a life of justice and service rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, in the Scriptures, and in Catholic social teaching; empowers young people to work for justice by concrete efforts to address the causes of human suffering; and infuses the concepts of justice, peace and human dignity into all ministry efforts. (Renewing the Vision, 1997, p. 38)

Edmund Rice saw his work as an initiative within the evangelising mission of the Church. While Rice certainly aimed to set up a system of good schools, he clearly wanted the education offered within them to go much further. Ricean education is distinguished by the following characteristics and their expressions:

1. Presence leading to a respectful sense of the sacred
  - A profound belief in the equal dignity of persons;
  - Nurturing a culture of faith;
  - A scholarly approach to education in the spirit.
2. Compassion nurturing authentic community
  - Honouring of a caring family spirit;
  - Solidarity with the unimportant, the poor and neglected.

3. Liberation underpinning the provision of education
  - Relevant, quality and critical education;
  - An interdependent system of education focusing on mission authenticity (McLaughlin, 2006, p. 396).

The discussion outlined above must be placed in the context of the many questions facing Catholic education today but especially those around identity, community [social capital] and authenticity. “At least some Catholic secondary schools are failing in achieving their core mission. Catholic secondary schools have absorbed an ethos which is pragmatic, competitive, consumerist and materialist” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 17).

**In the light of the Literature regarding the ‘core mission’ of Catholic Education, the nature of Service Learning Programs, adolescent spirituality and the role these programs play in the formation of Identity, the following research question is put forward:**

**Research Question Three: How do participants perceive their Service Learning experience in terms of their personal world view and the world view promoted by the school?**

## **2.6 CONCLUSION TO THE REVIEW**

This Chapter has reviewed conclusions derived from the literature relating to the broad concepts of student experience of Service Learning within an Australian Catholic Boys’ Secondary School context. Themes important to this study have been evidenced through the literature review. The literature review therefore serves to highlight the place of this study in understanding the experience students are having as they participate in direct, relational Service Learning over an extended period of time.

The literature review was presented in three sections. The review began by exploring the nature of Service Learning Programs, models of Service Learning and the processes of experiential learning. The difference between Service Learning and Community Service was explored, as were the debates concerning voluntary or compulsory programs, direct or indirect contact with recipients of service, probable effects of Service Learning and the importance of the supporting curriculum. The development of various models for Service Learning practice was examined, as were the core elements of models presently in use.

The processes of learning in an experiential setting were outlined especially as they impact on possible change in participant's worldviews. This outline led to an exploration of the nature of identity formation in adolescence and the place that Service Learning Programs, religion and schools may play in this formation.

The second section addressed literature concerning participant experience within Service Learning settings. Literature outlining the role ideology plays in student experience, length of time of programs, the role of program mentors or facilitators and the nature of the relationship formed with recipients were examined. The third section focussed on the importance of ethos or charism in schools, especially in Catholic Schools as an instrument of meaning development. Finally the review noted some of the issues of credibility facing contemporary Catholic schools as they search for authenticity in the context of their founding charism.

The literature review has determined that further research is needed to examine the impact the processes of experiential learning has upon student experience in Service Learning, as distinct from the influence of parents, prior experience and significant mentors. It is recognised that Service Learning has clear educational benefits to students in increased social skills, lateral thinking, growth in communication skills, academic performance and self esteem. What is unclear is the effect of Service Learning upon the clients of programs. More research is needed in this area. The review serves to provide a broader understanding of experiential learning, adolescent identity development and the place of ethos in Catholic schools. Against this understanding, analysis of the data can proceed in order to explore the experience fifty-three young men had of a Service Learning Program at an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of this chapter is to generate a theoretical framework that underpins an understanding of participant experience of a Service Learning Program in the context of an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. For many years Service Learning practitioners drew on the work of Dewey, Kolb and Freire for theoretical support for their work. In more recent years Cone and Harris (1996) have taken the discussion of 'best practice' models in Service Learning to another level and have provided helpful constructs to assist this. Youniss and Yates (1997) have made an important contribution to the discussion through their work on ideology and the importance of the Service Learning in the context of a strong ideological base. Jarvis (2004) and Le Cornu (2006), while not specifically addressing Service Learning, have contributed to the discussion about the role of reflection in experiential based learning and theological reflection.

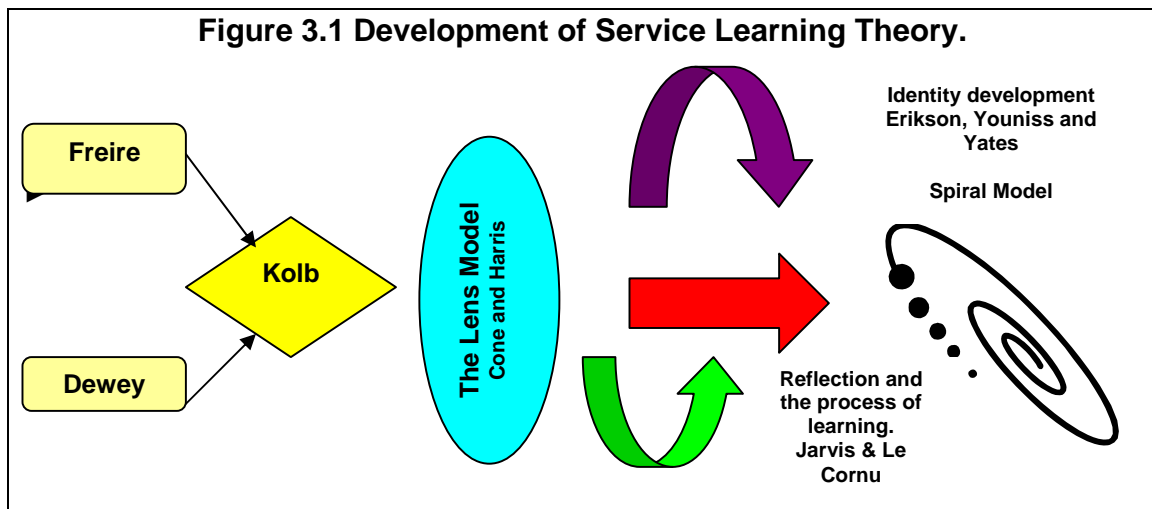
#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Service Learning practitioners are continually seeking to develop better and more effective ways to enhance learning through their programs. Scholarly interest in the area of Service Learning has focused on the benefits both to the individual and to the learning institution that sponsors it. Subsequent benefits include increased self-esteem and self knowledge (Kraft, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999), reduced stereotyping (Howard & Hamilton, 2000; Rockquemore & Shaffer, 2000; Root et al, 2002), better academic performance (Eyler, 2000; Vogelgesand & Astin, 2000; Green, 2006), growth in civic pride, engagement and sense of responsibility (Eyler et al 2003; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Moely, Mercer et al, 2002; Simons & Cleary, 2006) and increased personal skills (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler et.al 2003; Moely, Mercer et al, 2002). However, it is questionable whether these benefits are achieved at the expense of the communities they 'serve'. Service Learning without a critical dimension may produce temporary emotional euphoria in contrast to more reflective approaches resulting in longer term attitudinal change. Without critical reflection, programs may leave the recipients less empowered, more dependent and more likely to be the future victims of structural injustice, perhaps even from the students who once served them. Without critical reflection Service Learning may well act to reinforce prior stereotypes and unhealthy attitudes (Cone & Harris, 1996;

Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Rhoads, 1997; Taylor, 2000). The challenge for Service Learning practitioners is to generate learning experiences that become the catalyst for shifts in values and consciousness, both in the educational process and in the society that schools serve.

We believe that service-learning needs to consider the personal and intellectual growth of both the student and the community. For it to serve as an effective tool that will survive the test of time, careful thought must be given to the pedagogy of service-learning. A model which simply asks students to go into community settings and learn through experience is potentially damaging. (Cone & Harris, 1996, p.32)

The following diagram (Figure 3.1) outlines the development of the Theory of Service Learning that has led to the Spiral Theory that concludes this thesis and reflects the participants' experience of Holy Family's Service Learning Program.

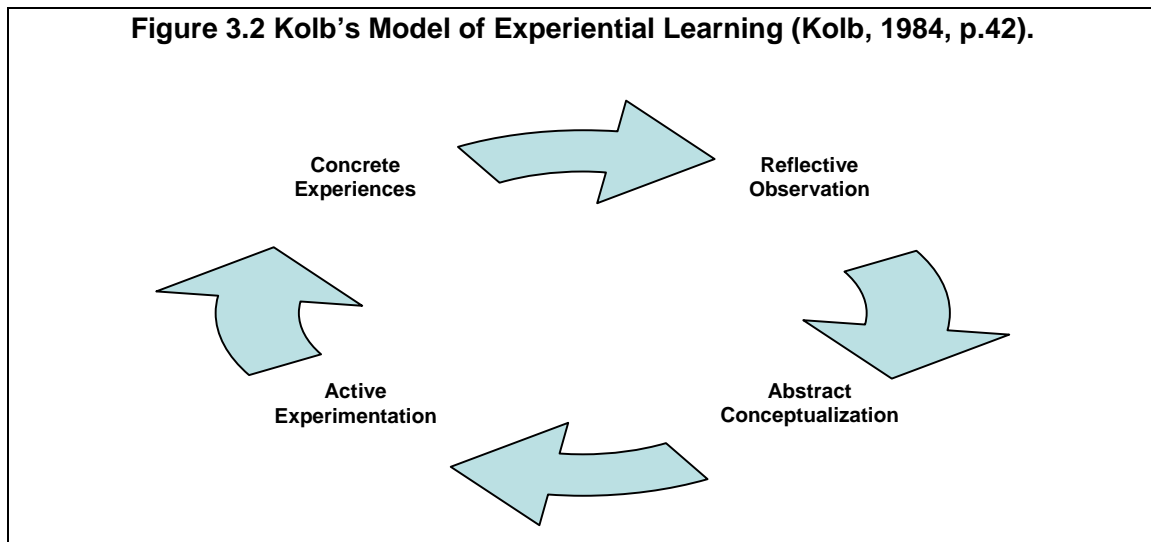


Kolb's work on experiential learning is an important link in providing a theoretic framework to underpin Service Learning approaches and informed the work of Moore (1990) and Cone and Harris (1996). Jarvis, Le Cornu, Youniss and Yates have directly and indirectly contributed to the formation of new models of Service Learning as they addressed the nature of experiential learning and identity formation.

### 3.1.1 Models of Service Learning David Kolb

The experience of critical reflection underpins all authentic Service Learning and experiential learning processes (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 1996; Eyler, 2002; Jarvis, 2004; Simons & Cleary, 2006). The experiential learning model pioneered by Kolb offers an insightful framework to guide the generation of appropriate curriculum in Service

Learning. Using Dewey's scholarship (1938) as his guide, Kolb suggested a four stage experiential learning cycle involving concrete experiences, reflection, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984, p. 22). This cycle is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3.2.



The central role that experience plays in the active learning process has been highlighted by Dewey (1938), Lewin (1951), Piaget (1970), Kolb (1984) and Jarvis (2004). These scholars, while honouring the importance of rationalist, cognitive and behavioural theories, saw experience as integral to the process, thus combining experience, perception, cognition and behaviour. For Jarvis, experience was pivotal between individuals and their environment, and learning; a process of internalisation as those same individuals transformed and made sense of this interaction (Le Cornu, 2005, p. 172). Kolb's model incorporated the work of Lewin, which emphasised here-and-now concrete experience to validate and test abstract concepts and active feedback processes in generating valid information.

Immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning, giving life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process. When human beings share an experience, they can share it fully, concretely, and abstractly. (Kolb, 1984, p. 21)

Likewise, Dewey's model of experiential learning acknowledged "learning as a dialectic process integrating experience and concepts, observations, and action" (Kolb, 1984, p. 22). Learning occurs in reflection upon, and the interaction between, the participant's

actions, decision making and conceptual frameworks. In order to promote meaning-making Kolb invited his students to reflect on their experiences in community settings, guided by an instructor, in order to form abstract concepts and hypotheses that are then used to inform future practice. Kolb's key contribution was in identifying the importance of reflection in relating the world of concrete experiences to abstract theories, and producing a model that honoured the variety of learning styles that students presented (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 33). Periods of written reflection and classroom discussion upon their experiences, placed in the context of concepts associated with homelessness and facilitated by the program mentor, are deliberately incorporated into Holy Family's program.

As the participant accommodates these classroom-taught concepts with experiences in the field, and assimilates events from the Service Learning site with concepts and schemas already possessed, they draw closer to insight linked to their own experience. Learning occurs in the tension between the two processes of accommodation and assimilation.

The adolescent moves from symbolic processes based on concrete operations to the symbolic processes of representational logic, the stage of formal operations. He now returns to a more active orientation, but it is an active orientation that is now modified by the development of the reflective and abstract power that preceded it. The symbolic powers he now possesses enable him to engage in hypothetico-deductive reasoning. He develops the possible implications of his theories and proceeds to experimentally test which of these are true. (Kolb, 1984, p. 25)

The tension or interplay between the processes of accommodation and assimilation, between concepts and experience, is brought to awareness through reflection. As students develop the skills of reflection and link their experience of issues such as homelessness with conceptual frameworks, they begin to question previously held assumptions. The development of the skills associated with these processes takes time. Much of the theoretical and ideological framework associated with a Service Learning Program may not be appreciated by students early in their volunteering, as they lack sufficient experience to assimilate the appropriate concepts. At Holy Family College the concepts associated with the Service Learning Program are introduced gradually and in parallel with student acquisition of reflection skills.

In Kolb's model, ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought, but are formed and re-formed through experience. The learning in Service Learning is a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience. The



sense-making process is squarely situated in the social context, in the interaction between the person and the social environment. Learning is an active part of the sense-making process, working on, rather than simply responding to inputs from the outside world (Moore, 1999). This perspective contrasts with the 'banking' concept of education where education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Service Learning repudiates this passive model of learning and acknowledges that knowledge emerges "through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 1974, p. 58). In late adolescence values and beliefs are in a state of flux as teenagers question and experiment in order to come to some awareness of who they are and what they stand for. This time of identity-formation parallels well the processes of invention and reinvention necessary for learning to occur in experiential contexts.

The process of forming and reforming, invention and re-invention generates the need for mentoring in the adolescent learning process (Cone & Harris, 1996). A mentor's role is important in introducing new ideas and questioning old ones. The integration and substitution of new ideas into one's concept map leads to resistance, which in itself is part of the learning process. In both Lewin and Kolb's models learning results from the resolution of conflict between concrete experience and abstract concepts, between observation and action. The resolution of conflict invites reflection upon experience.

The dialectic nature of learning and adaptation, and its accompanying conceptual dissonance, generates the need for praxis defined as: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1974, p. 36). The processes imbedded in praxis invite the participation of mentors to assist the participants to view their experience and name it. This naming can transform it, and the choice of words in the naming can give added meaning to the experience. How this process, this interaction and tension are resolved, determines the quality of learning in the process (Kolb, 1984, p. 31). This process of continual engagement with concepts and experience demands a high degree of adaptation and flexibility so that the needs of each individual are met.

The fluidity of Kolb's model is important for learning and requires quite specific abilities. For effective learning Kolb suggests that the learner requires four kinds of abilities:

concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.

They [the participants] must be able to involve themselves fully, openly and without bias in new experiences. They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives. They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories and they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems. There are two primary dimensions to this learning process: concrete experiencing of events at one end and abstract conceptualization at the other. (Kolb, 1984, p. 31)

The four abilities that Kolb saw as necessary for effective learning are not to be seen in isolation, but as being exercised in rich learning environments. One element of Kolb's model that has led other practitioners to use it as the basis for theory development, is his recognition of the importance of environment in experiential learning. While environment is important in all learning it is especially so in Service Learning where the participant is invited into relationship and interaction with people whose life circumstance is normally quite different to their own. Learning in this context goes beyond the stimulus-response mode used in scientific inquiry. In Service Learning the variables are not independent and the interaction not one way. For Kolb the "environment of real life" gave the learning process a rich context (Kolb, 1984, p. 34). As participants interact with their environment there is change in one's subjective, personal and internal experience and change in the objective 'out there' experience.

Experience does not go on simply inside a person. It does go on there, for it influences the formation of attitudes of desire and purpose. But this is not the whole of the story. Every genuine experience has an active side which changes in some degree the objective conditions under which experiences are had ...an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment. (Dewey, 1938, p. 42)

Learning "is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 26). This transformation of experience requires reflection-linking concepts and personal experience as they both change and develop over time. As the Service Learning Program lengthens there may be changes in the participant's inner experience of the environment. These changes have an effect on the outer, objective environment as well. If a participant is growing, for example, in their inner understanding of the dignity of all people, this may be experienced as ease and comfort in interaction in the wider, objective environment. This engagement with the environment, in the context of strong ideology, supports the importance of reflection and mentoring for participants. The lack of a clear role for mentors 'in the field', or pro-active insertion into the learning process at critical times, tends to leave students on their own to make sense of what they are experiencing. Moore built upon Kolb's work in this area,

suggesting a post-structuralist approach that encouraged the participant to be a critical thinker in the world of experience.

### **3.1.2 Models of Service Learning David Moore**

Conducting critical, unfettered investigations of social institutions, power relations and value commitments was the basis of Moore's (1990) approach to experiential learning. Moore based his praxis on the belief that meaning is not centred or fixed in time, and that by using experiential approaches the student could be immersed in these changes. Moore invited students to 'read' their workplaces as texts in which students 'examine the histories, power arrangements and values underlying their work organizations' (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 33). Service Learning sites and experiences present stimuli foreign to the participant's day-to-day lives. In reflecting on this stimulus, with the concepts ingrained in the program, participants may find more meaning in the experience (Strain, 2005).

Experiential learning takes place in the interaction of context and cognition; the process by which participants in a social setting organise their interactions in such a way as to make learning possible (Moore, 1981, p. 288). The study of the context of interaction has been called 'context analysis', 'micro-ethnography' or 'constitutive ethnography', and identified the importance of speech and other structuring procedures to accomplish interactions (Moore, 1981, p. 289). Speech and structuring procedures are often linked to the ideological context and philosophy that underpin programs. People do not simply respond to environmental stimuli on the basis of previous imprinting on their nervous systems, but rather select and transform incoming information; information from events, ideology and social analysis. By enacting a given social context such as the theologies of presence and guest that were pivotal to the Holy Family program, people create the conditions under which certain kinds of cognitive activities are evoked or inhibited (Moore, 1981, p. 290). These activities take place as the participants take up the tasks at the service site. One of the appeals of Service Learning for adolescents is its focus on doing rather than just talking about doing.

The identification of a set task for the participant to perform and possibly be shared by the client of the program is important in Moore's approach. Those involved in the Service

Learning project “usually share some minimal definition of the purpose of their interaction. This shared purpose represents a basic agreement among participants about what they are trying to get done” (Moore, 1981, p. 292). This ‘purpose-related task’ is important for learning to occur and parallels the process of identity formation (Youniss & Yates, 1997). The purpose-related task is performed in the context of what Moore referred to as the ‘organisational ethos and ideology’; creation and use of beliefs, values, explanatory systems, concerns, and interests within the organisation.

The student receives messages from co-workers, such as ‘this is the kind of people we are’, ‘our world operates like this’, or ‘it’s important that these things be supported’. These belief systems form an ideational core for the student’s placement experience. (Moore, 1981, p. 297)

The tasks, in the case of Holy Family’s Service Learning Program, in addition to the functional tasks of cooking a barbeque, are linked to the philosophy of the program; how to honour the dignity of the person, how to interact with a sense of equality, how to move beyond charity to change [to ask ‘why’ about a situation and to look for ways to engage with it] and the skills that directly relate to ‘presence’ and ‘guest’. In the carrying out of the tasks associated with the program the guests at the barbeque site were not passive receptors of a service; they actively engaged with the students and in many cases enjoyed building relationship.

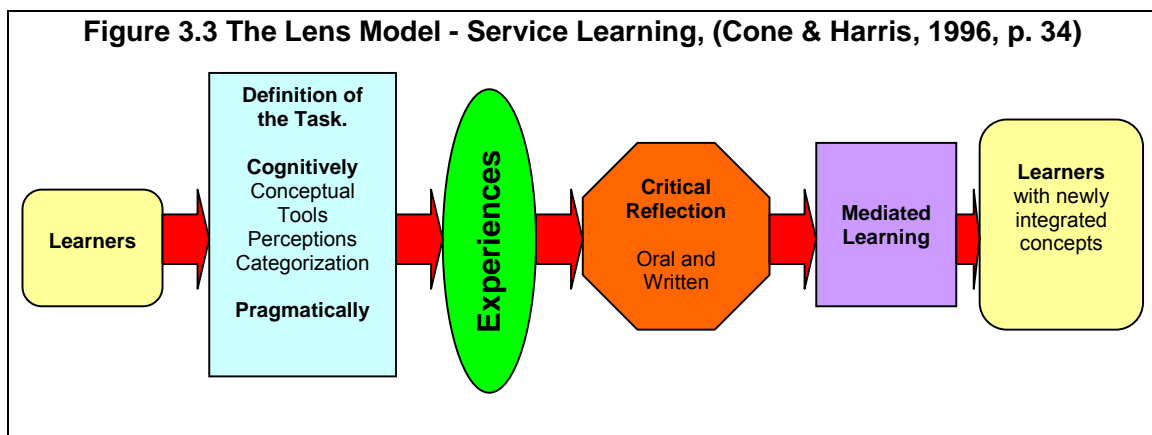
In both Kolb’s and Moore’s models reliance is placed upon the ability of the student to make sense of what they are experiencing during their time of reflection or while in the field. In suggesting a refinement of Kolb’s model, Cone and Harris saw as its main weakness the ambiguity around the role of the educator or mentor in the process. Service sites can be complex places and the sub-culture of relationships in an old person’s home, home for handicapped people, a soup kitchen or homeless shelter would all provide challenging texts for students to read.

As a consequence, many educators continue to send students out to ‘learn in community settings’ and ‘reflect’ on their work without a clear understanding of how experiences instruct or how educators make use of the reflective process. (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 33)

The reframing phase of participants’ experience in a Service Learning Program would be an important time for the instructors/mentors to help students make sense of apparently conflicting data, mixed messages from the clients of the program and confusion in the clash between their experience of the clientele, their perception of the program ideology and their prior-stereotypes. Consequently Cone and Harris focus attention on the role of the mentor in the learning process both before and after field experience.

### 3.1.3 Models of Service Learning Cone and Harris

The Lens Model (See Figure 3.3) suggested by Cone and Harris begins with the learner and their unique set of characteristics. Each student comes to the Service Learning experience with their own personal history, value systems, perspectives, attitudes, expectations and cognitive abilities.



After acknowledgment of the individuality of each learner, the Lens Model addresses academic and pragmatic issues: the definition of the task and the cognitive conceptual tools to make sense of the experience that students utilize during the course of the program. If this time of preparation and pre-brief is not undertaken, there is a danger that “each student may simply continue to understand their new experiences in the same ways using the tools of conceptualization that already lie within their grasp” (Cone & Harris, 1996, p.35).

As teachers/mentors provide students with tools and skills to identify problems, formulate questions, gather information and analyse social situations they assist them to a higher level learning. The more frequently students use abstract concepts to frame observation and think about, describe and talk about the world, especially a sub-culture such as the world of the urban homeless, the more they elicit meaning from experience. In time those concepts become integrated into the thinking processes of the user and provide ‘coat hangers’ on which to place new understanding. For example a student may enter a Service Learning situation with a superficial understanding of what poverty [lack

of food or shelter] means. Through reflection upon experience, the use of conceptual language and mentoring, the participant may come to newer understandings of poverty, especially psychological poverty triggered by mental illness or substance abuse. This awareness may even lead them to the point of becoming more cognisant of their own emotional or spiritual 'poverty'. This innate growth enables the student to stand back from the experience and critique it. The concept is no longer the academic theory of the mentor, but a real and used tool for the student's own understanding of the experience. "As these analytical methods and organizational concepts are acquired, they move students' one step closer to being able to think critically and defend their points of view" (Cone & Harris, 1996, p.38).

To aid the process of critical thinking, the third phase in the Lens Model, the experience itself must be "discontinuous and distinct from students' everyday experiences so as to broaden their perspectives on the world" (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 33). Clearly cognitive and emotional dissonance has to be deliberately planned in quality service experiences if the hoped for outcomes are to be realized. In the model, both predictable and unpredictable experiences are important for learning to occur, and practitioners are challenged to build in factors in the experience that promote active learning and minimize those factors that hinder learning. In the experiential learning process, students 'anticipatory cognition' uses scraps of input from perceptions from preconceived models and understandings to read what is going on around them. Active cognition is more likely to occur if the unexpected is encountered; this leads to a heightened state of arousal. Cognitive arousal is most often created when roles are changed, concepts challenged and the participant's world brought into question. The resulting dissonance leads to challenges to existing conceptual frameworks in which expectations are violated, thus leading to an aroused condition which invites the participant in the experience to re-conceptualize/learn (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 37). The Spiral Model which is examined later in this chapter, suggests that a direct and relational form of service is more likely to place the participant into situations of cognitive arousal and emotional dissonance. However, a heightened state of arousal in itself does not result in learning and deeper meaning elicited from experience. The participant must engage in guided reflection for this to occur.

A holistic approach involving the students' intellectual and emotional capacities as well as written and oral skills is suggested for the reflection component that makes up the fourth part of the Lens Model. The Lens Model highlights the importance of this reflection component being 'guided' by an educator or mentor who can facilitate the student's learning process. The mentor's role, among others, assists in the awareness of possible preconceived labelling or patronizing behaviours that could potentially do harm to the recipient of the service and limit the Service Learning relationship (Gardner, 1987). Over time, a range of problems, questions or issues may arise out of the Service Learning relationship and each has important potential for deeper learning. The mentor helps in identifying these and leads the student to some form of personal resolution.

The context for this resolution lies in the interplay between the theory and ideology of a Service Learning Program, and the participant's individual and collective experiences within that program. This is where the notion of socially constructed meaning comes alive. Through their reflections, both written and oral, the students shape and reshape their ideas based upon a larger public or communal discourse - in the case of Holy Family the ideology or charism of the school as a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition.

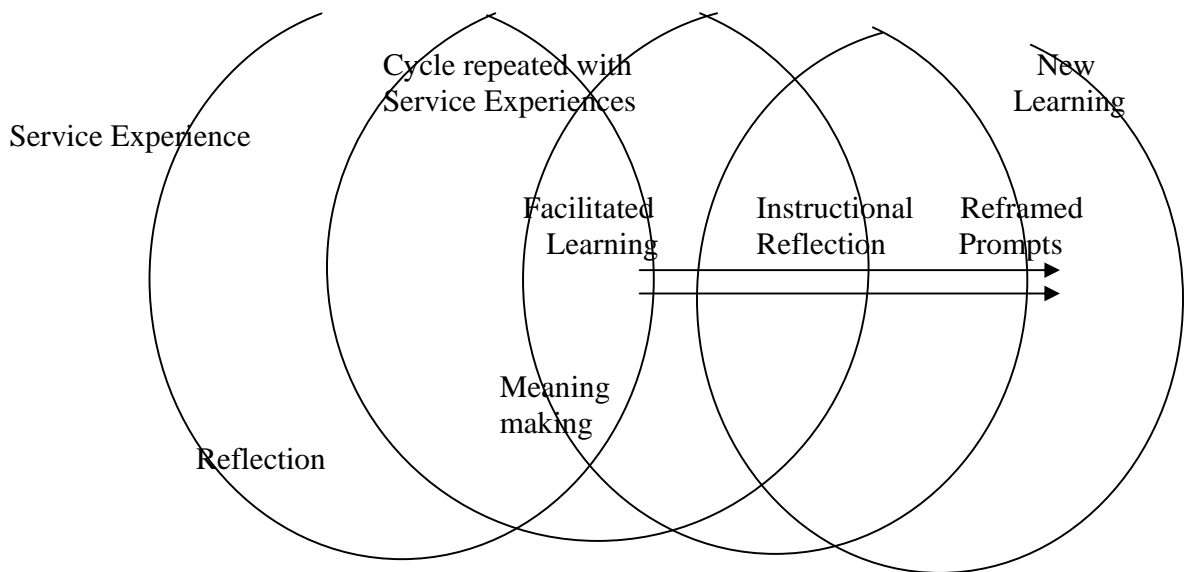
Whether reflection is written or oral, the process of naming and using concepts is central to concept acquisition. The instructor plays the role of mediator, facilitator, and guide in helping students to develop an understanding of these concepts as a necessary prerequisite to investigating and possibly challenging the concepts. The role of Service Learning educators is a delicate one in that, on the one hand, educators act as elders transmitting the concepts of the culture, and, on the other, as agents of change helping students to think critically about the contextual validity of those concepts. (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 39)

This mediated learning leads us back to the learner recognizing that rather than being some sort of abstract pedagogical tool, Service Learning can be a potentially profound influence on a student's intellectual and personal growth. The purpose of Service Learning is to assist students in gaining knowledge and to use their experiences in the community to build upon, critique and evaluate that knowledge, and in so doing move to intellectually higher ground. Ideally students may have gained an increased ability to engage in critical discourse at an abstract and conceptual level. Hopefully too, the student now has broader perspectives based on experience in the field. Holy Family's Service Learning Program would aim to further extend participant perspectives to optimise a reciprocal and respectful relationship with the homeless. These relationships would be personally transformative and give the student a sense of their own agency.

**3.1.4 Models of Service Learning Patrick Green**

The Service-Reflection-Learning framework put forward by Green (2006) suggests a cyclic model that helps make sense of student experience in Service Learning. Beginning with the student's experience, the framework moves to reflection, to meaning-making and facilitated learning, back to the service experience; this cycle repeats itself.

**Figure 3.4 Service-Reflection-Learning Framework (Green, 2006, p. 68.)**



As the journey of the participant progresses cyclically it is fostered by instructional reflection and reframed questions similar to the Academic Questions of Cone and Harris' model. After several cycles new learning occurs.

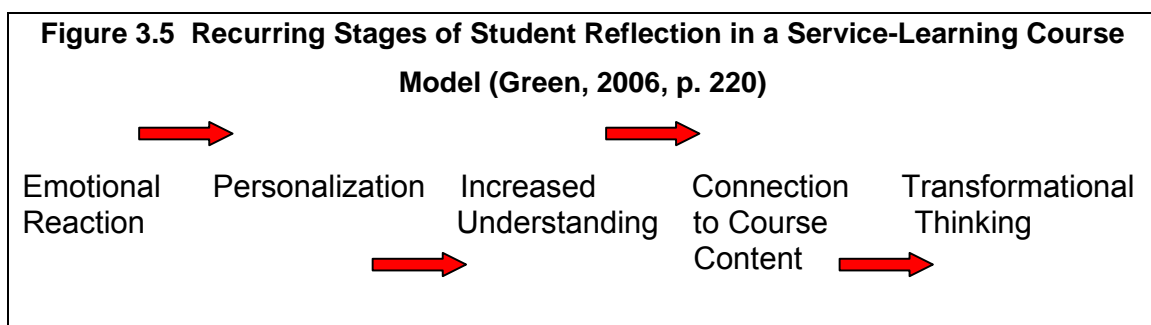
In the Service-Reflection-Learning framework the repetition of experiences and reflection, coupled with facilitated learning, leads to meaning-making. Green's framework is an open-ended helix or spiral allowing for continuous and repeated learning to occur. This framework acknowledges the central role played by the instructor, whose mediation in the form of instructor reflection and reframed questions leads to new learning. New learning can occur any time in the framework, and some 'learnings' may need a longer period of time and a wide variety of reflection methods before they are achieved. The



Service-Reflection-Learning framework is a developmental process that follows several steps:

- a. Reflection upon service experience
- b. Identification and creation of the experience's meaning through reflection
- c. Connections made between service experiences and course content [curriculum] by way of guided reflection/questions/discussion lead by the instructor
- d. Reflection by program instructors on student reflection responses leading to pedagogical strategy change
- e. The reframing of prompts to better enhance the connection between student experience and course content
- f. New Learning, new understanding and new concepts - resulting from the repetition of the above steps (Green, 2006, p. 69).

As students reflect upon experience, certain stages were identified within that reflection. These stages, like the framework itself, are cyclic. It is within these stages of reflection in a Service Learning course that students experience the meaning-making process.



In the early stages of service work, the emotional reaction of students to the experiences at the service site are often strong, and these reactions are identified by Green as the beginning of the meaning-making process (Green, 2006, p. 72). These strong emotional reactions coupled with reflection become an “ah-ha” or “light bulb” experience that leads to deeper understanding (Green, 2006, p. 104). Some of the emotional reaction of students would be linked to issues of ethnicity, socio-economic standing and other demographic differences related to privilege (Dunlap, Scoggin, Green & Davi, 2007). As they attempt to engage with communities vastly different to their peer and family circle, program participants need to be invited to grow in privilege awareness. This process is not easy and many will go into denial, but “recognising and addressing students’ struggles with privilege, guilt, and related emotions can assist them in engaging more effectively in the community” (Dunlap et al., 2007, p.4).

Once participants have interacted with other volunteers and the clients of the program the process of personalization begins: talking with and learning from the stories of individuals. As they share story with individuals at a service site, they are humanized and participants relate to them on a more personal and empathic level. Hence the importance of programs that allow for direct contact; “it was through experiencing the people and their stories that perspectives change” (Green, 2006, p. 158). Direct contact is not always easy and at times a student will be confronted with a situation linked to another’s disadvantage [compared to their socio-economic privilege] or disillusionment. These ‘trigger events’ tend to “create cognitive disequilibrium, that is, a discomfort or confusion brought about by new information that must either be assimilated or accommodated into one’s cognitive structure” (Dunlap et al., 2007, p.4). The role of Service Learning mentors is to identify this disequilibrium within the reflection process and assist students to work through it; grapple with it. As this process occurs the ‘other’ in the relationship becomes more personalised beyond stereotype and reaction.

Service Learning based disequilibrium, when properly supported, can enable students to re-evaluate society, their place in society, their and others’ identity, and perspectives on socioeconomics and race. Through reflection and discussion, students may begin to diminish the disequilibrium between their past and present experiences. (Dunlap et al., 2007, p. 10)

As participants personalise the service, stereotypes are challenged and the ‘clients’ become ‘people’. As participants journey from a distanced view to a personalised view of those they are seeking to serve, the issue addressed by the service [eg. Homelessness] becomes contextualized. This contextualisation and the repeated cycle of reflection upon experience lead the participant to deeper levels of understanding and meaning.

Deeper levels of understanding of the issues addressed by the program then lead students to make connections back to and between the elements of the course content. By understanding and making links between a particular issue and social structures, historical factors, causal factors etc., participants are more likely to have an increased empathy and more sophisticated thinking around the issue addressed. Finally, as students reflect within the framework of Service-Reflection-Learning, they may move to a point of transformational thinking where perspectives change, possible solutions are identified and an increased sense of agency experienced.

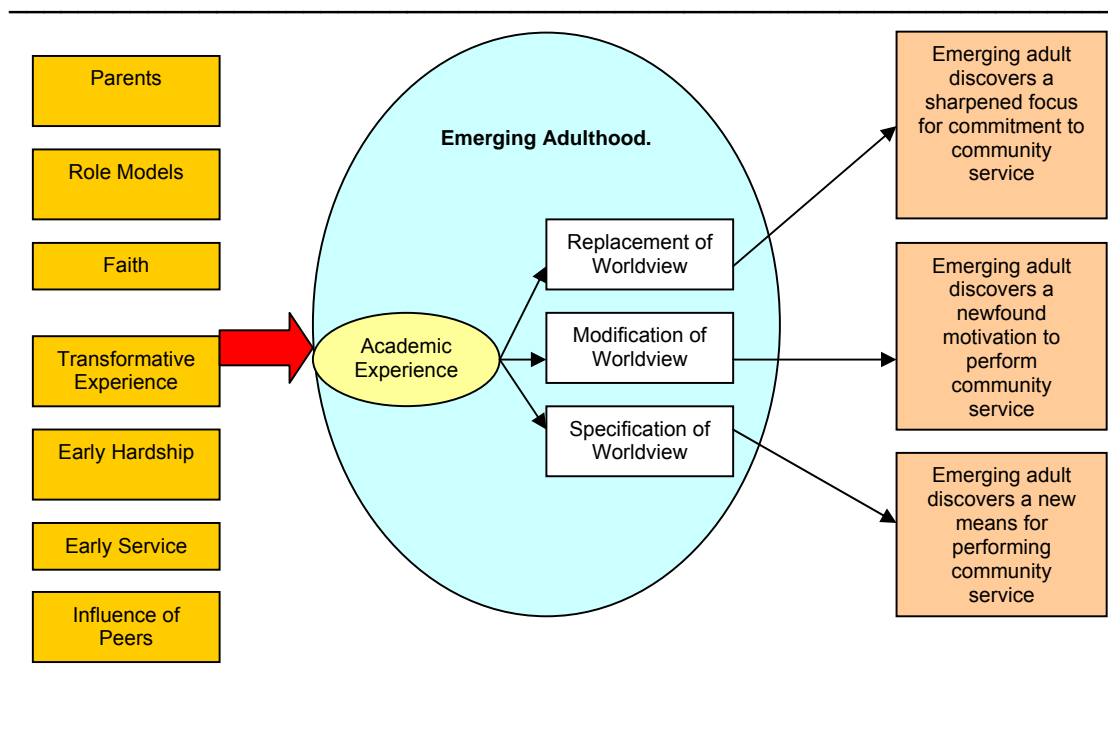
### 3.1.5

### Framework Experiences

Scott Seider

Why some young adults move to a point of increased empathy, sophisticated thinking and deeper levels of commitment to service, focussed the research of Seider (2005, 2007). Interviews with young adults who had an in-depth commitment to Service Learning Programs identified “the impact of a particular academic experience that they believe to have altered what Erikson (1968) referred to as their ‘ideology’, and contemporary identity scholars refer to as ‘worldviews’”(Seider, 2007, p. 619). One pathway to a longer term and more in-depth commitment to service-work and social action, could be involvement in a frame-changing experience; a several days to several weeks academic experience/program that aims to alter the students’ worldview and/or self concept in relation to their place in that world. This frame-changing experience builds on the predisposition for service established by parents, deep religious faith and significant mentors (Seider, 2007). The Framework Experience model developed by Seider is outlined below in Figure 3.6.

**Figure 3.6 Framework Experiences: Impact of Academic Experiences that led to replacement, modification and specification of Worldview, (Seider, 2007, p. 629).**



In Service Learning Programs the effective development of framework experiences early in participant experience will prepare students to make sense of what they experience, give them a 'why' for service, help motivate them and give them more effective means to serve.

### **3.1.6 Experiential Education**

Service Learning is but one form of experiential education. Experiential Education, "education that makes conscious application of the students' experiences by integrating them into the curriculum" (Carver, 1996, p. 9), is a growth sector within education. A wide continuum of Experiential Education programs and experiences exist ranging from 'Wilderness/Outdoor Education' to Community Service, Immersion programs, Work Experience to Service Learning (Moore, 2000). What many of these programs and approaches have in common is an authenticity [considered by participants as activities relevant to their lives]. Programs provide meaningful experiences within the context of the students' outlook on life, cater for active learning where students are physically and/or mentally engaged in the active process of learning, draw on student experience [what happened to them and how they felt] and then provide ways to connect student experience and learning to future opportunity (Carver, 1996, p.10). Central to all experiential education are experience, relevance and reflection where students, sometimes with the help of a mentor, sometimes not, are actively engaged in the learning process and are not just passive observers. Active student engagement in the learning process, whether in an outdoor setting, third world immersion or working with disadvantaged groups in the community, may lead to a development of personal agency [an awareness of their power and potential to be agents of change in their communities], a sense of belonging to a community with a purpose and a growing realisation of their own competency (Carver, 1996).

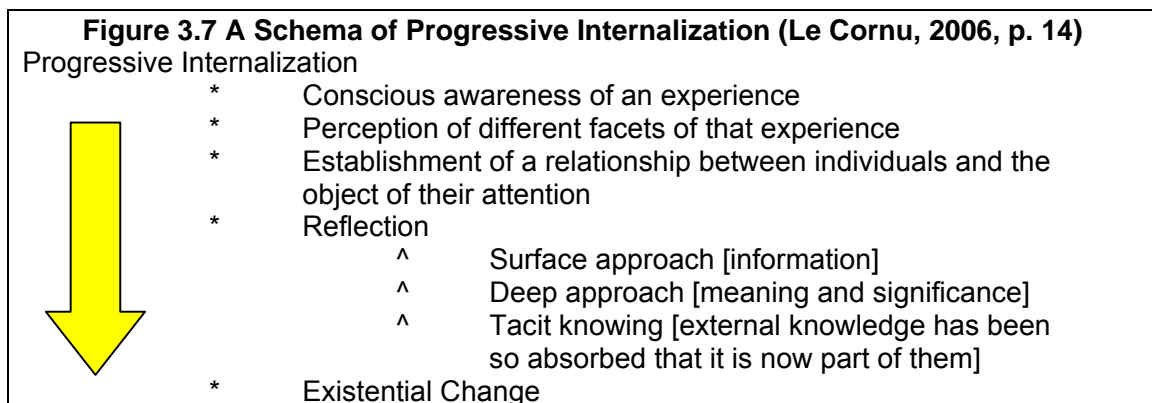
## **3.2 REFLECTION AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE**

Experiential learning and especially Service Learning centrally acknowledges the context specificity of learning. It is in this rich learning environment that individuals respond to experience and in which the process of internalization takes place. Where as Youniss and Yates (1997) have contributed to the understanding of adolescent identity

development through service, theorists of experiential learning such as Jarvis (2004) and theologians such as Le Cornu (2005, 2006) have furthered developed our appreciation of the role of experience in self-construction and meaning-making through internalization. The process of internalization relies upon reflection to assist participants to construct their moral and civic identity (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 12). As they respond to experience and reflect upon it individuals construct a sense of self and meaning.

Human learning is a combination of processes whereby whole persons construct experiences of situations and transform them into knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, emotions and the senses, and integrate the outcomes into their own biographies. (Jarvis, 2004, p. 111)

Internalization is an integral dimension of learning, accounting for changes both in individuals and in the social and cultural milieu in which they live. Through reflection the individual 'takes in to themselves' and makes their own the sifted-through learning from their experience (Eyler, 2002, p. 519). The ultimate goal of this process is meaning based understanding flowing from knowing rather than having knowledge (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 13). As this level of understanding is reached the individual experiences profound and intimate inner change: existential change. No two experiences are identical, nor are individuals affected in exactly the same from one experience to another. Through reflection the individual makes changes to their mental and conceptual maps, enabling them to make meaning from what they have experienced. This process is deeply related to people's lifetime quest to understand personal identity, purpose and meaning and is highly existential in nature (Jarvis, 1992). The external experience is 'progressively internalized'; internalisation becomes the bridge between learning and existential change (Le Cornu, 2005, p. 172). This schema is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3.7.



Some experiential theorists would talk about 'triggering events' and 'transformative experiences', "sudden, unexpected occurrences that create powerful emotional responses that may 'trigger' a re-examination of one's life-choices" (Seider, 2007, p. 3) as being pivotal in bridging the gap between emotion and awareness. Triggering or transformative events seem to impact on one's emotions initially and afterwards, one's worldview. Green sees the doorway to new learning as linked to epiphanies or "intense emotional reaction combined with further personalizing of the issue" (Green, 2006, p. 207). By personalising issues such as homelessness and by interacting and observing people, participants deepened their understanding and complexity of the issues. Others (Seider, 2007) would suggest that when one begins with the development of academic frameworks and concepts, a worldview is created or shifted that then leads to possible emotional responses to this shift. Frame-changing experiences may provide the scaffolding for deeper internalization. These emotional responses may lead to longer and deeper commitments to service as they now take place in the context of the 'why' provided by the worldview.

Framework Experiences, in providing the conceptual map that enable students to find meaning and sense from experience, rely on program mentors or facilitators for their effectiveness. These same mentors play a key role in the interpretation of and engagement with the day-to-day experiences participants have. Individuals shape [construct] their Service Learning experience through an ongoing interplay between attention to pertinent stimuli, assessment of the context within which they the experience occurs, storage of perception about the experience, and retrieval of expectations based on prior experiences (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 37). The role of the Framework Experience prior to the commencement of a program is to set up an experience 'search strategy' that influences the images, information, and stimuli to which individuals will pay attention. No individual can attend to all the stimuli in a setting, so the framework experience helps set up a cognitive-affective template of images or expectations that will focus attention on pertinent aspects of a situation (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997).

As students enter the Service Learning site they are flooded with a wide range of experience. Some of the information linked to experience will remain in the episodic memory only as long as the individual is paying attention [attending] to it. However, if this information is tested against models of meaning stored in semantic memory, it can be

either 'confirmed' or 'disconfirmed' leading to more lasting 'knowledge about the world' or worldview. The outcome of the matching process influences the nature of the learning that occurs from the Service Learning experience (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 38). Generally there will be a match between experience and expectation, sometimes with some modification, "overall, learners 'construct' the Service Learning experiences so that the viability of their expectations, values and models of meaning is maintained" (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 38). The Academic Framework Experience plays an important role in developing the models of meaning, values and ideologically framed expectations. When a match occurs between student experience and the expected properties of a concept such as 'guest' or 'their turf', then the models of meaning in the semantic memory are strengthened and clarified. The mentor plays a vital role in ensuring that the models of meaning and expectations reflect the ideology of the program, otherwise the interplay between non-informed expectations and experience may confirm and strengthen prior bias. Much of this learning will occur during the Exposure and Reframing Phases of student experience.

Sometimes learners find that their expectations are disconfirmed. Apparently 'normal' people are choosing to live in the Botanical Gardens. Articulate and well-educated people do not appear to want to find a job. Yet there is a genuine sense of community around the van. When this happens learners may ignore the disconfirming data, or accept it and change the model of meaning they had previously constructed: in so doing change may occur. This reframing means that the learner,

revises the models of meaning and expectations that they use to construct their Service Learning experience and thereby modify the very cognitive/affective representations that they use to structure and make meaning of and pre-shape their world. (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 39)

When disconfirmation occurs, learners are surprised and forced to either ignore [non-learning] or rethink and reconceptualise and even transform how they see the world (Seider, 2007). At times a disorienting dilemma can initiate a transformative learning process that leads to a profound change in the meaning perspective by which a learner makes sense of the world (Mezirow, 1991). Individuals in a Service Learning context learn through an ongoing, dynamic and recursive interaction between their expectations for the experience and the confirmations and disconfirmations they encounter (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 40).

When learners construct Service Learning experiences so that their expectations for the experience are confirmed, a 'cognitive conduit' is formed. Perceptions that conform to the model of meaning are processed pre-consciously [not needing conscious awareness], post consciously [attention primed as a result of prior experience] or goal dependently [by setting a goal a set of responses specific to that goal are elicited]. In a foreign environment such as a van for homeless people, the majority of information is processed using the conduit effect, as it frees cognitive resources for other matters that are often difficult. From prior experiences learners develop and store in semantic memory, durable models of meaning and expectations for situations. When learners move into new situations, they will be particularly sensitive to those specific attributes of the situation that are compatible with their values and the images and expectations that are stored in semantic memory (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997).

As participants' experiences are confirmed through use of the conduit effect the 'rule', 'model', or abstraction is reinforced. The use of the conduit effect results in desired learning outcomes because confirmations maintain a coherent, unified, expectation confirming and knowledge consistent view of the world (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997). While this has obvious advantages for learning in a fragile situation foreign to the day-to-day reality of a student, it can impede new learning. The role of the mentor is to continually invite the participant to think outside the square, especially when disconfirming experiences occur. As the participant is surprised by experiences that do not fit within the existing models of meaning, expectations or constructions they are forced to stretch their worldview: the accordion effect. When there is a departure from an expectation, information is missing or is extreme, the participant has little or no prior knowledge of the experience [eg. a particular form of mental illness] or a very complex situation is encountered, the student faces a mismatch between experience and expectation. There is an interaction between the immediate information stored in the episodic memory and the images, expectations and rule-based symbols stored in semantic memory. To resolve this tension mentors need to facilitate reflection based processes that will assist learners to abandon, refine, alter or transform their worldview knowledge stored in the semantic memory. By doing so the learning cycle expands outwards like an accordion; pre-existing mental models are no longer validated by experiential input and so an expanded meaning-making process is required (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 43).



The interplay between expectations and experience, between conduit and accordion effects takes place in context and contextual facts impact learning. The learner in a service situation does not act alone nor in isolation; they are part of a rich environment. In the case of a van with homeless people, that environment is unique and the subculture foreign to the day-to-day lives of students from privileged backgrounds. The culture imposes the patterns inherent in the culture's symbolic systems – its language and discourse modes, the forms of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutual dependent communal life (Bruner cited in Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 46).

The participant too comes from a thick culture; from their often privileged socio-economic background with its ways of viewing and interpreting the world. As the participant enters the service site they not only enter a foreign sub-culture, but also an environment rich in language, images, models of meaning, norms, taboos and symbols foreign to their life experience. The actors in this setting permit the 'intruder' to see what they want them to see, and experience what they want them to experience, until such time as relationship and trust grow and deepen. In all of this the program mentors, facilitators and 'gate-keepers' within the culture itself play important roles in forming and framing participant experience. It is in the midst of this experience and emotional reactions to it that meaning is found (Green, 2006).

### **3.2.1 Meaning from reflection upon experience**

The progression from surface to deeper understanding and meaning-making is characterized by the degree to which meaning is sought and found; a developing internalization through the process of reflection. Ideally, through the processes of Service Learning, aided by timely interventions from program mentors, the external knowledge [ideology of the program, concepts such as reciprocity etc] is so absorbed into the participant through the processes of reflection that it becomes part of them. The process is complete when meaning-making is so effective that none of the original discrete features are identifiable, and the participant is engaged in an internal dialogue with the deeper meaning and significance of the experience. However, not all participants sharing a similar experience come to the same level of meaning.

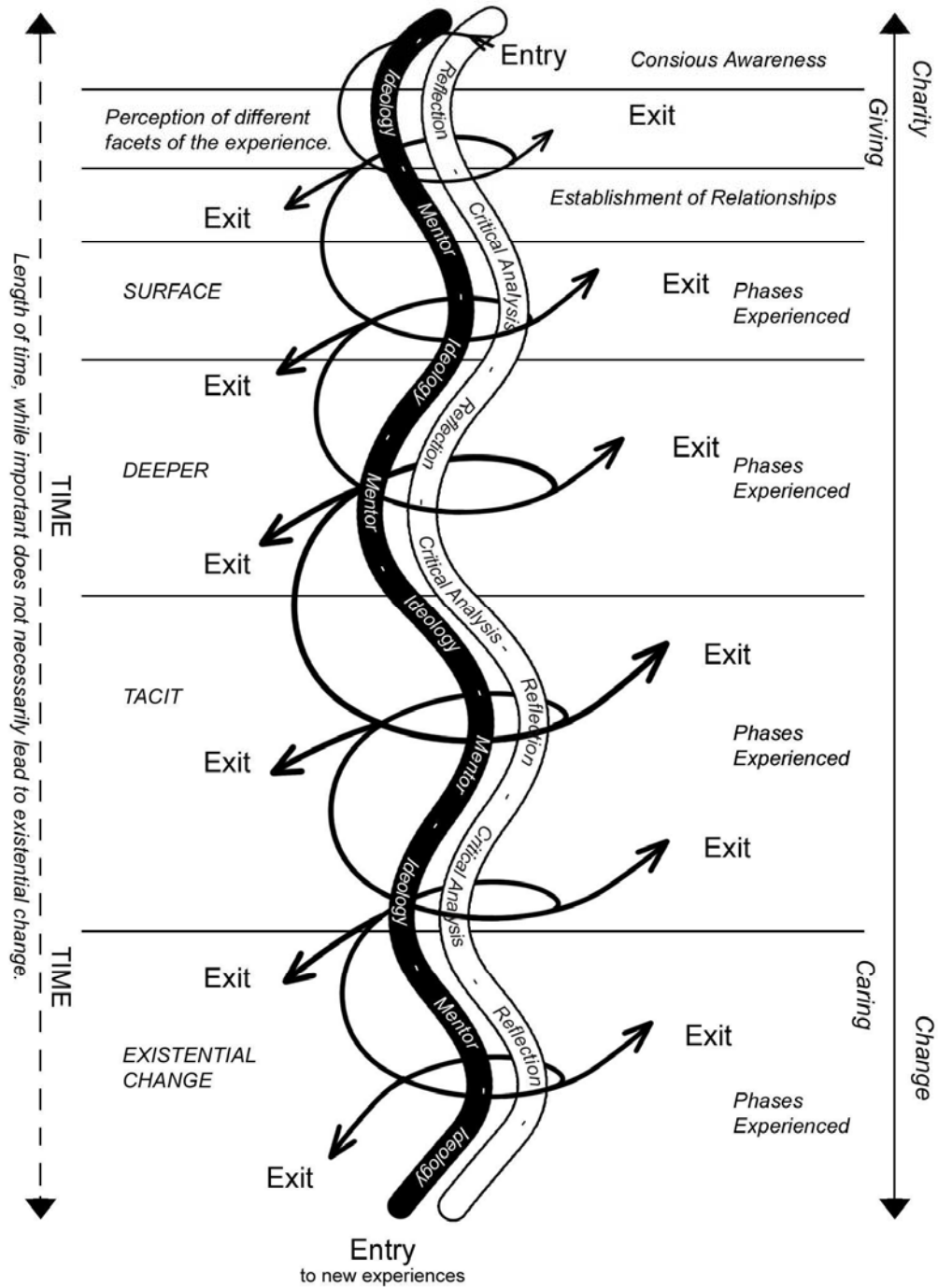
The findings of this study identified common phases in experience shared by all Service Learning participants: Expectations, Exposure, Reframing, Disillusionment, Awareness and Agency. However there was tension between these common phases of experience and the levels of meaning and understanding attributed to these experiences by the participants. The elements of the process of progressive internalization (Le Cornu, 2005) clarified this tension. Each participant experienced disillusionment at some stage but each 'made sense of' this experience in different ways. Each participant experienced a sense of personal agency at some stage but understood this in different ways. While each participant achieved some sense of personal agency some did so at a 'surface' level of meaning [I'm feeding the homeless], while others progressed to levels of deeper awareness [While I am serving this community they, in their turn are serving and stretching me]. These realisations, coupled with the insights of the Lens Model, led to the development of the Spiral Model that illuminates the research purpose of this thesis. This cyclical nature of learning gained from continual reflection upon experience was foreshadowed by Cone and Harris (1996) and built upon by Green (2006).

### **3.3 THE SPIRAL MODEL OF SERVICE LEARNING**

This study concerns itself with the bookends of the Service Learning experience; the developing biographies of participants before and after service. The study hopes to offer educators, especially those working from a religious faith perspective, a possible bridge between student experience of Service Learning and the core ideology of the school. Cone and Harris' Lens Model begins with students presenting for the program with particular values, beliefs, attitudes and conceptual frameworks. Ideally students leave the program having deepened the values and beliefs that support the program and made them their own. As with the Lens Model, the Spiral Model begins with the preparation of students. This preparation provides students with conceptual tools and language linked to ideology, and invites them into mediated reflection both individually and in groups to make sense of what they have experienced. In so doing there is an increased possibility of moving the students to a higher level of conceptualization. The Spiral Model of Service Learning is illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8

### Spiral Model of Service Learning



### **3.3.1 Participant Entry**

Like the Lens Model the Spiral Model begins with the participant: their personality, biography [their story], influence of family and other factors (Seider, 2007). Learning is hindered without an acceptance of where an individual is at any given point in time. Individuals come to particular, potential learning experiences with their values and attitudes, beliefs and practices - their world view. Whether compulsory or voluntary the key elements of the process of Service Learning are the same (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Billig, 2000) but certainly, in the case of Holy Family's program the voluntary nature of participant involvement resulted in a willingness and openness to learn.

The participant enters into the Service Learning process bringing with them the influence of their family's attitudes towards race, gender, socio-economic issues, politics, faith and meaning-making. This coupled with their particular personality and ways of engaging with stimuli, affect their learning process. The participant's life experiences have an important bearing; having been bullied at school, experienced racial taunts, experienced material poverty or opulence etc. All effect the participant's reaction to the facets of the Service Learning experience. Parental influence and transformative experiences play a primary role in shaping the values and beliefs that youth and young adults bring to service. Parental attitudes and beliefs, influence of role models, faith background, transformative experiences, experience of hardship in life, prior service experience and the influence of peers can all lead to a predisposition for service and an ethic of care (Seider, 2005, p. 20). Similarly, lack of prior service, negative parental attitudes towards those experiencing need, lack of positive role models and lack of peer support for altruistic approaches may create blocks to learning in the context of service.

Program organisers and mentors begin the learning process by acknowledging the individual nature of the journey that each participant undertakes. Participants journey through experience at their own pace and make sense of experiences in their own way. Program organisers need to be aware that no group of individuals are going to either be engaging with the experience on offer in the same way or make sense of it in the same way. To assist participants to interact with the experience effectively they need to be led to be conscious of the different facets of the experience: both the signs and signified (Le Cornu, 2006).

Some participants in a Service Learning situation may bring with them prior service experience. A volunteer at a soup kitchen may have volunteered at an old people's home during Secondary School or experienced a three week Immersion in a third world country in the early years of university. Their experience of entry to the new Service Learning situation is similar to other participants with their hopes and fears, prior stereotypes and levels of skill for the new context. The level of cognitive and emotional dissonance would still be high. While a student may be experienced at relating with a homeless person, they may initially be quite lost working with a severely handicapped child. However, the Spiral Model would suggest that while all participants would have similar early experiences of any new Service Learning environment, the level of internalisation reached in previous experiences could lead to faster and further progress in internalisation of the values and concepts at the centre of the new experience/program. The participant would now engage with the processes of reflection more readily and know what was effective for their personality. A skilled mentor would assist the participant in identifying common themes, reactions and insights across differing service activities. This process may assist the participant to approach more closely to existential change.

### **3.3.2 Developing Conscious Awareness**

As they enter into this world of new experience, the learner needs to be aided by processes and skill development aimed at increasing conscious awareness. Certain mental constructs need to be introduced to participants along with skills linked to awareness of feeling reactions: reflection, Social Analysis [or Theological Reflection] and the ideological context of the program or ministry. This entry time needs to introduce the participant to meaningful and purposeful action (Moore, 1981). This intense but vitally important time may, once again, be experienced by different participants at different levels and in different ways. There is a 'readiness' to learn experientially and in social contexts that is, to some extent, reliant upon the family of origin and life experiences (Seider, 2007). Some participants are more reflective by nature, others more conscious of the environment around them, while others make sense of what is happening to them in reflective ways foreign to that used by the mentors working on the program.

The processes of skill development aimed at increasing conscious awareness and development of mental constructs referred to above, would form 'framework experiences', that shape an individual's view of community and the role that he or she can assume within that community. Just as parental and other influences can predispose someone for service, so too can they predispose that same person to connect or make sense of framework experiences. Some individuals will embrace the inherent ideology present in any framework while others will struggle with it or reject it.

Part of growing in conscious awareness, is the development of mind maps or constructs that help the students arrange experiences more effectively. In the case of the participants in this study, topics addressed ranged from 'the nature of mental illness', 'cause and effect', 'personality type' to 'the nature of substance abuse' and cultural differences linked to ethnicity. By raising the conscious awareness of participants to the nature of mental illness, or to the complex web of causal factors that may lead to homelessness, the participant was preparing the canvas that they ultimately painted their understanding of homelessness upon. In some cases students will replace all or many of their mind maps, some modify them, others bring elements of their mind map or world view into sharper focus. Some may reject the framework experience/ideology associated with the sponsoring institution of the program. For those who do engage positively with this consciousness-raising or framework development, the process is already preparing to take the participant past any charity model or giving model of service to relationship, respect and change.

The Spiral Model identifies the progression from Charity and Giving to Change and Caring (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996) as continuous for all Service Learning experience. Through mediated reflection upon experience, participants slowly recognise that the deeper nature of their interactions goes beyond feeding homeless people or playing with a handicapped child. How participants integrate a caring and change mindset with their action, parallels movement towards existential change. Some participants may exit service programs still acting out of a charity model framework, others change, and others are on a continuum between. Not all Service Learning Programs have strong political and advocacy implications. In such programs an emphasis on change is more difficult to develop. In programs such as Holy Family's where the recipients are relatively well catered for by differing levels of government, the caring/change element associated

with the program's ideology would need to take a different form. By focussing on a respectful and reciprocal relationship with the homeless instead of a 'charity' approach, personal change may take place, at least in the participants. There would be limited avenues for political advocacy in some Service Learning situations.

The Spiral Model recognises the importance of length of the time in the experience that each participant has. While the length of the program or the time at the service site does not, of itself, result in deeper movement in progressive internalization, it does assist this movement to occur. Continuous, direct, relational interactions in service situations that develop more meaningful relationships between participants and recipients result in deeper levels of insight and awareness (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Billig, 2000; Green, 2006). The establishment of relationship with the clients of the program, fellow participants and the various elements of the experience are part of conscious awareness. Direct relationship between recipients and participants in service may lead to knowledge of names, acknowledgment of idiosyncrasies, awareness of group dynamics and the roles each person plays in the sub-culture that the service takes place in.

The process of progressive internalization invites participants to grow in awareness of the different aspects of the experience (Le Cornu, 2006), while the Lens Model names this as defining the task, the acquisition of conceptual tools, perceptions, categorization and pragmatic issues (Cone & Harris, 1996). Seider would then take this one step further by inviting participants to actively develop ideological/meaning frameworks in which experience will take place (Seider, 2007). Learning initially begins through the process of perception which in turn leads to conscious awareness (Le Cornu, 2005, p. 174). Perceptions of poverty for relatively affluent young adults may be largely media-derived. During the Expectations and Exposure phases of Service Learning the participants' experience is completely new and for an adolescent possibly 'exciting'. A new world may be opening up for the participant with its own language, symbols, ways of relating and power relationships. Awareness of the different aspects of the experience means bringing into conscious awareness the initial presenting data of the service site; the presenting data of an old people's home would be different to that of a homeless person's coffee van or a home for handicapped children in a Third World Country. By experiencing 'poverty' directly through their relationship with the homeless, students may be forced to open themselves up to the realization that their perceptions of the social

world may be severely skewed by their affluence. The 'shock' present in the Exposure Phase,

while frightening and upsetting, created in them an ideal state of cognitive openness toward the substantive course material. This stage of shock enabled students to examine the inconsistencies in their lives and in the community around them. (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 17)

The role of the mentor is to prepare the participant for this difference; to expect it and hence relate with it more effectively. This expectation of the differing elements of the experience does not take away from the potential learning moment when you encounter the unpredictable, but by "minimizing the demands on our thinking through a process of anticipatory cognition in which we use scraps of input from our perceptions and 'read' the rest of the scene", we are better able to make meaning out of the experience in a heightened state of arousal (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 37). In the case of the students in this study the venue of the service site, the number, age and gender of the homeless there, the practical arrangements of cooking a barbeque and the procedures of serving the homeless would all be part of the facets/aspects of the experience.

An experience of disjuncture provoked by an unfamiliar situation is accompanied by a raising of consciousness – a type of stepping out of the continuous flow of time experienced by a low level of consciousness – and a momentary freezing of time. This combination initiates consequent learning. However, if the disjuncture is comparatively insignificant, then people ride through the experience ...an important dimension of learning is the partnership between experience and consciousness. The partnership is also the precursor towards internalisation. (Le Cornu, 2005, p. 174)

The entry phases of the participant's experience are characterised by a heightened awareness and sensitivity to the difference between their day-to-day experiences and their new experience. This heightened awareness and sensitivity may lead to important data for reflection. If the participant is not led to engage with and reflect upon feelings, reactions, insights and occurrences early in the experience they could be lost to the learning cycle and this could lead to a reinforcement of prior stereotypes and attitudes (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). The initial heightened awareness leads to more sensitive feeling responses that are important for reflection.

The identification of the importance of Conscious Awareness and perception of different facets of the experience as the entry point to experience in service situations also points to the potential harm of brief, one off experiences. The heightened emotional arousal and dissonance associated with a trigger or shock experience quite foreign to the day-to-day reality of a participant, may be left quite isolated with no opportunity to make meaning from it. As a result there is a need to place this initial experience in the context



of a longer term relationship with the service recipients, supporting ideology and continual mediated reflection.

### **3.3.3 Central Core: Ideology, Reflection and Mentoring**

The Spiral Model of Service Learning has at its core threads that continue for the whole experience. The threads of program ideology, reflection upon experience, critical analysis of the facets of the experience and the presence and intervention of program mentors weave themselves through the whole of the Service Learning journey. The service experience spirals around these central core threads.

For many youth of 'generation Y' reflection does not come naturally (Mason et.al., 2007). Youth today are looking for instant quick experiences and sensory satisfaction and not comfortable with silence and introspection linked to day-to-day experience. In the entry time of the Spiral Model, the skills of reflection upon experience are taught and experienced. Different people reflect in different ways; some are more at home journaling [diary style], others responding to set questions, others sharing one-on-one verbally, others responding to group sharing, while others may paint or draw. Program organisers need to spend time teaching skills associated with all of these methods before the program begins and in its early stages. No skill is acquired immediately. The skills for reflection take time and practice, but participants quickly develop a 'mind-set' of looking and hearing beyond the words, of becoming aware of their own reactions and 'gut' feelings. As participants enter the service site they have the reflection stimuli and program ideology in the back of their mind. Their Semantic memory is filtering and organising what they are experiencing. All of this leads to deeper awareness and learning.

As the spiral progresses, reflection upon experience becomes part of the total Service Learning experience and not an added extra. The participant experience of Holy Family students pointed to the importance of reflection being 'user friendly', relevant and credible, and not as an end in itself divorced from the experience. Just as the participants' interpretation and meaning-making of the experience change and develop over time, so does the participants' understanding and appreciation of reflection. Initially participants are aware of a surface, emotional reaction to stimuli. Reflection techniques

give meaning to these reactions and in time, as the more complete picture of what is happening at the service site develops, even greater meaning and conceptual links flow from oral or written reflection. While the emotional dissonance is greater early in any program, other shorter periods of heightened emotional arousal follow as the participant encounters other trigger events or strong disconfirming data. While some of these are linked to difficult experiences during the Disillusionment phase of service experiences, others are entry points to deeper awareness: acceptance, an awareness of community, being appreciated, reciprocity, etc. During the stages of Progressive Internalisation some participants could arrive at a point where their reflection energy no longer needs to address surface stimuli as it becomes tacit confirmed data, and so is freed to look beyond more obvious signs to the deeper realities they signify. Participants may exit from the program at any point of this process. The points of exit in the spiral reflect not a place in time, but rather progression down the spiral [the experience] to existential change. As the participants' abilities to reflect deepen, so too do their skills at linking and using language and concepts associated with the experience. The deliberate use of both language and concepts associated with the program's ideology will assist in meaning-making.

Language, whether verbal or written, is an agent for altering the powers of thought; giving thought new means for making sense of the world. Language becomes the repository for new thoughts (Bruner, 1986; Baker et al., 2002). There is interplay between language and learning in contextual situations. Through the language in reflection, experience is ordered and reality constructed by use of both argument and story (Cone & Harris, 1996). The Spiral Model encourages the program mentor to be constantly encouraging students to use abstract concepts in observing, thinking about, describing, and talking about their experiences, and in so doing the concepts clarify and become more integrated in the thinking process of the user. The end result is an increased ability to think critically about an experience and defend points of view or beliefs. The Lens and Spiral Models see the role of the mentor as helping students in mediated skill development so they can better 'read' their Service Learning experience (Moore, 1990).

Young people especially need a 'why' for their doing, a reason to commit and to stay committed to some dream. Framework experiences, whether for several days or weeks

prior to service, will help provide this why (Seider, 2007). Ideologically driven framework experiences will invite students to modify worldviews, replace them or specify elements of them that especially speak to their experience. In the early stages of the Spiral Model especially, but continuing for their whole time of involvement, participants need to be formed in the ideology of the program. Just as 'the Universe story' gives meaning to the Greenpeace activist or the teaching of Gandhi to someone involved with Amnesty International, so the spiritual teachings of the Gospel of Jesus or the Koran would focus the energy and efforts of youth engaged in service from a Christian or Muslim perspective.

The students involved in this study were introduced very early to the concepts surrounding a profound respect for the dignity and worth of every individual, the reciprocal nature of true relationship in giving and receiving, the importance of coming as a guest into the life and experience of the 'other' and the power of being deeply present to self and the other in the experience (Nouwen, 1975). All of this, in the context of faith as experienced in the Jesus story, gives meaning and focus to the efforts and energy in serving. The Edmund Rice charism spoke about "seeing Christ present in and appealing to him [Edmund] in the poor" and linked well with Catholic Social Justice Teaching that names the innate dignity of all people as dwelling places of the Holy Spirit. This ideology informs the participants' method of relating to the individuals that they might meet at a homeless person's coffee van.

The ideology of the program is, along with reflection, the key vehicle to move participants from charity to change, from giving to caring. It is in the principles inherent in the ideology that patronising attitudes are challenged and worked through. The role of the mentor is of great importance here as they challenge, suggest, question and urge the participant to re-examine their actions or attitudes in the light of the ideology. A young man who has just returned from working on the street van may share that he, "helped all those poor homeless men today". The mentor in debriefing may simply ask, "And John, do you think you received anything from the experience today?" The time element of the Spiral Model comes to the fore here in that it takes time for the ideology to be truly understood and owned and therefore is part of the concept map of the participant as they see, hear and make sense of what they are experiencing. The Spiral

Model introduces students to a constant exchange between worldview and their lived experience via reflection.

The role of the mentor in Service Learning can often be the catalyst for learning to occur. The Lens Model recognises the importance of 'mediated learning'. The mentor is steeped in the ideology of the program and is clearly aware of the ideal 'end point' they would wish participants to reach on their experience journey. As a professional, the mentor can often be aware of the 'readiness' of any particular participant for greater awareness and meaning-making. As they work with the participants moulding reflection experiences, breaking open the ideology of the program and teaching the skills of analysis, mentors ask questions of, prompt and direct different participants to individual experiences that may help them on their unique journey of experience with the program (Green, 2006). The mentor needs to be highly sensitive to each participant's ability and preparedness to interact with the elements of the experience, inviting participants out of their comfort zone but not in a way that threatens their safety [psychologically or physically]. As the program develops the mentor identifies different elements in participant written reflections to comment on, or ask probing questions about, or inject themselves into group discussions at critical points of 'learning'. This reflects the critical reflection/academic question elements of the Lens Model. The mentor's role here is not to provide the answers but simply to ask the question.

The mentor's role may appear quite daunting. Any program needs its overall program mentors with particular responsibility for the processes inherent in its articulated goals and the overseeing of the supporting curriculum. Many Service Learning Programs have their day-to-day mentors who accompany participants to the service site and ensure simple but immediate reflection takes place while emotional arousal is heightened and or dissonance experienced. Holy Family has had particular success in developing a group of young alumni, who having experienced the Big Brekky program during their secondary school years, now act as day-to-day mentors for the students alongside faculty members as well as volunteering on Eddie's Night Van.

### **3.3.4 Phases common to all**

Participant experience in Holy Family's Service Learning Program suggests that each student journeyed through particular phases of experience over the six months of the program. Every student had Expectations prior to their involvement, and every student had a period of initial Exposure to the sub-culture of homelessness at their particular van site. As their time on the van progressed, each participant felt more 'at home' and began to interpret or Reframe the experiences they were having; Rockquemore and Schaffer (2000) refer to this stage as 'normalization' (p. 17). These phases would be common to all Service Learning experiences as they describe the nature of personal experience in any relational setting.

Within the Spiral Model each participant experiences some form of 'honeymoon' or idealism associated with their giving, often linked to an altruistic motivation for volunteering to be involved in the program in the first place. All participants, in varying degrees, then experience some form of Disillusionment where prior expectations are not met, stereotypes are brought into question or the ugly side of reality is brought home. No service experience is continually ideal, and at the end of the day bed pans have to be emptied, barbeques cleaned or sandwiches buttered. At some point in each service experience you feel rejected, misunderstood or not appreciated. With time, and to varying extents, all participants grow in Awareness, experiencing some degree of change and incorporation of the values of the program into their conscious self. Finally each participant exits the program with some sense of their own Agency; their ability to make a difference.

Each participant experiences these distinct phases, but the interior meaning from sign to signified that they arrive at through reflection, differs from participant to participant. Not all participants progress through the stages of internalization to existential change.

### **3.3.5 Exiting the journey – exiting the spiral.**

The nature of a spiral suggests journey. In one way you never arrive; you are always 'getting there': so too for the experience of Service Learning. No participant can ever say, "I have experienced all there is to know about homelessness!" Each participant

walks their experience of service in their time and at their pace. The spiral slowly deepens and so too does the experience of the participant. What deepens is the meaning level the participant is able to extract from the experiential data presented to them. This extraction comes about through the interplay, the back and forward interaction between the participant and the guests of the program, and between their previously held and experienced beliefs and attitudes [world view], their framework experience and new experiences that challenge, question or confirm same. Some participants would have entered the spiral more predisposed towards finding meaning than others, some would have engaged positively with the framework experiences at the beginning of the program. These participants may have reached deeper levels of awareness and change from their reflected upon experience.

Some of this experiential data comes from primary experiences transmitted through the senses. Other data comes from secondary experiences mediated through spoken word, the written word, image or gesture. This interplay takes place through reflection and the critical mediation of program mentors. This interplay or learning involves people internalising elements of their external world and then externalising them through their subsequent action in and on this world (Le Cornu, 2005). It is here that each participant hopefully experiences a sense of agency; of making a difference as their actions change themselves and their world – however minutely.

While each participant may spend three months, six months or longer at a particular service site each participant exits the experience, the spiral, at differing levels of insight and awareness: existential change. Learning takes place, knowledge is born by a change in something in the world as experienced by the person: Service Learning focuses on that change. While all experience the phases of experience, some few may still only experience 'change' at a 'surface' level, others 'deeper' and others 'tacitly', leading to deeper inner change in values and attitudes; existential change. While factors such as time, quality of stimuli [experience] at the site, quantity and quality of reflection and support from program mentors are relatively constant for participants, the depth or placement of exit from the spiral appears to be influenced by personality, life experience and family-of-origin factors that prepare or do not prepare the participant for greater meaning.

This preparation for meaning sometimes shows itself in two groups of learning according to the approach taken when engaging with learning matter: surface and deep (Marton & Saljo, 1976 cited in Le Cornu, 2005). Surface learners focus principally on the sign, deep learners on the signified. The key is the making of meaning that the participant engages in and Jarvis (2004) directly links this to reflection. The goal of Service Learning is a progressive absorption into the individual participant of the knowledge [ideology] of the program that sponsors it. Ultimately, in tacit knowing, reflection upon experience has so integrated knowledge into people's lives that it is no longer distinct from them. A student relating with homeless people may so integrate the concept of 'coming as guest' into people's lives that the associated approaches, skills and values become automatic, part of them. Their engagement with the program's elements may lead to a conduit effect, joining a learner's expectations for a Service Learning experience to the attributes of the experience to which the learner pays attention; guest and presence. At this point the participant is not consciously attempting to 'guest' a situation as they may have done early in their experience. 'Guest' has now become an integral part of the whole, the respectful approach to relationship with an experience or person different to your own that honours its dignity and worth. When this happens, sensory and meaning-making energy is freed up leading to an even deeper awareness and level of meaning.

We identified the two terms of tacit knowing, the proximal and the distal, and recognised the way we attend from the first to the second, thus achieving an integration of particulars to a coherent entity to which we are attending. Since we were not attending to the particulars in themselves, we could not identify them: but if we now regard the integration of particulars as an interiorisation, it takes on a more positive character. It now becomes a means of making certain things function as the proximal terms of tacit knowing, so that instead of observing them in themselves, we may be aware of them in their bearing on the comprehensive entity which they constitute. It brings home to us that it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning. (Polanyi, 1983, p. 18 cited in Le Cornu, 2005, p. 175)

What this study suggests is that length of time of experience, quantity and quality of reflection, clear and relevant ideology and the active presence of mentors lead to participants moving further down the spiral than would otherwise have occurred. These factors enable deeper meaning to be elicited from the experience and nurture the learning environment already prepared by family and other life 'teachers'. Over time and with the core elements of the Spiral Model present the 'knowledge' that formed a key part of the Conscious Awareness phase at the beginning of the program may be transformed into 'knowing'.

### **3.3.6 Time element and the Spiral**

The time element of the Spiral Model is important. The longer the time period involved with a Service Learning Program, the more likely the experience has the natural elements of progression that allow for greater learning and awareness. The participant's initial experience of a service activity may have an idealistic element to it, or conversely a 'shock' element where the participant is scared by an environment so foreign to what they normally experience that they struggle to cope with it. For some participants early spiral experiences are a real 'honeymoon' experience, where youthful idealistic energy or agency meets a romantic humanitarian need. The participants find themselves in a soup kitchen, at a coffee van, or engaging in an adult way with handicapped children who appear to really need them. There is a heightened energy level and arousal.

A longer length of program time not only allows for a richer variety of learning experiences, but for the reflection process to mature. The longer the Service Learning experience the more 'real' it becomes; the participant meets the clients/guests of the program in good times and bad, in the ordinary and in the extraordinary. However time of itself will not lead to progression down the spiral towards Existential Change. For some participants, pre-program values systems and predispositions may be so strong as to block potential learning leading to assimilation of previously held views.

### **3.3.7 Internalization: from Giving to Caring, Charity to Change**

As the participant journeys the spiral that is their Service Learning experience they encounter varying levels of awareness; of internalization of the core values of the program resulting from their interaction with the clients/guests. As they progress down the spiral, each participant makes sense of how their initial framework experience modifies their worldview, replaces it or focuses elements of it as they go. Many youth begin Service Learning Programs with a charity/giving mindset. In their idealism they want to make a difference and want to give to those in need; the elderly appear to be lonely, the homeless hungry and the handicapped perhaps rejected. The youth, from the wealth of their personal health, economic standing, education and social skills seek to 'give' to those in need.



The journey to caring and change takes time, and some never arrive at this point. Initially there is a surface interaction with and understanding of the experience. Prior stereotypes and charity/giving mindsets are strong, and bind the participant's expectations and goals. In the early stages of their experience the participant is absorbing a whole new world of information. They are identifying the different characters in the experience, coming to grips with new skills needed to serve, growing in awareness of different rituals associated with the service site [eg. Who lines up first for the soup kitchen meal] and generally opening their eyes to the new culture. If the program is very short in time there is a real possibility that participants may exit the program at a surface level of awareness with prior stereotypes and attitudes confirmed or reinforced. They may have met an intoxicated and aggressive homeless person on that first morning and so leave the site convinced that their view that homeless people were lazy drunks was right. The many facets of the experience and the service site procedures take time to be understood and owned. More importantly the relationships with the clients/guests of the program take time to develop, for trust to be established and the skills of how to relate with varying types of personality and brokenness to be acquired.

As the skills of reflection and the ideology or 'why' of the program deepen and develop, more participants go past a surface experience and gain a greater awareness and understanding of what is really going on at their place of service. Many participants are still working from the mindset of charity and giving and it takes time to adjust. Depending upon how strong prior beliefs and stereotypes were, the journey down the spiral may be slowed or quickened. One participant may come from a family that has encouraged them to value difference in people, while another may have been taught from an early age that hard work is the greatest of virtues and no one is owed a living. Each of these participants, in the case of homelessness, experience a variety of clients at the soup van [Eddie's Van] and their presenting 'data' in vastly different ways, and there may be a tendency for prior beliefs to confirm expected data.

As the participants move deeper down the spiral the assisting role of the mentor is important. Questions and prompts such as,

- Why do you think you reacted that way? Why do you think that person comes to the van? Do you think that person's reaction was normal?

lead the participant to reframe what they are experiencing leading to deeper understanding and meaning (Green, 2006). This reframing may take place through written journaling, in discussion or by de-brief after the experience. While the person exiting the program with only a surface experience may do so with their prejudices, beliefs and attitudes confirmed, those who exit during or after this deeper point of awareness may be left confused and uncertain with insufficient data [experience] to move to deeper insight. In the case of participants who may exit with surface or deeper understandings of the experience, the mentor has the responsibility to attempt to follow up the participant and debrief them in such a way that invites them to remain engaged with their questions and energy in the longer term.

The longer the Service Learning Program and the more the ideological framework and reflection skills are owned by the participant, the more likely it is that a level of tacit experience is reached. This is a valuable point of possible entry to a deeper awareness and understanding as the surface data of the experience is now everyday [ordinary] and the whole experience more real. The participant has now related with the clients/guests of the program on their good days and bad days, through boring mundane interaction and periods of extreme, and has probably got to know names, idiosyncrasies, relationship patterns, who their friends are, who is accepted, who is rejected, what to talk about etc. As the presenting data becomes ordinary, the participant's energy is freed up to more deeply engage past any conduit, to internally debate beliefs and attitudes about the culture and to find new levels of meaning behind the language and symbols of the experience.

Some participants begin to be aware that they are 'bored' and for many of these their understanding of the experience remains surface. Others begin to be aware, at a feeling level, that they are enjoying 'being welcomed', 'being appreciated', 'being accepted' and that there is a different positive energy in them before they arrive at the service site; an energy beyond charity and giving. As the spiral continues, this energy points to the beginnings of change and caring; that there are deeper and more complex 'whys' for homelessness or loneliness in a nursing home, that the deepening relationship with the guests of the program is more reciprocal than the participant ever expected and they are 'receiving' as much, if not more than they give. In this accordion process the ideology of the program plays an important role in giving the participants 'coat hangers' on which to

hang concepts and language and skills to deepen the nature of the interaction and enable deeper levels of awareness to be attained.

Some participants in Service Learning, because of family upbringing, an ability to reflect, a positive response to the mentor, and their affinity with the program's ideology, continue down the spiral and reach some degree of existential change. At this level the insights and awareness take on an almost universal nature. The poverty of the homeless now leads them to an awareness of their own brokenness as people; the freedom of the homeless leads them to be aware of how in many ways they are 'unfree'; their sorrow at the handicap of the wheelchair-bound child is increasingly replaced by admiration for the child's courage; they become aware of their own 'inner' handicaps. While there does appear to be a pre-disposition towards this level of change it appears to be assisted by the core elements of the Spiral Model: reflection, ideology and active mentoring. Participants who exit at this point of the spiral from the Service Learning experience are more likely to see the bigger picture, the importance of longer term solutions where applicable, the complex web of causal factors, and the humanity we all share. There is a strong sense of equality between participant and guest, of a shared humanity differentiated only by roles within the context of the service experience.

### **3.3.8 Participant entry to new experiences and new learning**

Just as Cone and Harris' Lens Model begins and ends with the learner, so does the Spiral Model. The participant exits the spiral with varying degrees of challenged, new, renewed and integrated concepts. For some, their replaced worldview has given them the motivation and skills to make service part of their continuing biography. Some will enter new experiences with their modified worldview, or elements of it, more focussed. If they have reflected upon their experience, in the context of a strong ideology and with the assistance of a mentor, there is the strong possibility of some movement down the spiral to deep, inner, attitudinal change. It was noted during the Holy Family study that one group of participants who had previously experienced an Immersion period in East Timor, seemed to come to levels of change more easily than most other participants. The particular Immersion experience was informed by the key elements of the core of the Spiral Model, reflection, ideology and mentoring, and would have been for many a prior framework experience. While recognising that some of this would be linked to the

family's interest in Social Justice Issues and personalities more naturally attuned to this type of experience, the Spiral Model would suggest that these participants may move through the early stages of the spiral more quickly and reach deeper levels of change.

Each time a participant is involved in a Service Learning experience, the need for consciousness-raising remains, as the context and culture for the experience differs to prior experience. A student who has worked with homeless people could initially find working in a nursing home service situation difficult and different, but then would more easily come to a point of recognising and being able to name the common realities present: the dignity of each person, the fragility we all share or the many faces of poverty. These and other similar insights would suggest some degree of existential change.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

When a student exits the Spiral Model they do so with some degree of ownership of the ideology/philosophy of the program that they have participated in. For each participant the Framework Experience would have engaged with their life experience and predisposition for service at varying levels. No participant totally embraces an ideology, and indeed the process of coming to a position of owning your own beliefs and values is essential to adulthood. While it is outside the scope of this research, anecdotal evidence, especially linked to Eddie's Night Van, suggests that each participant who exits a program with a deeper or tacit understanding and awareness linked to the program's ideology, forms their own service ideology, their own worldview. To varying degrees this would align with the core values of the sponsoring ideology. The process of coming to one's own belief system/worldview linked to service, especially if linked to a deeper or tacit awareness, may result in a longer term commitment to service into young adulthood (Seider, 2007). This hypothesis would provide fertile ground for future research.

This chapter has situated a new model of looking at Service Learning based on participant experience, within the context of the development of experiential education from Freire and Dewey to the present day. The model is an extension of the Lens Model developed by Cone and Harris, who in their turn had used the work of Kolb as a guide. The Spiral Model takes the Lens Model further by placing it along side the process of

identity development in adolescents (Erikson, 1968; Youniss & Yates, 1997) and the reflection-driven processes of experiential learning and progressive internalization (Jarvis, 2004; Le Cornu, 2006).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the research design adopted in the exploration of participant experience of a Service Learning Program in an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. This study focuses primarily upon participant experience of the 'Big Brekky' program as a core element of the school's Service Learning Program. As such, the research area is highly contextualized, individual and value-laden, lending itself well to the social theory of Symbolic Interaction. This study is focussed by three research questions that provide the scaffolding for the investigation and the cornerstone for the analysis of the data (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 31):

1. What features of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College impact on participant experience?
2. What changes are there in the meanings participants give to their experiences in the Service Learning Program over time?
3. How do participants perceive their Service Learning experience in terms of their personal world view and the world view promoted by the school?

While numerous studies have identified possible benefits for participants in Service Learning, there remain significant questions around self selection, parental influence, the nature of the learning that appears to be taking place, the generalisation of results and the development of appropriate Service Learning theory (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005). Bringle and Hatcher (2005), in suggesting that "Systematic, scientific, theory-based research with reliable and valid operationalisations offers many benefits in contributing to the knowledge base of Service Learning" (p. 33), support quantitative methods for measuring outcomes and designs that control for self selection and pre-existing differences. While acknowledging that qualitative methods have strengths, they believe that the academic community will be more receptive to information about the efficacy of Service Learning that is based on quantitative methods (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005). Bringle and Hatcher challenge the research community to produce Service Learning

theory that can provide coherence across variations in programs and experiences through common themes and constructs.

Theories enhance the understanding of how and why these variations matter. When research is derived from theory and evaluates theory-based hypotheses, the work is more systematic, the relationship between the educational experience and the learning outcomes is better understood, and the findings have broader implications. (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005, p. 34)

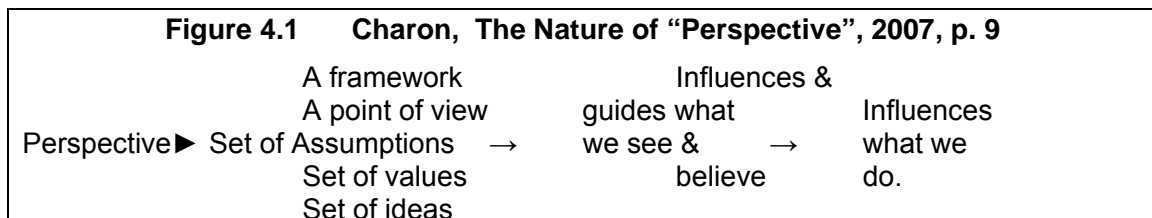
In addressing Bringle and Hatcher's challenges to produce research that is "not parochial and limited to a particular setting, a combination of circumstances, or a period of time .... going beyond describing a highly idiosyncratic event (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005, p. 35)", this study aimed to place its data-gathering and analysis within the context of identity development and learning theory. An interpretive, epistemological framework suited this aim as it seeks to produce 'interpretive' accounts of phenomena, rather than law-like generalizations. The intricate web of relationships that forms the interaction between Service Learning participants and their 'guests', suggest that this social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individual actors. "The act, then, and not the tract is the fundamental datum in social and individual psychology" (Mead, 1934, p. 8 cited in Gusfield, 2003, p. 121). Given the purpose of this study, the research design needed to be able to guide the researcher to gain contextual information (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106).

The study explored participant experience of a key aspect of the school's Service Learning Program, the Big Brekky program. Small volunteer teams of up to nine faculty, parents, students and recent past students, provided a light breakfast for sections of the homeless community of the inner city. The setting was highly particular, the interaction unique and the relationships, given the nature of the people involved, quite complicated. The study explored participant experience of the Service Learning Program in the context of the ethos of the school that sponsored the program. This exploration invited an interpretative approach that allowed the researcher to gain a sense of the meaning which people had constructed of events and experiences in their lives (Crotty, 1998). This approach was quite appropriate as human situations "can only be understood from the standpoint of the individual actors" (Candy, 1989, p. 3). To study human behaviour, the observer must, as much as is possible, 'take the role of the other', try to see, as much as possible, from the other's perspective. Human beings interpret events, objects and situations and respond to their interpretations. The sociological observer must have some experience of the group to be able to frame a research problem and to develop the

appropriate methods of study (Gusfield, 2003, p. 122). This research examined participant experience of situations that varied significantly from the daily experience of the volunteers. The researcher, in the case of this study, knew the group and the context well, was one of the ‘founders’ of the program and piloted the initial development of the program.

The importance of ‘trying to see, as much as possible, from the other’s perspective’ is particularly the case when exploring participant experience of Service Learning in the context of homelessness. The world of the ‘streets’ defies clinical definition and the symbols and meanings used and given by those who live, work or volunteer in this world are highly individual.

A study such as this was concerned with generating a richness of data that could allow the patterns of interaction between the participants in the Service Learning Programs and the guests of the programs to emerge. Given the highly personal nature of the participation in these programs, the study took its theoretical impetus from that stream of qualitative research known as Symbolic Interaction. “Human action occurs in some form of context” (Gusfield, 2003, p. 121). Words were one of the key ‘symbols’ that this study used to make sense and make meaning. Perspectives are expressed through words – it is these words that are used by the observer to make sense out of situations. In Symbolic Interactionism interrelated sets of words are used to order physical reality. This perspective can be seen as a conceptual framework; the words we use cause us to make assumptions and value judgments about what we are seeing and not seeing. The differences between actors’ viewpoints depend on the words they use to ‘see’ (Charon, 2007, p.5). The data that this study used was primarily the spoken, reflective perspectives of the volunteers. This approach is outlined below in Figure 4.1.





The role of epistemology is to address the nature of knowledge and provide a philosophical basis for understanding how knowledge is possible. Figure 4.2 provides an overview of the key elements of the research design for this study and each of these elements is expanded upon in the subsequent text.

<b>Figure 4.2 Research Framework.</b>	
4.2 Epistemology	Constructionism
4.3 Theoretical Perspective	Interpretivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Symbolic Interactionsim</li> </ul>
4.4 Research Methodology	Case Study
4.5 Data Collection Methods	Focus Groups Journals

#### **4.2 EPISTEMOLOGY: CONSTRUCTIONISM**

This study used the paradigm or world view of ‘Constructivism’. “A paradigm is a set of propositions that explain how the world is perceived; it contains a world view, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world, telling researchers and social scientists in general ‘what is important, what is legitimate, what is reasonable” (Patton, 2002, p. 69). What is the form and nature of reality in a Service Learning situation? The world of ‘Service Learning’ and specifically that of a ‘street van’ is highly social, ‘hands on’ and extremely ‘local and specific in nature’. With a huge range of client communities, diversity in ethnicity and in mental health, and an equally wide range of motivations for volunteers to be involved no two ‘van’ sites nor service providing organizations are the same. The basis for understanding and interpreting the experience participants had while involved with a ‘soup van’ was not objective scientific data, but personal and group articulation of the meanings people used to ‘make sense of their life.’ This study sought to understand the actors’ experiences; the way they constructed their experiences and the meanings they attached to them. What was of importance in this study was not observable social action, but rather, the subjective meaning of such action to the participants (Sarantakos, 2005). The perspective the researcher brought to the study and the perspective of the other actors involved was important, for what we saw and heard “will be interpreted through that perspective; and often each perspective tells us something very important about what is really true” (Charon, 2007, p. 2).

The nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known in the world of a 'street van' is both transactional and subjective. The depth and richness of 'data', the layers of relationship and the complex web of meaning that are generated in the street van context [as well as a school context], lead to an intimate link between the actors involved. It is difficult not to be a 'passionate participant' in such a study.

The epistemology of Constructionism would suggest that realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature. This certainly would apply in a specific Service Learning context. The Constructions in this study were not 'true' in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed in the context of the relationships central to the inquiry. "The investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively linked so that the 'findings' are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). Reality is not 'out there' but in the minds of people. Reality is internally experienced, is socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors, and is based on the definition people attach to it.

The interpretive approach holds that social life is based on social interactions and socially constructed meaning. People possess an internally experienced sense of reality. In contrast to an essentialist orientation view, those with a constructionist orientation assume that the interactions and beliefs of people create reality. There is no inner essence that causes the reality people see; it is a product of social processes. (Neuman, 2006, p. 89)

Reality, for interpretive theorists, is not objective but subjective; reality is what people see it to be. It is an active process of creating a world. The reality people experience in everyday life is a constructed reality – their reality – based on interpretation (Sarantakos, 2005, p.37). As a study using the epistemology of Constructionism, there was no objective truth about participant experience of Service Learning waiting to be discovered on the streets of Brisbane. Rather, the meaning participants gave to their engagement with the reality of Eddie's Van and the homeless people who came to it, was constructed by the participants over time (Crotty, 1998, p. 9).

#### **4.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

A theoretical perspective is based on a way of looking at the world and constructing an understanding of the world. The theoretical perspective must be congruent with the

purpose of the research and justifies the selection of particular methodology and methods to fulfil that purpose and to answer the research questions. The theoretical perspective provides a logical basis for the processes involved with the research. It structures the research design, gives direction to the data to be collected and provides a basis on which analysis of the data can proceed.

#### **4.3.1 Interpretivism**

As interpretive research, the goal of this study was to develop an understanding of social life, in this case participant experience of the Service Learning Program, and discover how people constructed meaning in this natural setting. As the researcher, my challenge was to get to know a particular social setting and see it from the point of view [the perspective] of those in it. This study, as an interpretive study, sought to explore meaningful social action, not just the external or observable behaviour of people. To this social action the actors attached subjective meaning, but it was social action with purpose and intent. This social action will often have little inherent meaning; it will acquire meaning among people who share a meaning system that permits them to interpret the action as a socially relevant sign or action (Neuman, 2006, p. 88).

The interpretive paradigm has as its basis the assumption that all human action is meaningful and hence “has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices” (Usher & Scott, 1996, p. 18). It follows that an understanding of the meanings that create, and are created by, interaction between human beings, is essential to an understanding of the social world and the myriad phenomena which it contains. Consistent with this interpretive approach, Symbolic Interactionists examine the meanings that phenomena have for people in their everyday settings; they look for meaningful social action (Neuman, 2006, p. 88).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

The decision to locate this study within the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interaction resulted in a particular approach towards the research purpose, the research foci, data gathering and data analysis. The concern of Symbolic Interaction is with the study of the “inner or experiential aspects of human behaviour”, that is, “how people define events or reality and how they act in relation to their beliefs” (Cherwitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 4).

Symbolic Interaction is concerned with perspective, an angle on reality, and in doing so forces us to pull out certain stimuli from our environment and to totally ignore other stimuli to make sense out of that stimuli in one way rather than another (Charon, 2007, p. 4).

Key concepts within Symbolic Interaction include self, interaction, self-interaction, interpretation, voluntarism and common symbolic language. The concept of 'self' is of primary importance to the understanding of the Symbolic Interaction approach. Mead said, that "the self arises within the social process" (Mead, 1934, pp. 7-8 cited in Aspland, 1999). The concept of self relates directly to the way people attach meaning to, and act towards, particular objects and phenomena. Elaborating on Mead's ideas, Blumer formulated three principles of Symbolic Interaction: human beings act toward things on the basis of meaning they have for them; secondly, the meanings of such things are derived from, or arise out of, social interaction that one has with others; thirdly, these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things encountered. For Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism is an 'approach' to and a 'position' for the study of human group life and conduct (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). This approach was well suited for this study.

The world of the homeless person, particularly in a First World country where the individual is surrounded by apparent wealth and comfort, is culturally rich. The stereotypes are many, the sub-culture quite unique, the boundaries of behaviour and language clear and the roles people play quite defined. The four interrelated and overlapping aspects of Symbolic Interactionism that Gusfield identifies are very applicable to this world. The four aspects are:

1. Meaning
2. Interaction, emergence and situatedness
3. Language and symbolism
4. the Humanistic thrust (Gusfield, 2003).

In Symbolic Interactionism human beings are not fixed into rigid patterns by their past or their demographics. They are reflective beings who respond to the experience of those around them. The self is both a product and a producer of relations with others. Action takes place in a context in which the person takes account of his or her interpretations of

the persons, places, and events in which the act occurs (Gusfield, 2003, p. 122). Through these interpretations each person finds meaning. By 'situatedness' we mean a concern with actions occurring in relation to the here and now, rather than actions as outcomes of race, ethnicity or class. The 'streets' are a very here-and-now context. Obviously there are clear links to issues of ethnicity, mental illness and class, but the daily interactions are very much 'in the now' and are an end in themselves. There is a de-emphasis on status categories as causal factors, eg. homeless people are from the poor classes. Symbolic Interactionism emphasizes the idea that behaviour is a response to specific contexts as the actor interprets them. To understand behaviour, the analyst must know the situation of the actor and the actor's definition of that situation.

The world of the street van is rich in language and symbol. Human beings have complex ways of communicating. Meanings are produced and transmitted through language and we respond to what things mean in and through symbols. Much of human experience involves the mediation of verbal symbols and their interpretations. Meaning and situations are transmitted through language in an almost infinite diversity of expression. We therefore need to be very conscious of the denotation and connotations of language. To be told by a homeless person to "Get lost!" would probably have a totally different meaning than to be told the same thing by a work colleague!

The relationship between the volunteer and the homeless person, between the volunteer community and the homeless community, is important. Human action emerges from the relation between subject and object and not as a simple response of the subject to an object. This suggests a creative, emergent, often unpredictable human being and with it, in the case of the street van, creative, emergent and often unpredictable experiences. A homeless person with whom one day you have the most profound and comfortable conversation, may not be talking to you at all, if not out-rightly abusive the very next day.

In Symbolic Interactionism we 'see' human action as creating meanings that can be understood as if they were literary texts, often poetic ones. Much of human action is performed before an audience, whether imagined or actual, interactive or staged (Gusfield, 2003, p. 126).

Human actions cannot be observed in the same way as natural objects. They can only be interpreted by reference to the actor's motives, intentions or purposes in performing the action. To

identify these motives and intentions correctly is to grasp the 'subjective meaning' the action has to the actor. (Carr & Kemmis, 1983, p. 88)

Symbolic Interaction focuses on the concepts of inter-subjectivity (what is real or valid in any social situation), motive and reason. Any event or action is explicable in terms of multiple interacting factors, events and processes. Causes and effects are mutually interdependent, and attaining complete objectivity is very difficult, especially when observing human subjects who construe, or make sense of, events based on their individual systems of meaning. Each 'actor' in Service Learning will 'make sense' of what they experience based on their own value systems, family history and individual personality (Moore, 1981).

So the aim of inquiry in this context was to develop an understanding of individual cases and experiences, not universal laws or generalisations. Symbolic Interaction makes the assumption that the world is made up of tangible and intangible multifaceted realities and therefore context makes a difference. Our inquiry is always value-laden, and as such, values inevitably influence the framing, bounding and focussing of research problems.

Symbolic Interactionism like all interpretive approaches, stresses the inappropriateness of fixed and static 'factors' in understanding human action. As reflective animals, human beings interpret situations and respond in creative and unpredictable ways. For Symbolic Interactionism and especially in the context of a street van with homeless people, 'place' and 'time' are vital variables for events and actions. This effects the data 'collected'. Often in these situations what is considered 'fact' is not a given, obvious matter. Both the recognition and content of fact emerge from processes of interpretation and presentation that are themselves deeply affected by the institutional bases of fact-gathering and transmission (Gusfield, 2003, p.127).

This research keeps in mind the deficiencies of Symbolic Interactionism: the danger of treating human behaviour only as the product of various factors that play upon human beings. When looking at group behaviour, the group and its relations to the meanings are essential to understanding the patterns of the group's aggregate characteristics: where people live, what laws and institutions exist, what occupations are pursued, as well as questions of race and ethnicity. In the case of Holy Family College the socio-

economic background of the participants was an important variable impinging upon participant experience. Contrary to what some believe in Symbolic Interactionism, social life does display consistency as well as change and fluidity, organisation as well as fragmentation, system as well as autonomy. For people working with the homeless the content of interaction cannot be assumed to be the same for all. Even when the meaning of symbols is agreed upon, the symbols themselves may arouse diverse emotions and imply different motives. 'Taking the role of the other' need not imply taking the values or nuances of the other's language. In fact, we do not take the role of the other. We take what we believe to be the role of the other and assume the 'other' will respond in terms of our interpretation. In much of Symbolic Interactionism, as in much of sociology generally, the character of interaction is more assumed than it is studied (Gusfield, 2003, p. 130). The challenge for the volunteer on the 'street van' is be in relationship and not be a performer.

The more the performer seems to adjust his performance to the supposed response of the audience, the more the audience tends to make the response anticipated. This simulacrum of conventional give and take may be called para-social interaction. (Gusfield, 2003, p. 131)

The challenge for volunteers in this sort of context is to be faithful over time to the relationship with the clients, so that both volunteer and client move past the role of performer. Symbolic Interactionism was especially appropriate for this study as it focused on participant experience of phenomena, and relationship with a highly stereotyped community, the urban homeless. Therefore there was a need for interpretive accounts to be 'coherent', to comprehend and account for insights and evidence within a consistent framework, and for these accounts to make sense to the actors whose behaviour was being studied. They must pass the test of participant confirmation (Carr & Kemmis, 1983).

#### **4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A methodology is a model which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 30). Several methodological approaches are located within the interpretivist theoretical perspective. Case study is one of these. The variable and personal nature of social construction suggests that individual construction can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. The very specific nature of the experience participants in this research

had, and the highly contextualised nature of the world of the homeless, would suggest this research was well suited for a case study. As Anderson suggests, “Specific situations with individual histories or unique contributions, are worthy of case study” (Anderson, 1990, p. 157). Education is a process and there is need for research methods which themselves are process-oriented, flexible and adaptable to changes in circumstances in an evolving context. For such situations, the case-study method is often appropriate because they incorporate a wider range of separate methodologies.

#### 4.4.1 Case Study

Case studies allow for naturalistic everyday, cultural and interactional phenomena to be studied in their own right and in their own territory (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 316). The particular nature of the world of the homeless and especially a ‘hospitality van’ and team working with the homeless, lent itself very well to this method of inquiry. Case studies deal with contemporary events within their real life context, are concerned with how things have happened and why, use multiple sources of evidence and do not attempt to control events (Yin, 2003). Case studies need to be clearly bounded and this is especially true when looking at participant experience of a Service Learning situation. “There is a focus, a heart of a case study, and a boundary which is often indeterminate, defining the edge of the case, that which is not been studied” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25 cited in Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 319). Each case study has its own dynamics and as one examines them, sub-questions to those already identified will emerge. Case studies of their very nature lend themselves to focusing on the issue being investigated, and an examination of the issue, participant experience of a Service Learning Program, will give rise to critical questions which then give rise to an issues and questions matrix (Anderson, 1990, p.159).

Case studies allow for two levels of questions to arise: those asked of specific individuals when they are interviewed or fill out questionnaires, then the questions asked of the case itself: how things are taking place and why. Case study suited the relational nature of this research. In case study the analysis phase takes place as the data is being collected and you can test it in the field, one big advantage of this methodology. As the research builds themes emerge; an ideal way to report a case study. Case study allows for lively narrative and a chain of evidence. Good case studies incorporate multiple sources of data, look for converging lines of inquiry, use triangulation to interpret



converging evidence and draw conclusions suggested by different data sources far stronger than those suggested by one alone (Anderson, 1990; Yin, 2003).

One key contribution that Case study allows is that of pattern matching. As the research developed, causal links and phenomena emerged, as did ways to explain and test these. One way of testing this was pattern matching (Yin, 2003). Pattern matching is where the pattern of relationships observed in one instance is predicted in another. When two patterns of interaction match then validity is added to the conclusions (Anderson, 1990, p. 162). In this research the patterns may be in how participants make sense of what they experienced on the van, in how they approached people, or in how the streeties reacted to them. Other patterns in this research may centre on the data from one Focus Group matching data from a separate one, or whether data from one team's daily journaling matched the reflections from another.

Case studies allow the researcher to concentrate upon a particular incident, an in-depth study of a single event, or a series of linked cases over a defined period of time. The researcher tries to locate the story of a certain aspect of social behaviour in a particular setting and the factors influencing the situation. Themes, topics and key variables may be isolated (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 317). Case study allows for a thick description of the research context; in this case, participant experience. Case study allows for a rich and vivid description of events within the case, a chronological narrative of events and an internal debate between the description of event and the analysis of events. Case study can address the general or at the particular. It can focus upon particular individual actors or groups of actors and their perceptions, upon particular events within the case, the integral involvement of the researchers in the case and ways of presenting the case so as to capture the richness of the situation (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 317).

Case studies clearly have their limitations. Often there is a danger that it is difficult to generalise, and the researcher acknowledges this to be the case here. The bounded nature of the case study means that this research merely addresses participant experience of a Service Learning Program in one Catholic boys' secondary school in Australia. Case study allows this to happen. It allows for a focus and emphasis upon the specific, the clearly bounded and unique. The use of case study has great value in giving some kind of internal coherence to specifics in fairly bounded settings (Hitchcock &

Hughes, 1995, p. 319). To what extent the findings of this research can be applied to Service Learning contexts outside of Australia, in settings other than homelessness, in co-educational situations or to groups of young women in similar situations, are all questions for conjecture.

When addressing the research methods to be used in any case study, it is important that sufficient data are collected so that the researcher is able to:

- explore significant features of the case
- create plausible interpretations of what is found
- test the trustworthiness of these interpretations
- construct a worthwhile argument or story
- relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature
- convey convincingly to an audience this argument or story
- provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments (Bassey, 1999, p. 65).

In the following section the different methods of collecting data for this research are outlined. It is hoped that a combination of focus group and journal keeping will address many of the challenges outlined by Bassey above.

#### **4.5 DATA COLLECTION**

The research design outlined above guided the researcher to adopt certain procedures or methods for both data collection and analysis. Methods refer to the tools or instruments employed by researchers to gather empirical evidence or to analyse data (Sarantakos, 2005). The nature of this study led the researcher to adopt participant journaling and the use of Focus Groups as the key data collecting methods. The time period for data collection was between January 2006 and July 2006, beginning and concluding with the student's academic semester and period of being a volunteer on the van.

In the presentation of data a coding system was used. The first two letters, eg. JG [James Gofton] referred to the participant [pseudonym used] whose reflection was being

presented. The letters that followed: EN [Entry Journal], EX [Exit Journal], DJ [Daily Journal] and FG [Focus Group] referred to the type of data source. Finally the numbers, eg. 8.6 [the 8<sup>th</sup> of June] referred to the date of the data gathering. Using this coding system meant that (JG, FG, 8.6) was a comment made by James Gofton in a Focus Group on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June or (BP, EX, 6) was data gathered from the Exit Journal of Ben Pincus in June.

#### **4.5.1 Participant Journaling**

Reflection upon experience would appear to deepen the learning in Service Learning. “Reflection is an essential component if Service Learning curricular are to impact on personality development and social-emotional aspects of the learning process” (McCarty & Hazelkorn, 2001, p. 32). Reflection upon experience may well be the key to ‘other oriented’ thinking and behaving that sets the stage for purposeful, meaningful social skill acquisition and generalization (McCarty & Hazelkorn, 2001, p. 32). The type of reflection needed to make sense of Service Learning experiences would demand vocabulary rich enough to describe the complexity of the interaction of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours inherent in human relationships. Hence the importance of situating the Service Learning experience within a Social Justice/Religious Education curriculum where relevant concepts and vocabulary are frequently introduced, developed and used.

The first data gathering method used in this research study was that of participant journaling. Education theorist Dewey espoused an educative experience that fostered meaningful [purposeful] learning. For Dewey “an effective learning condition was one that actively engages the student with the content in an intensely personal way” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 61). Personal journaling in the context of a structured Service Learning Program aimed to engage the student both cognitively and emotionally with the experience they had just had. Learning theorist Vygotsky identified how reflective journaling helped students develop an understanding of connections between themselves and the world around them.

Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by emotion, ie, by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last “why” in the analysis of thinking. (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 252 cited in Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p.62)

The participant journaling in the study took two forms. The first was an entry and exit journal gathering participant expectation of the upcoming program; identifying how the students felt and what changes they could identify in themselves as they moved on from the program. The entry journal completed by the students before the start of the program aimed to assist the students to reflect upon their experience of volunteering for the van, their hopes and fears, their expectations and goals for participating in the program. The exit journal hoped to tap into students' insight, wisdom and experience as they moved on from the program. Secondly, the participants were invited to journal about their daily experience each time they returned from the Service Learning site. This immediate articulation of what they felt as they returned from the service site tapped into the feeling level identified by Vygotsky, and indirectly prepared the participants to engage with the experience with a readiness to learn.

Writing about the process of Theological Reflection, Le Cornu identified a step by step process where awareness flowing from experience progressively grew deeper; from surface knowing to possible existential change. Key to reflection leading to existential change is the process of progressive internalization (see Figure 3.7 page 80).

The early stages of the process, conscious awareness of an experience and perception of different facets of that experience (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 14), were closely linked to the work done in the Religious Education classes associated with Holy Family's Service Learning Program. This involved the basic skills of Social Analysis, the introduction of the theologies of presence and of guest and the pre-brief work before students participated in the van experience. These processes allowed the participant to bring the experience into consciousness; it is not just any ordinary everyday experience. The initial journaling and class lessons about the nature of homelessness in Australia would have assisted students to frame the experience with both language and concepts.

The process of internalization then centres on the establishment of a relationship between individuals and the object of their attention; in this case the homeless who come to Eddie's Van. As these relationships built during the six month period of van service the participants were invited to reflect upon their experience and do so at first with only a surface approach to reflection concentrating on information itself. This would very much coincide with the Exposure Phase discussed in Chapter 4. Over time the daily

journaling and Focus Groups allowed a deeper approach to reflection as participants looked beyond the information to understand meaning and significance, drawing links and connections where possible (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 14). Many of the student reflections in the Reframing and Disillusionment Phases mentioned in Chapter 5 were linked to this element of the internalization process.

As the students became more and more a part of the sub-culture of the world of the homeless, their reflections began to take for granted the original presenting data that they had noted: the stereotypical images, the sense of welcome or rejection, the age of the homeless and focus on the deeper elements of their newly found friendships with the homeless; the sense of community, the sense of agency, the reciprocal nature of the relationship and the finer points of mental illness. This 'tacit knowing' would speak to the final elements of progressive internalization where meaning-making is so effective that none of the original discrete features are identifiable; the point at which external knowledge has been so absorbed into people's being through the process of reflection that it is now part of them (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 14). This process was paralleled by the growing ownership of, and use of, the theological language and skills of the program.

In Dewey's model of empirical inquiry, feelings in reflection are down-played to allow the student to play the role of 'objective observer' (Cone & Harris, 1996, p.38). However in Service Learning, especially in direct relational programs such as Holy Family's, the students were hardly objective observers. They brought with them to the service site their beliefs, attitudes and values which were at times at odds with those of the homeless with whom they related. The discontinuity between student and homeless person, while provoking active learning, further represented a danger in which their 'learning' may simply be built upon their prior attitudes and values (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 39) reinforcing frozen attitudes and negative stereotypes (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This was seen initially in the daily journaling and then in the Focus Group discussions centred on equality, on the purpose for the van and on the invitation to 'be aware of their story'.

Oral and written reflective exercises that connect cognitive inquiry with the experience of service are the key to lasting transformation on multiple levels (Strain, 2005, p. 62). Reflection honours the belief that learners are the experts in their own learning and developmental processes. "The only learning which significantly influences behaviour is

self-discovered, self appropriated learning” (Rogers, 1982, p. 223 in Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p.62). Reflection, and especially longer periods of journaling and Focus Group discussions, provide opportunities for students to mull over ideas, uncover inner secrets, and piece together life’s unconnected threads and thus create fertile ground for learning (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p.62). The reflective journal provided a vehicle for an inner dialogue that connected thoughts, feelings and actions coming from personal experience, in this case relating with homeless people. Critical reflection, leading to the development of autonomous and independent thought, allowed the student to stand back from the object of attention, their experience at the van site, and look at it objectively (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 15). Reflective journaling is an especially successful strategy for helping move the learner to higher levels of critical [analytical] thinking, and personal insight (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63). Hubbs and Brand use Mezirow’s transformative thinking theory to bring out the power of reflection. For Mezirow the danger is to stay in automatic thinking [conclusions, judgments which people jump to without thought or question].

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning, perspectives, habits of mind, mind sets), to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7 cited in Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63)

While the journaling in this study was not as in-depth and lengthy as private journaling nor that used in some forms of therapy it was highly significant for these adolescents in a world not known for reflection. Young men like to be actively involved, like to see change and be agents of change, and so valued the practical nature of the short but sharp journaling time at the end of each Big Brekky experience. The journaling time forced the students to think and reflect on what they had just experienced. Why were they doing it? What were they possibly learning and how they could do it better? It was certainly not mindless action.

Strain would argue the importance of “post-conventional levels of moral judgment that emphasizes the autonomous grasp of universal moral principles focused on rights and justice” (Strain, 2005, p. 62), and that Service Learning, and especially internalization linked with reflection, plays a key role in this movement. This was identified by Eyler and Giles when they reflected on the “transformational power of service-learning in terms of a transition from patronizing charity to a greater sense of the importance of political action to obtain social justice” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 135). The Focus Groups and

journaling questions in this study were aimed at transformative learning, requiring students to question the foundations and prior learning that went into the formation of a given belief. This process prompted the students to consider whether a given belief came about as a result of concepts tacitly accepted, or as the result of a deliberate thought process. The eight daily journaling times and vibrant focus group discussions were witness to this. By inviting the student to reflect upon their experience while the feeling reaction was still fresh, by engaging the student in mutual dialogue and by deliberately linking journal questions to reflect the previous focus group material and events on the van, the staff involved with the program were assisting the students to illuminate automatic thinking and habits of mind and possibly lead the students through a transformative process where ultimately the learner may be changed or transformed (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63).

Time in itself does not deepen one's understanding or insight, and ideology in itself does not lead to deeper awareness. As the participant journaled after van experiences and discussed in Focus Groups, there was a filtering and sifting of ideas and concepts, giving rise to beliefs and attitudes leading to deeper awareness and insight. Bruner (1986) refers to two modes of thought, 'the well-formed argument' and the 'good story', and Cone and Harris would use both by providing students in Service Learning situations with intellectual stimuli in the form of academic and journal questions (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 37). Through academic questions participants defined terms, cited observations and explained how these observations support or contradict theory, while through journaling questions, participants were encouraged to examine their personal response to experience. Several students in Strain's program came to much deeper levels of awareness through their reflection activities. In one case that the life of a person the student was writing an advocacy letter for "hung in the balance". While another, through reflection, became much more aware of the 'us' and 'them' atmosphere of a soup kitchen. Through Holy Family's classroom work, the pre-brief and de-brief sessions and journaling after each van experience, students were invited to interact with the skills of social analysis, their growing awareness of the cause and effect of mental illness and homelessness and the elements of the theology of the program. This provided a means to both a deeper relationship and deeper awareness of the social context of the van site.

Immediately upon their return from the Service Learning site the participants were invited to journal their experience. The journaling focussed upon their emotive reaction to what they had just experienced. Each journaling time had two common questions to allow for comparison over time and to tap into possible strength of feeling. These two questions were: What was the highlight of your morning and why? What was difficult about your morning and why?

The common questions meant that the students got used to these questions and were better able to engage with them and their meaning. Over the course of the program having these common questions meant that the students were sensitised to look for or be aware of these two areas of experience while they were interacting with the homeless. Every journaling experience concluded with the question, "Do you have any other reflection or comment?" This question invited any other student response that they did not associate with the two key questions. The immediacy of the journaling so soon after the van experience resulted in the students being more in touch with their 'raw' feeling or response. Responses may be altered by rationalising or affected by prior belief. As time went by, the students became quite used to the journaling and approached their time on the van with more intent as a result of the challenges posed to them in pre-brief time and provoked by previous journaling.

The other great contribution of the journaling to the data collection for this study was that in the journaling every voice was heard. Despite the presence of a skilled facilitator in the Focus Group sessions, some voices were rarely heard while others dominated the discussions. The journaling after each van visit allowed every voice to be heard in a private forum, where reactions and reflections were captured on paper, and not publicly discussed and debated as in Focus Groups. The individual journaling allowed for those students who were more at home with written reflection to be 'heard'. While advantageous, there is the danger that the journaling could lead to some form of intrapersonal looping of ideas.

The personal journal is generally a narrative description of the student's inner processes. The solitary nature of a personal journal does not contain the sounding board effect inherent in dialogue and class interactive journals, and the writer of the personal journal may well process and re-process the same concepts repeatedly with little challenge or his or her accepted beliefs or ideas. (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 67)

Youniss and Yates continually come back to the importance of reflection in moving youth forward in the process of developing their social-historical identity. While youth need to



experience agency by being given opportunities to use their skills to redress social problems, and while this is especially powerful when they participate as a cohort encouraged by respected adults, it is in the process of reflecting on their experience that real change takes place. “It is this process of reflection, which takes place publicly with peers and adults, as well as privately, that allows youth to construct identities that are integrated with ideological stances and political moral outlooks” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 36).

In their study based in an inner city Catholic High School in Washington D.C., Youniss and Yates invited the participants to write quarterly essays about their soup kitchen experience. While not as frequent as the journaling in this study, the essays were longer as they reflected upon their experience over a longer period of time. The essays allowed a degree of emotional engagement with the subject of homelessness, and their soup kitchen experience lifted their reflections to higher levels of causation and transcendence (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.58). In this study it was noted that the student reflections were a mixture of ‘descriptive’ and ‘reflective’ narrations, and that over the course of the year the percentage of reflective comments increased. The quarterly essays,

depict students’ cognitive and emotional engagement in questions about homelessness. This engagement was expressed through intense emotional statements of sadness, anger and satisfaction as well as evaluative statements that explored the transcendent meaning of the soup-kitchen experience. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 67)

Guided reflection and discussion are two ways that Service Learning is injected into the curriculum. Increasingly, those involved in Service Learning are recognising the complementarity of instructional and reflective components in service curricular. The essays undertaken by the participants in Youniss and Yates’ study showed “the advantage of directing reflection to ideological alternatives through which youth can connect themselves to history” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 155). In so doing youth are discovering the power of their agency and see this agency coupled with that of previous generations. When the participant journals, he is not just internalising the experience, but going through a process of reflective reasoning. Reality is not given, but individuals construct it by reflecting on their actions in order to make sense of past experience and anticipate their future actions. Through the journals and the Focus Groups the participants are “reasoning together in the sense-making process” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 157). Written reflection, focussed to understand one’s experience, can move the participant to a level of transcendence. Another term for journaling in this context is

appreciative inquiry. Lander used appreciative inquiry to engage research participants in telling stories of their peak experiences and formulating provocative propositions for action.

Appreciative inquiry with its emphasis on telling personal stories of lived experience, when directed to the lived experience of good writing, could accomplish this flow of meaning among the many different practices and genres of writing represented by the adult education practitioners of the graduate student cohort. (Lander, 2002, p. 38)

For researchers such as Lander and Bazerman (1994), “writing is inherently dialogical and the processes and artefacts of writing constitute a mediated conversational space” (Lander, 2002, p. 38). Appreciative inquiry and journaling engages learners in imagining possible worlds, the best of ‘what is’ [the stories of peak experiences] moving to ‘what might be’ [predictions] to ‘what shall be’ [decisions] and ‘what should be’ [moral positioning]. By adopting this approach, journaling assists participants to move past the immediate experience to possible changes in values and a deeper level of meaning.

From van visit to van visit the other journaling questions changed slightly to reflect either the input from the Religious Education classes or the data coming from the Focus Group discussions. The changes in the journaling questions reflected the role of the mentor or mediator that is referred to in Kolb’s four stages of experiential learning and Cone and Harris’ Lens Model. Kolb, Cone and Harris, Le Cornu, Mezirow, and Stain all point to the role of reflection in some form leading the participant to deeper understanding. The changes in journaling questions reflect the journey from Exposure Phase to Agency Phase as outlined in Chapter 5, section 5.1. The other journaling questions used in the daily reflections are outlined in Appendix 4.

#### **4.5.2 Focus Groups**

Individual journaling is rarely used alone but often, as in the case of this study, in conjunction with other qualitative methods such as Focus Groups (Wilson, 1997). The second data-gathering method used in this study was Focus Groups. Individual interviews and focus groups are socially contrived situations established by researchers to enable respondents to ‘tell their stories’; stories based in a complex social network to which and in which the respondent seeks to give meaning. The use of focus groups as a method of eliciting respondents’ perceptions, attitudes and opinions has grown in recent

years. For researchers, the Focus Group is a highly efficient qualitative data-collection technique which provides some quality controls so that participants use checks and balances to weed out false or extreme views (Flick, 1998, p. 115). For some researchers, (Flick, 1998; Patton, 2002) the interaction between participants is an integral part of the research process, provided the group facilitator does not allow particular personalities to dominate or others not be heard. For this study a focus group was defined as:

- a small group of 4 – 12 people
- meeting with a trained facilitator
- for 1 – 2 hours
- to discuss selected topics
- in a non-threatening environment
- to explore participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, ideas and
- encourage and utilise group interactions (Wilson, 1997, p. 211).

While there would be a difference of opinion as to how much the researcher should inject themselves into the group interaction, there appears to be little doubt that responsibility for both the focus and content of the interview rests with the researcher. For Wilson, the researcher seeks explicitly to exploit group dynamics and analyse the resultant interaction as productions of data (Wilson, 1997, p. 213), while for Morgan and Spanish, the focus group is a "small, largely un-moderated and without elimination of acquaintances group". For them the researcher takes on a minimalist role in group interactions (Morgan & Spanish, 1984 cited in Wilson, 1997, p. 214). Key to the approach Wilson takes is the desire to tap into some 'collective remembering' by the interaction of peers within the focus group. Gradually, through the interaction of respondents, the researchers are able to develop a more complete picture of how respondents conceptualise the issues under discussion: feelings, attitudes and perceptions (Puchta & Potter, 2004). It could be argued that focus groups provide the best illuminative data on the way respondents interact with each other outside naturally occurring events (Wilson, 1997, p. 221). Normally in the focus group, the researcher leads the discussion and encourages participants to comment on and build upon each other's contributions. In this study the researcher chose not to facilitate the focus groups but invited a trained psychologist who was intimate with the program to do so.

The choice not to facilitate the focus groups was primarily linked to a belief that given the researcher's role within the school community, his presence as facilitator would have influenced what was being said. For the Focus Groups a moderator was used who was skilled at leading groups and knew the Service Learning Program well. The moderator focused on encouraging quiet individuals, controlling those who dominated and keeping the conversation flow directional, animated and relevant.

The moderator of the Focus Groups reminded the participants at the beginning of each group that there was no 'right' or 'wrong' response to the questions under discussion, and that the researcher only wanted their candid and honest opinion or reaction. At the end of each series of four Focus Groups, the moderator and researcher met to identify themes in the data and to phrase new questions for the next round of Focus Groups and/or daily journaling, so as to be faithful to the evolving articulation of participant experience and the resulting issues. This study of participant experience of a Service Learning Program used a number of focus groups in order to sensitise the researcher to the emerging issues. "Focus groups are particularly useful in helping develop specific research questions and issues for further exploration" (Anderson, 1990, p. 242). From these a topic guide for use with future focus groups was developed.

This study used small, moderated focus groups for the purpose of understanding and interpreting participant experience. To best elicit an articulation of participant experience the issue of focus group membership needed to be addressed. What was initially unclear was whether the focus groups should consist of the members of one Big Brekky team or a mixture of teams. Kitzinger (1994) has no problem with the members of the focus group knowing each other well. Kitzinger argues that focus groups composed of respondents who already know each other, such as members of the same 'Big Brekky team', may result in, "precisely the people with whom one might 'naturally' discuss such topics (as their van experience), at least in passing and these would be the major sites of 'collective remembering'. By using pre-existing friendship groups we were sometimes able to tap into fragments of interactions which approximated to 'naturally' occurring data" (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 105). Not all researchers would agree with this. "We would argue that precisely because we separated members of friendship and family groups in to different focus groups, respondents were able to be more open in their disclosures on a sensitive topic" (Wilson, 1997, p. 217). As interaction between participants is a key

feature of the focus group method there needs to be sufficient diversity of view to encourage discussion and yet not too heterogeneous so as to lead to conflict or the repression of views of certain individuals (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001).

Anderson's contribution to this question was to remind the researcher not to restrict the focus group to only one target population when several are able to relate to the issue. Indeed, the experience of the Service Learning Program will probably be different for the students who attended different Big Brekky sites, as each site had quite different homeless populations, some with larger numbers of younger homeless or Indigenous homeless to others, and varying in size from fifteen 'regulars' to upwards of forty. Consequently each focus group was made up of the other members of each participants 'Big Brekky' team as well as the members of one other team. This resulted in discussions that had both the 'natural mix' of fellow team members aiding collective remembering, as well diversity of experience to broaden reflections. By having the other members of the student's team present in the focus group particular incidents were able to be expanded upon with differing points of view aired. However some degree of conformity linked to group dynamics was noted by the facilitator.

The significant value of focus groups over interviewing is that it addresses the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee. Sometimes respondents may feel obliged to provide answers which they think the interviewer wants to hear. Focus groups help to break down the power relationship between researcher and respondent. By reconceptualising the focus group interview as a discussion amongst respondents, the researcher goes some way towards democratising the process, and it is likely that more naturally occurring language will result in what still remains a socially contrived situation.

The focus group not only discloses what is important to individual respondents, but it attempts to provide a situation where the synergy of the group adds to the depth and insight; the group strives to provide in-depth qualitative data which could not be obtained as efficiently any other way (Anderson, 1990, p. 241). Focus groups provide a setting in which individuals are comfortable with self-disclosure and where the group dynamics create a chain of reaction designed to exhaust the view on the issue or topic. As one explores participant experience of a Service Learning Program, it would be hoped that

the focus group would assist participants in developing their feeling reaction to the program and to particular situations within it, and so move participants closer to learning.

Kolb, Moore, and Dewey all suggest that much of the learning in Service Learning occurs in the interaction and interplay between cognition and experience, between feelings and ideological constructs and that the verbal interaction of the focus group allows for this. Focus Groups can produce richer data than quantitative methods as they allow for interaction, cross-participant learning and clarification and probing by moderators. The Focus Group can, if skilfully facilitated, engage the individual in a cycle of thought and action based on experience, introspection, shared and examined analysis, and finally synthesis (Silcox, 1993, p. 62). Some adolescents enjoy verbal exchange, are more at home in the world of conversation, and so do some of their best analysis in and through engaging in discussion with peers.

The Focus Group can prompt participants to analyse their experiences (Schmiede, 1995). This is accomplished by “probing about what happened, why it happened, how this could be so, what does it mean, and how things might be done differently. Such questioning prompts students to synthesize their experiences and gives a call to action” (Dewey, 1910 cited in Silcox, 1993, p. 64). By hearing others’ perspectives, participants are implicitly encouraged to evaluate their own values, beliefs, and stereotypes related to a particular population. However one key disadvantage of focus groups is that participant influence may yield ‘socially desirable’ rather than candid responses. “Group interviews [Focus Groups] are not, without problems: The results cannot be generalised; the emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, and the group may be dominated by one person; and ‘groupthink’ is a possible outcome” (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 73).

By basing focus groups on pre-existing groups (such as the Big Brekky teams) a rich data set is generated, but this may bring into the question the authenticity of the voices present. Some researchers use the terms ‘public’ and ‘private’ voices. The in-depth interview could be seen as a ‘private’ voice situation while the focus group is public. Wilson would suggest there is no clear cut answer as to the validity and quality of the data gleaned from either source. Some would argue that interviews are overly dominated by the questioner and criticized for not eliciting the true feelings of the

respondents (Anderson, 1990, p. 241). The value of focus groups can be summarised as,

encouraging more open discussion of sensitive issues, allowing the researcher to probe for meaning where one might have been more reluctant to do so in individual interviews, demonstrate a greater variety of discourse than is available in other methods [with the exceptions of observation] and let the researcher experience being in a group with the respondents and hearing them talking with their peers. (Wilson, 1997, p. 221)

The probing for meaning that Wilson identifies is a deliberate intent of the Focus Group facilitator. While mentors play an important role in guiding participant journaling and concept formation in curriculum situations in the Focus Group, the facilitator ensures that participants are engaging in critical thinking and analysis. It is through the processes of guided and critical reflection that assumptions and stereotypes can be questioned and in time lead to new beliefs and values based upon their reflected upon experience.

Thought that involves critical reflection involves learning; critical reflection moves beyond reflection, with participants assessing the validity of the assumptions and beliefs which guide their thoughts and actions. Uncritically assimilated meaning perspectives can reflect such distorting ideological assumptions as sexual or racial stereotypes. It is important to critically analysing one's own psycho-cultural assumptions. This can be a critical barrier to learning that must be addressed in Service Learning, and Focus Groups can serve as a potential forum for participants to reflect on their experiences and their belief systems. (Mezirow, 1990, p. xvii)

The key to an effective focus group lies in the quality of the questions asked. Questions must be carefully selected and phrased in advance to elicit the maximum amount of information. Typically a focus group would deal with about six questions. "As participants answer questions, the responses spark new ideas or connections from other participants. Answers provide mental cues that unlock perceptions of other participants – cues that are necessary in order to explore the range of perceptions" (Krueger, 1994, p.54). Typically, focus group questions are open ended, are qualitative in nature, avoid quantifying (how much?), do not allow for 'yes' or 'no' answers and do not ask 'why'? When focus group questions do have a 'why' nature, it is not because the researcher is looking for a rational answer, but that you wish to determine why from a less directive approach based on how people feel about what is being discussed. Good focus group questioning will be sequenced, leading to a natural flow resulting in a feeling of participating in a discussion exploring a variety of related issues (Anderson, 1990, p. 243). The Focus Group questions for each of the four Focus Groups are outlined in Appendix 4.

The decision was made not to use semi-structured interviews as part of the data gathering. Initially it was intended to use interviews to expand upon issues raised by participants during either their journaling or in focus groups. However, the potential for bias in the data, given that some would be interviewed while others were not, led the researcher to choose not to interview.

#### **4.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis involves organising what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned. In the process of making sense you categorise, synthesise, search for patterns and interpret the data you have collected. 'Analysis' involves breaking data down into bits and then bringing them together in some meaningful format. Analysis gives life, real life, to our impressions and intuitions. Data analysis takes place as the study proceeds – not waiting until all the data are collected (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

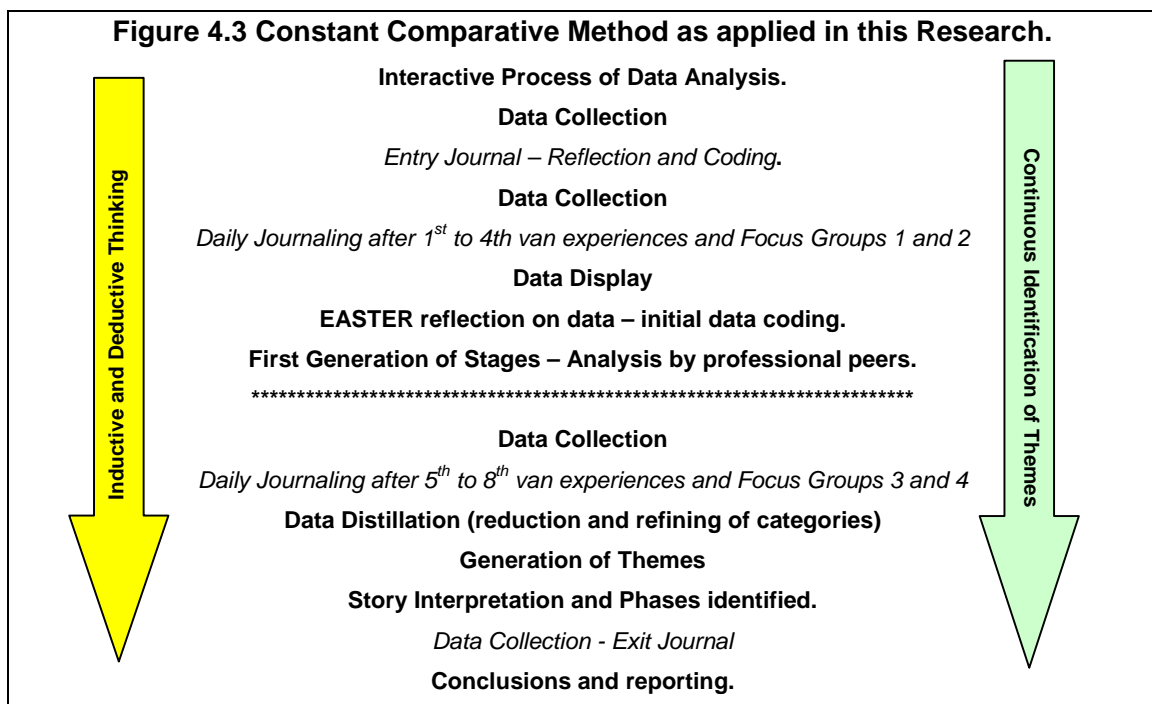
Data gathering began in late January 2006, resulting in almost immediate changes being made to both daily journaling and Focus Group questions as a result of what was heard and experienced. The first major analysis of the data did not take place until Easter. Initially a time sequence was used for data analysis as the one variable that was constantly changing was that of time; the weeks that went by, the number of times that the participants worked on the van, the changing relationships through time, their comfort at the site and immersion into the sub-culture, all influenced by time. Hence the initial analysis of the data used the sequential reflections of the participants, their sequential participation in the Focus Groups and their journaling to get in touch with their experience of the van.

By Easter sufficient data had been gathered to begin initial analysis. The process used to analyse the data was the "constant comparative method" (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). Within this dynamic process, data collection, analysis, and interpretation occur simultaneously and interactively in order to make sense of the information gathered (Creswell, 2003). Given the nature of the experience to be explored, some eight van experiences over a six month period and four focus group discussions, the mid point of the data gathering period, the Easter holiday period, was a natural break in both the



participant experience and the analysis of that experience. In keeping with the constant comparative method, this break invited an in-depth reflection period at the half way point of the experience. Again towards the end of the time, there appeared to be a natural articulation of experience linked to the Exit Journal. The validity of the Easter analysis was linked to the early elements of the experience and not the total van experience. A summary of the constant comparative method as applied to this data collection and analysis is outlined below in Figure 4.3.

By coding the journaling and Focus Group data it was hoped to “present the reader with the stories identified throughout the analytical process, the salient themes, recurring language, and patterns of belief linking people and setting together (Anfara, Brown & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). Miles and Huberman noted the importance of initial coding to “find conditions among the participants as a method of pointing to regularities in the setting” (Miles & Huberman, 1994 cited in Anfara et al., 2002, p. 32).



The Entry Journal that was completed by the participants was open coded where by expressions are classified by their units of meaning (single words, short sequences of words) in order to attach annotations and above all ‘concepts’ to them (Flick, 1998, p.

180). Some refer to this process as “code mapping”, where reams of data are brought into manageable chunks, meaning and insights brought to the words and acts of the participants, and then themes generated (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 32). Tesch calls this process “de-contextualization and re-contextualization” (Tesch, 1990 cited in Anfara et al., 2002). This process was undertaken for each of the seven questions in the Entry Journal and the number of participants whose response was linked to a particular code noted. The questions and open coding for the Entry Journal are set out in Appendix 3. The Entry Journal data was initially recorded by question, with all fifty-three responses to a particular question listed one after another. After this was done an initial coding was completed and the number of responses to that code noted. Examples of the Entry Journal are set out in Appendix 3. Frequently the code adopted referred to a key word or phrase in the response; excellent reputation, new adventure, high expectations, wanting to help others etc. To help illustrate this the initial coding for Question 1 of the Entry Journal and the number of responses are outlined below in Figure 4.4.

<b>Figure 4.4 Question 1 of Entry Journal: coding and frequency of response.</b>	
1.1	The program has an excellent reputation within the Holy Family Community; it is ‘part of Holy Family’. [23]
1.2	It was a new adventure and challenge. [11]
1.3	High expectation of a good experience. [14]
1.4	Wanting to help others. [10]
1.5	Want to work with Mr. Finn and Brother Damien; admiration for the mentors involved. [6]
1.6	Curious about the life of a homeless person. [7]
1.7	Wanting to do ‘Religious Education’ that was beyond traditional curriculum. [6]

Theoretical coding is the procedure for analysing data which have been collected in order to develop a grounded theory. At this early point in the data gathering process, it was important to identify the concepts and categories of experience that would become the experience map from which later more abstract concepts would be produced (Flick, 1998, p. 179).

Concepts are the basic building blocks of theory. Open coding in grounded theory method is the analytic process by which concepts are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. The basic analytic procedures by which this is accomplished are, the asking of questions about the data, and the making of comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event and other instances of phenomena. Similar events and incidents are labelled and grouped to form categories. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 74)

Some of the Entry Journal questions elicited strong responses with 32 of the 53 participants saying that they wanted to “gain a greater understanding of homelessness”,

40 reported that their parents “thought it was a good idea that they were involved”, and 17 indicated that they were concerned that they “will not know how to connect with the homeless”. The coding and data from the Entry Journaling provided some of the insight that identified the Expectations and Exposure Phase material that will be discussed in Chapter 5. The full summary of themes/codes from the Entry Journal, with associated levels of response, is outlined in Appendix 3.

Between February and Easter 2006 most participants worked on the van four times and experienced two Focus Group discussions. At Easter a preliminary analysis of the journaling data was undertaken to assist with the forming of future journaling and Focus Group questions, and to identify whether the methods being used were giving data relevant to participant experience of the Service Learning Program. During this preliminary analysis the researcher made notes and observations next to the transcript text on what the initial presenting data was and was not saying. For example it was noted that few gave a religious faith reason as their motivation for being involved in the program, many of the adolescents responded favourably to any small sign of appreciation from the homeless pointing to their need for a sense of agency and many of the early journaling reflections used an ‘us’ and ‘them’ language. This continual reflection aided in the later Axial and Selective Coding. Simultaneous data collection and analysis is recommended for generating categories and building theories (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998). The Easter analysis coding is outlined below in Figure 4.5.

**Figure 4.5 Easter Open Coding of Journaling.**

a. Nervous, uncertain of role	k. Communication Skills	u. Faith / Ethos
b. Positive anticipation	l. Going beyond comfort zone	v. Enhance school reputation
c. Helping others	m. Getting to know names	w. Coming as guest
d. Reciprocity	n. Being useful	x. Being present
e. Sharing of Story	o. Feeling appreciated	y. Experience of rejection
f. Pre-conception / Stereotype	p. Dismantling of stereotypes	z. Appreciate what I have
g. Confronting experiences	q. Deep personal awareness	aa. Mental Illness
h. Curiosity	r. Social Analysis	bb. Team bonding
i. New Environment	s. Wider Awareness	cc. New Stereotypes
j. Connection to homeless	t. Sense of Community	

The Easter analysis was important in distinguishing how the first two research questions identified what features of the program impacted upon students and what changes occurred over time in the meaning participants gave to their experience. By coding the articulation of student experience linked to the time sequence of the data, the changes in

meaning within Axial codes became more apparent. Open coding was used with the Easter data, resulting in a large range of quite general codes with some initial themes (concepts) beginning to emerge.

The second step in the analysis process was to “categorize these codes by grouping them around phenomena discovered in the data which are particularly relevant to the research questions” (Flick, 1998, p. 180). These constructed codes are by necessity more abstract. One approach to coding uses the terms, ‘Open’, ‘Axial’ and ‘Selective’. In this approach “First Iteration: initial codes/surface content analysis” are referred to as Open Coding, “Second Iteration: pattern variables” as Axial Coding and “Third Iteration: application to data set” as Selective Coding (Brown, 1999 cited in Anfara et al., 2002, p. 32). The common factor in analysis is the interaction between researcher and data, a constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Quite soon after the first couple of journaling experiences, the researcher noted that the students’ ability to express themselves in the journaling format increased significantly. Longer sentences, more stories, more personal names and anecdotes, more feeling words and more social analysis began to appear. The transcript of the first Focus Group was Open Coded resulting in a much smaller number of codes as outlined below in Figure 4.6.

<b>Figure 4.6 Focus Group 1 Open Coding.</b>		
a. Nervous, uncertain of role	k. Communication Skills	aa. Mental Illness
f. Pre-conception / Stereotype	j. Connection to homeless	m. Getting to know names
g. Confronting experiences	l. Going beyond comfort zone	p. Dismantling of stereotypes
	t. Sense of community	

Initially each focus group transcript was read in its entirety without interruption, allowing for particular but broader themes to emerge. From this first reading a initial coding sequence was identified and applied to the transcript during a second reading. As this was done new themes were identified and some were joined to existing codes. This early comparison of journaling and Focus Group data was important for triangulation as the analysis showed the participants grappling with similar concepts and categories linked to their experience, but coming from ‘personal reflection’ (journaling) or group conversation (Focus Groups).

The coding for the daily journaling and the first two focus groups was more complex than the Entry Journal coding. While both data collecting methods had the participants

addressing particular questions, the responses were less predictable, and varied in length from single word “Yes” and “No” to lengthy reflections. Once again the daily journaling responses were set out with all the responses to particular questions under one heading. From these responses to a common question, themes were identified. The daily journaling coding provided the initial coding list for the focus groups. As the researcher read the focus group transcripts, the theme or themes were identified and the code placed in the space adjacent to the text. Often the text was linked to more than one code and this was noted.

Over time, and with more reflection and data, the codes changed. Some were deleted as not sufficiently strong to reflect participant experience, others were combined with other codes, and some were so strong as to suggest ‘sub-codes’. Once again the codes often reflected key words or phrases used such as “nervousness”, “excitement”, “surprised by the reality”, or “the homeless are just like us”. In this initial analysis, the researcher first named the stimulus question from either the daily journaling or the focus group, followed by the identification of the codes and a brief explanation of them, all followed by a series of key quotations from the participants that reflected those codes. Figure 4.7 below sets out one set of codes from the daily journaling after the first couple of van visits. The code assigned to the comment is bolded.

**Figure 4.7 Coding from Van Visits 1 and 2: “Initial good experience, sense of being ‘at home’, valued or the highlight of your morning”.**

- a. When the **homeless approached** the participants and chatted to them.
- b. When the **homeless responded** to questions or to conversation initiators.
- c. When they got to know someone’s **name**.
- d. When they found **common ground**.
- e. First awareness that the homeless are ‘**just like us**’.
- f. When the homeless responded to them as teenagers – in an adult way – as **equals**.
- g. When the participants **felt appreciated**.

At Easter, the text supporting various codes was selected from the transcripts and placed under the code, allowing for a more complete expression of the theme to emerge. At this point in the analysis the process did not involve any of the participants’ names, as the focus was on the theme linked to the articulated experience rather than to the particular person experiencing it. Figure 4.8 below displays a short section of one focus group with the theme code identified in bold on the right.

**Figure 4.8 Sample Focus Group Transcript and Coding – March 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

Andrew: They don't look normal. Even if they did not have torn clothing or stuff it is how they look – when you look at them they look half scary, missing teeth, some of them look like ferals. **Stereotypes**

Martin: I really did not know what to say to them – how to start a conversation with them or what might offend them or what. So I just followed the other guys conversation at first. Or I would let them start the conversation and then once we got into it I was right. Then the second time I found it really easy to connect. I was able to start a few conversations. I was even able to talk to people I avoided the first time. Easier to Connect

Facilitator: The first time when you had difficulty knowing what to say – were there some topics that you discovered that you found easier to talk about than others.

Martin: Definitely! Like when you mentioned sport for example – they would really talk about that. Connecting skills.

Andrew: Or they would talk about smoking or alcohol and stuff and what we should not do. You would steer away from some topics. Connecting skills.

Ciaran: I've done it before, when I first came to the school in Year 8 with my mother and last year as well. I'm a bit sceptical about these people at times. I think that some of what they talk about is complete rubbish and what is wrong with them. Some of the things that they say don't really add up. Confronted

Facilitator: So for most of us – before we went the first time we were a little nervous. And one of the most difficult things was approaching people and feeling that they were interacting with you.

Martin: Fear of the unknown as well.

Facilitator: So the second time you knew – so the unknown was not as much of a factor – you said that the second time was easier. How did other people find the second time?

Geoff: Yeh, a lot easier. Cause you knew some of the people and so if you did not get in contact with new people you could go back and talk to them again and perhaps meet new people then. The whole experience of the first time was that you were accepted and that most of the people are accepting. Before you go you don't really know what topics they are going to talk about – but then the second time you know the type of things they want to talk about and discuss and it is much easier. Past Stereotypes.

Facilitator: Was it easier just because it was not new or were there other things?

Alex: You had got rid of the unknown. You knew that you could go up and approach people. Going beyond comfort zone.

Geoff: You also were not judging them on the stereotypes anymore. Past Stereotypes.

One of the weaknesses of Focus Groups is the potential for socially desirable responses. The Focus Group facilitator and researcher identified that the first group discussion began with an atmosphere of 'telling the researcher what they felt he wanted to hear'. As a result the facilitator began the remainder of the Focus Groups by reminding the participants that the researcher only wanted to hear their honest views and expressions of their experience of the van.

The early participant journaling and Focus Group discussion paralleled the early stages of 'Progressive Internalization': Conscious awareness of an experience, perception of different facets of that experience, establishment of a relationship between individuals and the object of their attention and surface reflection with its focus on the information linked to the world of the homeless (the characters, the procedures, the physical set up of the site etc). As the participants gained the language to discuss their experience, were

more 'at home' in the unique social setting of a street van, and were more used to both the journaling and Focus Group methods, their ability to depth their articulation of experience grew.

The next step in the analysis of data was to refine and differentiate the categories resulting from the open coding. In Axial coding the most promising categories of the Open coding are selected for further elaboration. This process was paralleled by a 'falling away' in participant articulation of categories such as "curiosity", "new environment" or "being helpful" (around the barbeque). Axial categories are enriched by their fit with as much data as possible and their growing relationship with other categories (Flick, 1998, p. 183). Axial categories such as 'story', 'community', 'reciprocity', 'purpose of the van' were emerging and framing the van experience. In moving continuously back and forth between inductive thinking (developing concepts, categories and relations from the text) and deductive thinking (testing the concepts, categories and relations from the text, especially data that went against the flow) a sense of the 'story' that was participant experience began to emerge (Flick, 1998, p. 184). It was the "naming of possible relations between phenomena and concepts used to facilitate the discovery or establishment of structures of relations between phenomena, between concepts and between categories" (Flick, 1998, p. 183) that resulted in the researcher's first attempt at Selective Coding or framing of participant experience of the van.

From this preliminary analysis an initial framework for student experience of the Big Brekky program was drafted. In this framework the van experience was outlined in terms of 'stages' that each participant would experience. Sixteen 'stages' in the participant experience were proposed. In constant comparative method hypothesis, generation (relationship discovery) begins with the analysis of initial observations. The initial observation suggested that there were identifiable stages in participant experience. These stages are outlined below in Figure 4.9. Each 'stage' reflected the 'experience' of participants as articulated by them at a relatively surface level. While these stages do reflect participant experience it was at an early point in their overall experience. Some students were still caught up in a 'honeymoon' feeling which idealised the homeless. Some were still struggling to connect with the homeless because of shyness, and others were reacting to apparent hypocrisy in what the homeless were saying and appearing to

live. Significantly, these stages were identified before the ideology of the program had neither truly being understood nor owned by the participants.

**Figure 4.9 Stages of Experience of the van site [Easter].**

1. Expectations Stage. 2. First Reality Stage. 3. Skills acquisition Stage. 4. Pushing the Boundaries. 5. The Indigenous Population. 6. Why do we do the van? (Re-stereotyping and rejection). 7. At home at the site. 8. Fidelity and friendship: testing the waters. 9. Ideology and Ethos. 10. New Comfort Zone. 11. Attitudinal Change. 12. Sub-culture. 13. Group Bonding. 14. Community. 15. Sense of Agency. 16. Where to now?

Immediately after Easter the researcher met with the focus group facilitator, the coordinator of the night van, and a psychologist who knew the program well, to review the data and reflect on the initial coding and the stages identified. While agreeing that the stages named did reflect initial participant experience, there were too many stages identified. Some were considered to be sub-sets of other themes/codes, and the relative lack of experience to reflect upon led to their questionable validity.

In the post-Easter period, the focus group discussions regularly centred on the participant experience of 'coming as guest' and 'being present', and this led to a re-organisation of the themes identified. As the focus group members began to feel more at home with each other, and the conversation began to flow more freely, several themes arose from the participants without direction or prompting from the facilitator or researcher. The generation of themes from participant reflection is true to the constant comparative method where "inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1990, p. 390). Issues such as 'who benefits', the meaning of 'story', the true nature of mental illness, the 'purpose of the van' and reciprocity, all took time to surface and in turn helped identify the phases that were later identified and will be discussed in the next chapter. Other elements of the van experience, such as the importance of the gatekeepers, and the gatekeepers as 'mentors' to the experience, were not identified until later in the analysis.

In keeping with the principles of Constant Comparative Analysis, the data from the fifth and sixth van visits, along with the third focus group, were typed up and the transcripts analysed just prior to the students' final van experiences and Exit Journal entry. By this time a clearer set of Axial and Selective codes, and the phases that ultimately were to



form an element of the Spiral Model, were emerging. These more complex codes suggested a deeper level of awareness and reflection from the experience. It was this set of codes that were used in the complete analysis of data when the total journaling and focus group data were brought together. The final sets of codes are outlined below in Figure 4.10.

<b>Figure 4.10 Axial and Selective Coding for Data Analysis.</b>			
1. Presence	5. Dissonance / Disillusionment	9. Nature of friendship	13. Story aware
2. Guest	6. Reciprocity	10. Acceptance Welcome	14. Their turf
3. Mental Illness	7. Purpose of Van	11. Asking 'why'	15. Agency
4. Community	8. Skills developed	12. Importance of Name	16. Context of Holy Family

By the end of the data-gathering period, the categories that were most relevant to the research questions were selected from the developed codes (Axial coding). Many different passages in the text, from both the journaling transcripts and Focus Group transcripts, were then grouped as evidence of these relevant codes in order to elaborate the axial category in terms of causal conditions, the phenomena, the context, intervening conditions and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 90). As the relationship between the different axial categories became clear, phases in participant experience began to emerge. These phases were the selective coding labels at a higher level of abstraction. This third step, selective coding, aims to “elaborate the core category around which the other developed categories can be grouped, and by which they are integrated; in this way the story of the case is elaborated or formulated” (Flick, 1998, p. 185). At this point theoretical saturation had been reached. Further coding or enrichment of categories no longer provided or promised new knowledge.

The Exit Journal that was completed by the participants at the end of the program was not coded as the students were invited to respond to specific questions that reflected the climactic point that the focus group discussion had arrived at. The purpose of the Exit Journal was to invite the participants to articulate their interpretation of where they were at within the experience and what they felt they had experienced and learnt.

#### **4.7 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

The participants in this study were selected from the body of volunteer students involved in the Big Brekky element of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College. The criteria set for the purposive sampling of participants in this study are:

- Regular participation in the program
- A minimum of five instances of serving on the Big Brekky team
- Membership of the Year 11 Religious Education classes studying the Social Justice Unit

At the conclusion of their Year 10 Academic year, students were invited to volunteer to be on Eddie's Van for the first six month roster of the next year. Fifty-three students volunteered and these students then formed the two Religious Education classes involved in the program, and served on the roster. Parents/Guardians of volunteering students were then contacted by letter to both confirm participation and grant parental/guardian permission for their children's participation in the research. The invitation outlined the purpose of the study, its importance for the College, the criteria for participation in the study and explained the research design and data collecting methods to be used. The length of the study, the steps to be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants and how findings would be communicated to the participants were outlined. Participants were assured that in no way would the research involve the clients of the program nor compromise the professional respect participants have for them. Participants were advised that ethical clearances would be obtained from both the College's Principal and their employing authority and the Australian Catholic University's Research Projects Ethics Committee. Details of the ethical clearance obtained from both the University and the site of employment/study of the participants, including both consent form, Letter of Information to participants and parent consent form have been included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

The case study was bounded to include only those volunteers who were regular participants in the program, to allow for some depth of experience and to allow participants to move past any possible honeymoon stage while involved in the program. A minimum of five experiences of working on the van was considered necessary to provide some depth to the participant observation, as on any one morning participants could experience a whole range of incidents that would be out of the ordinary. The time period for this study was chosen to allow the research to fit into the academic year of a Secondary School and for the interviews and other data-gathering not to impinge on the participants' experience of the program or their own academic commitments.

#### 4.8 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

As described in Chapter One I have worked as a secondary school teacher since 1977. I have been a member of the College Leadership Team at Holy Family College since January 2002. As Dean of Mission I have had overall responsibility for the Campus Ministry Program which includes the College's Service Learning Program. I have been involved in the Student Leadership and Retreat programs of Holy Family since the early 1990's, and as a member of the Congregation of Christian Brothers have a high profile in this school and the wider Catholic community.

As one of the two founders of the Service Learning Program and as the facilitator of the three week Year 10 'Matthew 25' Immersion Program, I was well known to the research participants. My personal involvement in many aspects of the program over several years and my 'hands on' credibility in working with the homeless (many of whom would know me personally), could reasonably lead to participants' acceptance of my presence around the van site and as a 'critical friend' in interview situations.

While I was the 'line manager' for the faculty involved in the 'Big Brekky' program, I made moves to ensure that I was not the direct line manager for any of the participants. Having the services of a College Campus Minister and a Co-ordinator of the 'Big Brekky' van ensured that the day-to-day running of the program was not my responsibility and that my overseeing of the program was at a distance. This ensured 'duty of care' and at times enabled some independent strategic planning. As Dean of Mission I would be perceived by faculty as having a significant role in the 'ethos' direction that Holy Family College is taking. As such, my role as researcher could be compromised to an extent when there is a clash between the beliefs and practices of faculty involved in the program, and their perception of the College Mission.

In the years prior to the commencement of this research, I had maintained my involvement in the 'Holy Family Night Van' as another element of the Service Learning Program. Holy Family Night van is a hospitality van conducted by the College but staffed by past students. It operates one night a week all year round in the middle of Brisbane's Central Business District. This van experience has maintained my street credibility with the homeless, and means that I have stayed in touch with the politics and coming and

goings of the homeless community. Many of the 'characters' referred to by volunteers on the morning Big Brekky would be well known to me.

As a member of the College staff and as a member of the College Leadership Team, I do have a discipline role. I am not the Dean of Students responsible for discipline, nor am I the Dean of Studies with ultimate responsibility for academic performance. It is important to note however, that my high profile within the College community would mean some degree of 'influence' upon student participants in the study and their responses. For some, I would be their Religious Education teacher and for some I would be their sporting coach. One major concern that I held was that the research participants would view me as an authority figure. However, as the data collecting, both for the daily journaling and monthly Focus Group experience, were either facilitated by the staff leader on the van that morning, or an independent-trained psychologist, there was a degree of distance between my presence and the participant responses. While the participant observer is expected to stay "sufficiently detached to observe and analyse", (Merriam, 1998, p. 103) my experience in this research was that I needed to establish a degree of familiarity and sense of collegiality with the participants to allow them to reconceptualise my role as co-researcher with them.

Because of my own passion for the relationships that the 'Big Brekky' program and other Service Learning initiatives at Holy Family College are building, my own self-interpretation and analysis of the data is important. In this study the researcher's insights, reflections and ideas about the area examined and the data gathered, thus become an important part of the data base contributing to the validity of qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 513).

#### **4.9 LEGITIMATION**

Legitimation concerns itself with the degree to which findings capture the reality of the situation under investigation. This reality though is holistic, multi-dimensional and ever-changing, and is not a single, fixed and objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured (Merriam, 1998, p. 167). Creswell and Miller see validity as "how accurately the account represents participants' realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). However, some believe that in case study methodology, the concepts of reliability and validity are problematic (Basse,

1999). As the “blurring of genres” in research methodology rapidly occurs, other theorists do not believe that criteria for judging either ‘reality’ or validity are absolute, but rather are derived from community consensus regarding what is ‘real’, what is useful, and what has meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 2003, p. 264). As a researcher working out of an interpretive paradigm, the perspective of reality will be pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended and contextualised. This study uses the work of Creswell and Miller (Figure 4.11) and Bassey (Figure 4.12) to establish the key criteria for legitimation. In any approach to criteria, it is important to note that we live in an age of relativism where all observation is theory-laden, with no possibility of theory-free observation or knowledge; the neutral spectator in life and in research does not exist. However, it is important to acknowledge that this does not mean that ‘anything goes’ as we seek legitimation for what we observe or name (Smith & Deemer, 2003, p. 428). Our knowledge can not be divorced from our historical, cultural and engendered ways of being.

In the age of relativism the issue of who is making judgments, about what inquiries, for what purposes, and with whom one share these judgments is of critical importance. As individuals we must make judgments, and as members of social groups, however loosely organized, we must be witness to situations in which our individual judgments are played out with the judgements of other individuals. (Smith & Deemer, 2003, p.443)

For the researcher the act of judgment means the necessity to bring to the task at hand a list of characteristics that are to be used to judge the quality of inquiry. This list of characteristics must be seen as always open-ended, in part unarticulated, and, even when a characteristic is more or less articulated, it is always and ever subject to constant reinterpretation from one’s stand point. These lists are challenged, changed, and modified, not through abstracted discussions of the lists and items in and of themselves, but in application to actual inquiries. These lists are part of us – they are expressions of our own particular standpoints or effective histories; they are our prejudices – part of our being. For legitimation to be upheld, the researcher must approach inquiry in an open way, willing to allow the text to challenge one’s prejudices and possibly change one’s list and one’s idea about what is and is not good inquiry (Smith & Deemer, 2003, p. 447). As the researcher puts pen to paper, he automatically knows that in writing he will leave silence and inevitably speak for someone else.

There is no doubt that there is a problem of representation. Silences must be questioned, we must be careful of what we speak in that we speak for others, and we must be cautious in our judgments and be willing to risk our prejudices as we share and justify our judgments in a public space. We must give reasons for our judgments, offer up these reasons to others and simply attempt to do the best we can. (Smith & Deemer, 2003, p. 450)

As the case study central to this research relied upon the written and verbal reflections of students, the researcher needed to be aware of his own bias so as to allow both the disconfirming evidence and confirming evidence present in the reflections to speak.

<b>Figure 4.11 Validity Procedures within Qualitative Lens and Paradigm Assumptions, (Creswell &amp; Miller, 2000, p. 126).</b>	
<b>Paradigm assumption / Lens</b>	<b>Constructionist Paradigm **</b>
Lens of the Researcher	Disconfirming evidence
Lens of Study participants	Prolonged engagement in the field
Lens of people external to the study.	Thick, rich description
** Note – Creswell and Miller use the Term “constructivist Paradigm”.	

Much of the debate about Case studies in research has concentrated on the issues of validity, reliability and generalization (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995, p. 323). A case study is the study of a singularity which is chosen because of its interest to the researcher and the reader of the case study report. If the major concern of the researcher is with the intrinsic interests of the case itself, then it is likely that a range of techniques will be used to obtain data and different kinds of data will feature. Multiple sources of evidence will help the researcher to establish the trustworthiness of the findings by cross-referencing different perspectives obtained from different sources and/or by identifying different ways the phenomena are being perceived (Creswell, 2003 p. 196).

This research study addressed the criteria of ‘prolonged engagement with data sources’. As the researcher has been in the field for fifteen years, and a faculty member for six years, he has been engaged with the data sources for a significant length of time. “Substantial involvement at the site of the inquiry in order to overcome the effects of misinformation, distortion, or presented ‘fronts’, to establish rapport and build the trust necessary to uncover constructions, and to facilitate immersing oneself in and understanding the context’s culture” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 304 cited in Guba, 1989, p. 237) gives the researcher a strong possibility of assembling trusted and reliable data. The researcher has been involved with the homeless in the inner city since the inception of the Service Learning Program in 1999. The participants were involved in the program for a six month period with a minimum of five Big Brekky experiences. The program itself

has become a valued part of the routine of the city's homeless and many of the students from Holy Family College have become trusted parts of the homeless peoples' lives.

The spread of the data-gathering over the whole length of the six months of the study meant that 'persistent observation of emerging issues' was addressed. Persistent observation means "sufficient observation to enable the evaluator to 'identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and [to focus] on them in detail" (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 304 cited in Guba, 1989, p. 237). Over this time period, and given the differing data collecting methods, one would expect that the salient features of the case would emerge to be rejected as irrelevant to 'participant experience of the program' or for the true nature of the issue to be recognised.

One key contribution that case study allows is that of pattern matching. As the research develops, causal links may emerge, phenomena will emerge, and ways to explain and test these will emerge. One way of testing this is pattern matching. Pattern matching is where the patterns of relationships observed in one instance are predicted in another, and when two patterns of interaction match, then validity is added to the conclusions (Anderson, 1990, p. 162). In this research the patterns may be in how participants make sense of what they experience on the van or in how they approach people, or in how the 'streeties' react to them. It may well take the form of the content of one Focus Group discussion being mirrored in another.

In this study focus group records were reported back to the participants as soon as possible after the focus group had taken place. The Focus Group facilitator began each Focus Group with a 'checking in' and summary of what she felt the previous Focus Group had said and invited participant comment. This allowed for 'feedback' to the researcher, especially in cases where the respondent has not clearly articulated what they intended to say. This practice allowed for a participant to identify comments that they may not wish, for whatever reason, to be used in the study. Guba would suggest that 'member checks' are "the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility. If the evaluator wants to establish that the multiple realities he or she presents are those that stakeholders have provided, the most certain test is verifying those multiple constructions with those who provided them" (Guba, 1989, p. 239).

One of the strengths of this data collecting method is the triangulation (see Bassey, 1999, Figure 4.12). This study used 'methodological triangulation': the use within a data collection format of more than one method of obtaining information (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995, p. 324). The use of five separate focus groups, along with the significant 'journal' entries, resulted in the participant having every opportunity to articulate his experience of the 'Big Brekky' program.

Time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data. In the case of this study, time 'to build sound relationships with respondents' is a significant contributor towards the trustworthiness of the data (Merriam, 2002, p. 26). The researcher not only was the co-founder of the program and so knew the 'sites' well for this program, but was in the unique but enviable position of knowing the participants well, while not being seen as their 'line manager' or in some way an authority figure. When a large amount of time is spent with participants they less readily feign behaviours or feel the need to do so; moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 146). The daily journaling completed by the students was overseen by the faculty member in charge of the Big Brekky team that morning, and the Focus Groups were facilitated by a trained psychologist, so at neither data gathering point was the researcher present to pressure participants in any way. Being aware of my own bias and subjectivity as a Co-founder of the program and as a member of the College Leadership Team of Holy Family College, have hopefully assisted in producing more trustworthy interpretations.

By the use of coding, the identification of emerging themes, the researcher hoped to name the key 'evaluative statements' or storyline which was the participants' experience of the program. There should be a consistent repetition of the coded themes across data-collecting methods, across participants and across the time span of the data collecting. Part of the identification of emerging themes was the noting of disconfirming or negative evidence. In this process, the researcher relied on his own lens. As evidence for the validity of a narrative account (the participant experience of the program), this search for disconfirming evidence provides further support for the account's credibility because reality, from the Constructionist paradigm's stance, is multiple and complex (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). On several occasions disconfirming evidence came



strongly to the fore in Focus Group discussion, and was actually a gateway to a deeper discussion of the theme and even in some cases a bridge to a deeper internalisation of values.

This study used a significant 'critical friend' to challenge the findings. The critical friend facilitated the focus group process, ensuring that they knew the participants and the data while not being too close to the initial articulation of the findings. The critical friend reviewed the findings and analytical statements. The researcher kept a detailed 'case record' to assist the audit trail. This audit trail consisted of,

- the researcher's notes after each focus group
- the researcher's notes after each round of journaling
- the initial drafts of the focus groups and journaling questions
- Focus Group transcripts
- the notes kept by the critical friend after the focus groups
- the enlisting of an 'outsider' to 'audit' fieldwork notes and subsequent analysis and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

**Figure 4.12 Trustworthiness of Data. (Bassegy, 1999, p. 75)**

Collection of Raw data:

- \* Has there been prolonged engagement with data sources?
- \* Has there been persistent observation of emerging issues?
- \* Have raw data been adequately checked with their sources?

Analysis of Raw data:

\* Has there been sufficient triangulation of raw data leading to analytical statements?

Interpretation of analytical statements:

- \* Has the working hypothesis, or evaluation, or emerging story been systematically tested against the analytical statements?
- \* Has a critical friend thoroughly tried to challenge the findings?

Reporting the research:

- \* Is the account of the research sufficiently detailed to give the reader confidence in the findings?
- \* Does the case study record provide an adequate audit trail?

#### **4.10 ETHICAL ISSUES**

In any research there could be concerns about the extent to which the researcher's biases or preconceptions influence data collection, analysis and reporting; these

concerns need to be named and monitored (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2003). Norum would suggest that in qualitative research biases, if recognised and named, can be helpful, directing our research.

Our biases help us identify stories. They help us choose what to describe. They help us define the beginning and ending points. They help us determine whether we are listening to a story or for a story. They can serve as the source of fruitful ideas and illuminating perspectives (Norum, 2000, p. 319).

In her work with homeless people, Norum, who had been homeless herself for a short period of time, was able to see that because of her own experiences, certain parts of the stories shared by the homeless youth resonated more strongly than other parts, prompting her to recall her own experience. For Norum the challenge for the researcher is,

As you read the parallel stories [of her as researcher, of the homeless and of academic reflections on homelessness], I invite you to consider your place in your research. What happens when the distance between the 'researched' and 'researcher' is minimized because of a shared, similar experience (Adler & Adler, 1997; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998)? How much of our own experience dictates what we 'hear' and do not hear when we are interviewing others? How much of ourselves bleeds through our research – not just in writing it but also in conceptualizing and conducting it? How honest are we about our biases? How honest should we be about our biases? How do we create a portrait in which our own voice echoes, yet not create a self-portrait if it is a story about 'others'? (Norum, 2000, p. 320)

While the outsider to an experience is not completely objective, the one experiencing it is not completely attached and subjective. If we have experienced what we are studying, some of what we are finding will echo our own thoughts and experiences. While I as researcher have not been homeless, I had been a volunteer on Eddie's Van for the seven years prior to the research. This does not have to be a problem. "This does not mean we indubitably 'contaminate' our research. Rather, it may mean we bring a new dimension to our research, a level of understanding that may not be there otherwise" (Norum, 2000, p. 334). If I am aware of my bias and personal feeling reactions, I can use it "in the conceptualizing, conducting, and writing of my research" (Norum, 2000, p. 334). The place of the researcher in a qualitative study such as this is quite powerful. I as the researcher, exercise this power by determining which stories, quotes, and voices to display and how I display them.

Research ethics involves three headings: respect for democracy, respect for truth and respect of persons (Bassey, 1999, p. 73).

Respect for democracy. While a researcher has many freedoms [to investigate and to ask questions, to give and receive information, to express ideas and criticise the ideas

of others and to publish research findings], these freedoms are essentially subject to responsibilities imposed by the ethics of respect for truth and respect for person.

Respect for truth. A researcher is expected to be truthful in data collection, analysis and in reporting findings. The research journey is a commitment to trustfulness and to the rejection of any form of deception [of self or others].

Respect for persons. In taking data from persons, the researcher must always be aware that the respondent is always the first owner of the data and that the respondent must always be treated with dignity and have their privacy respected (Bassey, 1999, p. 74).

The researcher's respect for the clients in this study was of paramount importance. Given the particularly sensitive nature of the field in which this study took place and the lives of the homeless of the inner city, it was vital that the boundaries of the case study were respected. This case study was in no way looking at the experience that the homeless were undergoing. Holy Family College has consistently denied the media access to the program over many years. The College has a strict 'no photos' policy regarding the Service Learning Program. While the researcher attended some of the Big Brekky experiences over the course of the study, it was only in the context of his role within the College Leadership Team and not as the researcher of this study. As the study was an exploration of participant experience of the Service Learning Program, there was no need for the clients (the homeless of the inner city) of the program to be involved in any way.

The case study involved taking extensive data from the volunteers through reflective journaling and participation in Focus Group discussion and trying to extract some meaning that was not apparent or was not previously substantiated. To maintain 'respect for persons' and to obtain the participants' cooperation in providing data, the guidelines for the use of the data were negotiated with participants early in the research process. In specific terms the ethical concerns revolve around the topics of:

1. Informed consent;
2. right to privacy; and
3. protection from harm. (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 89).

In this study the following procedures were put in place:

1. A letter outlining the purpose of the study, the length of the study and the requirements of participants, was handed to potential participants at a meeting prior to the commencement of the study.
2. At this meeting participants were informed that a pseudonym would be used for each participant and for the College. A pseudonym was chosen to maintain the relational feeling to the participant experience of both the study and the program (Creswell, 2003, p. 66).
3. A letter of permission from the Principal of the College was obtained prior to the commencement of the study. This letter also addressed the issues regarding guidelines for publication of research findings.
4. Participants were informed that the record of the focus groups would be made available to them as soon as possible, for them to check and amend where necessary to fully reflect their belief or intention.
5. Student participants in the study were required to have a 'permission to participate' form returned to the researcher signed by their parents or guardians.

Each participant was given a coded number that was attached to their journal reports and also given the same pseudonym used during Focus Group discussions. The school was also given a pseudonym. The case report will require the agreement of the Principal before it is made public (Bassey, 1999, p. 69).

#### **4.10.1 Ethics Clearance**

To meet the requirements of the University's Research Ethics Committee each participant and their parents or guardians received a letter outlining the scope of the study: its purpose, value to the College, the data-gathering methods and the involvement required from each participant in order to gain consent and acceptance into the program. Participants and their parents or guardians were advised that they were free to withdraw, or to withdraw their children from the study at any time and that confidentiality would be maintained. The student would be offered the opportunity to transfer to another Religious Education class without penalty or to continue with the Social Justice Religious Education Unit, but with no participation in the van experience. Ethical approval for this

research was obtained from the Australian Catholic University Research Projects Ethics Committee, the Edmund Rice Education Australia (the overseeing body for Edmund Rice schools in Australia) and the Principal of Holy Family College. Copies of the letters to participants and their parents or guardians are provided in Appendix 1. Participant anonymity was assured by using pseudonyms to protect the student's identity. Participants were informed of their right to access the accounts of the Focus Group discussions and their reflective journaling, and that at the conclusion of the study this material would be stored at the Australian Catholic University until destroyed.

The Focus Group discussions were conducted in a large room adjacent to the main College campus but away from the classrooms and observation by other students. This quieter and more private space appeared to have contributed to the relaxed and trusting approach of the participants to the Focus Group discussions. The daily journaling was completed by the students in a small room adjacent to the kitchen of Eddie's Place, and overseen by the faculty member in charge of the van experience that morning.

#### **4.11 DESIGN SUMMARY**

This chapter outlines the rationale for the research design which is consistent with and complements the unique nature and purpose of the research: an exploration of participant experience of the Service Learning Program of Holy Family College. This study adopted the paradigm or world view of 'Constructionism'. The study focused on the meanings participants used to make sense of their experience of working on the Big Brekky van. This study sought to understand the actors experience, the way they constructed their experience and the meanings they attached to it. "What is of importance is not observable social actions but rather the subjective meaning of such action" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 42). Fundamental to the research design is a constructionist epistemology which honours the distinctive nature of the volunteer's role, while acknowledging the social context and multiple levels of meaning different actors will subscribe to it and to the actual experience of the van.

As interpretive research the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism was chosen, as any exploration of participant experience in a Service Learning situation assumes that all human action is meaningful and hence "has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices" (Usher, 1996, p. 18). The context of a

street van with homeless people is rich in symbol, language and dynamic, multi-layered relationships, and thus allows the fluidity of Symbolic Interaction to make and re-make meaning.

Three research questions provided the focus for this study. These questions sought to provide a framework for data collection, analysis and interpretation. They were:

1. What features of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College impact on participant experience?
2. What changes are there in the meanings participants give to their experiences in the Service Learning Program over time?
3. How do participants perceive their Service Learning experience in terms of their personal world view and the world view promoted by the school?

Given the nature of the Service Learning environment, the research methodology of case study was chosen. Case study allows the researcher to explore the particular nature of a van site and the unique nature of the relationships formed between volunteers and the homeless. "Case study allows for a rich and vivid description of event with the case, and a focus upon particular individual actors or groups of actors and their perceptions" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 317).

Primarily data relevant to the case study were collected using the strategy of Focus Groups and Reflective Journaling. The Focus Groups generated the themes that were further explored through an analysis of participant personal reflective journaling. The summary of the research design is summarized in Figure 4.13, a summary of the Legitimation process in Figure 4.14, and the Phases of the Research outlined in Figure 4.15.

**Figure 4.13 Summary of Research Design**

<b>Sources of Data</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Literature Review	January 2004 to September 2007
<p>Data Collection:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of and Establishment of relationship with participants</li> <li>• Preparation of Entry Journal</li> <li>• Introduction to participants 'log' / journal</li> <li>• Initial journal writing.</li> <li>• Participant Journal 1</li> <li>• Participant Journal 2</li> <li>• Focus Group 1</li> <li>• Participant Journal 3</li> <li>• Participant Journal 4</li> <li>• Focus Group 2</li> <li>• Participant Journal 5</li> <li>• Participant Journal 6</li> <li>• Focus Group 3</li> <li>• Participant Journal 7</li> <li>• Participant Journal 8</li> <li>• Focus Group 4</li> <li>• Exit Journal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• November 2005</li> <li>• November 2005</li> <li>• January 2006</li> <li>• January 2006</li> <li>• February 2006</li> <li>• February 2006</li> <li>• February 2006</li> <li>• March / April 2006</li> <li>• March / April 2006</li> <li>• March / April 2006</li> <li>• May 2006</li> <li>• May 2006</li> <li>• May 2006</li> <li>• June 2006</li> <li>• June 2006</li> <li>• June / July 2006</li> <li>• July 2006</li> </ul>

**Figure 4.14 Legitimation Process and Criteria**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>How done in study</b>
Prolonged engagement with data sources	* Study over 7 months * Length of researchers' involvement * Experience of participants
Persistent observation of emerging issues	* Length of time of data gathering * Triangulation of methods of data gathering
Member checks	* Focus group records reported back to participants
Methodological Triangulation	* Focus groups * Reflective Journaling
Time and Researchers' relationship to participants	* Data gathered over 7 months * Researcher part of the program relationship 'web' while not the direct line manager
Coding and disconfirming evidence	* Same coding across data gathering methods * Identification of disconfirming evidence
Researcher Reflexivity	* Bias and subjectivity identified in 'Role of the Researcher'
Peer Debriefing	* Use of critical friend to conduct focus groups and review findings
Audit Trail	* Researchers notes after focus groups * Initial drafts of focus groups and interviews [transcripts] * Notes of meeting with Principal of College * Notes of Critical friend after focus groups * Use of an outsider to audit field notes and subsequent analysis and interpretations
Generalisation / Transferability	* The thickness of the data, thick description





## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to document the findings of a thesis that explores participant experience of the Service Learning Program at an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. These findings are a synthesis of the data gained from participant journaling and focus group discussions, after visits to a service site where the participants formed a team offering a light breakfast to the homeless in Brisbane's Central Business District.

The presentation of these findings is through a framework based on a journey metaphor, as each participant's van experience was a unique journey with varying beginning points, blockages and exit points. The findings are presented using six phases that point to important times in the journey that participants experienced. Each participant moved through these phases in their own time and at their own depth of awareness and meaning. Beginning with the Expectations Phase, students entered the program with varying degrees of trepidation, a range of hopes and expectations of just what this unique and very different sub-culture would be like. The first couple of van experiences paralleled the Exposure Phase as the students identified the boundaries of their new experience: what working on the barbeque meant; the ages, sex and differing personalities of the homeless; the numbers of homeless coming to the van and the dynamics of beginning to form relationship with them.

Armed with newly informed data from their initial experiences, the participants then reframed their experience: broke down prior stereotypes, in some cases re-stereotyped, grew in communication skills and realigned their hopes and fears against the reality that was the van. In time, the 'honeymoon' that was the van experience ended, and all participants in one way or another experienced a phase of disillusionment in which they wondered what the purpose of the van really was, why apparently 'normal' people were on the streets, whether they [the students] were actually doing any good. During this

time the harsh reality of the streets became more apparent to them. At different levels the participants, towards the end of their van experience, began to experience degrees of Awareness of the ideology, values and concepts in which the van experience was wrapped. Finally, the participants experienced some sense of 'making a difference', of agency as youth growing in their sense of civic and moral identity.

The concept of stages or phases in Service Learning was the focus of two American studies involving College age students. Rockquemore and Schaffer (2000) identified three stages of social psychological development: shock, normalization and engagement. Shock, "a psychological jolt to a student's perception of reality" (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 16) would parallel some of the elements of the Exposure Phase outlined above, while Normalization which "appeared in journal entries about the third week of Service Learning experience" (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 17), would share many of the elements of the Reframing Phase. The Awareness and Agency Phases identified in this study have much in common with the Engagement phase identified by Rockquemore and Schaffer. During the Engagement phase students questioned why their clients were in poverty and,

became engaged in the learning process because the clients they worked with were not just hypothetical characters but 'real people', and so were forced to reconcile the content of the coursework which heavily emphasized the size and scope of structural inequalities in American society with their previous propensity toward individual attributions. (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19)

To these three stages Pracht added three more: guilt, cultural sensitivity and empowerment (Pracht, 2007, p. 73). While feelings of guilt were linked to white students from affluent families, the break down of stereotypes and engagement with "tense issues" led to a growing cultural sensitivity that in many ways mirrored the Disillusionment Phase gleaned from the findings of this study. There is a clear parallel between Pracht's Empowerment stage and the Agency Phase that concludes this presentation of findings.

As a means of providing clarity to the reader, the following structure for the Chapter, Figure 5.1, is offered.

**Figure 5.1: Chapter Structure**

5.1.1	Introduction
5.2	Expectations Phase
5.2.1	Motivation for participation.
5.2.2	Hopes and Fears

- 5.3 Exposure Phase
  - 5.3.1 Initial Contact
  - 5.3.2 Skills to connect
  - 5.3.3 Acceptance and welcome; stereotypes challenged
  - 5.3.4 The Indigenous community
- 5.4 Reframing Phase
  - 5.4.1 Quality of Relationships: 'at home', agency and impact
  - 5.4.2 Out of their comfort zone
  - 5.4.3 Social Analysis
  - 5.4.4 Gatekeepers
  - 5.4.5 Knowing the team better
- 5.5 Disillusionment Phase
  - 5.5.1 Re-stereotyping
  - 5.5.2 Reasons for homelessness.
  - 5.5.3 Purpose of the van.
  - 5.5.4 Rejection
  - 5.5.5 Violent Reality
  - 5.5.6 Contradictions
- 5.6 Awareness Phase
  - 5.6.1 Coming as guest
  - 5.6.2 Presence
  - 5.6.3 Deliberate Choices
  - 5.6.4 Acceptance and personalising
    - \* Knowing their names
    - \* Particular Individuals
    - \* Aware of causal factors in homelessness
    - \* Aware of Story
  - 5.6.5 Changing attitudes
    - \* Empathy
    - \* Reciprocity
    - \* Acceptance and Welcome
    - \* Equality
    - \* How they see us; acceptance
    - \* Coming as guest pays off
  - 5.6.6 Building a conceptual map
    - \* Who benefits?
    - \* Why do the van?
    - \* We're on their turf!
    - \* Being appreciated
  - 5.6.7 Skills now personally owned
  - 5.6.8 Deeper Social Analysis
  - 5.6.9 Sense of Community
    - \* The Van Community
    - \* The Student Community
    - \* The Indigenous Community
  - 5.6.10 Surprised by the experience
  - 5.6.11 Link to Holy Family
- 5.7 Agency Phase
  - 5.7.1 Motivation for staying involved
  - 5.7.2 Aware of personal gifts; contribution to community
  - 5.7.3 Sense of achievement

5.7.4	More than just a food van
5.7.5	Youthfulness
5.7.6	Personal Change
5.7.7	Respectful service but with limits
5.7.8	Holy Family's Mission
5.7.9	Moral Obligation

Between February and the second week of June, participants experienced between 5 and 9 van visits with most participants having 7 or 8 visits. Only two of the 53 participants had fewer than 7 times on the van. Fourteen participants had the maximum of nine visits on the van. The five month period of van participation was broken up by a short Easter holiday period of two weeks in which most students did not serve on the van. After each second visit participants took part in a Focus Group discussion of about 40 minutes led by Dr. Ros Lim. These Focus Group discussions were audio-taped. Most participants took part in all four Focus Groups, though a small number, for varying reasons, only participated in three. After each van experience participants reflected on their experience responding to the common questions:

- a. What was the highlight of your time on the van this morning and why?
- b. What did you find difficult about your time on the van and why?

Each journaling time the participants had other questions put to them, but these varied from one visit to the next to reflect and be responsive to the data from the Focus Groups. The Focus Group questions changed in response to the data gained from the written journaling, the participant responses in the previous Focus Group and the informal debrief after the van time. At the end of January and just prior to their final experience on the van, students wrote up an Entry and Exit Journal in class time in the computer labs. This more extensive journaling experience was aimed at capturing how students felt at the beginning and end of their time on the van; what was their experience?

The findings are presented according to the identifiable phases that make up the journey that was the experience of the participants of the van. These phases provided an authentic framework to honour the sense of journey in the participant experience and a context for the Research Questions to come to life in the later discussion. As far as possible these findings present the 'voice' of the students as they articulated the experience they were having through their participation in Eddie's Van.

## **5.2 EXPECTATIONS PHASE**

Before participants began work on the van there was a fear of the unknown, an excitement, almost a sense of adventure all wrapped up in a strong stereotype of what the homeless would be like. The expectations surrounding Eddie's Van and the students' desire to make a difference were paralleled by the students' enthusiasm and idealism.

### **5.2.1 Motivation for Participation**

The participants were certainly positive about the upcoming experience. The motivations for doing the program were diverse. Many were drawn to the program by its positive reputation, while others were attracted by the sense of adventure and challenge. Many were altruistic and saw the van as a way to help others. "I wanted to do the van because I wanted to experience what it would be like and I've always said that it was something I have wanted to do to give back to the community and help those in need" (BS, EJ, 2). Others wanted to experience Religious Education that was beyond the traditional curriculum. "I want to experience something different from the standard RE class" (JMc, EJ, 2). Some were simply curious about the life of a homeless person, "I'd like to learn about the homeless situation in my own city, make some homeless friends and do my bit to help when I can" (ZO, EJ, 2). Some just wanted to be more involved in Social Justice. "I believe strongly in Social Justice and I want a way to help others less fortunate than me" (TH, EJ, 2).

### **5.2.2 Hopes and Fears**

The majority of the students hoped to gain a greater understanding of homelessness from the program. "I hope to gain a new understanding of homelessness in Australia, a more accepting perspective concerning the people living on the streets and to find out why most of the homeless are homeless" (CT, EJ, 2). Others hoped to gain personal skills and develop friendships with the homeless and give back to the community. "I hope to make friends, develop confidence and courage by talking to the homeless and give myself a reality check when I don't think my life style is the best, participating with people who need my help, comfort and friendship" (ME, EJ, 2). Some hoped to appreciate their own life more. "I hope to learn more about homeless people, their

situations and their stories. I also want to learn to appreciate how fortunate I am” (DO’L, EJ, 2).

A fear of being unable to connect with the homeless, “I was afraid I would not be able to communicate with them, getting past the stereotypes and already existing ideas and thoughts I have about them” (CT, EJ, 2), coupled with a fear of being awkward and uncomfortable around the homeless were very real for the participants before the program began. “I feared that the homeless people could be just a bit too far out of my comfort zone; that I just could not even begin to relate to them” (AR, EJ, 2). While some were concerned for safety, and others that they would not challenge themselves, another group were concerned that they might not make a difference. The participants were very idealistic even in their fears and concerns of not wanting to be disrespectful. “I am afraid of the difference between myself and the homeless, afraid of hurting their feelings by how I act because I want to be equal with them but will they want to be equal with me” (MW, EJ, 2)? Some were afraid of coming across as arrogant. “I’m concerned about how I will act around the people I will meet, I hope I am not different or, especially arrogant around them” (GMc, EJ, 2). In this beginning stage the stereotypes and perceptions held by the participants were quite strong.

My perception of homeless people came from my experience of walking to school from Brunswick Street train station and having the occasional drunk Aboriginal shout at you or someone threaten you and you just keep on walking – you don’t talk to them, you stay away from them. (AMc, FG, 23.2)

Despite the fact that Eddie’s Van had been operating in the Holy Family community for many years and enjoyed a good reputation, very few of the participants had any idea of what the experience would really be like. This led to some degree of nervousness. “I really have no idea of what the van will be like. I expect that it’s just a question of how confident I am as to how much I get out of it” (AC, EJ, 2). The majority of the participants expected the van to be a difficult and challenging experience, but eye-opening and valuable. “I think it will be strange to be stepping far out of my comfort zone into lives that are pretty terrible; lives that I fear” (JD, EJ, 2). Many were looking forward to relating with the homeless and experiencing a whole new world where they could make a difference in people’s lives. “I think the experience will be worthwhile because I will be able to make friendships with people and act as somebody who they can talk to” (AS, EJ, 2).

### 5.3 EXPOSURE PHASE

The Exposure Phase in participant experience centred on their initial contact with the homeless in their visits to the van site. They were exposed to a whole new world quite different to the day-to-day reality of a private boys' school. This phase was where the participants' expectations and stereotypes met the reality of life on the street.

#### 5.3.1 Initial Contact

On arrival at the van site and after their initial contact, there was a genuine surprise at the nature of the homeless population; almost an immediate breaking down of the stereotype, surprise at their friendliness, the large numbers and the easy-going way they interacted with the students. For some it was an eye-opening experience. There was a sense of being welcomed, but also a strong awkward feeling among the students as they struggled to know how to connect and communicate. At this stage many of the students stayed well within their comfort zone whilst only some ventured out. The participant journaling after they had returned from their first van experience was full of phrases and reflections that suggest that most, if not all of the students, had valued and 'enjoyed' the experience. Phrases like the following were common:

"was happy to talk and share their feelings with me"; "he was just like us and wanted to be off the streets and have responsibility"; "he wanted my opinion"; "they are normal people looking for a chat and a feed"; "he treated me like an equal and talked to me, and seemed to enjoy my company"; "it showed they knew who we were and why we were there"; "some of them saying thank you and G'day"; "Ernie was willing to share his story with me"; "just speaking to the first person, because then I knew it was well worth it". (DJ, 1)

Adam Coghlan, on his first morning, reflected that he felt truly at home when, "I was talking to a guy called Fritz and I was having a conversation identical to one I had recently had with an uncle. So it felt normal and there were no labels between us" (AC, DJ, 1). For Ben Pincus the difficulty was finding the right approach to take and to make it a part of him so it appeared natural. He knew what he had to do but the situation was different to anything he had ever experienced. When he began to treat them as people, go past the label of homeless, he could relax and his skills improved.

At first, it was difficult to know quite what to do. The situation I was in was new and I wasn't sure just how to go about things like getting to know the guys and just what I should talk about. As time went on, that became easier, because I not only got experience at talking to the van-goers, but I came to look past the difference in socio-economic position. I went into the van having been told to respect the dignity of the poor, and I believed that it was the right thing to do, but at first it was different to actually put it into practice, because I had never really dealt with anybody like that before. As a result, my perception of what I needed to do to respect their dignity like any other was a bit distorted because we seemed more different than I first anticipated. (BP, EX, 6)



The nature of the Holy Family program is to place participants into direct contact with the homeless by cooking the BBQ, serving the food, giving out clothing and most importantly and for the majority of the time, chatting to the homeless. The initial contact with the homeless on their first morning on the van brought this feature of the program to the fore. In reflecting upon their initial experience one participant said that he was “Surprised, they all waved and opened the door of the van for us” (NM, DJ, 1)! Another felt “a bit confronted when some of the people came over, but I became comfortable pretty quickly with being around them” (AC, DJ, 2). Some were surprised by the friendliness and openness of the people. Others were quite scared because they were in a completely new situation and in some cases especially because of the presence of some Aboriginal people. One participant was intimidated at the numbers at the van site while another felt “A bit scared because there were some Aboriginals with bottles of paint and they came right up to the van” (MC, DJ, 2). Almost all of the students expressed some degree of nervousness.

The first time I went out on the Van I was extremely nervous, anxious and scared. I feared for what I'd say to the homeless, how we'd get along whether I would say something that would offend them which maybe caused me to be bashed or yelled at. When I arrived I felt awkward and wanted to stay at the BBQ with my school mates and not talk to anyone but my team leader. (DO'L, EX, 6)

### **5.3.2 Skills to Connect**

The direct and relational nature of the program initially made things difficult for the participants. The students had to quickly learn new skills of reading body language and making conversation with strangers on their turf. “The initial walking up and talking was the most difficult. It was sailing into uncharted territory” (ME, DJ, 1). In the pre-brief lessons prior to their first van experience the students were given basic safety rules to observe around the van site, and the core philosophy under which the van operated: engaging directly with the homeless people, respecting their innate dignity and being of service. Students were aware of this philosophy and at first found its implementation difficult. “I found it hard to connect with some of the people and trying not to stereotype the homeless people was difficult” (DP, DJ, 2).

The first time we went out on the van we arrived at the spot and about 5 aboriginal teenagers moved up to the van. Most of them were sniffing paint so it was both confronting and scary. But after it soon dawned on me that these people were there for some food and were of no threat to me or anyone else. I started off on the barbeque just to get an idea of how things ran but it wasn't long before I sort of ventured off and started talking to people. (MC, EX, 6)

As this Exposure Phase continued participants rapidly gained confidence in their acquisition of the skills necessary to work on the van effectively: skills of communication [reading body language, verbal cues, open-ended questions, topics to talk about etc] and skills associated with cooking a BBQ for a large group of people. The participants were already aware of what not to talk about and what topics may 'hook' a reaction from someone with a mental illness.

You felt more comfortable talking to them [the second time], you knew how to chat to them and it was a lot easier. You knew how to go up to them and engage them. I was less nervous cause I knew some of the people there. Like I'd seen them around and knew how they would react and stuff. I kind of knew what to talk about the second time. They love to talk about sport. (TM, FG, 23.2)

### **5.3.3 Acceptance and Welcome: stereotypes challenged**

Many of the homeless made the first move to connect. "I felt really good when three men came up at the start and said hello which made us all feel safer and better" (GMc, DJ, 2). Others responded to the participant's questions in ways that opened up true conversation. "I felt really accepted when my guy Alan said, 'What do you reckon?' He wanted my opinion" (JD, DJ, 2). Some of the students found that they had common ground with the homeless, a shared interest in sport or politics. Even on this first van experience some students got to know people's names and felt some acceptance and welcome. "The highlight of my morning was when I was talking to Albert and he treated me like an equal and talked to me, and seemed to enjoy my company" (MH, DJ, 2). One phrase often repeated in the journals was "they are just like us"! The participants reflected that the homeless were just normal people looking for a chat and a feed. Many of the students were surprised by and valued the way that so many of the homeless treated them as equals and appreciated their efforts. "The highlight of my morning was discovering that everyone appreciated us being there, didn't clam up, but opened up to us" (BE, DJ, 2). In general the students found the older men more welcoming and easier to relate to in these early stages.

I remember feeling good when, the second or third time out, I began to leave immediately to talk to the homeless. I felt good having overcome a bit of my shyness. I've gotten to know a few streeties as well, such as Jack, whose father died and mother left him when he was at Uni. He's a joking kind of guy, who's good fun to talk to, sometimes, however, his speaking is hard to understand. (BP, EX, 6)

During this first van experience some students found great comfort by simply working on the BBQ, cooking the sausages and eggs and buttering the bread. This gave them something to do and a release from their awkwardness. Many experienced a sense of

release and relief as they discovered that they had the ability to connect with a homeless person. “The highlight was realizing that I had managed to connect and introduce myself to a homeless person. I felt like I had achieved something” (AC, DJ, 2).

As the initial breakdown of the stereotype continued the students began to build their own ‘map’ of the homeless landscape: the types of people, the ways they reacted, their approachability and the differing types of mental illness. Despite their newly-found confidence working around the van and connecting with the homeless, many students were still expressing their reflections in terms of the students from Holy Family helping the homeless: ‘them and us’.

There was this guy called Steve, he has red hair, and he was always complaining about a lot of things. You would be talking to him and all he would do was complain about things; about the BBQ and so I felt like saying, “If I’m giving of my time for you why should you complain about getting this free meal?” I did not say this because he kind of looked and spoke very strongly about it and he did not look all that mentally well. It looked like just something that he just did – it was him. It was his health. (JBa, FG, 23.2)

The prior stereotype that they had held of homeless people was now being broken down by hearing stories of their life experience. “The van was pretty good, I talked to a few people, including Noel for quite a while. I learned that homeless people quite often have had many experiences and have interesting lives” (XB, DJ, 3). Participants were surprised by their own observation and the reactions of the homeless to them. “The highlight of my morning was meeting someone called Greg, who appeared to be your ‘stereotypical’ homeless person [unkempt, long yellow toe nails, missing teeth etc]. He was a really nice person and had had an interesting life” (NM, DJ, 2).

The first time I went I thought there would be sort of drug addicts reclusive sort of people and that sort of stereotype of people on the street but then when you come there you see that some of them are just sort of normal people. It is a shock to see the stereotypes you have in your head. Then you realise then that 90% of them are just like you and me. (NM, FG, 16.2)

Many of the students had arrived at the van site expecting to see unkempt and substance-abusing old men or aggressive younger men, and were surprised to discover a wide assortment of men and women; some well dressed, some with mobile phones, some from boarding houses and some obviously sleeping out.

It sort of surprised me because a lot of them had sort of mobile phones and stuff, walkmans and stuff and I did not think they would have anything like that at all. Yeh – some of them were really nice – none of them were actually really rude at all. There were a couple that were mumbling and stuff but I’m sure they had their reasons – and I think there was only one guy there who was either hallucinating or talking to himself and that was the only really stereotype type person I saw – apart from that they are basically just normal people – except they are ‘on the street’. (DC, FG, 16.2)

### **5.3.4 The Indigenous Community**

Another important area of this Exposure Phase was the initial experience of meeting Indigenous people. Very few Holy Family students had ever met or interacted with Indigenous people prior to their van experience. Many students found this interaction difficult and they quickly became aware that they did not know how to read them or how to find common ground to truly connect with them. In this Exposure Phase there was very little contact with the Indigenous community at all.

Talking with the Aboriginal kids was difficult because I have had no experience with them. When I had to walk over to them to tell them about the BBQ they were giving me death stares and I was worrying. (JD, DJ, 3)

I found that it was easier to speak to the older guys. They seemed a lot more open and a lot more polite. They were more open and I guess they had been on the street for a lot longer time and they knew what to expect. I know this will sound terrible but I did not speak to any Aboriginal people because they seemed to just go off in their own group. There were only about four of them. But they seemed to just be in their own group. (MH, FG, 16.2)

The reality that presented to the students during their experience of the van site was in most cases quite different to their expectations. What they had been exposed to challenged them to reframe their mind maps of homelessness as the differences between their expectations and their experienced reality grew.

## **5.4 REFRAMING PHASE**

The next phase on the journey of students' experience saw a reframing of their original mindset, perspectives and to some extent expectations. During this phase the participants had to abandon some of their previously held views, thinking and beliefs and reframe the context of their van experience in the light of their new 'reality'.

### **5.4.1 Quality of Relationships: 'at home', agency and impact**

There was a real sense of being at home at the site as shown by the participants' feeling of being accepted by the homeless. "Some people truly tried to connect which was great. I was invited undercover to get out of the rain, which made me feel like I was accepted" (AM, DJ, 2). The participants began to remember the names of homeless people, were remembered by particular homeless people and felt appreciated. "I felt great when Tony said that he liked us coming and wanted us to keep coming" (MS, DJ, 2). Another student felt appreciated by Tony. "Tony said that he enjoys us coming here and that

although they have their problems, we make their life a bit easier” (NM, DJ, 2). Several of the participants had begun to get to know John O’Keefe who was writing a book and Annette, an Indigenous lady who lives in the Botanical Gardens. “The highlight of my morning was expanding upon my relationship with John O’Keefe. I enjoyed talking to a new person – Annette and then John O’Keefe came over to me and said, ‘Hi Matt;’ I was happy to hear that his story is coming along” (MQ, DJ. 2).

Knowing the person’s name meant participants had a connection and knew something about them. Knowing the person’s name engendered a more ready response and opened up the conversation making it more “a friend not just someone wanting to talk to them” (ZO, FG, 17.3). As they got to know the names of the homeless many participants felt that it was now more of a catch up; they felt like they had a connection with the homeless and a sense of comfort with them.

I agree that knowing a name means it is more of a catch up. Me and Zac met with this person on the first time and we sort of talked to him for a while and then next time I was there he was talking to someone else and I felt I was able to go and talk to him – John – and then meet the other people in that group. So I found that knowing one guy, relatively well, meant that it was a lot easier to meet a whole lot of other people. Knowing his name really helped. (NN, FG, 17.3)

The students now appear to be much more at home, and in their reflections stories and names are now used frequently. In this reflection Myles Elliott had come to the point that he was ‘at home’ among the homeless and valued the acceptance he felt around them.

It’s that we have been talking with people in our society and now we are talking to people from kind of a different society – homeless people, I find it is a lot easier to talk to the homeless people cause you are not always going through formalities – you can just be yourself around them. (ME, FG, 11.5)

The students were becoming more aware of their own sense of agency and ability to impact upon the lives of the homeless. “A few people opened up and said more than they had to. It made the conversation feel like it meant something to them” (AM, DJ, 2).

I felt most valued when I was talking to a group of homeless men who were all good friends. They accepted me and valued my input into the conversation. The highlight of my morning was at the end as we were getting into the van – seeing the people’s faces – they were all so happy to have had us there. (NM, DJ, 3)

As this phase continued a real pattern of relating began to form. The participants now knew the ‘regulars’, their routine and that of the van. There was a real pride in the ministry and an expressed sense of agency. Some students began to refer to particular homeless as their mates or friends.

I loved meeting Ram again and we just walked up to each other and greeted each other like old friends. Ram sleeps in the Botanical Gardens and I first met him on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April. When I first met him he was very quiet, looking down at the ground asking “What have you got?” And I was trying to get deeper asking have you seen this or that? This time he and I walked up to each other and greeted each other like old friends. I immediately sensed he had changed. He was looking at me eye to eye and speaking louder and more confidently. He and I talked about ANZAC day and other things. It was gratifying to see that I had become a friend to a man who needed friendship. (ME, DJ, 5)

Some students were now able to appreciate the value of spending longer conversations with particular people. “I spent most of my time with two people. Both of them were really nice and were relatively normal people. I thought it was much more valuable staying with them for longer” (AS, DJ, 3). “A person broke from their group to say hello when I walked past. The person thanked me for coming and I managed to talk to this person for a longer period of time which made the experience more valid” (AM, DJ, 3). Even at this early stage of the program the students were growing in their ability to ‘read’ the body language and verbal cues from the homeless, instinctively knowing who to approach and who not to out of respect for their space. The students found it difficult to connect with some of the quieter guys who did not want to talk, but they were accepting of this.

Many participants now felt that their interactions with the homeless were now more real and genuine; they were past any honeymoon phase, they knew the scene at the van and they felt that their relationships were much more honest. The participants felt that their communication was “much better and more genuine” and “we had a genuine discussion”. Others found that as time went by they did not feel false or ‘fake’ talking to the homeless and they were now “genuinely interested in what he [the homeless person] had to say” (NN, DJ, 3).

#### **5.4.2 Out of their Comfort Zone**

While many of the participants found the group a safe haven at first, they now began to move away from the groups staying around the BBQ.

The first time I went out on the van I did the BBQ the whole time. I just then saw a few people and I saw the looks on the faces when we arrived – the majority of them were very polite. That was pretty good. Then the second time I went I was standing at the front of the BBQ again – and after I had finished that I went and talked to a guy who was sitting by himself and he was a really nice guy. At first as I approached him I thought it would be hard because I was not sure how to begin the conversation with him. I was not sure how the conversation would work or if I got on well with him or if he would walk away. It turns out he was a really nice guy and so I had no problems really. (PR, FG, 16.2)

Quite often the students discovered that they had formed a real comfort zone of a couple of particular individuals that they were comfortable talking with; they felt welcomed and accepted in this space. In the team pre-brief before they went out on the van, the students were challenged to step out of this comfort zone.

The more that I talk to people though, it seems the harder it is to keep pushing myself out of my comfort zone to talk to new people or people away by themselves. This is because I made myself a comfort zone by talking to people easy to get along with and it was hard to keep pushing this to extend to more people. (AM, EX, 6)

Participants moved out of their comfort zone and approached perceived difficult people, and learnt from and reflected upon these interactions. “I faced the fear I had and talked to the Aboriginal people. I now know that I can do things I fear if I set my mind to it. I learnt homeless people are very picky. Aboriginal homeless people don’t have the nature of approachability” (GMc, DJ, 3). Some participants were now very aware of who and what they feared and were struggling to connect with: homeless people with severe mental illness, Indigenous youth in groups and in some cases argumentative personalities. Dan approached a young Aboriginal. “As I was the only one talking to the Aboriginal kids, I wasn’t too sure how to start conversation but then it was good when I got into a conversation” (DP, DJ, 2). Matthew set himself a challenge of talking to a ‘difficult’ person on his own. “I challenged myself to talk to someone [an Aboriginal] by myself and to make their day. What was difficult was going to a person and talking to him by myself because last time I was with someone else and this time I was by myself” (MH, DJ, 2).

Many of the students valued having the homeless share their story or valued being appreciated for what they were doing. “I felt most valued when I had small conversations and being thanked for giving them food” (JS, DJ, 2). But this was by no means a universal experience. Several of the students reflected on the importance of that first person you approached who “could make or break your confidence” (ME, DJ, 2)”, while others were outrightly rejected. “What I found difficult was talking to someone who said everything was ‘f\*\*\*ing terrible’. He then walked away – leaving me feeling pretty dejected. I then found it hard to talk to people” (CT, DJ, 3).

One important area of reframing touched on the participants’ approach to and thinking about how to interact with the Indigenous population that came to the van. The participants were now aware that, in general, the Indigenous population was a very

different community within the wider community of the homeless. They stood apart, were not as communicative, were not as readable or predictable and did not appear to openly appreciate the van service in the same way that the other homeless did. Many found that initially the Indigenous population presented in quite a stereotypical manner. The students were now adjusting their thinking and using the skills they were learning from relating to other homeless to connect with Indigenous people. This connecting began first with older Indigenous people and then in time spread to the younger people.

They tend to stay on their own; they stay with the others in their group. They tend to stay on the outside and even when they are there the guys don't talk much – the girls will talk to one another but the guys don't talk much. Even when you go up to them, the girls might talk but the guys will rarely say anything. (AMcC, FG, 30.3)

The Indigenous population in general provided a whole new challenge to the students; they really had to work much harder at connecting and communicating with them. In general many of the other homeless population often made the first move in making the students feel welcome by coming up to them, initiating conversation or remembering their names. From within the Indigenous community certain older individuals like Uncle John, Uncle Bob and Auntie Annette were very popular with the students and made this connection. While some students were able to approach the larger and younger group of Indigenous people at Kurilpa Point there was still a strong sense of not really wanting to or knowing how to connect.

The last time I went out I met an Aboriginal woman, Annette, she was 41 years old and she said that her father died at 25 from drinking too much mentholated spirits, and her mother died at 45 from diabetes and she said that she was really worried because she has diabetes as well. She said that she did not know how to cope with things and that she took up drinking to cope with her problems. She did not want to think about it. From that she has now got memory loss and she is probably going to get a lot worse now; from drinking. (AS, FG, 31.3)

Uncle John was an important gatekeeper for many of the students at Albert Park. In Sociological terms a gatekeeper is a member of a particular group or someone who knows a particular experience and enables a safe entry to either the group or experience for an 'outsider'. An older Aboriginal man, Uncle John was a real character who loved to sing and play the guitar. Uncle John was a heavy drinker and was often under the influence when the students were at the van site. While this did present its own difficulties in connecting with him, many of the students found that they quickly learnt how to chat to him and adjusted their approaches accordingly. Some still felt a little scared of him at times but were very accepting of him. His alcohol problem was just part of who he was.



My hardest situation was talking to Uncle John when he was on Metho because he was very aggressive and hard to make sense of. He made me feel extremely uncomfortable by talking directly to me. I had to watch what I said in case I insulted or enraged him. (ZO'S, EX, 6)

One of the Aboriginal men came to be known to the students as 'Dregs'. 'Dregs' is important in that over time the participants' attitude to him and ability to relate to him changed greatly. This particular Aboriginal man was in the advance stages of alcoholism and suffering from hallucinations. Often he would present raving into the thin air, shouting at non-existent birds and mumbling to himself. At first most of the participants were totally unable to connect with him and were quite scared. Quickly they were able to identify that he was unwell. Just as quickly they noticed that he had patches of totally rational behaviour and often when he lined up at the BBQ he would politely say please and thank you and often would wave farewell to the group as they left the site.

There is also this bloke, a really big Indigenous guy and he usually spends the whole morning yelling to himself; I think he has schizophrenia. But then he might pop out of it and talk to you really normal for a second and then he sort of goes back into his world. I just spoke to him while we were serving sausages. He said something like, "They are trying to control us". He was telling everyone to stand back behind the line as the train comes into the station. (AC, FG, 31.3)

In the first series of Focus Groups the participants rarely refer to the Indigenous homeless people, and when they do it is with a significant degree of unease. The Indigenous people fell into three basic categories: one or two individuals with significant substance abuse and mental illness problems who came to the van and were difficult to communicate with; younger Indigenous people who approached the van in a group, were often under the influence of some drug or had been sniffing paint and did not in any way attempt to engage with the participants; and a third category made up of a couple of quite friendly, older individuals. The participants only connected with the first and second groups towards the end of the program.

#### **5.4.3 Social Analysis**

As the participants began to have more and more quality conversations with the homeless, they found that they were beginning to Social Analyse, identifying the why of the person's situation without naming it as such. "I spoke to one person for the whole time and I learnt about the guy's reasons for being on the street such as the fact that he was adopted and that having more money than he could manage to a gambling problem" (MC, DJ, 3). At this stage of the program the students had only just been introduced to the surrounding theology and ideology of the Holy Family Service Learning

Program. The concepts, while only newly introduced, began to appear in some of the participant journaling. "I tried to be present while the homeless people were talking. I tried to remember a conversation that will enable me to start / continue the conversation on the next outing" (CT, DJ, 2). "I tried to make their day. I tried to 'come as a guest' even more and forget about the little things that annoy me" (WA, DJ, 3).

Some participants reflected that it was easy to go back into their prior stereotype, but just as quickly their new 'eyes' or new awareness countered that immediate reaction.

Well I live near the city and I get to see homeless people a lot so I understand the situation but every now and again you see the drunken homeless person and it just sends you right back to the stereotype and you're thinking what should be your attitude to that but then once you get out there you start to think, "Why are they getting drunk? Why are they putting themselves into that situation?" It really opens your eyes to the minor things that cause people's problems. (ME, FG, 23.2)

In this reframing phase there was now a quick 'why' reaction. The Focus Group reflections were full of stories, of names and of causal links between elements of the story and being on the street. As the discussions opened up, participants began to identify the complexities of life on the streets and how people came to be there. The link each time was the conversation; the sharing of story with the homeless person.

I sort of had only seen the negative things about homeless people, like the tramp and problem causers, so my perception was really negative about them, and I had never talked to them, but now I can see what it takes to live a normal life and I can see why they can't do it, like the guy I was talking to today, he knew that if he wanted to have a family he would need about \$800 a day and he knew that he could not get a job like that and so he felt he was unable to live our kind of life, he felt you needed connections to get anywhere and he did not have them. (TH, FG, 23.2)

The students began to become aware of the group dynamics within the homeless community. They noted the view of the homeless towards other homeless. "This morning was a good experience because I learnt how some homeless people perceive others who they believe are not as homeless" (NN, DJ, 3). "I learnt a lot about how homeless think of other homeless people, how they think there are levels of homelessness and homeless people" (MC, DJ, 3).

Several participants identified 'two different worlds', the world of the homeless and their world. This awareness led, even early in the program, to a respect of the other world that they could not know or understand, and so would need to come gently to that world as a guest.

I try not to see them as different. I say that I don't do this but actually I do. I still look at them as different, maybe not so much in a negative way anymore, but in the fact that we are two different

world; there's me who's living comfortable, you can go out, and basically just splurge money when I got out with my friends, and then there's those people who live a more simple life, they got to really like count their pennies, and so, in a that way its difficult anytime you go out. Because you're always conscious about what you're doing that you don't offend them. And so, like, just small things like they keep you on edge and they keep you thinking in sort of a negative frame in mind, and yeah, we are two different people. But you become more aware. (XB, FG, 30.3)

#### **5.4.4 Gatekeepers**

Although several students had experiences of rejection by the homeless during this reframing time, this led to the recognition that some of the homeless had become important interpreters of the homeless sub-culture and saw part of their role as taking care of the students. In time this led to the recognition of the importance of 'gatekeepers' among the homeless, allowing students to enter the homeless sub-culture. Certain individuals among the homeless looked out for the students, were sensitive to what was happening to them and cared for them. For Matthew and Alex, Steve was one such gatekeeper.

I was going to say that last week was really hard because no one wanted to talk to us at all. But it was good to have the knowledge that Steve was a really open person because after getting rejected by about ten people, trying to start conversations and they just did not want to talk to you, Steve was really present to us. He saw what they had done, we could not get a conversation with anyone else, so he talked to us for a long time. It made it easier and even though we did not achieve all that much with the others we felt we had achieved something with him. (MQ, FG, 27.4)

I found that as well with Steve – he sort of goes, "Hey, come over here!" Cause you feel that at least somebody cares that you are making an effort. It is also easy to judge – when they are not being nice to you – and they are not opening up. It is then good when somebody actually cares about you and what you are doing – the effort that you are making. (AB, FG, 27.4)

Alex was still concerned about the homeless 'being nice' and 'opening up' and needed to be appreciated for his efforts.

#### **5.4.5 Knowing the team better**

Early in the program the participants had noted that the purpose of the van was not to grow closer to the other members of their team, but rather to serve the homeless. But after some time the participants noted the changes they saw in their team members and the bonding that had occurred. The participants felt that the van gave them something to talk about with their mates and they saw a different side to them; how they reacted in difficult situations and operate in a new context. However, they felt that the van experience did not build a strong sense of community among them or deepen their friendships or create new ones. Having said this they identified that it was still early days

in the program and that they had only gone out with the team on a couple of occasions. Some referred to the van experience giving them “a common bond” and this common bond added to their relationship.

The van experience enabled the participants to see gifts and abilities in one another that they would not have seen in their ordinary school life. This was particularly the case in rather difficult situations. Josh Doonan was impressed with how Dan Procopis connected with the Indigenous youth at Kurilpa Park.

One gift I have seen consistently within the group is determination and commitment. Dan in particular has been very dedicated to the program both in his consistency on going on the van and his willingness to speak to all people at the barbeque. I remember one particular morning when a group of young Aboriginals came to the van. I tried to talk to them but quickly gave up as I had no idea how to connect with them but after I left Dan managed to connect to them in a way I never could. His open mindedness allowed him to really be a guest to these people in a way I couldn't. (JD, EX, 6)

Every participant reframed in different ways, and every participant had different aspects of their experience that they needed to reframe. In many ways it would be natural for student experience to progress from Reframing to Awareness, but the student reflections suggested the presence of another phase in experience - disillusionment.

## **5.5 DISILLUSIONMENT PHASE**

The reframing of their experience after their initial experience was an exciting time for most of the participants; a kind of honeymoon period in which the participants grew in their new skills and generally enjoyed the excitement of this new experience. However, this phase came to an end fairly quickly and some of the reality of life on the streets became apparent. All the participants, in one way or another, found themselves disillusioned either with the homeless, the purpose of the program in contrast to their expectations, their inability to connect with the homeless or their inability to make a difference in some tangible way. The idealism of adolescent agency was meeting the reality of human fragility in the sub-culture of the homeless.

### **5.5.1 Re-stereotyping**

After the initial breakdown of the stereotype, some of the participants now re-stereotyped the homeless and especially those with more of an argumentative nature. The old

stereotype of 'smelly bum with an alcohol problem' was replaced by some with a reaction to the strongly held views of some homeless. Some participants reacted to the views of some of the homeless and how they were expressed. They felt they were hypocritical in not practicing what they preached. At this stage of their van experience, some of the participants were unable to see that for the purpose of the van it did not matter whether the stories the homeless were telling were true or not.

From what everyone has been saying you have to tread so carefully when you're around them. I can't really express myself to some of the people. You have to be so careful what you say because some will say, "Oh look – you said the wrong thing". They will be offended or upset and so you have to be really careful and so in some ways it is so pointless trying to have a conversation; you have to be so guarded not to offend them. I'm a bit sceptical about these people at times. I think that some of what they talk about is complete rubbish. Some of the things that they say don't really add up. (CD, FG, 3.5)

In some of the student reflections you can see a clash between their personal world view and the philosophy and ideology of Holy Family. However, even in their reactions to some of these homeless people one could notice the seeds of change: "their intentions are always clean" (AR, DJ, 3). They were trying to understand and have empathy for where the homeless might be at. There seemed to be three different participant responses to the verbal exchanges with the homeless: (a) they were hypocritical for not "practicing what they preach"; (b) we can't generalize from a couple of bad reactive experiences; and (c) those who felt that the job of the volunteer is to try to see life through the eyes of the homeless and their life experience and not be judgmental.

Response A. Some of it is a lot of rubbish. Obviously it is based upon what they have not done. It is very hypocritical of them to tell you to do something that they have not done and lots of it is just made up. It is what their opinion is and they don't take what other people's opinions is into that. (GMc, FG, 30.3)

Response B. When I tend to talk to guys they have their opinion but then I put my spin on it, I have mine too. We are categorizing their opinions and stuff. You really can't generalize like that. Geoff was obviously talking to someone who was very hypocritical and I have obviously spoken to someone who was willing to listen to my opinion and so we can't say from our limited experience that they are all hypocritical or all good listeners etc. (AMcK, FG, 30.3)

Response C: But he has experienced the worst and that has affected him. He is explaining what has happened through his eyes. He is looking at the worst of what has happened to him and the probability is that if you don't finish school you will end up like me. That is his experience. It is like what Pricey is talking about – it is coming to them as a guest. We have not been in the situation that they have been. They might go to bed, scared and having night mares about alcoholism and stuff. (AC, FG, 30.3)

### **5.5.2 Reasons for homelessness**

Other participants reacted to the apparent wealth of some of the homeless and some could not truly comprehend the nature of mental illness and the fact that some may not

have the capacity to change in the way a fully rational person might. Some of the students felt that if the homeless really wanted to get off the streets they could. It was simply a matter of them being lazy or looking for excuses.

What I still have trouble with understanding is why some of these people are on the street. The council has a myriad of programs available to help these people get off the streets into low cost accommodation. So why are there still perfectly sane healthy people out on the street? (RO, EX, 6)

What still confuses me is when some of them buy alcohol and drugs, why don't they be stricter on themselves so they can try to break the cycle of homelessness. (MD, EX, 6)

The things that confuse me are the reasons that some of the people are on the streets and how come they can't just reconnect with their loved ones and leave the streets? (TK, EX, 6)

In some participants, there was a degree of cynicism linked to the apparent wealth of some homeless, or the strength of their opinions on particular issues, especially politics.

There was some questioning of the validity of the van ministry.

As much as Brother Price would say that these people are on the streets and it is beyond their control, I still believe that even though a person could be born into an abusive Aboriginal family – apparently they have no chance to getting out of that. I still believe that that is not true, that the fundamentals of our society mean there is a chance. (AR, FG, 2.3)

In response to this discussion one of the group, apparently quite cynically said, “We have to take off our shoes“ (AMcK, FG, 2.3)! This would be a response to the work done in the Religious Education class where participants were invited to have empathy for and try to understand the situation that the people are in, and to try not to judge from their own life experience.

### **5.5.3 Purpose of the van**

After two or three van experiences some began to question the role or purpose of the van. Participants were unsure whether the van was about charity or change. Four or five vocal members of one team reacted to some of the homeless and their stories, and this in turn resulted in other participants clarifying for themselves why they volunteered on the van and what they saw as its role and purpose. What was clear is, that at this stage of their experience, many of the participants were in a position where they could and did pause and reflect on the purpose of the van. For some of the participants the van challenged them to develop a mindset where the purpose of the van was simply for the volunteers to come as a guest and create an environment of care, community and concern.

We are not supposed to be going there to believe what these people are saying or not – we are supposed to be going there to listen, to come as a guest, but even if they say that they want to get off the street, they may subconsciously want to, they may want to, they may think that they want to, but subconsciously they are holding themselves back, we are just there to listen to them, have a conversation with them; but I don't think we are there to judge them. (AMcK, FG, 30.3)

Some participants struggled to truly understand the purpose of the van. The invitation to 'get to know the homeless person's story' was misunderstood by some as an invasion of their privacy. Some of these participants saw the role of the van as having some sort of deep therapy-style conversations with the homeless people, and from this, healing them or 'fixing them up'. They rejected this as a valid role for the van. This response would be a misunderstanding of what had been said in the Religious Education class. Participants were invited to be 'aware of the story' of each person or to 'be aware that each person has a story'. Some participants apparently misinterpreted this as saying that the role of the van was to primarily get to know the story [the details] of the person. Much of the Focus Group's energy was taken up in this discussion about the right or wrong of delving into the personal story of someone else, suggesting that the participants did not see the role of the van as being purely operating a BBQ. What is unclear then is how participant's perceived the role or primary purpose of the van.

Brother Price is always on about understanding their story. I wonder what the purpose of what is behind the Eddie's Van – because whether or not we are just there – giving them a friendly chat about sport or school or whatever – or whether or not they trust us enough to talk about their personal stories. My question is whether that is delving too deep into something that we should not be on about. Because I would even question telling people in my grade some of my stories let alone people I would consider strangers. I'm just questioning whether or not we should be talking to them about their personal life! I just wonder whether we should be going deeper – because Brother Price always talks about understanding their story. Do we need to understand their story and if we do, then why? (AR, FG, 2.3)

#### **5.5.4 Rejection**

In this disillusionment phase, at the mid-point of the program after the Easter break and with the onset of the colder mornings, there was a tough period in which some of the participants experienced strong rejection from the homeless after the Easter break. The students had not gone out on the van for a period of about a month because of school exams and holidays. In some cases the homeless apparently did not take kindly to this and let the participants know it. The flip side of this experience was the emergence of 'gatekeepers' from among the homeless who seemed to be aware of this and went out of their way to welcome the students back, and to assure them of the value of what they were doing. Chris Tunbridge and others felt a deep sense of rejection and hurt when the

homeless were not as welcoming after being away from the van for some time. While this rejection was real it was not a universal experience across the various teams.

I noticed that we went on the very first day of school and a lot of the people at Albert Park did not sort of want to talk to us. They were kind of giving us the cold shoulder. People we had spoken to previously did not speak to us at all. I was not sure if they were angry at us for not being there or whether they had just had a bad night – because it was cold and stuff or whether we had not been there for a while because of holidays and exams. Only a few people decided to talk to us. It made it really difficult. (CT, FG, 27.4)

While many were finding some of their attempts at connecting with the homeless to be difficult, others were impressed with their peers' attempts to do so. Often students were surprised at the ability of the mates to connect; gifts and abilities that they had not seen in the normal environment of the classroom or the playground.

Tom was an exceptional listener to anyone but he copped the political talk from Steve almost every week. Higgo amazed me, he would try to talk to someone no matter how bad they looked or how off their face they were. I remember when Matty Quinn and Tommy copped the political talk from Steve, no matter how hard they tried to change the topic Steve wanted to get his point across and the final pun that would leave us wetting our pants in laughter. I remember when Higgo and I approached a big group of smokers, Higgo wanted to talk to them but I didn't, but I gave in to him and we went over and spoke to them. (TK. EX, 6)

### **5.5.5 Violent Reality**

During this phase the reality of street life became very clear to the participants. They had moved past the reality that broke their prior stereotype, and past the honeymoon time when they were deeply relating with the homeless and valuing their acceptance, and were now seeing some of the more painful side of street life: addiction to drugs, alcohol problems, random violence etc. Some saw first hand that life on the streets was rough, tough and violent and that many of these people did not wish to be there.

I think Michael was the guy that Rivers beat up cause he was in a wheel-chair or something. He was saying that he [the guy in the wheelchair] was not really homeless. (MS, FG, 27.4)

I met Richard yesterday. He had been down in Grafton for some time, in New South Wales, and then he did not like being down there because he got beaten up the whole time. Police kept on checking his bags; he went down there to see his girlfriend. He was down there for a couple of months and then he came back up here and he was up here with his brother. (DP, FG, 17.3)

I met this guy called Colin and unlike most of the others that I had met previously he actually wanted to get off the streets and he told me how much he hated it. He had actually tried to get a job and the next time I went out I met him again – but he had not got it. He was having a bit of trouble. (TM, FG, 30.3)

### **5.5.6 Contradictions**

Participants were at times confused by the apparent contradiction of the homeless declaring that they wanted to get off the streets and yet still choosing to be into



substance abuse: drugs, alcohol and chroming. Yet even here they were able to go to a deeper level of awareness and analysis, “because this [the substance abuse] was something that has destroyed their life and yet they are still wanting to do that sort of thing. It is almost as if they don’t have a choice to use it” (AB, FG, 17.2). While they were developing deeper relationships with the homeless some of the participants were still struggling to see that it was they who were slowly changing and not the homeless.

They tend to be a bit less shallow now – some of them – just want to talk about the NRL, or what kind of music they listen to, but others are keen to tell their story, what they have to say, what they have been through, to share what they believe and think. (AMcC, FG, 30.3)

No two participants came out of the Disillusionment Phase at exactly the same time, but an increasing number of statements showing a greater depth of awareness began to appear in the Focus Group and Journaling data.

## **5.6 AWARENESS PHASE**

The ideology of the program with its language and theology taught to the students in the first three weeks of the program, now began to show through in the student reflections. The participants began to refer to ‘coming as a guest’, ‘being present’ and the ‘dignity of the person’ much more. Students began to reflect that this approach enabled a more effective and empathetic connection with the homeless. The input on ideology and mental illness appeared to result in more participant comment and reflection, displaying a choice to be there for the homeless, an awareness of the other’s needs, empathy and compassion. Some participants noted that while concentrating on trying to come as a guest and be present made the interaction harder for them, it appeared to lead to the homeless being more ‘at home’ and comfortable.

### **5.6.1 Coming as Guest**

In the ideology of the program and Edmund Rice spirituality, ‘coming as a guest’ is how you come to a situation and ‘being present’ is how you are in that situation. Some students felt that having the ‘guest mindset’ made them more comfortable, helped them talk more freely, helped them be more real and less fake, more aware of their own thoughts, helped the conversation flow, helped them listen more deeply, was more natural and more ‘on their level’. For the participants coming as a guest made a real difference and led to more meaningful conversation. The students felt they were not as

intrusive and they sensed that the homeless were more comfortable with them; more at home. When they attempted to come as guest into their interactions, they found that they were less likely to judge, and more open to accept the homeless person for whom they were. For students like Andrew Romano, this was a developing consciousness.

I don't think I can remember myself in the class thinking "I'm going to walk in this guy's shoes ...this is what I'm going to do". It is just a consciousness – if we did not get taught that we would not have been able to take in the whole experience as much. (AR, FG, 15.6)

In attempting to 'come as a guest' many of the students made deliberate changes in how they spoke to the homeless, in order to be more sensitive to them, and even went as far as making choices about how to sit, careful/mindful of the mindset and attitude they brought to the interaction. This attitude was one of respect and of not judging. Several participants paralleled 'coming as a guest' to how they would be when they visited a friend's home.

JG: To go to their place, to their park, it is their park and not sort of be like, "This is our breakfast and you're here taking our food!" You are kind of there and being a guest in their place.

PR: On the van it is like going to a party and you bring a bottle of wine or something – you are the guest coming to their place. That is all we are doing. But we still have to be a guest. It is their area.

JG: It is not looking down on them. Even physically – if they are on a chair and you sit down on the ground that makes a difference. That kind of makes you feel sort of lower, even physically – and that kind of helps.

SR: Well a guest is not when someone comes to your house saying, "Well I'm here and I'm here to stay". They come in more gently. They talk to you at the door and YOU [participant emphasis] invite them in. That is what it is like with the guys on the street. You make the first move, say hello, and then if they like you they might invite you in, into their conversation. They might say, "It is not a good time now – come back some other time". That is what the concept of guest means.

JBS: I think it is really just leaving all your stuff behind you – being sort of welcomed into their world for want of a better term. It is just sort of not bringing with you all your, what you believe and think is right. You are just sort of looking at them, this is who they are, how they exist and you are not bringing with you all your judgmental attitudes. You are welcomed in – and that is how I see it. (FG, 27.4)

### **5.6.2 Presence**

Being present to people was an important concept for the participants. Several participants felt that the choice to 'be present' helped push them past an image or role to the person. In striving to be present, the participants felt more equal with the homeless, did not react to negative people, were more patient and better listeners, even when they did not really want to. "I think I was very present this morning as I didn't miss anything Peter said and that was all throughout the morning" (AS, DJ, 5). As a result of their efforts to be present, the students felt that the homeless felt more valued and that their listening was more real and genuine. They were able to look past the mental illness to the person. "Yes, I was able to do it [be present] all the time. When you try to be present

you can 'hang off every word'. You are then really interested. It does make a difference" (BP, DJ, 5). For the students Presence meant:

I think it is going past everything on the outside, social norms, physical appearance, past the homelessness and focusing on the person. I think it is just listening to them, looking at them and trying to put a bit more effort into it – not just listen and be passive but going past that; listen but do it genuinely. I think it is to listen in a way that you try to work out what they really want you to do; as a person who is going to listen. I don't want you to criticize me or correct me – just listen and be a friend – being present means filling that void. (AM, FG, 27.4)

Again, participants discovered that when they were present they appeared to get a better response and often experienced deeper levels of connecting. They felt more appreciated by the homeless. For James Barry 'presence' meant that he sensed the possible mental illness in one of the regulars that he spoke to, and then made a deliberate choice not to judge him but to be 'there for him'.

This is a while back. I was talking to a guy named Richard and he is a guy who comes and is always complaining about something; the food is not cooked or something or the serving is too slow or something. And I said to myself, "Nah, fair enough he has got something wrong with him or something – don't go there kind of thing". And he is talking about how this guy owes him some money and if he does not pay this guy he will be kicked out of his rental and so he needs the money owed to him real bad - he has been trying to get this money for a while. And he was talking about drugs and all of this and I kind of felt – I was tempted to think, "Hey, you've got yourself into this situation!" But I did not go there – I just sat there and listened, listened to his story and was kind of there for him. (JB, FG, 11.5)

For some like Ben Summers, being present meant a deliberate choice to go and sit in silence near someone he felt was having a difficult time; a level of presence that shows quite a deep level of maturity.

We were at the Riverstage and there was this one time that there was this guy sitting on the stage and he looked as if he was having a bit of a hard time and so I just went over and just started to chat to him and he wasn't necessarily too talkative but I just sat there with him for a little while and he just seemed to like the fact that I did not actually start to talk to him, I just sat with him; I did feel that he did not want me to go away. (BS, FG, 3.5)

The ability of the students to differentiate between the person and the issue has grown, and hence the participants were able to focus on the person and their dignity and not be distracted by non-rational arguments. At this stage of the program the participants were able to reflect and differentiate between 'coming as a guest', 'being present' and 'respecting the dignity of the person'. Increasingly the students were able to talk about these terms in their own words and from real experience.

Coming as a guest is pretty much that everything that anyone is is because of the history that they sort of have had and so coming as a guest means rather than judging what you can see – you come ready to learn about their story. (BP, FG, 28.4)

DO'L: Maybe all three are the same thing just worded differently. Being present you listen to people, coming as a guest you don't judge them and when you are aware of their dignity you also don't judge them but you relate to them as a real person not just as a homeless person; you don't mentally judge them, put them on a scale straight away – he's homeless. (FG, 28.4)

AC: When I think of respecting the dignity of the person I remember one day when everyone was lining up to get food – I saw this bloke off to the side who did not seem to be coming over and I – went over and asked him did he want some food and then I brought him over to the group. I felt that that was respecting the fact that he needed to be included.

GMc: When you understand the situations that have led them to that stage – that is respecting their story, their person. It is not necessarily their fault that they are there where they are; respecting their particular circumstances.

AMcK: Well like, it does not matter if they are alcoholics or don't have jobs or anything – they are a human being just like the rest of us so we have to still give them the same amount of respect that you would give to anyone. (FG, 3.5)

The time element in their relationships began to come through in many of the reflections about coming as guest and the dignity of the person. The participants felt that the more you knew the person, the more times you met them when you were out on the van, the more they were able to truly connect in a respectful way.

Going off what you said about how as you meet them more you respect them more I've met this guy Nick twice – the first time that I met him I respected him, I respected the situation that he was in but the second time that I met him I respected the situation that he was in even more than I did previously. It has a lot to do with coming as a guest and being present. (AB, FG, 11.5)

### **5.6.3 Deliberate Choices**

As the study progressed the participants' attempts to be present and come as a guest were no longer the theory of the classroom. In striving to be present the participants struggled not to judge, as the presenting data from the homeless sometimes can be contradictory. They may have phones, be dressed well, even have a car and have no apparent reason why they could not find work. The participants now named this difficulty, were aware of it, and attempted to be present to the person beyond this, deliberately putting their urge to judge aside. They made deliberate choices to 'be present' and this meant deliberately choosing particular communication approaches: to completely focus, to not look around, to actively listen, to make eye contact. For some participants this deliberate choice to be present actually occurred as they were listening to the homeless person. An initial voice inside them said that what the homeless person was saying was rubbish, but then a counter voice invited them to be present to the person regardless. The participants became more aware of these two voices and the choices they made in the midst of conversations; the interaction was much more deliberate.

I tried to come as a guest to this guy who was telling me this story that I doubt was true. I think by trying to come as a guest it makes it easier to talk to the person and not worry about the truth of what they are saying. (MC, DJ, 5)

I think it is important to ignore that little voice at the back of your head saying, "This guy is psycho or this guy is.... whatever" until you actually know what they have done. (MH, FG, 27.4)

#### 5.6.4 Acceptance and personalising

Some participants who earlier in the program had been annoyed by how people could have miniature TV's, or drive to the van site, or have mobile phones, and could still use the van service and see themselves as homeless, were now aware that they had changed. Students could see that they had moved past this block and were able to accept that this was just where these people were at, and that for some inexplicable reason the homeless just could not 'move on' or move back into normal society. For some their reflection upon the world of the homeless helped them understand better how society works and how a person can end up on the streets.

Another difficulty I found was my ability to deal with the fact that although these guys seem normal they have underlying mental conditions. At first I could only think of this while I spoke to the guys but after time I realised that their mental condition should have no bearing over my relationship with them. I feel a much deeper understanding of homelessness now that I have spent my time on Big Brekky. (AMcK, EX, 6)

I sometimes don't understand why some homeless are on the streets but I have developed my own philosophy on what to view them by. Every person is shaped by the experiences in life that they have, these experiences have an impact on their lives and changed them into the person they are today. (MQ, EX, 6)

After only a couple of visits to the van site the students began to let go of stereotypical images of the homeless and see them as individuals. This personalising of the relationship led to an energy shift in the students, and they began to see what they were attempting to do was more than the functional task of cooking a barbeque; it was being a part of, and helping build a community of care and respect.

Over time, with the deepening of skills, many students appeared to be relaxed in their interactions with the homeless. "The highlight of my morning was talking to a guy called Allan and just talking about what is going on in the world today and having a laugh with him" (AS, FG, 3.5). "The highlight of my morning was talking to Steve about footy and being able to have an easy, down-to-earth conversation, and being able to explain who will win the title in footy and who he barracks for" (MQ, DJ, 5). The participants by now were much more aware of the undercurrents of the interactions with the homeless and were more sensitized to the nature of the relationship. There was less of a disparity between the participants' responses to 'what was the highlight' of their morning, and to what was difficult about the morning. The difficulties were not so much a difficulty, but an observation or reflection on how they could not or why they could not connect with a person.

### **Knowing their name**

Many participants found a vital part of being present was to know the person's name or remembering it; beginning the interaction with their name. Knowing their name appears to have a definite effect on the dynamic of the relationship.

I think if you give someone a name you give them an identity. You also are looking past who they first come across to be; usually the first impression is not who they really are. For me that is no different with a homeless person – so in giving them a name you are sort of looking past, giving them an identity and you are looking at the actual person as opposed to “the crazy guy with dreadlocks”. Instead of it being that ‘raving old guy’, you say, “Oh, there’s Harry!” or something like that. And then he turns from the raving old guy to the guy who has the car to the guy who used to live in Brisbane to the guy who is Harry. (DD, FG, 2.5)

### **Particular Individuals**

As the weeks went by some of the homeless became very significant for the students. They were people that they shared a common interest with, or people that went out of their way to make them welcome, and were aware when they were having a hard time with other homeless.

The one Street person I have gotten to know over the course of the program is Tony. Every morning I have been on the van he has been one of the first people to arrive if he wasn't already waiting. I was able to talk to Tony fairly easy because we both have an interest in sports. Tony is a pretty big guy and I recall him telling Josh and I that when he was in high school at KGSB he was Prop for their First XV. Just little similarities in our interests allowed me to get to know Tony. (DP, EX, 6)

Alex McKechnie developed a close relationship with Steve. In fact many of the participants developed a close bond with Steve, as they identified him as one of the key people who made them welcome and accepted. Alex, while appreciating Steve's relationship, was able to identify his mental illness.

I've got to know Steve reasonably well. Steve is a man who is always up for a chat and he always wants to speak his mind but I have found that sometimes he can be paranoid. One morning while I was speaking to Steve I noticed that every few moments he would look over my shoulder and move around trying to see something, when I turned around to look there was nothing there. I had begun to feel quite comfortable with Steve but his paranoia, although not making me disregard him as a human being just like me, reminded me that although he may seem normal he is on the streets for a reason. After that incident a number of other incidents have also showed me another side to the seemingly always joking, jovial Steve. (AMcK, EX, 6)

### **Aware of causal factors in homelessness**

The ability of the participants to read the homeless people's body language had now grown. This followed a series of class lessons on mental illness. The participants appeared to be much more sensitive and aware of the true nature and effects of mental illness. There appeared to be a fine-tuning of participant's expectations of relationships and of connecting, in the light of possible mental illness in the homeless.

The guy I was talking to studied a lot in school and did well. He was a single child and his father died when he was 21 and his mother left after his dad had died. He was then confused and did not know what to do – so he ended up on the streets. As he was very dependent upon his parents he had not developed any skills or have any support; he had no money at that stage. (BP, FG, 28.4)

Most of them – there is a trigger that starts things up – they then go down from there. (DO'L, FG, 28.4)

I've only seen this guy once and he just keep talking about all the things that have happened to him on the street and I think he had a pretty bad gambling addiction and he was adopted as a child so he was not really settled in his home kind of thing. It was just a string of things that sort of led to where he was now .... But as Pricey says there probably is something there but I could not see it easily see it. (MC, FG, 2.5)

### **Aware of Story**

At this phase of the program many of the participants appear to be more self aware and more aware of the dynamics of the relationship between them and the homeless. This awareness often manifested in the students' ability to be in touch with the 'story' of each homeless person. As the level of trust between the participants and the homeless deepened, more stories were recalled, some at some depth.

I met Matthew at the Ozcare having dinner and James Gofton and I both agreed that it was the best chat we had ever had on the van. It was the first and only time a person had really opened up and said what his situation was and told us how he got in this situation. I have experienced the overview of some homeless characters such as they do drugs or get in trouble with family but not the step by step progression to their situation. I was grateful that he was happy to not only chat to the two of us but tell us his story. (MQ, EX, 6)

Even in situations where some of the homeless were under the influence of alcohol or harder drugs, the participants were still able to connect, feel accepted and welcome, whereas previously they would have distanced themselves. When the participants thought some of the homeless looked very respectable they somehow sensed that there was more of a story there.

There was one particular guy that I met and everyone seems to congregate around one area and he was around the other side – so I felt I had better go and speak to him – I don't think of it like that but - I went and ended up speaking to him and he ended up starting to roll a durrie and I felt that we were present to each other – he offered me one and that felt special. (BS, FG, 3.5)

The guy who was the army engineer he sort of had both [different sides to a stereotype] because he did finish school but when you see him he is all sort of clean, a shirt and shoes; so he does not completely look like a homeless person but he has had something that has made him into a homeless person. (ME, FG, 30.3)

### **5.6.5 Changing Attitudes**

#### **Changing Attitudes: Empathy**

As time went by and the relationships between the participants and the homeless deepened, attitudinal changes began to appear in some of the participants. There

appeared to be a growth in empathy for the homeless and their situation, where the logic or sense of the homeless person's situation did not matter any more. The participants appeared to be finding more meaning from their interactions with the homeless. Over time many of the participants developed an emotional bond with the homeless that presented in many different ways. In some cases they had become aware that they were now seeing the homeless very differently from peers not involved with the program.

This morning on the train there was this young kid, probably a little bit older than me, he was listening to rap music really loud, he had a beanie on and everything, really fitting the stereotype and he was looking really angry. One of my mates paid him out behind his back. He said that he was a weirdo on the train and he looked down on him. And I did not really agree or bring it up with my mate but I sort of thought that my mate, you have no idea of the sort of experience, the story that he [the fellow on the train] has had. Like, obviously he did not look like he had been treated so well in his life and if I had not been on Eddie's Van – otherwise I would not have seen that side. (AMcC, FG, 30.3)

### **Changing Attitudes: Reciprocity**

In the Awareness Phase the participants have developed new boundaries to their thinking and are more aware of the reciprocal nature of their relationship with the homeless. After months of the students going out on the van they were more aware of the homeless reaching out and caring for them; reciprocity.

This incident was on Eddie's Night Van on Tuesday night – and the next morning I was walking through Brunswick Street and I ran into one of the guys and he stopped and we talked for five minutes and I was impressed and I thought it was pretty cool how he stopped and wanted to talk to me. He was really listening to me and to what I had to say because there had been a fight on the night van and we had to close down and he was now asking me how I was feeling. He was saying, 'That stuff happens, and you have to be safe.' He was having a conversation with me and he really cared about me and about my safety and what had happened last night and he knew that what had happened was not what should happen normally. (JM, FG, 11.5)

The same guy – I think it was our first time out – he was the first guy I talked to, I think his name was John. He was just listening deeply to what I was saying and engaging in conversation with me. He was the first guy who really made me feel comfortable and he was the one who made a big impact upon me to go out to other people. (ME, FG, 11.5)

Some participants became aware of just how present to them many of the homeless guys were. This may well have been happening all along but the students were not aware of it. The participants had now become aware that many of the homeless trusted them, were willing to share deeply with them, looked forward to seeing them and could joke around with them. Many homeless people are naturally suspicious and have been on the wrong side of the law, so for them to trust adolescent young men with their stories and especially about little drug deals and other issues, was important.

Tony, he is the big guy with a skin disease with scabs on his face and hands. He was talking to me about his experiences and he was sort of relating to me about my life from his experiences. It was the first and only time that a homeless guy has done that; he was really present to me. (MG, FG, 27.4)



Some of the guys who do come up to you and talk to you –they do treat you as if you are on the same level as them – you can talk about stuff there that you would not talk about with your parents, like the guy who was talking with us about alcohol – you would not talk with your parents about that – only with your mates and with the guys out there. (JG, FG, 28.4)

James Gofton at the end of his time on the van reflected upon the relationship he had developed with one particular streetie. James had come to the realisation that he had benefited more from the relationship than had the homeless person, and that many of the people out there were great at cheering the students up. They were receiving from the homeless in ways that they had not imagined before the program.

I think I have gotten more out of our relationship than he has; which is incredible when you compare our circumstances. The most recent time I went out I spent the whole morning talking to two guys who seemed to be really good friends. They just accepted me for who I was. Sometimes the people out there are really good at cheering people up. (JG, EX, 6)

### **Changing Attitudes: Acceptance and welcome**

Others had a strong sense of welcome and acceptance when in a reciprocal way the homeless asked them questions, inquired about how they were going at school and their footy game the previous weekend. Andrew Marchesi pondered ‘who was helping who?’ on the van while Chris Chadwick valued how a homeless person related to him in such a way that he felt accepted and welcome.

The van has been great as it provided such a strong feeling of community. Also it feels good to help out people (though sometimes I wonder who helps who) and I enjoy the feeling of acceptance that some homeless provide to us. (AM, EX, 6)

I felt valued when I was getting along with a person, and was having a positive conversation with him smiling; he was asking me questions as well. He was laughing with me and he smiled and said goodbye and patted me on the back. They would wave to us when we were driving away. I felt like this because they were coming as a guest to me, and being open and friendly and making me feel accepted as well. (CC, EX, 6)

### **Changing Attitudes: Equality**

Many participants had come to a point where they could discuss quite philosophical issues linked to their van experience. One discussion asked whether you can truly be ‘equal’ in a relationship, not just with a homeless person, but with someone a lot older than you. Some participants struggled to conceptualise from their experience of relating with the homeless. Some appeared to see ‘equality’ linked to ‘dignity’ as social equality similar to the father/son or manager/employee relationship as distinct from referring to the innate dignity of a person. One of the issues linked to this type of discussion was to know to what extent it was purely intellectualizing from previous held views, or where it was actually reflecting their van experience in the light of the surrounding value systems.

What was clear is that this was a new experience [this type of philosophical discussion] for many of them and especially one related to their own lived experience of relationships. Louis in this discussion saw equality as being purely social where as Nick Nagle was able to articulate an insight linked to the worth of the person just as they are.

BP: Dignity is a feeling of importance ....

NN: That you are on the same level as them. That – you are not above them – being equal.

LP: It is a bit hard to do that because we are still students. It is hard to be on the same level as us cause they are 30 years our senior. It is hard to have an in depth conversation with a 15 year old when you are a 50 year old.

NN: To me when you think of dignity it would be like disregarding age and disregarding material possession and just having a talk to them as the person that they are.

ZO'S: We do do that in society anyhow.

NN: But when you try to be nice to somebody, like even if they are not homeless – if is someone who is older than you or a lot younger than you – the dignity of the person can be shown if you just ignore their age or how they are different to you and just accept them as a person.

JH: It is hard to be equal with a homeless person if you go to a school like this. I know this might sound really bad but it is hard to go down to that sort of level. But they are on a totally different level to us. (FG, 28.4)

James' comment then led the discussion to an important insight into how society values people, and judges their worth and dignity according to their material worth and usefulness. Dylan's insight was that because of this judgmental attitude in society there was a subconscious 'distance' between the participants and the homeless and there was little that anyone can do about it.

I know it is not about material things but that is what society judges people on – material things – you judge a guy who owns a Porsche as compared to a guy with a broken down car and assume that the guy with the Porsche has a better job, he is more well off in society, he knows more people sort of thing than the guy with the beaten up car. He is a guy who is poor. You don't say it out aloud but society judges you on these sorts of things and so when you are trying to be equal it has been drilled into you that you judge people on that – and you know that you should not do it but probably everyone subconsciously does; even though we are young they still subconsciously think of us like that and show a little separation between us! (DO'L, FG, 28.4)

### **Changing Attitudes - How they see us: Acceptance**

Another discussion that perhaps showed the depth of awareness of the key concepts and ideology of the program centred on how the participants thought the homeless saw them. There was a consensus that they saw them as 'mates' and 'friends' and came to the van because they felt that they belonged and were accepted. This friendship was not the day-to-day friendship of normal society, but a friendship for the time they were on the van; they were there as mates, chatting to them and catching up and listening. Most of the participants felt that the fact that they were from a wealthy private school did not matter to the homeless. In one Focus Group the issue of wearing the school uniform came up. Two boys for different reasons ended up volunteering on the van wearing their

school uniform. One felt that it distanced him from the homeless while the other felt it had no bearing what so ever on how the homeless reacted and related to him. The general consensus of the participants was that it [the wearing of a private school uniform] did not matter to the homeless; a real acceptance by the homeless that goes beyond labels.

I've worn my uniform the last two mornings that I have been out and they have not cared at all. They treat me exactly the same. I do it because I'm lazy too but you just go out in uniform and they don't even seem to notice, it is more 'Wow, that looks nice'. (JG, FG, 8.6)

I think they think of us as friends, people they can joke around with and like with the guy that always taps people on the shoulder; Trevor. He is always tapping you on the shoulder and you always know that it is him and he always points to someone – and you always play along with it – and it is just good fun and other times you will just go up to someone and you will have a very light hearted chat and it really gives a sense of friendship, kind of getting along with them, friendly, a bit of fun. (JB, FG, 23.5)

As Jack was saying about them seeing us as mates – I've met this bloke called Bruce on the Tuesday morning van and when I went on the Eddie's Night Van at night it was good to talk to him again and catch up with him again – and as mates do you greet them with a handshake – with a firm handshake and that is how I've always greeted people that I've met on the van. It is like – it shows that you're there and you're their friend. (TK, FG, 23.5)

The fact that they were from a relatively wealthy private school did not appear to make any difference to the homeless and the students were aware of and appreciative of this.

JB: I don't know that they judge us on our school cause we don't go around talking about it or saying that "We go to Holy Family". Some find out from the old boys but I don't think that they think we are doing it to make the school look good.

WB: A lot of them don't know that we are from a wealthy school. A lot of them would not know whether we are from a rich school or state school – I don't think it matters to them. (FG, 30.5)

There was a tangible sense of pride among the participants when they heard the reaction of the homeless to a series of Government workers who were conducting surveys and follow up work to applications for assistance from some of the homeless. The students enjoyed the fact that the homeless reacted in a very positive way to them when they found out that they voluntarily chose to work on the van and that they did so over so long a period. The participants obviously wanted to be there and easily mixed in with them in a more down-to-earth and equal way. The homeless appeared to sense this and responded positively.

We have been trying to come as a guest and be present to them and not be intrusive. They probably don't think that we think we are coming in to help them; all high and mighty and stuff. Because we are coming as guests and not trying to be intrusive or disruptive they think more of us than if we were to do that. Just with the Social Workers that come. I think that they don't really like people like that because they appreciate people from the vans because no one is actually doing that as a business. I think that they think – that people like the Social Workers and the Council – they are there, "You're not doing anything – you're getting paid to do this – so – what is really the point – would you be here if you weren't getting paid?" I think they really appreciate how we do it; then again it actually goes back to that there is actually some thought going into it – it is not just mindless action. (SR, FG, 30.5)

For the homeless it was important that the participants were not 'do gooders' or 'fake'. The participants believed they were seen differently to the Government workers because of how they approached them and interacted with them; there was genuineness about the relationship.

- NN: They appreciate what we do, they say it is nice what we do.  
ZO: Most of them say 'thanks friend' when they get the sausage and yeh – and its just all round good.  
DP: Yesterday I was talking to three of them and they all said to me that you are doing a great job and you are great guys and thanks for all of this. It gives us a great start to the day and stuff.  
JD: Good blokes who really appreciate us and what we do. (FG, 26.5)

### **Changing Attitudes: Coming as guest pays off**

In their final visits to the van, most of the participants had reached quite a deep and genuine level of relating, so that the topics they reflected upon and the way that they did, were the day-to-day stuff of friendship. Eddie's Van had become the context for the friendship between the homeless and the students. This friendship was quite real. The homeless knew they were students, knew they were from 'Holy Family' and to some extent knew that they were from relatively wealthy families but that, as in all true friendships, did not matter. Core to this friendship appears to have been the approach that the participants took.

The Council guys, when they go up and talk to the guys on the van they are really patronizing. They can be real condescending in the way that they talk to them. And I was talking to some of them and they really hate it how the Council guys talk to them. They have not worked hard to establish that link in the first place – and the big difference between what we do and what they do is that they go out sort of thinking that they are fixing things and sort of making changes but they are really not; they are not really getting to know these guys – where as we are out there trying to really get to know the guys and just be friends with them. (AMcC, FG, 26.5)

Facilitator: So you're distinguishing between us and these other people, the Council guys – and what you're saying the difference is that we – one of our objectives is to get to know the people and become their friends ...

TH: It is like we are friends – but we are friends through the Eddie's Van – like I was talking to this guy with Jack and we were also on the night van and when we are finished he asked us, "When will I see you next?" When is the next time you will come out on Eddie's Van? Our friendship is linked to Eddie's Van. We can't kind of be friends in the sense of every day in their normal day-to-day. (FG, 2.3)

### **5.6.6 Building a Conceptual map**

#### **Who benefits?**

Part of the attitudinal change during this phase related to the participants' reflections and the debate as to who actually benefits from the van experience - the volunteers or the homeless? This debate reflected the increased ability of the participants to conceptualise

what they are trying to do through the van. Some of the students had developed a rather romantic and idealized view of the effect of Eddie's Van, while others were able to see that it was just one service and element among many in the lives of the homeless. Two basic schools of thought came to the fore. Firstly, Eddie's Van was benefiting the homeless as they gained people to talk to, a warm breakfast, clothing and a sense of community that may be contributing to a lessening in the effect of mental illness. Secondly, the participants gained from the experience as it would not matter which people were working on the van for the program to continue, but the participants would 'miss' the experience of the van and what they were learning.

Arrogant view "we are doing them a service". Maybe he just does not want to talk to you. I think that is a valid point – you don't always want to talk to someone. Especially if you come with this arrogant view that you are doing them a service – I'm probably wrong here but a lot of us come with this arrogant view that we're doing them a service and they should respect us by talking to us. (LP, FG, 28.4)

It is benefiting us. I just think if they don't remember us but we are remembering them then it's going to be more for us because we are the ones remembering them and what happened and they remember having a good morning but they don't remember names and things as well as we do. And so, for us we are getting to know people but for them they are just having a talk. So it is probably better for us. (BP, FG, 28.4)

It is for them. I don't necessarily disagree with it but is it not correct that all of us could go on with our lives quite normally if we did not do this? Where as doing this – as Pricey says, Pricey was telling us about Terry whom he – Terry has been there since the Night Van and Eddie's Van started and has become a lot more mentally stable and um – based on that – to some extent I think that it is for them. (NN, FG, 28.4)

In the discussion the students mixed up the terms 'benefiting' and 'for them'. Louis and Ben were arguing that it was the participants who mainly benefit while Nick, not necessarily disagreeing with them, pointed out that the van was for the homeless. The final argument put forward was that many factors could contribute to change in a homeless person and Eddie's Van could be one of these.

BP: But it is not one person's single actions that are causing the change it is the whole Eddie's Van.

LP: You can't contribute a person's whole change of well being just to Eddie's Van – it could be a whole lot of factors.

NN: But if Eddie's Van was not there so that he had someone to talk to, I don't think it matters who he is talking to provided they have someone to talk to; it matters. Today I talked to this guy. I asked him what does he do and he just told me that he just sits at home all day and comes out to these, if there was not an Eddie's Van he would not have any social sort of life, anything to do socially. I think it is really important that they have someone to talk to otherwise they would go just completely mad.

LP: It is important but we are not the only organization out there. There is Rosies and there is that nursing organization.

NN: I'm not really concerned for who is doing it as long as someone is.

BP: I think that's what matters really. (FG, 28.4)

As the program drew towards its close the participants were able to reflect deeply on what their motivation was to be involved in the van [as compared to their entry journaling] and who benefited. James Halloran identified the mutual benefit of the van program.

I think that it is not that they kind of don't get anything out of it, I'm sure that they are, they get to talk to us and they get breakfast and stuff but it probably is more for our sake like it gives us a better understanding and they wouldn't really care who is there, they don't really care who they talk to. (JH, FG, 28.4)

### **Why do the van?**

Dylan O'Leary could identify that at the level of the basic need of conversation and receiving an early morning meal, the homeless benefited, but that at this level it would not make any difference who was serving up the meal or chatting to them. At this basic level there are two different and separate benefits: the homeless people getting a meal and some conversation, and the volunteers having a valuable experience. Nick Nagle took the discussion past 'who benefits' to the question of motivation for volunteering for Eddie's Van.

DO'L: Just like if they replaced all of us with another RE class I don't think the homeless guys would care but we would say, "Oh, we miss Eddie's Van, which was good".

NN: Everyone seems to be saying that it is all about us just because we like to go there but I think that the thing to them is not so much who is doing it so long as it is happening – which is what everyone has been saying. But it seems that someone has to do it or someone is doing it, whether it is us or someone else and I think that whoever is doing it – they may benefit from it. But the reason so many different people do it is because it benefits the homeless people. (FG, 28.4)

Nick Nagle had no issue with participants liking to serve on the van, and agreed with the others that the key thing was that someone was doing this service. Nick identified that the reason many volunteer to do the program was to benefit [serve] the homeless. At this point the facilitator suggested that there may be a mutual benefit and the Focus Group members agreed.

Facilitator: Perhaps the reason many participants have for doing the program is to benefit the homeless but in doing so they know they will benefit as well.

LP: They are there to talk to you as well and if you go, "Oh the reason I'm here is to help you, to provide help for you". I think that is really arrogant.

NN: But surely that is why it started.

LP: That may be the reason it started but it is not the reason we started, none of us here had any prior experience of it, before this program, so what is the reason you signed up – you weren't thinking, "I'm going to help you, I'm going to make a difference!" You would have thought, "I'm going to try this, see what it is like". You want to see what it is like. A completely self centred thing – it is only now that we can see that it is beneficial to them as well. (FG, 28.4)

Jak and Rory, in reflecting on this issue, were able to identify that the key issue was the how of what you were doing; not being morally superior but coming as a guest.

JBS: Well with what Sean is saying – you can give someone their basic needs – you can give them food and water and shelter and stuff – but if you do it in an impersonal way – a morally superior way – you are not respecting their dignity – you are not truly valuing the person – in addition to just helping the person – they are two different things – when you listen to someone – talk to them – you make them feel that who they are and what they have to say – is valuable kind of thing. I know we as one person can't do this – but it is .....

RO: It is not 'I've paid my dues – I've helped out!' (FG, 3.5)

### **We're on their turf!**

Many of the students had come to a point where they were very aware that they were in the homeless people's territory and that Eddie's Van was in many ways theirs. This mindset allowed them to be more aware and part of the local scene or sub-culture. The participants began to identify the importance of territory for homeless people and that the van volunteers were guests on the homeless people's territory; it was their place.

Also if I saw a guy on the street as I wandered past I would wonder, also you would not be sure whose territory you would be in. Like, at Eddie's Van; it is their territory and not one particular person's. You know they are at Eddie's Van and they won't be picking fights or anything. (AC, FG, 17.3)

The participants were beginning to see Eddie's Van as 'belonging to the homeless' rather than to the volunteers. While many of the participants were feeling very safe talking to the homeless gathered at Eddie's Van, they appeared to label them as different to 'other' homeless people elsewhere even though the majority of them had little or no experience of other homeless people.

I just think that at Eddie's Van they are kind of willing to be there and they want to be there. They know that if they get aggressive or anything that we are going to leave and they know that - cause we've been told that. So we feel comfortable and they are not going to do anything to us while we are there at Eddie's Van but someone in the streets somewhere else, it is not someone who wants to be there talking to you; who is willing to stop and talk to you (ZO'S, FG, 17.3).

I think it is that when they are at Eddie's Van it is kind of like private. It is their area. Where as when they are out in the public it is homeless people and the rest. If it was someone from Eddie's Van they would be easier to approach. (LP, FG, 17.3)

### **Being appreciated**

During this phase some of the discussion examined whether the homeless should appreciate what the participants did. Discussions such as this forced the participants to a new level of awareness of what they were doing and why. The discussion of appreciation linked into the previous discussion about motivation and benefit. This discussion was initiated by the participants, from the Focus Group discussion and not the facilitator. The facilitator picked up on it and invited further reflection. The discussion showed quite a depth of maturity, as the participants were aware that it was their choice to serve the homeless, and while the homeless should respect them it is more a mutual

acceptance that all people should respect one another and not operate as a top-down thing.

GMc: I think that they should be respectful towards us to the extent that we are respecting towards them.

AMcK: We should not go down there to expect recognition from them.

SR: I don't think that we are 'owed' appreciation. I still think that in a sense they should appreciate what we do. They don't owe us anything and we don't owe them anything.

ME: We should appreciate them as well. We have all agreed here that they have changed us – that they have taught us certain things, so in a way it is sort of mutual – we give them breakfast – they teach us how to respect the person, how to speak to a person .....

Facilitator: Do you then think they should appreciate that?

CC: I don't know that I think that they should but I think that they do.

Facilitator: Why don't you think that they should?

CC: It is like our choice to be out there and their choice to come. They just do appreciate it – they don't have to. (FG, 3.5)

### **5.6.7 Skills now personally owned**

After six or seven van visits, the participants became part of the sub-culture of the van site; they were part of the scenery. This was evident in the relaxed atmosphere around the van with the students so at home with the rituals and language, that what had appeared to be unique and extraordinary was now taken for granted. They knew who would be standing where, who would line up first, who was mates with whom etc. Many of the participants had developed quite good friendships with particular homeless people as well as members of their own team. Their communication skills had become second nature to them; were owned and part of their skill portfolio. There was an even deeper level of sharing and the small number of students, who had struggled to connect at all, had built up their comfort zone of people they could connect with and a workable approach that connected. The communication skills were more sophisticated, the participants more aware and felt that they are making a difference; not in a hero sort of way but just that they felt appreciated for their efforts. Some of the students were seeing applications for their increased communication skills beyond the homeless scene.

Yeh, basic conversation skills like learning how to direct conversation, how to keep it going, how to prevent it from stopping all the time, like how to handle awkward silences and stuff. You are talking to random people and starting up conversations with them is now starting to get much easier. (CC, FG. 11.5)

I'm really beginning to become a better listener. You really have to be present to them, by keeping eye contact and really watching them, you are really present to them and so you really hear what they are actually saying better. (TM, FG, 11.5)



### 5.6.8 Deeper Social Analysis

As they became aware that the van belonged to the homeless, and that each homeless person or group claimed their own territory, the participants grew in their awareness of the inner dynamics of the homeless society: the pecking order and inner politics. This was important as it showed that the participants were seeing and hearing more. Their energy had gone past the nervous 'breaking into' this group, to a level of comfort that allowed them to sense the deeper nuances of interactions. It reflected a deeper level of relationship when some of the homeless confided in them. The participants began to notice that the homeless assigned different levels of homelessness to different people, different levels of street credibility! The participants were much more sensitive to what they could and could not say; sensitive to the 'rules' of the homeless person's sub-culture.

I had met this guy called Steve and one time I met him he was really going along well and then the next time I met him he was really serious and I learned that most homeless people are really protective and don't think anyone should get more than someone else; and everyone knows Harry, everyone has met Harry, and this guy used to think that Harry took more food than he really deserved. Steve believes that he really does not need the extra food and all of that was so different to the first time I had met him – like the first time I met him he was joking around and this time he was really serious – a bit angry too. (CD, FG, 30.3)

The way I see it is following their rules – you are in their house and so you go by their rules – what they say – you have to tread a bit carefully – like if you are in someone's else house and you don't know that you are not allowed to wear shoes – you take the safer option – not push the boundaries. When I first went out on the van and you did not know the rules. And now you are beginning to understand the rules of their house a little bit more. (RO, FG, 3.5)

As they grew in their awareness of the inner workings of the homeless people's community the participants seemed to know what the homeless people did, where they spent their time and the category of homeless person they were in: street dweller, boarding house, Government accommodation, etc. The participants became aware that the homeless people's society was as complex and multi-layered as any other group in society. When they realised that a lot of the homeless came to Eddie's Van for the company, the sense of community, and the feeling of security rather than for the food, some of the participants began to label the Eddie's Van homeless as different to other homeless they saw around the city. In perhaps a romantic and possessive way, they saw the homeless who came to Eddie's Van as "coming from more educated backgrounds" and "being nice", where as the homeless on the streets away from Eddie's Van were of doubtful reputation – "you don't know what they are like" (MQ, FG, 17.3). This insight that the homeless that came to Eddie's Van were one group, and other

homeless around the city were different, and the general population different again, may be true. Certainly those homeless who are further along in the area of substance abuse may be incapable of making it to a regular early morning van venue on time. It is unclear whether this insight was good social analysis and sociological insight, or a romantic rose-coloured glasses view of the homeless they have come to know and have built relationships with.

Sometimes I get the feeling that the people that we sort of see in the city they appear a lot dirtier and have no money and stuff. I get the impression that sometimes the people we meet on Eddie's Van are not in that sort of position; not as destitute. There seems to be a difference between the people with a lower sort of accommodation and those on the streets. (NN, FG, 17.3)

The ones we talk to seem to come from educated backgrounds. But because of certain circumstances have ended up on the streets. Where as some of the ones in the city may not have ever known anything different. The ones who are educated know that if you co-operate with them and with the van things go well for both groups. (LP, FG, 17.3)

While many felt that they had acquired the skills to connect with non-Eddie's Van homeless, they generally felt that they probably would not approach homeless people in society in general as "you just don't walk up to a stranger and chat to them" (JD, FG, 17.2).

It would be kind of weird to just walk up to a homeless person away from Eddie's Van cause Eddie's Van is a kind of buffer – you go there to have a conversation, and we go there to talk to them – it would seem strange just to rock up to some one away from Eddie's Van and try to talk to them. (CC, FG, 30.3)

The participants were increasingly looking at their experience and asking 'Why?' The cause/effect element was increasingly present in their reflections on their van experience. Early in the program the participants had been looking for broad or sensational reasons for homelessness. As the program neared completion many had come to realise how small and simple incidents could tip the scales into homelessness.

It is very scary to think how small the instances are that cause someone to be homeless. One guy on the night van, Bruce – his wife died and he had kids at Churchie, a high profile school, and now he is on the street just living on the Goodwill Bridge; that is where his squat is. To think that something like losing your wife could cause that – it is a lot of small steps leading to a big thing. A small occasion like that. Then there is Imogen who is 15 or 16 and she has just been in trouble at school and then gone through and got expelled and been to other schools and got into trouble and now she is on the street and had a miscarriage. You don't think that it could be you but it there is a tiny chance that it could be – in a real rare case, just a small thing like your wife's death could cause it; they don't have the skills to deal with is. (MQ, FG, 8.6)

The students were becoming more cognisant of subtle differences in and insights into the world of the homeless. This deeper level of Social Analysis was encouraging them to realise that some of the homeless actually want to be on the streets and that even

psychologically it is safer for them there. Some cannot escape the streets. The participants were now much more aware of subtle mental illness symptoms.

AMcK: But some of these people have been on the streets for 20 years or so, I mean I'm not a homeless person, I would not know but – but if they have been there that long, I'm not saying that they are not trying hard enough, I'm just saying that they really don't want to, can't leave.

AC: But even if they don't want to leave it is still right for them to be on the street.

TH: There is this guy that I've been talking to who believes that he can't get off the street. He believes that he does not have the contacts and the skills to get a job to get the money and to get off the streets. Where as he used to have a job – but it was too hard and he just sort of gave up. He was getting paid really poorly. (FG, 30.3)

### 5.6.9 Sense of Community

#### The van community

The participants realized that there was a bond of community around the van and among the homeless in general. They came to a point of identifying that it was this sense of community, of welcome, companionship, acceptance and relative safety, that drew the homeless to the van as much as the lure of food or clothing did. At this stage on the journey of their experience many of the participants reflected on why people came to the van.

The reason people go surprised me. At the start I thought it was just people wanting some breakfast. But this morning I was talking to a guy and asked if he wanted anything to eat and he said "No, I'm going up to Ozcare for breakfast!" and it hit me that maybe people were coming to the brekky van for something more; the sense of community. (MC, DJ, 8)

The sense of community had now become quite strong both in the ability of the students to sense it among the homeless, feel it around the van and feel a part of it themselves. "I talked to a few familiar people so it felt like I was really building relationships and it felt like a community" (MC, DJ, 8). One student reflected that he felt that he now belonged in their community. "What was good about the morning was having a great chat to Uncle John, Mick Leon, Lindsay and Terry. It was awesome and I felt really part of their community" (AMcK, DJ, 8). Others related how they "felt welcomed and instantly accepted", "were recognized by the homeless", "felt valued" and "they were all really friendly". Some of the students who had previously found the experience difficult were now enjoying the van so much, that they did not want to leave at the end of the morning.

I really enjoyed the van this morning. Every conversation was easy and had funny group conversations with Imogen and the drunk guys. The first time I was disappointed to leave. (CT, DJ, 6)

The students had got to know Andrew and Richard quite well: two young homeless men not that much older than themselves who had been on the streets for most of the

program. Towards the end of the program they came to know Imogen, a young girl the same age as them who had been expelled from a local girls' private school. These three relationships were important for the participants, as the lessons of the van now more closely related to their own lived experience. The relationship with Andrew, Richard and especially Imogen provided much food for reflection for the participants as their closeness in age and similar social situations moved some of the students to a point of realization of "this could happen to me!"

I could relate to Imogen and her situation because I know how she got into her situation because she was open with us and she is the same age as us and her cousin goes to our school. (AB, DJ, 5)

### **The student community**

By the end of the program the participants had identified that they had grown much closer to the other participants and especially the other members of their team. This was important in that in the Reframing Phase the students had clearly identified this as not happening and not one of the purposes of the program. For some, like Chris Tunbridge, this was the highlight of the program. Others saw qualities in team members they had never seen at school.

The Eddie's van has allowed me to develop new friendships, both with the Holy Family students in our group and the people on the street. I have really enjoyed the being apart of the group. It made the experience less daunting and allowed a peace of mind, knowing that I had others there who could help me out. To be honest I felt most at home when I was in the Brothers' house, not on the street. I always felt awkward and unsure on the street, and I won't hide the fact that it was a relief at times to arrive back at school. I believe this is so because the group had a great sense of brotherhood and was pretty 'tight'. We developed our own sense of community where each and everyone were accepted. (CT, EX, 6)

The most enjoyable element of the van experience is the friendships I've formed with my crew. I felt most valued when the other guys on my crew looked to me for a little guidance and most at home when some of the streeties were able to remember my name. The sense of community was strongest when everybody had a sausage and egg and we were all just sat and ate. It was a sort of subliminal thing for me; a feeling of content. (SR, EX, 6)

Some identified that by working in a group with people they did not normally hang around with at school was beneficial, and now they were acknowledging each other a little more. Some felt that they were getting to know the other members of the team more but more through casual conversation to and from the van site, rather than because of the van experience itself. Several participants spoke about the importance of their 'shared experience' and how this bonded them more deeply. If they were to share with their normal mates what the homeless had said or done, they felt they would quickly get the hint to move on in the conversation or it would be brushed off as stereotypical.

Because the people in their team knew the people they were talking about and knew the scene, they felt they could relate to this shared experience at a deeper level.

For the people that have actually been out with you it is a shared experience like, I can talk about it, you know, the people I talk to at Eddie's Van like, Will and Grant and Sean and everyone here. But where as I couldn't do that with say people who haven't been on Eddie's Van. People who like, don't know what it's about. So, I think it's that shared experience sort of brings you a bit closer together. (BS, FG, 18.2)

By approaching the homeless in this way [coming as guest and being present], the participants ultimately became part of the homeless people's culture that they at first felt so uncomfortable and strange in. The students became aware that many of the homeless made an effort to change or modify their behaviour around them knowing they are school students; this especially happened with regards to swearing. While this was true other participants became aware that after some time, they were able to join in the conversation of groups of homeless people and the conversation did not change: it continued on as they were now 'friends' and a part of their culture, not a threat.

Like the mate thing – they do look at us as mates and they do know that we are not going to be their mates outside of the context of Eddie's Van – and they don't treat us exactly as they would a mate on the streets – I've only been sworn at once – without an apology – where as they would swear at one another all the time – as soon as they walk away from the van they would be swearing at one another all the time. But the only time that I ever heard them swearing at me without them apologizing was at the OzCare dinner on the Street Retreat – every other time they did it they would say, "Oh sorry for that language – or whatever". They are trying to keep with what we are used to. They don't just treat us how they treat their streetie mates but they still want to be mates with us – just in a different way. They acknowledge that we are not going to be swearing and drinking with them on weekends. (JM, FG, 23.5)

### **The Indigenous Community**

In this Awareness Phase the participants found a connection to the Indigenous people or found a level of connection that was real and respectful. Towards the end of the program participants made connections with the individual homeless Indigenous people, but rarely with the groups. "What was really good was finally talking to Dregs at the Botanical Gardens" (MS, DJ, 8). "What was really good was talking to new people today, lots of people – talking to the Aboriginal group for the first time this morning" (JS, DJ, 6). However the level of unease, even with the groups, lessened to the degree that some of the participants were confident that given time, they would be able to connect. Towards the end of their time on the van many of the participants felt that they had begun to understand how the Indigenous people think, and were more empathetic towards their situation. For almost all of the participants the van was the first real association they had had with Indigenous people. Importantly when chatting about the Aboriginal kids back at

Holy Family, the reaction of the participants was much more understanding and compassionate because they had seen their situation first hand.

The Aboriginal people who came to the van, we went up to where they live [under a bridge] and told them that the van was there, but none of them were picking fights or anything. I'm sure that if we did this [the van] for long enough we would be able to talk to even them. (LP, FG, 17.3)

When I came back from Eddie's Van and stuff, people were asking how was it. Was it worth doing it? And, I was telling them how like, what we first saw and stuff, like when we first got there, and what was obvious was there were a fair few young Aboriginal kids who had paint on their shirts and all that. And they were jumping around, acting a little bit crazy and stuff. And that was like, I told them it was quite sad and stuff like, to see them that they're doing that at such a young age. And like, people in our group, like most people would say it's pretty upsetting to see that some one that age and they're not going to get off it you know, its very unlikely. But the people who didn't do it [the van] just like sort of got the view that they are all trouble and they are all, just like, as like, say big jokes about it like just Aboriginal kids sniffing paint and thought it was funny. For us it was different. (GE, FG, 17.2)

It's very easy to, like when you're in our position, to sort of judge them, and really easy to label them, its whatever you feel like, like with the Aboriginal kids but, if you actually experienced it, like, seeing them up front, and talk to them, it just changes your mind completely. And it's a lot harder to label them that way. It's like you're receiving; like justice. (AC, FG, 17.2)

Matthew Quinn in reflecting on his van experience noticed three distinct communities on the streets. One of these was the Indigenous community.

I believe there is a sense of community and I have seen three clear communities. First the Eddies van community gathering in the morning, for a feed, a chat and some quality learning time for the students. Secondly the homeless community how most of them stick together, they talk to each other have a joke and most are good friends and accept who they are and move on. Lastly I believe there is a small Aboriginal community that sticks together and backs each other up. Although they might be trouble makers, most of the Aboriginal people I have talked to are a bit scary at first but once you get into a conversation they are cool and teach you little tricks. One example was a sound of an animal in your mouths I wasn't very good but they sounded cool when they did it. (MQ, EX, 6)

### **5.6.10 Surprised by the Experience**

As this phase drew to its end the participants were increasingly identifying how much they had learnt, how many homeless they had got to know and how deep some of their relationships with the homeless had become. There was a real pride and sense of agency in what they felt they had accomplished. "This morning I felt at home and we put together a list of all the people we met, realizing we had gotten to know lots of new people" (BP, DJ, 6). Many of the lessons that the participants identified reflected the awareness that 'all people have their own unique story'.

The students reflected that they had learnt to look past the stereotype. More of the students empathetically realised that "it could happen to me". The nature of homelessness itself surprised the participants and they now had a much broader

understanding of this social phenomenon. The students could now see that homelessness did not necessarily mean not having a home, but rather that it was a lack of connection and belonging, often little to do with lack of money. Earlier, in the Disillusionment Phase some participants had reacted to some of the presenting data of the stereotype but now, despite some homeless having money and even a car, they were able to see the lack of connection and belonging as key factors; judging had given way to understanding.

I was surprised that many people can still have cars, houses and money and still be homeless. Homelessness is caused by a lack of connection and belonging. Many of the people I have spoken to have a residence and possessions but lack a connection and belonging. (JBS, DJ, 7)

Many of the participants had now internalized the concept of 'story'; that everyone has their own unique story. This presented itself as the students realized that each person they met was unique and often had dreams and aspirations. Most of the students had now come to a point where they knew that the reason for the homeless being on the streets is often not their fault and a rational decision.

These guys are going through hell and what's to say if I wasn't from the same background I wouldn't be in the same situation. (AMc, DJ, 5)

The participants were aware in this Phase that they were learning from the homeless, and that people, regardless of life situation, can be friends and share conversation and laughter. In reflecting upon what had surprised them, the students were able to see the true beauty and dignity of the homeless as people; a concept that they did not have the language or the experience for early in the program. "No matter if they are drunk or stoned they are beautiful people", "everyone has a story and a why for being on the streets". They have now seen that many of them share strong friendships with other homeless people and that in their own way they have their own community. In reflecting upon what surprised them no participant spoke about elements of the traditional stereotype, but about the characteristics of the people and of the community that they shared.

What surprised me was that not all homeless people are sad, the camaraderie among them and presence among the homeless of people such as 15 year old girl – former private school girl. (NM, DJ, 8)

I have been surprised by the large number of old men who are homeless. I assumed it would be mostly young men on the streets. I have also been surprised by the sense of community between them. I thought that most would stick to themselves. There is a solid community established between the homeless. It can often be friendlier than communities that we live in normally. (BP, DJ, 8)

Very few participants anticipated the depth of friendship and relationship that they would establish with the homeless, and many were surprised at their own ability to connect with people who were apparently so different to them. What surprised the participants was “how friendly everyone on the van is and how much they want us to be there”, “how close we have become”, “the friendships I gained, I thought I would be too shy”, “that they are as present to me as I am trying to be to them, I did not expect this”, and “that the homeless people actually remember us and begin to build friendships” (DJ, 8).

Students such as Chris Tunbridge who were a little shyer and who initially struggled to connect, now were able to reflect that particular homeless people were gatekeepers for them, their entry point to the experience.

The ‘streeties’ I have gotten to know quite well are Steve, Wayne, Imogen and Annette. Steve was always the one you could go and talk to if you felt uneasy or anxious about talking to some of the others. He always gave us advice, but even though some of it may not have been appropriate, we appreciated his concern. He was probably one of the few who were also ‘present’ to us when we spoke to him, which felt like he was really interested in what we had to say. Wayne was the one who you could go to talk about the weekend’s sports results or upcoming sports events. It was easy to talk to him as well because sport is such an easy topic to talk about. Annette I only met once, but she really opened up to the group who were listening, she pretty much told us her story behind being on the street, and we didn’t even have to ask. Imogen was the girl who is about 16, pregnant, outcast from her family and is living on the streets. Tough life, but her age allowed us to talk to her more easily compared to the other adults. (CT, EX, 6)

The longer they were involved on the van the more the participants got to see the dignity of the people with their stories, their idiosyncrasies, their fun, banter and humanness. The participants grew in their own awareness and were surprised by the fact that the reasons for so many of the homeless being there were complex and part of a cycle that could trap almost anyone. “The amount of different characters and backgrounds that are the homeless of Brisbane; there are many people who are quiet, sad, angry and hopeful. There are many people with various backgrounds so there doesn’t seem to be a common trend” (MB, DJ, 8), “I was surprised to find how diverse the stories were on the van. Rather than all being dropouts or druggies” (RO, DJ, 8). “How much the people that are homeless know about everything it’s amazing. I just thought that they lived on the street and wouldn’t know anything” (JD, DJ, 8). “How much easier it gets to get along with the guys; the more mornings I have gone out the better” (JG, DJ, 8).



### 5.6.11 Link to Holy Family College

The link between the van experience and the participants' perception of why Holy Family College would support and promote such a ministry was now clearer for the students. The participants were now more articulate about the link between the program and Holy Family's ethos. Many of the students' reflections focused on the option for the poor and the dignity of the person, two of the key themes in the classroom work associated with the program. Many participants reflected that this practical reaching out to the poor was what Edmund Rice did. Most of the participants who commented felt that it was important for Holy Family College that the program should continue to be voluntary.

Now that the students had actually experienced the van program their reflections had a real context. The students felt that Eddie's Van "helped students to understand and get to know the homeless as people" and taught them the dignity of the person. Many felt that the van was core to what Holy Family College should be about and had a strong link to the College's ethos.

Holy Family's Edmund Rice teachings say that we must reach out to the marginalised and help those who need help. Eddie's Van provides a sense of community with the homeless men and respects their dignity – all of which Catholic Social Teaching preaches. (DD, DJ, 8)

Several participants felt that it was important for students of the College to put their Social Justice beliefs in action and that the program was important for this. The program, they felt, taught important values and did so in a practical setting. "Holy Family is a Catholic School. I believe all boys should at least have one go on the van as it teaches Catholic Social Justice values such as the dignity of the person, participation and community" (GE, DJ, 8), and "as Catholics we ought to do more than learn about Social issues but action them. Eddie's Van lets us learn about homelessness first hand and actually do something about it" (BP, DJ, 8).

One participant felt that while it was important to help the poor, Holy Family was a school and therefore learning should be core – and saw the program as a part of that learning. Another made a clear distinction between the school and the van. It was the volunteers on the van who helped the poor and who were in relationship with the poor and this had little to do with the school.

In keeping with the Edmund Rice charism of seeking to engage directly with the poor in a way that 'made a difference', the students were continually looking for that sense of agency. Over the course of the program the participant's became aware of a change in the nature of their agency; from pride in doing, to contributing to community, to building friendship and being deeply present.

## **5.7 AGENCY PHASE**

As their time on the van drew to a close the participants articulated a pride in their performance, a sense of having done well and a real sense of agency: that they did make a difference.

The best part about the van is being able to do something for people and making relationships that are very insightful. The best part about the morning is the sense of community that is experienced by a group of people on a rainy, windy morning when it's freezing cold. It's amazing how dedicated people are, both the students and the people that come to the van. I have felt most valued when a man constantly complimented me about my manner and how I approach life. (JG, EX, 6)

The things I have enjoyed about the van is the small sense of "achievement" or the feeling that you have done something good after you have come off the van. I don't mean to say that in a sense of loud mouthing myself or being a big noter but you do feel like you have done something good after you have finished the van of a morning. (BS, EX, 6)

### **5.7.1 Motivation for staying involved**

The fidelity of the participants to the program, to turning up, was quite high. What motivated this fidelity and involvement was unclear. Very few gave a religious faith reason for involvement with the van or continuing to be involved. Several participants identified an initial reason for volunteering on the van and then another for continuing to do so. "There is a sense that we are giving something back to the community, it's about breaking down the stereotypes. Now I continue to do Eddie's Van because I look forward to seeing the regulars and people who I would call mates" (CT, DJ, 8).

In almost all of the responses there was a change identified, a journey from getting involved because it was the right thing to do, to staying involved because of the relationships they had formed and the depth of what they have experienced. James Halloran exemplified this change and found a real empathy developing towards some of the homeless. He felt especially bad when an accident occurred to one of the homeless.

While this was the case he questioned why he and other members of his team ‘bothered’ when some of the homeless appeared to make no effort whatsoever to connect with him.

My hardest situation was when I saw someone that goes to the big brekky van get hit by a car when he was riding his bike. It did not occur when I was out on Eddies van but because of Eddies van I knew that this man was homeless. I felt bad about the situation as I knew this man really liked riding his bike and as a result of the accident he will not be able to this as his bike is broken. I haven’t spoke to him since I helped him after the accident but hopefully I will be able to talk to him at tomorrows big breaky and see how he is doing. Another hard situation would have been when Nick Nagle and myself were trying to talk to someone and he just wasn’t interested. I felt uncomfortable and wondered why I was trying to make a difference. (JH, EX, 6)

It would appear that one of the elements that led these young adolescents to continue to work faithfully on the van was that they knew they were appreciated by the homeless.

I felt most valued when a homeless bloke walked up to me and said that he really appreciated the “sterling effort” we were making. It made me feel that what we were doing really was helping the homeless guys and that we were making a difference. (AC, EX, 6)

I have felt most valued when people just say something simple like “you boys are doing a really great job here” or “thanks for the food, I really appreciate it” I have felt most at home when I am sometimes help cook the food it is a really good fun just to talk with the old boys. I have felt a sense of community when the big breaky van arrives at the park in the morning and the streeties come over to help us unpack the barbeque. I feel a sense of brotherhood when I am with my fellow students and we are working together. I think I felt all of these things because I have really enjoyed the whole breaky experience. (JH, EX, 6)

### **5.7.2            Aware of personal gifts; contributing to community**

The participants were able to identify the gifts in each other; gifts at connecting with difficult people and a real ability to make a difference. Some like Morgan Cooney, were even surprised at the gifts that he came to identify in himself. In what he calls a ‘role reversal’ he noted that he had admired the ability of some of his mates at school to relate while he was a little more withdrawn. On the van the roles were reversed. Dan Dawson and Rory O’Brien both noticed this in Morgan and saw the growth in confidence in him over the course of the program.

For me it was surprising to see how people coped with just talking to new people. There seemed to be this role reversal in relation to what usually happens. Because I’m good friends with some of the people on my van I know how they usually act around people and they seem to be more outgoing and talkative than me. But it was surprising to see that the first time or two they were having more trouble than me starting conversations with people and keeping them going. I thought before I started that I would be the person that had very awkward moments with people so it was surprising to see how some people reacted to this different situation. (MC, EX, 6)

I have seen Morgan develop his ability to connect with everyone; he is now very willing to talk to anyone out on the van. (DD, EX, 6)

Although I have always regarded myself as someone who can start a conversation with anyone anywhere right off the bat, I found it difficult to talk to some of these guys. However when guys like Morgan and Anthony who I have always regarded as pretty quiet guys went straight up and talked to some of people there, I felt a deeper sense of respect for them. Dan was also good and talking to people so I wasn’t surprised when he found it so easy. (RO, EX, 6)

For many of the students the very tangible expression of their increased sense of agency was the sense of community they felt around the van and the sense that they, in their own small way, were contributing to it. This community was characterized by a strong sense of acceptance and welcome, surprisingly so for most of the students. For several students they felt so 'at home' at the van site that they likened it to the atmosphere around the tables in the school yard at Holy Family. For many of the students one of the high points of their van experience was when they were invited into conversations by the homeless, trusted by them when they shared their story with them, or when the homeless remembered their names and greeted them by name. Participants in their final journal time noted more the importance of going out time and again, and how many of their most significant moments occurred after they had been accepted into the homeless person's community.

What I have enjoyed about the van the most is the welcome of the people and that they want to have a conversation with you every time we go out there and also that they let you know how appreciative they are of you coming out there for a chat and something to eat as well. I felt most at home when I was talking with Steve as his jokes made me feel as if I was just at lunch time at Holy Family and at home. A real sense of community came over me when we were serving them with as I was thinking that I was doing my little bit for the community. I felt a sense of brotherhood when we were all sitting down with each other all sharing a laugh. (MW, EX, 6)

One of my highlights would be a few weeks back when it was raining. It had been showering all morning when it started to sprinkle again and all the homeless started to head underneath the concrete shelter. Wayne took no time in inviting us under and it was one of the first times that I was truly welcomed. It made my day. This is also an example of when I felt valued. I have also been thanked for coming out which is great. I felt at home when I was involved in a conversation that flowed easily and didn't have any awkward silences. The sense of community was so obvious around the place and the groups that formed only strengthened this. It is also great to talk about my experiences with other kids on the van. I think a sense of brotherhood is just like a sense of community and was always there. I was most accepted when someone like Steve struck up a conversation with me instead of the other way around. It was a pleasant change. I just enjoyed being part of such a wonderful experience and community that the Eddie's van provides. (AM, EX, 6)

### **5.7.3 Sense of Achievement**

Over half of the participants identified personal satisfaction for being involved in the program and staying involved. They felt that they grew personally, learnt about people, had fun, were able to be with mates and had benefited so much. Some articulated what they got from the program in terms of the homeless giving back to them far more than what they themselves gave. About a third of the students identified more other centred reasons for being involved and staying involved: helping those less fortunate, being part of their belief system and a belief in Social Justice and what Holy Family College is

about. Ten of the fifty-two participants identified the value that they placed upon the relationships they had formed with the homeless as another reason they remained involved. The participants stayed committed to the van program because they had got so much out of it, especially the relationships with the homeless. “It is a great experience and I have gotten so much out of it. I started because my friends were doing it and originally kept doing it because I had to but now I do it because of the people out there” (MS, DJ, 8).

Many students now felt that they had gained a lot of experience and knowledge of the real world and felt empowered as a result of this. They felt they had been able to “build a sense of community with the homeless guys”, while in doing so they became more accepting and less presuming. For many students Eddie’s Van had helped them understand people better and several commented how they had gained as much if not more from the experience as the streeties had. “I get as much out of it as the streeties and it’s my responsibility as an advantaged person to do my bit” (JM, DJ, 8).

I stay involved with the van because it’s interesting to do and they are great people to talk to. Much more interesting than not doing it and really open your eyes – you get a lot out of it. (DO’L, DJ, 8)

You get a lot out of it. What you get out of it is worth so much more than the time you put into it. And I would like to keep going if time permits. (JG, DJ, 8)

Quite a few of the students felt that they had a responsibility to help the less fortunate, to give them a second chance and to give something back to the community. Their van experience led them to believe that they had achieved this. They continued to be involved with the van, “Because I can, because it’s helping other people, and that is what I believe in”, and “because I believe that what I’m doing matters to people”.

I continue to do Eddie’s Van because I think that we owe it to the homeless – they need help and we supply help. I stay on it because it’s actually become rather fun. There is a sense that we are giving something back to the community, it’s about breaking down the stereotypes. Now I continue to do Eddie’s Van because I look forward to seeing the regulars and people who I would call mates. (MH, DJ, 8)

The fun element of Eddie’s Van had become important for so many of the participants. While they initially were involved because of their mates or because they wanted to make a difference, many of the students in their final reflections referred to the relationships they had formed and the ‘fun’ they were having as key motivations for staying involved. They kept on serving on Eddie’s Van because “it helps me grow as a person, I find I’m not judging anymore and try to see the human dignity in all people plus Eddie’s Van is fun”. “I do Eddie’s Van because I have made a lot of friends on it and it is

fun to just talk to strangers especially when coming from a place like Holy Family where everyone judges you”, “Because I enjoy the short time I spend there. This is because I get a sense of being wanted and I feel valued. I also get enjoyment out of them saying thank you as I feel as if I have helped them in some way” (DJ, 8).

#### **5.7.4 More than just a food van**

In their final Focus Group many of the students articulated that they felt a real pride in the fact that many of the homeless looked forward to seeing them and that they sensed that they were making a difference. Much of this came from a series of discussions as to why they believed the homeless came to the van. While many of the participants acknowledged that the food service was important, it was not the key reason why most homeless people came to Eddie’s Van. The participants by this stage had identified a clearly bounded community that existed around and among the homeless, and this sense of belonging and identity was one key factor attracting the homeless to the van. One participant sat back one morning and likened it to a barbeque his parents organised for the staff of a unit of one of the city’s leading hospitals.

I felt most valued when I managed to get a depressed looking homeless person to laugh and be accepted by just talking with him. I felt most at home and sensed a real sense of community when – after I had just finished around a 30 minute conversation with Elm I went to do BBQ chores when I looked around and saw everybody chatting to each other either in groups or one-on-one and nobody was left out or looking dejected and it reminded me of when my parents organised a social gathering for the orthopaedic surgeons at the RBH and St. Andrews Hospitals and they were all chatting. It was strange because at first if you looked you wouldn’t even think they were homeless people because it seemed like any typical social get-together. (AS, EX, 6)

The homeless had their ‘mates’ that they loved to catch up with each day. The van was a place where they feel secure and welcomed, and they could share food with people they feel comfortable with. By the end of the program some of the people that the homeless felt really comfortable talking with were now the participants, and several remarked that the homeless “love talking to us”. This gave them a real sense of agency.

ME: Just from what Tom was saying about building up a sense of community – It is sort of like their family – like some of them don’t have anyone else but themselves and maybe a few other relatives and when they come to Eddie’s Van they maybe feel that they are part of something greater than just them.

SR: I talked to one guy during the holidays and he says that he goes to the Eddie’s Van and to the Ecumenical Coffee van and he says he goes because he wants a quality breakfast without paying a fortune for it and he gets to catch up with a lot of his old mates. It is that sense of community, I guess – the whole – there is actually some thought going into the food that is going out but there is something more, something else beyond the food. (FG, 30.5)

### **5.7.5 Youthfulness**

The participants felt that their youth was another factor in their sense of agency; that the homeless enjoyed coming to the van because of the students' youth. Their youth meant that younger homeless had people closer to their age to chat to and identify with. The older homeless enjoyed having the younger people around as people they could pass on their wisdom to. Some avoided the older volunteers as they did not want to feel 'shown up by' their apparent success. The students felt that the homeless sometimes avoided older people because their very presence reminded them of where they had failed or what they could have been. There was a perception among the participants that the older homeless saw them as more accepting of them and their life situation than what fellow older people might have been.

Some guys said that when we came back from the holidays – they said that they really missed us. They really don't like talking to the adults that much who are on during the holidays. So I think they just enjoy the company of the younger people that they can talk to better than the older people – like Andrew and Richard probably prefer talking to us than to middle age people – yeh – I think they enjoy our company. (AC, FG, 30.5)

I think that it is a lot more of a monetary thing in the sense that they enjoy talking to young people because they then don't have a feeling that – they look up – when it comes to adults they sort of think "It does not matter but that could have been me – I should be like that". He would have expected me to be like that. Where as we are still kids – growing up- going to school and perhaps maybe some of the older guys – they don't have families of their own so we are sort of like the grandkids that they can tell all of their stories to, and share their experiences with. (SR, FG, 30.5)

Also for the youthfulness because we are all young and they enjoy talking to young people. We can relate to them – we are like a breath of fresh air – they feel like we are not judging them. ( CD, FG, 15.6)

### **5.7.6 Personal Change**

Every participant was able to identify changes that had taken place in themselves. They felt that they were much more able to see past labels and stereotypes, were more accepting of people especially those who are different, less judgmental and had grown in self confidence. In many Exit Journal reflections, they were able to name that they had better communication skills, were more 'story' aware, more aware of the dignity of people and had a deeper understanding of society and of how people react and relate. Many felt a growth in communication skills accompanied by a mind-set growth or change as the language of the program became second nature to them and with this came an ability to connect at a deeper level. For many the relationships with the homeless led to a new perception, new eyes through which to look at the homeless and their world.

Several of the participants enjoyed the sense of acceptance at the van site. The homeless appeared to relate to them without any labels attached, and the students enjoyed the growth in their sense of self because of being accepted 'for who they are' by adult strangers.

My self confidence has bounced, some days it was hard to connect but others I truly was welcomed and it did wonders for my self-confidence. I built up my ability to connect with people, and I learnt that I can 'read' people and the atmosphere quite adequately. (AM, EX, 6)

I think on the inside I have become a more accepting person and a little more confident. I've stopped just seeing the materialistic outside and I've begun to look at the deeper person on the inside. I feel more confident when it comes to starting conversation with my friends and new people. (SR, EX, 6)

From the first day where I had no ideas about how streeties lived I must admit I was scared. However, through out this experience I find I am less judgmental of the homeless and have learnt to see them as if they were my brothers or sisters. This could happen to anyone. I no longer walk through King George Square seeing the men on the benches as "bums" but now as possible mates. (GE, EX, 6)

I have felt a change in me over the past few months. I believe I have grown to become more compassionate because of the guys on the van. (AC, EX, 6)

### **5.7.7 Respectful Service but with limits**

The students had gained a real sense of agency, of feeling that they were making a difference in people's lives, and they gave very specific examples of this. With this growing sense of agency the participants were now very aware of not bragging about what they have done. There was a real humility among the participants and a growing sense of personal satisfaction in what they have achieved. Several participants had enjoyed the sense that they have 'made a difference' and given something back to society. Many began their time on the van thinking they "were going out to feed the homeless" and ended up with a deep realization that it was more about relationship and community. Some noticed a growth in their compassion and empathy towards the homeless and those doing it tough. Many became aware of a sense of satisfaction within themselves for doing what they were doing, not out of a 'do-gooder' sort of way, but in the sense of making a difference and building relationship.

In terms of contributing to society, I believe we have been doing something good for the community and I also think that the homeless appreciate what we do. Going out on Eddie's van provides oneself with a sense of satisfaction, believing that we are doing what Jesus would of wanted us to do. (CT, EX, 6)

My story on the van is one of overcoming. I overcame my original awkwardness and my frightened approach to the van. I feel that inside of me I have become a much better human being for the experience as the van has helped realise that all people are sacred and deserve the same respect that I would give to my mates and my family. I am much more confident in my own ability to



contribute and communicate with people in my own society that I am unfamiliar with. The people on the van have made me realise that if you give someone the time of day and actually listen and communicate with them, then you will be valued by them. I have become aware that I am a much more caring person than I thought when I was talking to Tsing-we and Garth; they thanked me for caring and taking the time to talk to them. It was a massive moment for me to say the least, and really changed me. (AMcK, EX, 6)

Many participants now found that when they were walking through the inner city, they were looking for the homeless and wondering if they knew them when they saw a homeless person and hoping it might be “Tom or John or Harry”. The homeless had become a real person, an identity. Jack McMahan’s sense of relationship, welcome and acceptance led him to stop and talk to Greg on his way to the Brunswick Street Railway station [a thing he would never have done prior to the program]. Greg acknowledged him and they stood in the street and chatted.

The highlight over the past several months was stopping and talking to Greg in the valley because it was the time I realised I was no longer afraid or intimidated by them. Greg stopping to talk with me at Brunswick Street was an important moment for me. (JM, EX, 6)

Just with giving the people basic dignity as individuals and recognising them, like if you were walking in the city or something and you see a homeless person – you sort of look twice, see if it is someone that you know or something and so it is sort of like “Maybe I know that person”. Not that they are a homeless person [they have become known!] but more that they might be someone that you know – it gives them an identity. (MC, FG, 8.6)

Despite their increased sense of Agency some of the participants found that they were dealing with internal struggles as they witnessed the homeless in difficult situations and yet had to pack up and return to a comfortable school and lifestyle. The discussion highlighted the increased ability of the students to see the limitation of what they were accomplishing and yet appreciate the integrity of it.

TC: I feel bad about myself – you see them on the streets during Winter and they are asking for sleeping bags when we have got a warm bed and a doona and another blanket and you feel really bad just seeing them there – like one of the guys I was talking to he was just wearing shorts and a shirt. You just wish that you could give it to them. You feel guilty for having it.

AC: I don’t think that you should feel bad. Yeh, you do have that stuff but – at least we are trying to help them – we are giving them warm clothes and stuff – and it is not like you can just get them a bed and all that because they kind of have to help themselves a bit you know.

BS: You should not feel bad for them – you should feel bad about yourself if you are not doing anything for them – like you weren’t going out on the van or helping or anything like that then maybe you should feel bad. Actually going out and doing something then maybe you should not feel as bad – if that makes any sense. (FG, 30.5)

While the participants were quite convinced that it was the role of schools like Holy Family to work with the homeless, they were quite aware of the limitations of what they were doing. The participants suggested that this program brought them into relationship with the poor and this was of great benefit in a holistic education. The students showed some degree of sophistication in their Social Analysis about cause and effect. There was

a shift here in the student thinking to the point where they had come to the realization that they can not solve the problem, that there may not be a solution and more importantly, that it is not their job to solve the problem. This is quite an attitudinal shift.

AMcK: Like the diagram of the drowning babies that we did in class. There are the people that – the babies are coming down the river – and the people care for them but – rather than people asking why are they coming down – we did this in RE class – they won't go to the source of the problem and try and solve that.

GMc: We are providing further extensions beyond where someone would be – we are at least looking at the problem – we may not be solving it but at least we are asking why or how? We don't have the answers – that is not our job. (FG, 15.6)

This discussion was important. The facilitator challenged the participants to ask themselves what role they perceived they were playing in the 'solution' to the problem. The participant response displayed a level of maturity and Social Analysis. The students had a clear view that Holy Family College was not seeking fame or the spot-light from this work but simply did it because it believed in it.

CD: I was just going to say all that money does it is sort of like a band aid – that covers up some of the problem where as Holy Family does something about it. We are actually trying to do something about it not just chucking money at it. What is the solution – there is no solution to the problem. How many other groups do you know that go out in the morning and run a van? We are running a free service – come and have food, come and have a chat – that is what we are doing – we are not preaching our religion at you or anything.

AMcC: Holy Family would never come out and say, "We're here to help homeless people". Like help the solution – we are basically just there to comfort them and there to give them company for a day – and then – I guess in a way it is not a charity but then – I mean when they do need us we are there – we do open up and become a charity and provides a good sort of half way point – because when you talk about a charity – it means more giving out stuff – and we more than that – we are there for them – but when we do need to do the charity like stuff we can and do – we fall then into that category – we are there and we do have the resources – so I think that we have a pretty good balance. (FG, 15.6)

## **5.7.8 Holy Family's Mission**

The students had grown in their awareness of Edmund Rice ideology, and the ideology of the van was more owned and seen as a way of being more effective in relating with the homeless. The students had no difficulty linking the importance of what they were engaged with on the program and what they perceived as Holy Family College's mission. This ideology appeared to give them a vehicle for mission. For some, Eddie's Van was what Holy Family College, as an Edmund Rice school, should be about;

It is an Edmund Rice school. We are not like Grammar – they are a really good school if you want to just get an education [academic] where as Holy Family tries to give an education which is more about not just the actual in the classroom – also the spiritual and Social Justice as well. (NN, FG, 26.5)

I know this is a different angle but we are a Catholic school and it is kind of – you know – you are supposed to help other people and this is a way of doing that – like obviously you can help anyone

– that is not the only reason why we should be doing it ....well cause, we get a lot out of it, but that is the main reason. (JG, FG, 8.6)

Well, we call ourselves an Edmund Rice school. Edmund Rice put things into action. It would be ridiculous if we call ourselves a Christian Brother's school and he did all this stuff with the poor and we say that 'we should do all this' but we don't practice what we preach. So I think that it is worthwhile – for Holy Family, we should be a Social Justice school – Edmund Rice helped the marginalized in society and if he is our patron and we are going to follow him we should do the same. (CD, FG, 15.6)

Sean Rees took this much further and made a strong link to his perception of why Holy Family was founded. In doing so he challenged the present culture of the College as he saw it.

I think it is more than a duty – it is just – we have always said, "I'm going to take my South African interview – the question was "Why do you think it is important to do something like Eddie's Van?" And I think it is because Holy Family started off as a school for poor Catholic children who needed an education and to some extent we have lost that now and we are charging \$10,000 in school fees for the same sort of education that you could probably get at Brisbane State High School – don't bash me for that – but – and always you are talking and you sit there and you say, "Oh yes, our school we've got very noble roots, we were a charity for poor Catholic children – schools will say that – but it has gone – it's now – crap – its drowned out by heavy school fees and the big demand to perform well academically and on the sporting field and the cultural stuff – and I think programs like Eddie's Van – allows you to get back to the true roots of the school and what it means to be an Edmund Rice school – or even a Catholic school for that matter – any sort of religious based school. I think that programs like Eddie's Van are important because they show that we are not just a big wallet and we are not a bunch of jocks with big heads and big wallets we actually – are guys with some sense of justice in society. (SR, FG, 30.5)

Others felt that Eddie's Van was important as it helped humanize the poor to privileged youth who may never have been to a poor neighbourhood. Others saw this element slightly differently as a call to solidarity and empathy with the homeless.

I think all schools should be doing it – like, some of the people going to this school are some of the richest kids in Brisbane and I think some kids needs to see what it is like down there; like some of those kids have probably never been into that kind of area – places like Inala and out West - Ipswich – and having seen what it is like to live that way, to live below the poverty line. So as to humanize the people, some of these people are saying these are not our problems, they don't see the human aspect of it and this helps them see that. (AMc, FG, 23.5)

I think it is important, we are a very very wealthy school and most people here come from wealthy backgrounds – and a lot of people go on to be wealthy in their lives – like after Holy Family – so Holy Family is actually educating a lot of the sort of upper social demographic – and those are the people who are very important for them to be aware of what you know the people down there are experiencing. There are a lot of the people – who have all the money and who can do something about social injustice and all of that. They are the people who can help the people on the bottom; there is no point in educating the people on the bottom – "Hey there is people on the bottom!" You really – it is people like us who come from wealthy families – it is really important that we are aware and do understand that it is a problem. (JBS, FG, 30.5)

### **5.7.9 Moral Obligation**

Some felt that it was their moral obligation to do this kind of service and that while important, it had to be voluntary and not obligatory. The sense of duty to connect with

the homeless and to build community with them, was not a Catholic or spiritual thing, but rather a moral calling. It was the responsibility of those who are considered 'haves' to give back to the 'have nots'.

Something that I heard and I can't remember where I heard it – probably in English – a society has failed when the powerful fail to care for the powerless, like we have – it is not secret – that most of us are pretty well off, like we've got everything we need even though we complain about half of it. We have the opportunities to be at Holy Family – it is kind of our responsibility to give a little bit back – it is not compulsory but we are the powerful in a society of 15 year olds and we will grow up to be the influential in Brisbane and Australia and so its our duty to get in and do a bit while we still can – we have not major stress. (JM, FG, 23.5)

On what Jack is saying – yes it is a moral obligation – and I recommend everyone to do it who has not done it – and I try to tell them that if they do it they will get a lot out of it. It really makes you feel good inside that you are giving something back and just makes you feel that much fuller in a sense. Not just the Catholic thing but like – I would not be surprised if lets say if a State school or a Grammar school picked up this sort of program – it is not really a Catholic thing – it is a moral thing, it is a human thing – it is not just Catholic. (JB, FG, 23.5)

When reflecting on what they would miss about Eddie's Van, Matthew Quinn expressed that he would miss the 'kind of cleansing experience' he felt as he lay in bed after being on the night van or after a morning van experience - a real sense of agency – that he had made a difference. Andrew Romano would miss the connection with some of the homeless whom he felt had come to rely on him to some extent.

I went on the street retreat two weeks ago, it is only five hours after school and you don't have to concentrate on anything else apart from that – and you get home and go to bed and kind of reflect upon it – but it is good – it is kind of a cleansing kind of experience for you because you kind of feel better the next day. That is what you are talking about and that is what you are thinking about – like you are not thinking about all the little things like what subjects you have to do or what homework you have to do, sport etc. You are thinking about life, about bigger issues, people on Eddie's Van don't care about all that sort of stuff – they just care that they have a friend and stuff like that. (MQ, EX, 6)

I feel maybe a little bad that I'm going to see this guy John – cause every time I get out there – he always and I mean always comes up to me first and he always makes conversation with me and asks me something – and it kind of makes me feel bad that I won't be there when he comes out. I definitely feel important to him. The last couple of times that I have been out he has come over to me and asked me things – "Have you told Mr. Jones this ...".! And yeh, he always comes to me and that is what I will miss. (AR, EX, 6)

This chapter has presented the findings of the experience the participants of Holy Family's Service Learning Program had of volunteering on Eddie's Van. The findings reflect the journey of the participants as they engaged with differing phases of volunteering in a unique sub-culture such as the world of the urban homeless. Each student walked a journey in their experiences from Expectations and Exposure, through Reframing and Disillusionment to Awareness and Agency. In this presentation of findings the students' own voices were allowed to speak as the most direct way to connect with their own and unique experience.

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings that were presented in the previous chapter and critically reflect on these in the light of the relevant literature.

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of this study indicate that there were specific phases, justified and defended in the previous chapter, in the participant experience of the Service Learning Program of Holy Family College. These phases mirrored the journey that the participants experienced over the six months of their involvement in the program. Not all participants experienced the same phase at the same time, and each participant experienced each phase in his own way and for varying lengths of time. The phases that reflect the findings were:

- Expectations Phase
- Exposure Phase
- Reframing Phase
- Disillusionment Phase
- Awareness Phase
- Agency Phase

The element of time was important for each student as the Service Learning Program was not a one off event but rather between seven and ten van experiences over a period of six months. Because of the relational nature of the program the element of time was important to the experience each participant was having of a relationship with individual homeless people, fellow participants and the van community collectively.

This chronological approach to the analysis of the data led to the identification of major issues that needed further explanation. These issues are pivotal to the experience participants had within the program. It would appear from the data that the participant experience was framed by three key factors: ideology, time and reflection. One of the key limiters in this discussion is the relative lack of empirical studies dealing with

participant experience in Service Learning Programs and especially so in Australian Secondary Schools. As a means of providing clarity for the reader, the following structure for the Chapter, Figure 6.1, is offered.

**Figure 6.1: Chapter Structure**

6.1	Introduction
6.2	Framing of Participant Experience
6.2.1	Ideology
6.2.1.1	A school in the Edmund Rice tradition
6.2.1.2	Theology
6.2.1.3	Relational
6.2.2	Time
6.2.3	Reflection
6.3	Participant Experience
6.3.1	Tentative steps into new territory
6.3.2	Building their reality map
6.3.3	Establishment of relationship
6.3.4	Meaning and significance: links and connections
6.3.5	Past 'why' to acceptance
6.3.6	Growing sense of agency
6.3.7	Challenge to personal values
6.4	Experience in the context of the school: Holy Family College

## **6.2 FRAMING OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE**

### **6.2.1 Ideology**

#### **6.2.1.1 A school in the Edmund Rice tradition**

A growing school of writers (Youniss & Yates, 1997; Tropman, 1995; Eyer & Giles, 1999; Seider, 2005) engaged with Service Learning, have identified the need for developmental precursors to an adulthood in which morality has become central to an individual's self-perception (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 21). Erikson (1968) identified two complementary and essential aspects to the adolescent identity process: personal identity reflecting one's talents, weaknesses and energies and social identity - one's relationship to other persons and to a social-historical context. Community Service and Service Learning engage adolescents' talents by requiring active extension of self into the world via performance; adolescents experience themselves as makers of history (Flacks, 1988). For Erikson, youth focused inward to find self-sameness, but needed to look outward to form relationships with society's traditions so becoming part of a larger

collective that transcends the self's personal biography. To do this Erikson suggested that youth service must be placed in an ideological context that could simplify and organize their experience. For Erikson, ideology was "a universal psychological need for a system of ideas that provides a convincing world image" (Erikson, 1968, p. 31) and when preceding service, helped in the identification of patterns and ritual, the social glue that allows identity to transcend individuality and become honoured within a collective such as Holy Family. This 'systems of ideas' was the Academic Framework Experience (Seider, 2007) that students undertook in the first two weeks of the program.

The ideology of Holy Family's program was the theological framework that the students were invited to minister out of, and therefore part of the frame to the student experience. In the following discussion the terms 'ideology' and 'theology' are used interchangeably. While the program's facilitators were more motivated by a faith context for service, the reality of the students' experience was more ideologically driven. The program's ideology was informed by Catholic theology, Social Justice teaching with its "preferential option for the poor" (Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891; Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1987), as well as the charism of Edmund Rice. As students in an Edmund Rice College, the presenting ideology was hopefully already present to some extent in the student subconscious if the school's ethos was strong and clear. The program aimed to bring this ideology to the fore, and provide students with a concept map and related skills to use in their day-to-day interactions. The ideology of the program centred on the belief that God is present in each and every person that we meet, and hence each person has an innate dignity. Holy Family placed before the students the Gospel of Jesus and the charism of Edmund Rice as being the central inspirational stories and value systems that should motivate the behaviours of those who make up its community. During the first two weeks the program's ideology was developed through the Academic Framework Experience (Seider, 2007).

It is unsure how the overarching ideology of the College and the program was perceived by the participants in the program. What is clear is that the students at the beginning of the program did not engage with the ideology placed before them with deep levels of understanding or ownership. The students were, in the main, motivated by a desire to 'be of service' and easily identified that this was what Edmund Rice did. Classroom input about Edmund Rice suggested to the students that Edmund Rice was a person who saw

a need and responded to it. In this context the students saw their volunteering as complementing the tradition of involvement in justice that they perceived Christian Brothers schools were noted for. The underpinning theology of Christ's presence in the poor, of the dignity of all and of the Gospel call to come as guest and to be deeply present, appeared to result initially in an intellectual assent from the students. For the majority of students this articulation of the ideology of the program and its relationship to the institution of the Church, were predominately theoretical and irrelevant. A tension existed between a traditional Church ideology and theology, and the students' experience of Holy Family as a Catholic school and their motivations for wishing to serve.

While the students claimed their presence at an Edmund Rice school as an important motivation for participating in the program when responding to the question as to whether this type of program was 'core' to an Edmund Rice school, the students were quick to compare their school with other private schools that did not have such a program. Their sense of corporate identity was important. They were very proud of Holy Family and of being a "Christian Brothers" / "Edmund Rice" school. It would appear that many of the students saw their service as linked to the 'spirit' of the school, part of its culture as a good place to be, rather than as informed by any deep personal relationship with either Jesus or the Church. The students saw their service as giving them a valued place in a tradition of Social Justice and a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves. The boys liked the fact that they were people of action, doing their bit for the homeless, and in so doing they gained a sense of both personal industry and agency (Youniss & Yates, 1997).

Industry is critical to development. Children need to learn how to perform and achieve cooperatively with others, if they are to enter into the culture. The role of achievement in social identity is illustrated in adolescents' belief that society's leaders have actually earned their positions by being the best at what they do. Not chance, but concerted effort gained them leadership positions. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 24)

Despite the Catholic identity of Holy Family and the presenting of the ideology for the program in a Catholic, faith-based context, few of the students who participated in the program identified a faith-based reason and motivation for their involvement. While many noted that "this was what Edmund Rice did", few were able to make a strong link to a sense of mission coming from the Catholic faith community. In fact several rejected this as having anything to do with their involvement. Once again this would support the



participants' strong adolescent identification with the school community and not necessarily its founding vision. Many Catholic schools today would struggle with the tension between the founding vision and the motivation families would have in sending their children to these schools (McLaughlin, 2002). It is hardly surprising that adolescents coming from families where a personally owned faith, in this case Catholic faith, is lacking, would struggle to identify with the sense of mission of a community that they do not identify with at a religious faith level. These same students and families would be remarkably 'at home' with the culture of the Catholic school as a pastoral and high-performing school with a deep sense of community (Freund, 2001).

Several students, reflecting the work of Fenzel and Leary (1997), identified their involvement in the program as coming out of a moral imperative as good citizens rather than from a Religious point of view. While no students rejected the religious context of the classroom work, several saw no direct link between this and their choice to be involved, or as a support or context for their continued involvement. The Academic Framework Experience aims to assist students to modify, sharpen or replace their world views as they attempt to articulate the how and why of service. The inability of many students to clearly identify an institutional faith context for their service may indicate that while they are surrounded by the symbols and language of 'Church', it is not an important part of their world view at a personal level. This would support the work of Devlin who examined the challenges facing an American Edmund Rice University in transition to lay administration. "Many student programs focus on service and volunteerism rather than traditional religious activities, creating a question of motivation based on humanistic rather than religious values (Devlin, 1998, p. 2).

Several students however did strongly claim a connection between the message of Jesus [as distinct from the Church] and their involvement in the program. It is worth noting that the phrase 'Catholic Social Justice Teaching' appears frequently in the student reflections and journaling. This may point to the effectiveness of the Academic Framework Experience where it was presented, as well as the strong link between their efforts on the van and the call of the Church to act justly; this philosophy connected with their passion and energy. The language and concepts linked to Catholic Social Justice teaching, provided the students with world views that the students through their experience on the van could broaden, modify or specify (Seider, 2007). This approach

may suggest that many of the students were able to identify with a horizontal approach towards spirituality [social justice, compassion, service] compared to a vertical approach [personal piety, the Institutional Church, the Sacraments] (Kerestes, Youniss & Metz, 2004). The development of world views was important for the students and relevant in helping them construct an ideology that gave their service meaning and purpose. While these world views did not necessarily lead to a direct and personal link to the Church itself, they did encourage the students, as did the program at the centre of Youniss and Yates' study, to "live as Jesus lives by serving the needs of the have-nots" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.40). The use of the language and concepts from the Academic Framework Experience gave the students 'coat-hangers' – both verbal and conceptual to reflect on.

It was only towards the end of the Semester that classroom lessons began to look at Theological Reflection. This placed their efforts on the way into Scriptural situations that invited the students to take their Social Analysis further to faith, and to see the presence of Jesus (Le Cornu, 2006, p.26) in the people and the situations they had experienced. This was possibly a weakness in the program, with these lessons needing to be placed earlier in the foundation of the Social Justice unit within the Academic Framework Experience. While most students valued the program and saw it as meaningful and valuable and even an enjoyable experience, few saw it as necessarily religious and linked to their Catholic faith community in an institutional sense. In many ways, because a deeper relationship with the person of Jesus seemed to be lacking, the theology of presence, guest and dignity acted more as a construct map, communication skills, and a social analysis framework. By inserting Scripture-based theological reflection into the Academic Framework Experience earlier in the program, an empathic response linked to the person of Jesus may be elicited and assist in their faith development, bridging the gap between experience and the faith response of seeing the presence of God (Lonergan, 1958).

#### **6.2.1.2 Theology**

The Christian Brothers identified that Edmund Rice found "Christ present in and appealing to him in the poor" (Dare to be Disciple, 2007, p. 28). As a result of this the Service Learning Program at Holy Family is framed using a 'Theology of Presence' and

a 'Theology of Guest' as the key approaches students will use in ministry. Theology of Presence (Nouwen, 1975) simply means that in following the example of Jesus, students will strive to be deeply present to those that they meet and that by being totally present to the person [the homeless], they will sense their innate dignity. They will know and sense that they are loved. This presence requires a deliberate choice to put aside your own thoughts and feelings to be totally 'in' the present moment with the person with whom you are relating.

But slowly we can become aware of the possibility of making our human encounters into moments by which our solitude grows and expands itself to embrace more and more people into the community of our life. It indeed is possible for all those with whom we stayed for a long time or for only a moment to become members of that community since, by their encounters in love, all the ground between them and us has indeed become holy ground, and those who leave can stay in the hospitable solitude of our heart. (Nouwen, 1975, p. 46)

Paralleling the 'Theology of Presence' was the invitation to 'come as a guest' into people's lives. This approach built upon Benedictine spirituality that honoured the guest (Nouwen, 1975) and invited people to come to the stranger with an open mind, heart and hands, ready to truly receive and learn from the other. In the day-to-day reality of Eddie's Van this meant that students were reminded that as adolescents from privileged backgrounds, they would not know the reality that was the life of the homeless person and so they must approach the homeless with respect and openness (Dunlap et al, 2007).

Hospitality, therefore, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to your side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines. It is not a method of making our God and our way into the criteria of happiness, but the opening of an opportunity for others to find their God and their way. Hospitality is not a subtle invitation to adopt the life style of the host, but the gift of a chance for the guest to find his own. (Nouwen, 1975, p. 72)

The language and concepts of 'guest' and 'presence' seemed to appeal to the students and gave them a simple and do-able way of relating with the homeless in a way that gave transcendental meaning. At no stage did any student question this approach, but whether they perceived it as an ideological / philosophical approach rather than a theological one is unclear. The third element of theology that the program was based upon was a belief in the innate dignity of each person with each person being a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (The Catechism of Modern Man, 1968, p. 246). By imputing these three elements of theology, as well as associated concepts like charity / change, giving / caring, a credible Academic Framework was established that gave meaning to experience over time (Seider, 2005).

This theology and its associated language gave the students a means to simplify and organize their experience, and in the words of Erikson, allowed their experiences to “fall into practical patterns and spontaneous ritualization which can be shared” (Erikson, 1968, p. 32). This provided the social glue that allows the individual adolescent identity to transcend individuality and become synthesized within a collective (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 23). The ease with which the students used this language, and the vibrant Focus Group discussions flowing from their reflections on ‘guest’ and ‘presence’, would indicate that there was a strong confirmation of student expectation linking this approach and their understanding of what the program should be about. Language is important, especially in a contextual situation such as a street van with the homeless. Russian psychologist Vygotsky believed that “language (is) an agent for altering the power of thought, giving thought new means for explicating the world. In turn, language (becomes) the repository for new thoughts once achieved” (Bruner, 1986, p. 143 cited in Cone & Harris, 1996). Learning in contextual situations increases vocabulary, and in turn the use of new vocabulary increases the ability to learn in contextual situations (Sternberg, 1990).

While the students were at home with the ideology of the program, especially in coming as a guest and striving to be present, several struggled to fully grasp the meaning and importance of the innate dignity of the person and the theological link from this to the presence of God in each person. Whether this concept is too ‘adult’ for adolescents or too removed from their life and faith experience is unclear, but many students struggled to identify, at an intellectual, faith and personal level, the presence of God in the homeless people they were meeting. However, some were able to articulate a deeper awareness around the concept of dignity. Once again, whether this reflects just pre-van parental influence or the interplay between the program’s reflection and ideology is unclear. What is clear is that the program gave students like Jak both language and concepts to express their beliefs and values.

The Christian faith is based around helping those in need. Most of Christ’s teachings, in some way or another, came back to giving aid to those who need it. I think that by seeing who those needy are and meeting them face to face strengthens faith as it puts the Christian teachings into their real world context. I believe that being present to someone, by truly listening to and valuing what a person has to say is a very important thing to be able to do, not just when dealing with the homeless, but when dealing with anyone. Coming as a guest, accepting without judging or condemning, is key to being present to someone as it allows you to accept them as a human being. Respecting the dignity of the individual, however, comes above all. Every person needs their own

personal dignity to feel valued as human beings and no matter how much we help someone in some respects, if we fail to respect their dignity we offend their self-worth. (JBS, EX, 6)

The presenting theology gave the students a sense of the how and the why of what they were doing; a means for organizing their experience. Through the theology the students gained a language, a process, a 'why' and concept map to make meaning and give effectiveness to their ministry with the homeless. This language and process gave the students a common identification that allowed for a shared understanding at a higher level or as Youniss and Yates put it,

youth want to share ideals with others so that they can join in historical realities from which these ideals came. By identifying with ideologies, youth become distinguished as members of particular groups, and this gives them ego strength they could not acquire on their own, no matter how authentic these isolated individuals may be. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 24)

Anthony's reflections suggest that he has gained more ego-strength from identification with a community that shares his values and approaches, providing him with both a vehicle and context for service. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, Anthony's reflections suggest elements of Existential change, as he is able to see that the poor are blessed indeed for "they have learnt to appreciate the simpler things in life".

I think my Christian faith has grown as a result of my doing the program, because getting to know the homeless guys and seeing the way they act and live has shown me how all people, regardless of who they are, how they live or anything that separates them from others, all people can get to know and befriend each other. Jesus said "blessed are the poor", and the happiness and friendship I have seen displayed by the homeless guys I have met has shown that indeed the poor are blessed, because they have learnt to appreciate the simpler things in life. I will continue to do stuff similar to Eddie's van, but I also hope that I will be able to do some similar work in East Timor when I am a bit older. Eddie's van has helped me make sense of some of the Catholic Social Teachings. For example, I now realise that we can be in solidarity with the poor, despite our differences. By visiting them and talking with them we show to them that we value them and respect their dignity as people. Eddie's Van is a very rewarding experience and it is integral to our duties as Catholics in society today. I am glad that I participate in the program because not only has it taught me a lot more about homelessness in Australia today but it also makes me feel that I am taking action on my beliefs. Too often in society today we talk about ending poverty and helping the poor but don't take action, and by doing Eddie's van I feel that I am acting on my beliefs and putting words into action. I believe Eddie's van is core to Holy Family as a Catholic Edmund Rice school because we are taught that we should help the poor and we say that we have a duty follow Jesus' teachings, but unless we do something such as the van we are not putting the beliefs we have into action. (AC,EX, 6)

The participants in the program were very proud of their belonging to the 'Eddie's Van' community within the wider Holy Family community. While the concepts and language of 'coming as a guest', 'being deeply present' and 'respecting the innate dignity of the person' took time to be owned by the students, as the weeks went by these concepts and this language were used more and more by the students as their depth of understanding of what they meant grew. It would appear that the theology of the

program made sense to the students and touched their life experience at a meaningful and conceptual level if not necessarily at a theological level. This process assisted the students to interpret and make meaning out of what they were experiencing. The concepts and language acted as a conduit bridging the 'out-group', 'in-group' divide. Here a group of students share their understanding of coming into the lives of the homeless as a 'guest':

CC: When you go to another country – you are like a tourist and everyone kind of looks at you differently – like you are one of these homeless people – like they sort of see you differently – to one of their own sort of people.

ME: A similarity would be your coming as a guest in another country but it is sort of like your first time at Eddie's Van and you kind of don't know what is going to happen and so you have to make that first step to get familiar and so as you go on – you become more familiar with the people, with the landscape, with everything – and feel more comfortable.

NM: I suppose you could say that talking to the guys on Eddie's Van this experience is sort of like learning another language from another country – the first time you do it you sort of can't get your words around what you thought you would be saying, were saying and it is completely different to how they say it. And then as you progress you get to say it as they do and you get to actually think as the homeless guys do. And just like in another country there are cultural differences like say you are going into a Muslim Country – and you are a woman, you are not going to go in a Bikini – you are going to go in with respect, same as with the homeless you are not going to go in pushing – you go in with street clothes. (FG, 11.5)

These concepts, in addition to the communication skills they had developed, gave the students a way of deepening their relationships with the homeless and appreciate their situation more. The theology of the program was not just theory, but provided the students a way and a why to connect at a deeper level. Students discovered that the skills associated with coming as a guest and being present enabled them to effectively connect with difficult people.

By linking at a deeper level and with more difficult people many students identified within themselves a growth in spirituality; in meaning-making. While not necessarily linked to the institutional Church, there is a marked transition from 'little transcendence' to 'bigger transcendence' when comparing the early journal entries with student Exit Journals. While many of the Exit Journal reflections indicated that the students saw only a minimal link between their service and Christian faith, some were able to name faith as an important facet of their van experience. Seider (2005) addresses the importance of the Academic Framework Experience as the key to longer term commitment to service in College age students. Seider's research would indicate that many pre-program factors influenced participant's initial involvement in service – factors such as parents, role models and faith – and this study would support these findings. The extensive range of student responses to any link between faith and service from "my work on Eddie's Van

has nothing to do with faith” to “Eddie’s Van gave me a vehicle to express my faith in action” would suggest that many students enter service programs with strong Semantic memory expectations associated with faith [or non-faith] already in place. The following Exit Journal entries reflect the influence of parents and prior faith experiences in forming their Semantic memory.

I believe my faith has grown. I have a greater perspective of what the Christian church teaches and how we can be ‘good Catholics’ I believe in more about social justice as a result of this program because before the program I was somewhat apathetic towards the ideas. I feel proud to be a Holy Family student. It gives me a great sense of satisfaction that we are doing so much for the marginalised in our society. It makes me so proud that Holy Family is practicing what they preach. (AR, EX, 6)

My faith in Christianity and God has definitely risen as a result of the Brekky Van experience. I am much more appreciative of the gifts that God has bestowed upon me and everyone around me. Seeing people living in such poverty has made me realise that as a Christian and a follower of Jesus it is my duty to care instead of shun these people as society so often does. Eddie’s Van makes me proud to be a Holy Family student and a Catholic. (AMc, EX, 6)

Some saw the owning of the ideology and theology of the program as a growing consciousness; a growing sense of spirituality. As they shared in the Focus Groups they actively linked their experience with changing concepts. Over the course of the program many of the concepts linked with the programs ideology shifted from ‘just theory’ to ‘making sense’. In the following discussion a focus group is discussing ‘presence’ and the role judgment plays in it.

Facilitator: Now, Brother Price and some of you guys have used this word, ‘Presence’ – what does this word mean to you?  
GE: I think it is going past everything on the outside, social norms, physical appearance, past the homelessness and focusing on the person ...  
PR: I think it is just listening to them, looking at them and trying to put a bit more effort into it – not just listen and be passive but going past that.  
AS: Like listen but do it genuinely.  
NM: Presence is not judging them. Not thinking “You crazy old codger! That did not really happen”. Just seeing them for who they are and not what you want them to be.  
AB: Sometimes it is easy not to judge and sometimes hard. If there is a guy that is homeless but he does not seem homeless – it is hard to treat him as a homeless person. Cause if he has a suit on or stuff like that – you tend to think, “Why are you out here?”  
MG: That is judging them!  
Facilitator: So when someone comes up who appears to really not need the service it is hard not to judge them! How do you over come that?  
GE: I don’t think you can. We are only human. Everyone says that you would like to be completely not judgmental but – you have to be practically Jesus not to. It is so human to do so. I don’t think it is the judgment so much as how you go beyond the judgment that’s the actual thing that Eddie’s Van is doing and .... You can judge them – “Oh, that is so and so a useless old bum!” and that kind of thing – but Eddie’s Van goes past that – it goes to the person and that’s judgment. (FG, 27.4)

Over time the students were able to identify that the core theology and ideological skills and approaches that they used did make a difference and enabled them to connect in ways that they could not have before the van program. The ideology and theology taught

in the Academic Framework Experience gave the students a very do-able 'how' for their interactions with the homeless and a 'how' linked to a very credible 'why'. For many this 'why' was closely linked to empathy and compassion and for some, perhaps because of family factors, this 'why' went further to personal religious faith.

### **6.2.1.3 Relational**

The final key element of Holy Family's ideological approach to ministry that framed participant experience is a belief that all ministry must be relational, that in relationship conversion, change occurs (Nouwen, 1975). There is a significant energy difference between serving coffee from the back of a van or meals from behind a soup kitchen counter, and sitting down next to a homeless person and chatting on a regular basis over a six month period (Mabry, 1998; Green, 2006). Strain worked hard to have his Service Learning students reflect on the systemic causes of injustice and yet, as in this program, his students told him repeatedly "that it is the relationships that they enter into with inspiring community leaders, with immigrants struggling to learn English, with inner-city kids in after-school programs, and even long-distance relationships with embattled human rights workers in Latin America that are morally transformative" (Strain, 2005, p. 63). One of Strain's students, Andrew Barrera put it this way;

The power of relationships is often overlooked in daily activity, even in historic events. In order to accomplish a large change or transformation, there needs to be this stability of relationships. A voice is only as strong as the relationships developed in order for it to be heard. A person can kick, scream, and march all around, but it is not until they actually work to formulate the relationships and build their credibility amongst a network, that people will be more likely to listen and want to help bring about change. Therefore, empowering others is essentially empowering the relationship. I know what gets me going, and it is the people themselves, not the policy that we learned. I would rather get to know the people on the interpersonal level, and then, from there, make decisions on how to help. (Strain, 2005, p. 64)

While the participants in this program did spend time cooking the BBQ and in some cases serving coffee on the night van, the majority of the time was spent in direct contact chatting and listening to the homeless. Kahne and Westheimer found that students valued and responded better to direct involvement in social issues. "Exposure to and discussion of instances of injustice motivated students to act" (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003, p. 40), while Boyte (1991), Youniss and Yates (1997), Beamer (1998) and Dunlap et. al (2007) have all advocated service that "brings youth into direct contact with the needy as being particularly helpful in the development of civic engagement" (McLellan & Youniss, 2003, p. 49). The direct nature of the program enabled a true breakdown of any



stereotype, for in the sharing of story, the presenting data of an unshaven appearance or tattered clothing became unimportant as the person first had a name and then a context and reason for their life situation. Kahne and Westheimer suggest that those 'on the other side' of the serving bench are working out of a charity and giving model where as those that

aim primarily to deepen relationships and to forge new connections we will call 'caring'. In caring relationships we try to consider the life and disposition of those for whom we are caring. We attempt to 'apprehend the reality of the other' and then to 'struggle together'. In so doing, we create opportunities for changing our understanding of the other and the context within which he or she lives. (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 594)

The direct and relational nature of the program led to the development of quite sophisticated communication skills by the students. They learnt how to ask open ended questions, the importance of silence, how to read body language and understand Mental Illness, how to actively listen and how to physically position themselves so that the homeless felt 'at home' with them and respected. The students were truly coming as guest and striving to be present.

Just with the positioning thing that is where I was with Arne, he was sitting down, so I squatted down next to him and started talking to him, I was a little bit lower than him and then I noticed that he began to get much more comfortable – eventually I was able to sit on the bench next to him. I sort of worked my way up from below him to next to him. (ME, FG, 11.5)

Relating directly with the homeless, while at first difficult, was valued by the students. Relating in this direct way helped diminish 'the sense of 'otherness' that often separates students – particularly privileged students – from those in need (Dunlap et al, 2007). In so doing, the potential to develop caring relationships was enhanced (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). By relating directly and in a relational way with the homeless the students found that they grew in self confidence and through 'being present' were able to let go of any need to label them. This is similar to students in Washington DC who valued the fact that "the people who ate there [at the soup kitchen] regularly got to know them and their school" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 44). Similarly, like the students in Fenzel and Leary's study who found they "learnt more about themselves and that 'people are people' and not very different from ourselves regardless of circumstances" (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 11), the Holy Family students found that by relating directly with the homeless they quickly became 'real people'. By engaging in a direct way with the homeless they quickly became people with a name, a personality and a story and in time, the students too became real people for the homeless as they were greeted by name and snippets of conversation from the previous van visit were remembered and

built upon by the homeless. This element of the student's experience would parallel the 'Personalization Stage' of reflection identified by Green as the key contributor to thinking conceptually and making connections leading to transformational thinking and action (Green, 2006, p. 4).

There is a guy who comes out only every now and again, his name is Ernie. When we start a conversation with him he would always ask us how school is going how we are doing what are our hobbies and stuff. Usually it is the other way around. It was good that he asks us. (MW, FG, 3.5)

This level of participation, skill acquisition and formation of social bonds with the homeless began the movement from a charity approach stressing altruism, civic duty and compassion for the less fortunate, towards a change-based model which could "move students toward participation in a curriculum that emphasizes critical reflection about social policies and conditions, the acquisition of skills of political participation and the formation of social bonds" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, 595). The direct and relational approach supported by a strong ideology coupled with reflective practice, enabled the students to understand a little more the situation many of the homeless found themselves in, bond with them and critique society's harsh judgments of them.

A high proportion of homeless people in Australia are struggling with mental illness and/or substance abuse, rather than being direct victims of structural injustice (National Youth Commission, 2008). While extensive, the gap between the rich and the poor in Australia is not as obvious as in the United States of America. This, coupled with Australia's extensive social security system, means that the opportunity for strong political engagement by youth, in the way it is understood by Kahne and Westheimer, is limited. Fenzel and Leary's findings indicated that some of the students in the more advanced theology classes developed higher order thinking leading them to identify, "the need for policy that promotes justice or an understanding of inherent racism in the social system" (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 11). The Social Analysis of this study, while leading the students to ask 'why' and to comprehend the complex nature of homelessness, did not significantly bridge the gap to the political and structural world. What is unclear is whether this apparent weak link between political involvement and Service Learning is a reflection on youth in Generation X and Y (Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007) with an apolitical approach to service, the nature of Australian society and its approach to political engagement or to the nature of the program (Campbell, 2000). Perhaps the direct and relational nature of Holy Family's program might help prepare the students to

respond to a much wider range of justice issues in their future careers and invite them to higher levels of political participation.

The direct and relational approach of the program often placed the students in difficult situations where they had to engage with homeless people in argumentative moods. It is hard to avoid political discussions when working with homeless people; many of the homeless love to engage in political debate. Some of this comes from a philosophical approach towards life and some is fuelled by levels of mental illness fixated on particular issues and a need to blame. The program's ideology of direct and relational involvement meant that the participant experience was rich in emotive experiences of shock and disequilibrium and so provided more opportunity for new learning. If the students were left in isolation in such circumstances, harm, assimilation [no learning] and strengthening of prior prejudice may have occurred. The active presence of program mentors assisted an accommodation of new experiences and new learning to occur. In the following focus group discussion, the students, in coming to terms with what 'presence' and 'guest' mean, came to a point of deep respect, acknowledging the presence of mental illness and chose not to engage on the level of argument.

AM: I was also going to say it is important not to impose our kind of values upon them. When you come as a guest you don't do that – you don't come as supposed model citizens or something – and try and tell them what they are doing wrong – that would not be coming as a guest. I think it is more trying to help out rather than trying to tell them where they have gone wrong or something.

NM: In presence even how you sit or stand is a sign of respect to them. When you are standing up and looking down on them it makes it hard. Even in your speech you have to have great respect for them as a human being.

MH: In a way that respects their intelligence. You don't sneer down at them.

MQ: Judge them – for who they are and not what you see, or understand about them. We're towards the higher end of society and they are at the bottom – Socio Economically – so when you are at the Big Brekky – I know myself, I try to relate to them regardless of what they have or do not have. They might be doing it tough but I'm more concerned in the person they are and finding that out.

NM: I think it is a different sign of a different type of respect – even more respect.

AS: You have to agree with their values.

MG: Some times you really have to bide your time and sometimes just listen. (FG, 27.4)

The direct and relational nature of their interaction led to the development of closer relationships that resulted in some of the homeless becoming important 'gate keepers' for the students to the overall sub-culture of the homeless and to other homeless people. During the course of the program some seven or eight homeless people became very important for the students, and their names appeared time and again both in the journaling and the Focus Group discussions. While initially some of these 'gate keepers' were elderly men, over time they were joined by some younger people and some

Indigenous elders. These 'gate keepers' were important in leading students to a degree of comfort at the van site so deeper levels of insight and reflection were possible. The gate keepers were also, admittedly with their own bias, able to help students see past surface presenting data to more valid conclusions and social constructions. In so doing, many of the students came to a point where they were so 'at home' at the van site that many of the original presenting features that caught their attention were no longer 'different'. The conduit effect formed by data becoming so much a part of ordinary experience ultimately led to students reacting with a deeper insight to disconfirming evidence later in the program. Most of the students had their one or two particular personalities that they would 'catch up' with when they first arrived at the van and often they were the link to connecting with other homeless. These one or two homeless not only played the role of gatekeeper but were the link, at a feeling level, from 'out-group' to 'in-group'. This process enabled the students to free up energy for a more real social analysis and structural attribution rather than remaining locked into personal attribution for homelessness (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000).

TK: There is this guy called Harry and Harry came up to the BBQ with his cup of tea and he was easy to talk to, "How are you going mate? How have you been keeping?" He was so easy to talk to, to chat about what you and he have been doing since last time we met him.

AMc: There was one guy I was really looking forward to seeing, Bob. But he wasn't there and I felt a little let down. I was disappointed because I really wanted to see him again. He was the one person I really connected with the first time and I talked to him the whole time I was out.

AC: Yeh, I knew Bob too and we had made a connection with him and so were really looking forward to seeing him again.

BP: I think knowing people's names and knowing a little bit about them makes a huge difference, when you go up to talk to them the second time you don't have to start from the beginning – makes it a lot easier – what to talk about etc. (FG, 16.2)

These gate keepers played an important role in interpreting the sub-culture for the students: what type of a person a particular homeless person was, why they reacted a certain way, who was safe and who was dangerous, what a person's name was and more. The relational nature of the program meant that the students were open to being 'hurt' by the homeless at the feeling / friendship level and this did happen. The gradual shift from personal to structural attribution, from 'out' to 'in' group meant that any disillusionment or hurt could be placed in context and made sense of within this context. There were times when some of the homeless felt that students had let them down and there were times when the students felt rejected or ignored by people they felt they had got to know quite deeply. Importantly, the students were able to work their way through this and make sense of it, leading to a greater empathy and sense of relationship. Here

Matthew is reacting to the homeless people's expectation that they should always be at the van. The homeless appreciate fidelity in relationship more than charity.

Yeh, I was with Chris [when he was rejected] and even people that you have built up a relationship before did not want to talk to you – they would ask you “Where have you been?” and stuff like that and “Why have you not been here?” Like it was our responsibility to be there all the time. And I did not want to go out and explain why I had not been there – like I was on holidays and stuff. It was pretty hard and then I tried to keep a conversation going and learn about a person but he kept on talking about his own story and like this one topic and I think he was obsessed about it – like I asked him, “How have you been?” Not about this. And he went straight to this other topic; he just obsessed with this one issue. (MQ, FG, 27.4)

The direct and relational nature of the program was not one way and the students experienced quite deeply the welcome and acceptance of the homeless. While the students valued this, it took time for many to name the reciprocity in giving in relationship. Whether this is the result of adolescent egocentricity or some weakness in the reflection process is unclear.

When you use their name it seems a lot more personal. When you call them ‘mate’ it is more general. You don't really know them you just are having this conversation. One of the guys remembered my name as well and he seemed to really enjoy it when he remembered my name. (AS, FG, 31.3)

The journey beyond labels and initial stereotypes, growth in experience and awareness of acceptance by the homeless were important steps on the journey that was the students' experience of Eddie's Van. On this journey the continual placement of experience within the context of ideology assisted a growing accommodation of and expansion of worldview. On this journey, reflection and the invitation to critically examine experience sought to address potential assimilation that may have blocked new learning. Both of these processes needed time for the maturation of the learning process to occur.

### **6.2.2 Time**

The ideology and theology outlined above, while of great value needed some extended length of time to be truly effective in moving student experience to a deeper and more effective level (Mabry, 1998). Strain identified the need for a significant length of time for the development of moral character and effectiveness in Service Learning. It is in the context of this length of time that student experience matured and was framed. In their Lens Model Cone and Harris identify the importance of extended experiences. “Effective service-learning requires extended experiences and relationship building with members of the community” (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 37). The six month duration of the program

meant that the participants had time to go past initial stereotypes, re-configure stereotypes, truly grasp the meaning of presence, guest and dignity, engage in more real and effective Social Analysis and had time to build relationships of trust and respect with the homeless. Involvement in service activities over an extended period of time appeared to be important for a deeper understanding and commitment from students in Fenzel and Leary's study. Students from the first section of this American study had to spend at least 15 hours at a community agency over the time of the course. Students reported

an attitude of compassion for the disenfranchised of society, a greater level of commitment to wanting to work in their communities to help solve social problems, and a stronger belief that they could make a difference in the lives of others. (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 9)

For Youniss and Yates the concept of reflective comment was important and this component grew over time. Their study identified the solely descriptive as distinct from the reflective context of student reflections after visits to the service site [a soup kitchen]. In this study students visited the site at least four times over the course of a year and sometimes more often. As a result of their service experience Youniss and Yates found that

while not all students who entered the service program were equally open to reflectivity, those who were already reflective in their first essay were very likely (85%) to give reflective comments as they progressed through the program. In contrast, slightly over one-half (57%) of the students who started in a descriptive mode became reflective subsequently. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.66)

The school-based program of St. Francis High School in Washington DC that formed the basis for Youniss and Yates' study invited students to work at least four times, for approximately 20 hours, at a soup kitchen located in the basement of a downtown church. Students were encouraged to volunteer additional days over school holidays (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p.38). Students involved with the Social Problems course at Texas A & M University were more likely to experience 'Empowerment' the longer they were involved with the experiential element of the program working with homeless people (Pracht, 2007, p. 77). Participation in substantial hours of service prior to enrolling in the course as well as the hours volunteered as part of the program, led to the emergence of a theme of empowerment in student journaling and reflection (Pracht, 2007, p. 70).

A longer period of time is essential in any social situation if one is to see past the initial presenting data and to make sense of it. In ethnography it is only after a period of time

that patterns begin to emerge, relationships clarify and the not-so-obvious come to the fore. Similarly in this service context, it took time for the true nature of relationships to emerge, the identity of key players to become clear and for symbols and rituals to be identified. As the Service Learning Program of Holy Family is built upon direct relationship with the homeless it takes time for these relationships to form and deepen, to build trust. While the participants in Simons and Cleary's study

changed their preconceived notions about the community, learned to interact with people who are culturally different, discovered commonalities and developed tolerant attitudes towards cultural difference. Students formed relationships with community recipients and sustained these relationships and their involvement beyond the initial service. (Simons & Cleary, 2006, p. 317)

The researchers recommended only a short period of time at the service site. This reflects the nature of much American Service Learning as more what Australian educators would call 'work experience'; short term placements in semi-work situations as distinct from the deeper, relational and on the edge nature of Holy Family's program coming from a faith and Social Justice perspective. Simons and Cleary felt that a short Service Learning placement allowed participants to "be able to view the impact on community recipients .... when students are able to view their accomplishments, they gain greater levels of satisfaction with the service experiences" (Simons & Cleary, 2006, p. 317).

The six month period of involvement by the Holy Family students allowed for important changes to take place both in the students themselves and in the homeless. Rather than a brief, one off experience where students could leave thinking that they had done 'their bit' for the homeless with traditional stereotypes remaining in place, the length of time of this program enabled the students to truly experience [as much as one can] this microcosm of society. Payne (2000) noted that many College level Service Learning students made short term commitments and then made a transition to long term commitments to Community Service, suggesting the development of relationship and meaning. The length of time allowed students to go past their initial reactions, break down stereotypes and develop skills to connect. In this reflection from the Holy Family program Pat had got to know Bruce and how he reacted and sensed some of his story, the why behind what he did.

Met a guy on the street called Bruce – he is an old guy who went to an exclusive private school, had a really good job, put his kids through his old school and his wife died and now he is basically – gave up and became an alcoholic. I don't know but when I met him I just kind of listened to him and I think I was pretty present to him because I remembered all of his story, exactly what he said. It is a pretty personal topic so I don't think he would have told anyone if he did not think that they cared.

The first time I spoke to him he told me all about it. The second time I spoke to him we spoke about university and stuff like that and what I wanted to do. He is a really intelligent guy. (PR, FG, 27.4)

Some students, when confronted by disconfirming evidence identifying the homeless as “dirty, lazy, substance abusers”, substituted this stereotype with a slightly more sophisticated but equally untrue stereotype. It took time for the participants to grow in their sense that each person had their own unique story and to see the true nature and effect of mental illness on many of the homeless. When some students met aggressive or grumpy homeless, a match occurred where their expectations and properties of concepts were confirmed. This strengthened the model or concept held in the Semantic Memory. In some cases this led to a continuation of ‘out-group’ thinking. While this supports the importance of concept development, critical reflection and mediated learning (Cone & Harris, 1996), it points to the importance of time to allow a growing awareness of mental illness and cause and effect to ‘disconfirm’ expectations.

Over a sixth month period the participants were able to make the language and concepts of the program’s ideology their own. This gave the students a language in which to truly express their experience, and more importantly structure and skills to deepen their understanding of their experience and the nature of their relationship with the homeless. “Coming as guest”, “Being present”, “aware of each person’s unique story” and “innate dignity” were approaches that had time to go from mere words to meaningful awareness that altered and shaped how each participant approached their interactions and reacted to the homeless. The longer period of involvement on the van meant that both the students and the homeless had time to relate to each other in varying circumstances. Here Jack recalls an incident on the night van. Jack is able to stand back from his own experience and recognise that he still had some of an ‘us and them’ approach, but he is growing in a real sense of the dignity of each and every person.

When I went out on the night van I was still in the mindset before I went out on the night van – where it was still sort of us and them. And talking to this guy – he was actually really smart – probably smarter than me. I sort of talked to him and he sort of said that this, “Was like the graveyard of lost souls!” And what he was saying was that his mate – he is going well with his girlfriend and he looks like he is on the up side but he just knows that he is going to relapse into drinking and start hitting his girlfriend again. And I asked him, “Why are you still there?” And this was the part I found really interesting – he said, “I can leave and I would not feel betrayed but I feel that I’m cheating myself by not helping”. He is exactly the same – only he is just in a completely different situation – he deserves exactly the same dignity. It is like coming as a guest – as you come as a guest to them you would come with respect to them, like every person has a right to be respected – no matter what their situation is – you don’t know what their situation has been – what they have been through and all that. So you have to respect that they have been through a rough time and you shouldn’t down grade them and the situation they are in. (JM, FG, 11.5)



For many students there was a 'honeymoon' period in which one could romanticize the situation of the homeless. The program's length meant that the participants saw the homeless in good and bad times, and the participants themselves served on the van when they themselves were in good and bad space. The length of time enabled a much more realistic and valid Social Analysis of the van situation to take place. It takes time for trust to develop in any relationship, and over time some of the homeless shared at a deeper level with the students and the students were able to reflect upon a much more comprehensive and real picture of life for the homeless. In Fenzel and Leary's study, the advanced theology course students found that they were more deeply learning "about people or the conditions under which people lived, what it is like to be poor or homeless" (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 11). The length of time of the program meant that the students were much more aware of the complexities of life on the streets, of the issue of homelessness and that simplistic solutions would not work. As students became more aware that simplistic solutions were linked to shallow stereotypes, they grew in awareness of their political agency and responsibility to address structural injustice in the longer term.

The length of time of the program gave the students the opportunity to face their fears, learn from them and make choices to come out of their comfort zone. This was especially the case with Indigenous people. For almost all of the Holy Family students involved in this program this was their first direct contact with Indigenous people. At first the students had quite negative experiences of the Indigenous community, especially of the youth. They had no idea how to connect, what to talk about and how to read the body language of the young Aboriginal people; the stereotype for this section of the Australian community is very strong. The Holy Family students found themselves experiencing some degree of shock and certainly disequilibrium. As articulate young men at home in the world of debating and public speaking, it was an unusual experience for them to be in a situation of powerlessness. It took time for trust to build up between the students and the Indigenous youth and time for the growth in confidence and awareness of the 'rules' of connecting with this community. In this reflection Dan, who connected well with other homeless people named the difficulty he had engaging Aboriginal youth around his age.

I won't get bored doing the van cause there is always different people coming to the van. Yesterday when I was out, there was this group of Aboriginal kids there and they had not been there before

and they were really different to the other homeless people. Didn't really get to speak to them – other people you can have good conversations with. (DP, FG, 17.2)

The factor linking time spent in service, and meaning elicited from experience, was evidenced in reflection and mediated reflection upon that experience.

### **6.2.3 Reflection**

While the student experience of the program was framed by ideology and theology, and while it required a length of time for the relationships, rituals and symbols to become more real and clear this was not sufficient. The deeper levels of meaning and insight, both personally and from Social Analysis, emerged much more effectively through reflection (Mabry, 1998; Eyler, 2002). There is much to be gained through service, when linked to reflection. “Service can stimulate reflective thinking about self-society relations, which feeds positively into the ongoing identity process” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 65). Reflection in the context of Service Learning experiences has recurring stages (Green, 2006): emotional reaction, personalization, increased understanding, connection to course content and transformational thinking.

In Dewey's (1938) model of empirical inquiry, feelings in reflection are down-played to allow the student to play the role of 'objective observer' (Cone & Harris, 1996, p.38). However, in Service Learning, especially in direct relational programs such as Holy Family's, the students are hardly objective observers. They bring with them to the service site their beliefs, attitudes and values which are at times at odds with those of the homeless with whom they relate. The discontinuity between student and homeless person, while provoking active learning, further represents a danger in which their 'learning' may simply build upon their prior attitudes and values (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 39) and can reinforce frozen attitudes and negative stereotypes (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, Dunlap et al., 2007). This was seen in the Focus Group discussions centred on equality, on the purpose for the van and on the invitation to 'be aware of their story'. In the following Focus Group discussion, Geoff and Ciaran were questioning the honesty of some of the homeless quite early in their van experience, basing their comments on prior beliefs. For Geoff and Ciaran the homeless were still an 'out-group' [groups of which they are not members] and hence there was a tendency to individual attribution, “explaining other people's failures through personal characteristics

such as lack of talent, drive, effort or loose morals” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19). Ciaran concludes his reflection with suggestions of possible change but it is a change in ‘them’.

GMC: A lot would lie about their story. They don’t tell the full story. Because they are either ashamed of it or they are embarrassed to tell somebody else it, and I suppose that is probably one of the reasons why they are on the streets – I guess they are embarrassed by what has happened or don’t really want to revisit the matter so therefore it ends up easier to stay on the streets.

CD: You find that many of them are pretty untrustworthy – they really don’t trust you as many of them have problems and stuff and they can’t trust and find it hard to really open up to you and that. One guy I was talking to he won’t talk about his children – he does not trust you – he thinks you want to do something – you really can’t get to that deeper level. And I also think um, that you are just there and that once they know that you really want to be there with them and that you don’t have to be - they are more willing to share and are glad as well. (FG, 2.3)

Time in itself does not deepen one’s understanding, and insight and ideology in itself does not lead to deeper awareness. As the participants journaled after van experiences and discussed in Focus Groups, there was a filtering and sifting of ideas and concepts, beliefs and attitudes leading to deeper awareness and insight. Bruner (1986) refers to two modes of thought, ‘the well-formed argument’ and the ‘good story’ and Cone and Harris use both by providing students in Service Learning situations with intellectual stimuli in the form of academic questions and journal questions (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 37). Through academic questions participants define terms, cite observations and explain how these observations support or contradict theory, while through journaling questions participants are encouraged to examine their personal response to experience. The process of confirming or disconfirming evidence (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997) in the light of a personally-owned conceptual map enhances learning. Several students in Strain’s program came to much deeper levels of awareness through their reflection activities. In one case the life of a person the student was writing an advocacy letter for “hung in the balance”, while another, through reflection, became much more aware of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ atmosphere of a soup kitchen. Through Holy Family’s classroom work, the prebrief and debrief sessions and journaling after each van experience, students were invited to interact with the skills of social analysis, their growing awareness of mental illness, cause and effect and the elements of the theology of the program as a means to both deepen relationship and deepen awareness of the social context of the van site.

Oral and written reflective exercises that connect cognitive inquiry with the experience of service are the key to lasting transformation on multiple levels (Strain, 2005, p. 62). Reflection honours the belief that learners are the experts in their own learning and

developmental processes. “The only learning which significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered, self appropriated learning” (Rogers, 1982, p. 223 in Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p.62). Reflection, and especially longer periods of journaling and Focus Group discussions, provided opportunities for students to mull over ideas, uncover inner secrets, and piece together life’s unconnected threads and thus create fertile ground for learning (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p.62). The reflective journal provided a vehicle for inner dialogue that connects thoughts, feelings and actions emanating from personal experience, in this case of relating with homeless people. Critical reflection allowed the student to stand back from the object of attention [their experience at the van site], and look at it objectively, and analyse it so leading to the development of autonomous and independent thought (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 15). Reflective journaling is an especially successful strategy for helping move the learner to higher levels of critical [analytical] thinking and personal insight (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63). Hubbs and Brand used Mezirow’s transformative thinking theory to bring out the power of reflection. For Mezirow the danger was to stay in automatic thinking [conclusions, judgments which people jump to without thought or question] or make individual attributions (Rockquomore & Schaffer, 2000).

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning, perspectives, habits of mind, mind sets), to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7 cited in Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63)

The emotional reaction identified by Green as the first stage of reflection may result in shock or disequilibrium. Being rejected by the homeless, meeting someone with profound mental illness before awareness and communication skills had developed, attempting to engage with Indigenous youth or reacting to people who have no obvious disadvantage were all points of dissonance for the students. This emotional ‘window’ can lead to deeper insight and personal growth through accommodation of new or reformed concepts into one’s worldview (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 20). The emotional reaction may lead to an assimilation of the experience into existing stereotypes and prejudice. The key to new learning is facilitated reflection upon experience. This was identified by Eyley and Giles when they reflected on the “transformational power of service-learning in terms of a transition from ‘patronizing’ charity to ‘a greater sense of the importance of political action to obtain social justice” (Eyley & Giles, 1999, p. 135 cited in Strain, 2005, p. 63). The Focus Groups and journaling questions in this study were aimed at transformative

learning, requiring students to question the foundations and prior learning that went into the formation of a given belief. This process prompted the students to consider whether a given belief came about as a result of concepts tacitly accepted, or as the result of a deliberate thought process; the vibrant focus group discussion were witness to this. By engaging the student in mutual dialogue and by deliberately linking journal questions to reflect on the previous focus group material and events on the van, the staff involved with the program were assisting the students to illuminate automatic thinking and habits of mind. By so doing students may be led through a transformative process where ultimately they [the learner] are changed or transformed (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63).

The oral debrief of the van experience as teams returned from the service site, and Focus Group discussions, played an important role in meaning-making. Experiential learning portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience—apprehension (concrete experience) and comprehension (abstract conceptualization), and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience—intension (reflective observation) and extension (active experimentation).

In grasping experience some of us perceive new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on our sense and immersing ourselves in concrete reality. Other tend to perceive, grasp, or take hold of new information through symbolic representation or abstract conceptualization – thinking about, analysing, or systematically planning, rather than using sensation as a guide. Similarly, in transforming or processing experience some of us tend to carefully watch others who are involved in the experience and reflect on what happens, while others choose to jump right in and start doing things. (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002, p. 3)

Without being aware of it, participants in a Focus Group moved through the cycle of experiencing, reflecting, abstracting and acting, as they constructed meaning from their experience of conversation through the group. While listening to another student express a view or comment on another's position, the listeners were not passive but actively made sense of their own inner conversation. The conversation of the Focus Group on the importance of 'story' or 'who is the van for' or 'who benefits' was a meaning-making process whereby understanding was achieved through the interplay of opposites and contradictions (Baker et al., 2002, p. 5).

As the Focus Group discussion continued, the discursive process of an individual's ideas, experiences expressed and concepts generated, was guided by linear time from past and present experience. Paralleling this discursive process was a recursive process, the desire to return to ideas and experiences generated in conversation. The

cyclical process was where ideas and concepts acquired new meaning as the speaker, or active listener, returned to the conversation to question and inquire about their experiences anew (Baker et al., 2002, p. 13). The cyclical understanding of reflection has parallels with the reflection, meaning-making, experience, facilitated learning and instructional reflection at the centre of Green's framework (Green, 2006).

The Focus Group discussion or the verbal debrief after a van experience was a linguistic process leading to the generation of new ideas and concepts developed from one's awareness of the tension and paradox between two or more opposites. The tension between a student's prior stereotype and their newly experienced 'reality', the tension between serving the homeless and experiencing being 'served' by them through welcome and acceptance or the tension between presenting data and the sense that you are engaging with a form of mental illness, would all be examples of this process.

Like most processes, the truth or contribution of the process is not in the outcome but rather in the journey. The conversations of the Focus Group or oral debrief involved stating a point of view and questioning it from other points of view, eventually seeking consensual agreement which in turn is ultimately questioned from still other perspectives. "Truth thus lies in the journey" (Baker et al., 2002, p. 5). The facilitator of the Focus Group sought to nurture conversations focussing on 'guest', 'presence', 'story', 'benefit', 'mental illness', and reciprocity that planted, nurtured and cultivated ideas rather than initiate contentious and defensive debates. The change in articulated student views and beliefs over the period of the van experience would indicate that this process was active through the Focus Groups.

The value of immediately journaling after a van experience while feelings are still raw, and of allowing sufficient time for Focus Group conversation to generate feeling responses to the issues discussed, is linked to experiential learning theory. Reality is grasped through two distinct, but inseparable modes of knowing: concrete knowing and abstract knowing (Kolb, 1984). Through concrete knowing one apprehends - an immediate, feeling-oriented, tacit, subjective process that serves as physiological and emotional gatekeepers that monitor the emotional dimensions of learning. In many ways the immediate journaling upon arrival back at Holy Family, as well as the verbal debrief by the adult mentors, facilitated this process. The recall of names and stories, faces,

reactions and feelings all contributed to concrete knowing. It was here that often the 'stereotypes' were first challenged. Following this, Focus Group discussion played its part in abstract knowing or comprehension: a linguistic, conceptual, interpretative process. Learning is based on the complex interrelationship of these two knowing processes and integrated learning, as in the type of learning that Service Learning hopes to achieve, and occurs when learners engage simultaneously in these two complementary modes of knowing (Baker et al., 2002, p. 8).

As a student joins in conversation about experience through a Focus Group, name feelings immediately after being on the van, or during group debrief time on the way home from the van site their direct perceptions of what they experienced are important as all concepts derive their validity from connection to sense experience. Concepts that are transformed from this reflection upon experience, then guide future action and goal setting.

Simple perception of experience alone is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it. Similarly, transformation alone cannot represent learning, for there must be something to be transformed, some state or experience that is being acted upon. (Kolb, 1984, p. 42)

The interplay between comprehending, apprehending, extension [action] and intention [reflection], result in a greater possibility of transformative learning. All four processes need a rich ideological and conceptual environment to channel the processing energy.

There was an intimate link between the ideology of the program and the role of reflection within it. The daily journaling and Focus Groups gave the students a vehicle with which to work through their feelings, reactions and insights. As busy students it would be all too easy to arrive back at Holy Family College, do a quick clean up and then rush into classes. By journaling on their van experience, students were able to name and identify what they had experienced and what it meant to them. In time, these journaling times led to insights and awareness that the students learnt, both at a personal and societal level. In this reflection Jak comes to the realization that despite the cold morning, a probable addiction, and lack of a place to stay, Kane is still quite happy with his life - quite a deep insight for a young man of sixteen.

Yeh, well I met this one fellow and he was called Kane and he was a younger fellow and he was, when I spoke to him on a particularly cold morning and he did not have any proper clothing and he was sort of just wrapped up in this blanket thing. What stuck me about him was that he was actually – all you had to basically do was introduce yourself to him and he was really friendly and really talkative. I really got taken by surprise because he actually had a really good sense of humour and he was sort of actually able to have a really good talk to him and stuff. So – that is what struck me

about him was that he was still able to – smile and happy and even though really cold and living in really bad situation – and he sort of just – in the way that he spoke and the way he had this cigarette and had shaking hands and everything and you could tell that he had some addiction or something but ....! (JBS, FG, 2.5)

Jak's reflection on his experience suggests that he is in the process of accommodating new insights into his worldview. His interaction with Kane and other homeless individuals that he had met, was leading to an "accordion effect" as he engaged with surprises that did not fit within his existing models of meaning. Jak began to expand his expectations of his interactions with the homeless to accommodate his new reflected upon experience (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 45). The Academic Framework Experience at the beginning of the program, coupled with the influence of Jak's family and other significant pre-program influences, led him to modify his worldview. This apparently cold, homeless young man could be happy and laugh at life.

The insights gained through reflection by the students varied in both variety and depth. Some insights were more personal. Chris, after eight visits and naming his own shyness and difficulty in connecting with strangers reflected that "It was the first time I was disappointed to leave". James on the other hand, gained more of an insight linked to empathy and solidarity – not so much what you do for someone but being there with them in their hard times; quite a mature insight for a young man of sixteen. Just prior to this reflection, Morgan recounted for the group, the story of how one of the young adult volunteers on the night van had prevented a young homeless man from taking his own life.

That is like, what did Mitch call it, don't walk in-front of them cause they may not follow, don't walk behind them cause they may feel pushed to do things, walk with them and be their friend – and that is sort of the whole aim of what we do. Like you are not trying to fix their situation – you are just trying to be with them through their difficult times, which is probably the best thing we can do. Sympathy you can just throw money at them but with empathy you have to be – literally on the street with them. (JG, FG, 8.6)

It was from their experiential reflections that students gleaned their more important insights. Often it was in reflecting upon the stories that the homeless shared with them that students came to insight. Often the insights were linked to personalisation, some to resolution from a divided self, some in the letting go of 'out group' thinking and some through critical reflection upon disconfirming evidence. In this extract from a Focus Group, the discussions centred on why the students felt they [the homeless] were in that particular situation. Patrick moves to a place of structural attribution while Alex experiences real personalisation.



PR: Eddie's Van gives you a better understanding of why they are there cause you can actually just stop and talk to them about it – like generally you just make an assumption that they are there because they don't want to work but when you really get into it and ask them why they are there – you can understand that it is not often their fault.

AB: You just kind of have a sense of community with them – like – once you have gone out and got to know them, have talked to them and got to know their stories and stuff – it makes you actually want to go out again and keep seeing them. A sense of community, a sense of family – when we stop doing it we will lose that too. When you see the guys walking down into the city or something – guys will say, “Hey, I used to do the van with that guy” – if you don't keep doing it you will lose that relationship, that sense of community with them. (FG, 8.6)

For Alex and Patrick the process of personalisation led them past an 'out-group', individual attribution mindset towards an expanded worldview. Their expectations were expanded and the accordion effect led them towards an 'in-group' approach, with its consequent external-structural attributions, where “the poor are individuals like themselves”. In this context poverty is analysed through factors external to the individual (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19). Towards the end of the program, as students were growing in both awareness and agency, much of this personalisation expressed itself in quite practical terms. Regularly the students would return from the van site identifying the need a particular homeless person had for a blanket or coat or jumper, or responding to a request from particular homeless people for the same. In reporting this and ensuring it was responded to, they had a sense that they were making a difference. The experience of the students pointed to another level of personalisation. While the personalisation process brought the students past stereotype to respectful reality, it meant that they had built particular relationships with individuals. When those individuals asked for a pair of tracksuit pants or a jumper or a beanie and the students went home to find “a beanie for Bob”, the personalisation took on a more intimate feel. Once again this points to the importance of quality reflection with program mentors to ensure such relationships are respectful, and the grieving when the time comes for the student to move on, is processed well.

In one focus group the discussion centred on Bruce, a man the students had all got to know well, and his journey from a privileged lifestyle to life on the streets. The insights here centred firstly on the cause and effect modality of the story leading to James claiming that his story “makes sense”. Quite an empathetic insight and a little like the concept of the 'trigger' that Dylan named in Chapter 4. Rory and the others in this discussion had normalised their experience of the van, “developing relationship with the staff and regular clients that were crucial to the learning process because they were based on common human bonds as opposed to pity” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p.

17). Normalisation of a Service Learning experience leads to engagement where students seek answers to causal questions. As a result of this discussion the focus group members were able to identify possible entry points to a life of homelessness. From their reflection they were able to move on from this discussion, with their concept map of homelessness more complete and real.

RO: Like Bruce was saying to me that when his wife died it was like a blurr – like he was obviously upper middle class by the sounds of it and then one thing happened and then just – keeps building up and ...

JG: He sold everything that he had ....

PR: He became a big alcoholic after his wife died which is pretty sad.

MQ: And he didn't have the skills to deal with it.

JG: What seems to happen is just how they deal with it – like with things that they are given in life – I'm not saying that necessarily deal with it badly – they just deal with it differently. Especially family – his wife – he had been with her for forty years or something and that is really going to screw you up if she had died – so his gambling away his money is understandable. It makes sense. (FG, 8.6)

Another example of a reflection driven, accordion effect in operation, was the growing awareness of the great sense of community around Eddie's Van: community among the students, among the homeless and as time went by, community among the combination of both groups. The students had not expected this sense of community and were surprised when they experienced it. Surprise is one of the key precursors of disconfirmation leading to possible accommodation. After all, weren't the homeless lonely old men who had been rejected from society? It was this sense of community and belonging that drew the homeless to the van and in turn led the students to really enjoy the van experience and look forward to going again.

MO: Some of them just come for something to eat where as some of the others come for something to eat and a chat.

TH: There is a real sense of community around Eddie's and it gives them a place where they can get together and talk.

CC: It gives them a chance to catch up since last time they saw each other – catch up with us as well and get some free food as well.

JB: I think that we are kind of their connection to society in a sense cause the rest of society does not seem to respect them – they shun them – where as when they come to us – they know that we have respect for them – and we are interested in them and in some cases we are there for them. (FG, 23.5)

While there was change in the student journal entries over the course of the program reflecting change in attitudes and beliefs, it was often in the robust Focus Group discussions that clarity was gained of issues, solutions or insights worked towards. The Focus Groups and journaling would have given the participants a 'voice' either orally or through the written word. The mere fact that these young adolescents were invited to share their opinion was important in moving from being a dependent personality towards being a self-directed human being and learner.

Speaking (externalizing) and having other people 'hear' are important ways in which the self develops. People's autonomy matures as they speak in their own voice rather than in that of others, and as they take responsibility for their own views and the way in which they articulate them. (Le Cornu, 2006, p. 16)

In the Focus Groups the students were able to question rather than passively accept, to form, articulate and accept responsibility for their views, to discriminate between and evaluate a range of opinions, and in doing so grow in self awareness and individuality. For many students the focus group discussion played a bridging role between assimilation and accommodation (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 20). The focus group gave participants a forum to grapple, both internally [their thoughts] and externally [their spoken reflections], with their divided self around trigger issues, leading to varying degrees of resolution (Dunlap et al, 2007). Within the Focus Group discussion, the students worked through their reactions and thinking about questions such as appreciation, who benefits, how to get off the streets, the pecking order within the homeless community, etc. Each discussion was a mixture of attitudes and values from family, the influence of peers, reflections from the value system of program mentors, and the individuals own meaning-making processes.

One Focus Group concentrated on the question of who benefits from the van experience. The quite robust group discussion led to the expression of a range of views. "It is probably better for us", to "guys like Terry who come to the van have become a lot more stable as a result of Eddie's Van so based on that, to some extent I think that is for them". One student, Louis, challenged the patronizing approach he perceived some students displayed. "I'm probably wrong here but a lot of us come with this arrogant view that we're doing them a service and they should respect us by talking to us" (LP, FG, 28.4)!

These three reflections show different points of view, and when placed in the context of robust discussion and the intervention of the facilitator, would have, at least, led to views being challenged and not just defended. Louis' intervention, while suggesting the influence of parental values on his thinking, may not have led to an accommodation in his thinking as he had limited van experience to engage with. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, Louis was the only student who attended the van a minimum number of times and hence his reflections may have remained in the emotional reaction, grappling and shock stages of disconfirmation. Louis' experience was so limited that personalisation

and normalisation and certainly not true engagement could occur; hence he may have remained at an intellectualising level based on prior belief.

Reflection in itself is not enough in Service Learning, for as Kahne and Westheimer suggest, “Clearly, having students share their thoughts and experiences with one another may be valuable, but reflective activities [commonly journal entries and discussions] may simply reinforce previously held beliefs and simplistic, if generous, conclusions” (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 596). The questions put to the students in their daily journaling and by the facilitator in the Focus Groups were important in ‘moving the conversation’ to a deeper level. This is in keeping with the role of a mentor as described by Cone and Harris (1996), and highlights the problem they have with Moore’s critical pedagogy. For Moore as “analytical methods and organizational concepts are acquired, they move students one step closer to being able to think critically and defend their points of view” (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 38). Cone and Harris question whether students are ready to do this without a great deal of mediated skill development, and hence the fifth stage of their model, mediated learning. Bringle and Hatcher use the term ‘cognitive apprenticeship’ to identify “a mentor with whom students can discuss and learn generalisation of principles, transfer of knowledge between theory and practice, and how to analyse perplexing circumstances” (Bringle & Hatcher, 2005, p. 29). Approaches to Service Learning typified by Cone and Harris’ Len’s Model have begun to address concerns that

claims about the relationship between ‘classroom learning’ and ‘experiential learning’ are often vague and intuitive. They seem to imply that students learn concepts, theories and skills in the classroom and then ‘apply’ or ‘test’ them in the real world; that assumption is hard to substantiate. (Moore, 2000, p. 126)

Moore suggests that it is problematic to parallel knowledge use in work places with students’ transference of classroom learning into service situations. The emphasis on proactive mentor insertion into the learning and reflection process that highlights the work of Cone and Harris, directly addresses this gap.

In general few students displayed attitudinal change within one Focus Group discussion but over the course of the program change occurred. This reflects the process nature of the movement from assimilation to accommodation (Dunlap et al, 2007), from conduit constructions of expectations and experience to accordion (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997) and normalisation to engagement (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). This was especially

the case in relation to discussions about equality with the homeless, the purpose of the van program and the approach one should take to relating with the homeless. Several strongly expressed Focus Group discussions appeared at times to harden an already present prejudice or bias in some students. This reflected Kahne and Westheimer's belief that

Students may use their developing ability to articulate powerful logical argument to maintain their most deep seated prejudices and irrational habits of thought by making them appear more rational. For the most part, however, descriptions of reflective activities do not include the kind of critical analysis that might help students step outside dominant understandings to find new solutions. (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 596)

It is in the context of this ideology, length of time and reflective practice that the student experience of personal motivation, purpose of the van, and experience of change and sense of agency took place.

### **6.3 PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE**

In the context of the framing outlined above, this discussion now looks at the experience that the participants were actually having as part of the program. In constructing identity, adolescents look outside themselves for meaning that has historical stability and future promise. In the stories of Jesus and Edmund Rice, the young men of Holy Family found a proven way of engaging with issues of Social Justice that gave them an immediate sense of potential agency and methods and context for future engagement. Within the community of Holy Family students found fertile ground for their emerging identities.

Adolescents seek to become part of places, institutions, ethnic groups, ideologies, and the like, which carry such meaning [historical stability and future promise]. In exploring them, adolescents give their emerging identities definable shape so that individual selves become part of identifiable collectives. Their actions thereby take on purpose and join the legacy of actions from previous generations, thus becoming individual representations of collective ideals. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 61)

Without consciously doing so, the students of the Service Learning Program of Holy Family looked for transcendent meaning, seeking to become part of a larger historical entity. By exploring the program's ideological stance toward social justice, students assessed themselves as actors within a tradition of helping the less fortunate in a spirit of mutual responsibility and respect. The rich Social Justice history of the Catholic Church, and especially in this case of Edmund Rice who brought his particular passion for a liberating education to the poor of Waterford in Ireland (McLaughlin, 2006), gave the students a sense of belonging to a strong tradition of care.

Building on the work of Luckmann (1991), Youniss and Yates suggested the concept of transcendence as a way of looking at student experience within a program such as Holy Family's. Just as many of the students in the program struggled to name and identify a 'Christ presence' in the homeless they were in relationship with, so too Luckmann proposed that "transcendence need not be construed solely in its most abstract sense of finding unified meaning in metaphysical being" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 61). For Luckmann "Religion is to be found wherever the behaviour of the members of the species becomes morally accountable action" (Luckmann, 1991, p. 172).

Perhaps the role 'religion' and 'spirituality' play in student meaning-making may find more clarity when viewed using Kerestes, Youniss and Metz' differentiation between vertical and horizontal beliefs. While most of the participants struggled to associate their van service with a vertical approach to 'religion' [personal prayer, piety, religious ritual] they were more at home with a horizontal approach to spirituality: this-worldly, socially oriented, social justice, helping others style beliefs (Kerestes, Youniss & Metz, 2004). Transcendence involves the recognition that aspects of one's life are shared with the lives of others, so that meaning depends on the self's relationship with others as individuals and as members of society. As their experience on the van deepened, more and more students articulated much deeper appreciation of story, of the sense of community surrounding the van and among the homeless, as well as a growing awareness of reciprocity. "Sometimes I wonder who is helping who" (AM, EX, 6)?

In working on Eddie's Van the students were exposed to new and different experiences that stimulated them to reflect on their relationship with homeless people. The homeless that the students met were living lives very different from the students, and yet in so many ways were similar. As the students progressed through the personalisation (Green, 2006) and normalisation stages of engagement, (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000) their relationships with the homeless deepened. With greater depth they became aware, at all sorts of levels, of how they differed from the homeless, how they were so similar, how they came to be where they were, why they could not 'get out of this scene', of a sense of story and of the nature and effects of mental illness.

Youniss and Yates used Luckmann's scheme to classify student reflections into three levels of transcendence: little, intermediate and bigger. Little transcendence "anything that transcends that which at the moment is concretely given in actual, direct experience that can of itself be experienced in the same manner" (Luckmann, 1991, p. 173), appeared in two forms.

In one, students saw through the stereotype of 'the homeless' to acknowledge that homeless people are real human beings, differentiated individuals, and not invisible figures whom you pass by on the street corners. In the other type, students perceived homeless people as ordinary humans living in unusual circumstances rather than unusual people in rare states. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 62)

Intermediate transcendence, "that which is actually experienced that cannot be experienced directly" (Luckmann, 1991, p. 173), led students to grow in awareness of their own lives as a result of their interacting with people 'on the street': how lucky they were, how privileged and empowered. In intermediate transcendence students were able to identify the causes or circumstances that led to people being homeless. In 'bigger transcendence'; "when an experience presents itself as pointing to something that not only cannot be experienced directly but in addition is definitively not part of an ordinary reality can be seen and touched" (Luckmann, 1991, p. 173), students were able to stand back from, and reflect upon, the injustice of homelessness within society and the possible ways they could 'make a difference'.

In the following exit journal entry, Grant articulates his initial fears, his prior stereotypes and the change he experienced through the program. Many of his reflections could be examples of 'Little Transcendence' leading to 'Intermediate Transcendence' as identified by Luckmann (1991), and are expressed in the language of personalisation and normalisation.

From the first day where I had no ideas about how streeties lived I must admit I was scared. However, through out this experience I find I am less judgmental of the homeless and have learnt to see them as if they were my brothers or sisters. This could happen to anyone. I no longer walk through King George Square seeing the men on the benches as "bums" but now as possible mates. My confidence has grown tenfold but I don't believe I have made a major contribution to society. I feel I have helped those 'Individuals' to have a slightly better life and they in their turn have enriched my life. I am surprised how open I can be with strangers. (GE, EX, 6)

### **6.3.1 Tentative steps into new territory.**

One of the important elements of the Expectations and Exposure Phases of the study was that of student motivation for involvement in the program. Student motivations for

participation in the program varied, as did their reasons for staying involved. While many joined the program to 'make a difference' most stayed because of their sense of agency, the fun and the relationships they experienced. It is not surprising that many of the students were motivated by high ideals and their own desire to reach out to those in need. Stukas et al recognised that "when volunteers are encouraged to reflect on and to frame their actions in terms of a broad pro-social values system, they may be led to perceive themselves as 'people who help' and thus to develop an altruistic self-image: their giving becomes an integrated and central part of the self-concept" (Stukas et al, 1999, p. 7).

Stukas' study went on to find that "Students with parental helping models were more likely to have altruistic self-images and to be committed to helping than students without parental helping models" (Stukas et al., 1999, p. 13). While almost all of the students from Holy Family expressed parental support for their involvement with Eddie's Van in their Entry Journals, no participant was conscious of parental influence motivating them to volunteer. Only one quarter of the Service Learning participants from the Social Problems class at Texas A & M University "reported that their parents volunteered regularly in the community" (Pracht, 2007, p. 71). A link was made between this and the high income, socio-economic standing of many of the families involved with the research, indicating that busyness may be a key factor in student / parental involvement in service (Pracht, 2007). While any link between student motivation for involvement in Holy Family's program and parental influence is outside the framework of this study, it would be fertile ground for future research, especially in the light of the recent work of Mason, Singleton and Webber in researching 'the Spirit of Generation Y' here in Australia (Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007).

The first experiences of the students were essentially universal in their strong breakdown of their prior stereotype. Many students were surprised at how quickly their fears dropped away and their confidence and communication skills in this very new environment increased. This surprise at finding a subculture that did not fit with prior expectations led to an immediate opportunity for new learning, as the students could choose between assimilation of the initial presenting data leading to maintenance of previously held beliefs, or an accommodation and changed world view. Many student



reflections were expressed quite idealistically with a focus on the welcome they received and how approachable most of the homeless were.

I knew what I expected – I thought that most of them would have a sort of mental illness or hanging around by themselves – but when we got there they were all having a laugh with each other – the Eddie’s Van brought them together. It was a good place to be. (MG, FG, 16.2)

If the van experience had stopped at this point in time with only a short term exposure to the life of the homeless, despite any amount of reflection, it is questionable what changes in values and attitudes would have occurred. A short exposure may have left participants in the middle of shock, disequilibrium and responding to powerful trigger experiences. Short exposures may have left participants with stereotypes enhanced or romantic views strengthened. Exiting from such experience before resolution and true relationship may well have resulted in the further enhancement of pre-program prejudice and a patronizing approach to those in need. While the breakdown in stereotype described above may have had an accordion effect in that the students’ experience “did not fit within the existing models of meaning, expectations and values”, the resulting “abandoning, refining, altering or transforming” (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 43) of their knowledge of the world would not have had time to be reflected upon. The ‘stretched accordion’ of meaning needs time and facilitation to be conceptualised anew in the context of the program’s ideology.

Knowles (1983) highlighted the importance personal experience plays in the process of adult learning, and subsequent theorists have devised strategies [such as reflective journaling] to move the participant towards higher levels of critical thinking and personal insight (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63). While this is certainly true, the worth of the insight is totally dependent upon the quality and depth of the personal experience that the whole process is built upon. If one had questioned the students as to the value of the van experience after only one or two visits, they would have probably concurred that it was valuable and could have moved on from the program blissfully unaware of the many deeper levels of learning and awareness that they could obtain from longer involvement in the program and its process. They may have moved on blissfully unaware of much of the pain and hurt present in the lives of the homeless. The students may have moved on before a proper engagement had taken place nor the opportunity for true resolution of shock or disequilibrium to occur (Dunlap et al, 2007).

### 6.3.2 Building their reality map

The Academic Framework Experience (Seider, 2005) was designed to provide program participants with an ideological and conceptual map to frame experience – the reality of service. After the initial formation of the ‘reality map’ of just what the van site and its community was like through trigger events, the students quite quickly began to identify deeper facets of the whole experience. Through their experience of shock and disequilibrium questions began to rise, stereotypes were broken down and then rebuilt, only to eventually be rejected altogether. At this point in their experience, the students had not formed sufficient personal relationships with some of the homeless for the gatekeeper entry to a more complete awareness to occur. Personalisation takes time. The immediate breakdown of prior stereotype was quickly replaced by confusion concerning the presenting data that clashed with the concepts the students had brought with them. Why particular homeless with mobile phones and nice clothing were ‘on the streets’. Why they did not appear to want to get back into normal society. While ‘smelly old bum’ had been rejected, the deeper level of what homelessness actually was, how it comes about and the complex dynamics of any group, let alone a group of street people, had not yet come about due to insufficient experience. Through no fault of their own many students still viewed the homeless as an ‘out-group’ and hence tended to make individual attributions from their surface experience and perceptions (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19). The students were in the process of relationship formation with the homeless [and with one another], and in the early stages of the reflection process.

At times the student perceptions of different facets of the experience brought out their lack of awareness of the true nature of homelessness, and an ego-driven reaction to the presenting data from the homeless. A person’s ability to make observations in the community is limited by the conceptual tools available to them in their daily life (Cone & Harris, 1996). This can be problematic if they [the students] are simply drawing upon stereotypes and prejudiced perspectives as they reflect (Dunlap et al, 2007).

Perception is affected by such things as the amount of material being considered, the conditions under which the perceptions take place, prior knowledge of the perceiver and the perceiver’s beliefs, interpretations, inferences, assumptions and intentions. (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 35)

In this case some students were still locked into a charity model of helping these “helpless victims of society”. As they experienced the homeless as articulate and having

no obvious reason for being on the street, a degree of intolerance presented itself in some participants, suggesting that the homeless “do not have anything in common with us”, “looking for excuses is not good enough” and that “I won’t get bored on the van but I think I will get a bit sick of them talking about topics that I really detest”. The students in these reflections were using ‘out-group’ and ‘other-ness’ language typical of pre-normalisation (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000).

At the early stages of the program the ideology and theology were still very much just theory, and in many cases students were as yet unable to link it to the reality they were experiencing. In the learning process students may often need to see a reason linking theory and practice before they take it seriously and allow it to become part of their new framework for experience. The ‘why’ of good reflection experiences, whether by journaling or Focus Group discussion, informed by a strong ideology, had still not had time to nourish deeper and more valid awareness and understanding.

Thought is not begotten by thought; it is engendered by emotion, ie, by your desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency, which holds the answer to the last “why” in the analysis of thinking. (Vygotsky, p. 252, in Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62)

At the early stages of the program, the ideological ramifications of what the students were attempting to do and be was not yet a reality for the participants. However as they began to use the skills associated with guest and presence, many students became aware of some sort of quasi-agency: the bridge to personalisation and in the context of pre-program motivation a chance to ‘make a difference.’ While most of the students found their initial contact with the homeless difficult, they quickly gained self confidence and the ability to connect with people quite different to anyone they had previously met. The following reflection of Ben Pincus is typical of the normalisation stage of engagement in Service Learning.

I remember feeling good when, the second or third time out, I began to leave immediately to talk to the homeless. I felt good having overcome a bit of my shyness. I’ve gotten to know a few streeties as well, such as Jack, whose father died and mother left him when he was at Uni. He’s a joking kind of guy, who’s good fun to talk to, sometimes, however, his speaking is hard to understand. By getting to know the actual situation of real people who come to the van, it’s been real life learning on a subject I’ve found is often very misunderstood, as well as just developing a few good friendships. (BP, EX, 6)

The acquisition of skills that facilitated a deeper connection with the homeless was almost a passport to a deeper experience of the homeless community. In time this

increased, and a more sensitive ability to connect lead some of the students to deeper insights regarding community, our shared humanity and the value of reciprocity.

They kind of look at us – like we are going out there trying to see them as people, and then they start looking at us the same way that they would look at anyone else – just like a friend – there is a guy out on my morning the other day – with Maori appearance and I was wearing an Australian Rugby jersey and we started joking around with that and um, he says to Mr. Connell who was also wearing an All Blacks jersey – “I reckon we should burn this blokes jersey”. And Um – I thought– don’t start a fight – aussies outnumbered kiwis about ten to one here .... We had a bit of fun with it all – they start looking at us as mates and not just as people there helping them. (JM, FG, 23.5)

Many of the students had quite stereotypical expectations and images stored in their Semantic Memory regarding connection with more difficult homeless people, especially those with a mental illness or younger Indigenous people. The reflection processes and ideological skills gave the students an effective means of engaging with more difficult people and situations. After gaining the confidence to talk to ‘easier’ people, the students were challenged by program mentors to move out of their comfort zone and connect with the wider van population. By doing so the students felt that they now had the skills to approach almost anyone that they met regardless of the social situation be it with their peers at school or with the homeless at the van site. By making deliberate choices to connect with more ‘difficult’ people, the students were going past their comfort zone to experience a more complete picture of urban homelessness. Even the experience of now having diverse experiences of homeless people from friendly to grumpy, aggressive to welcoming, irrational to sullen, gave the students real people to engage their conceptualization.

The more that I talk to people though, it seems the harder it is to keep pushing myself out of my comfort zone to talk to new people or people away by themselves. This is because I made myself a comfort zone by talking to people easy to get along with and it was hard to keep pushing this to extend to more people. (AM, EX, 6)

As the participant’s conscious awareness of the experience grew, and the various facets of the sub-culture of urban homelessness became more apparent, the students began to be aware of the importance of gatekeepers. The gatekeepers played an accordion role for the students in that they provided both relationship and insight that allowed the participants to expand their prior worldview and concept map. These quasi organizers of Eddie’s Van virtually run the barbecue: telling the team where to set up, how to load up the van, how to cook the eggs etc. These people were important and a link into the world of the homeless and a welcoming face for people a little unsure and sometimes scared.

There is Harry, he is really easy to talk to just by the van. He helps out and fixes up the BBQ and all that. He hangs out just by the BBQ and he will talk to us all and to the teachers. The first time I met Harry he said that he had been going to Eddie’s Van ever since it had been started and that he knew Mr. Smith and Mr. O’Brien and all the teachers. I introduced myself to him and he talked

away and we talked about the sausages and all of that. Small talk like that the first time but the second time I felt we really connected. (NM, FG, 16.2)

In time, these homeless individuals would feature more and more in student reflections as they took on a vital role in taking student reflection to a deeper level. They became gatekeepers to deeper meaning, to the subtle layers of homelessness, to interpreting the signs and symbols of this sub-culture and in doing so personified and helped facilitate the breakdown from charity to true relationship. However, the gatekeepers, while a rich part of the student experience, may have given the students an incomplete or biased perspective and experience.

The accordion effect, based on reflective judgment, takes effect when “pre-existing mental models are no longer validated by experiential input” (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 43). As a result of the accordion effect, learners reflect imaginatively on service events in order to devise durable ways to represent and store the new information in Semantic Memory. As a result students readily noted the observations of these gatekeepers: their little comments about the ‘pecking order’ within the homeless community, who is really homeless in their eyes and who was not, led to more accommodated learning. The participant’s expectations and images, broadened by the gatekeepers, in time were confirmed through the students own experience. The data from the gatekeepers, “This morning was a good experience because I learnt how some homeless people perceive others who they believe are not as homeless”, and “I learnt a lot about how homeless think of other homeless people, how they think there are levels of homelessness and homeless people” (DJ, 3), in time was ‘confirmed’ by the students’ own experience and added to a more complete and realistic picture of the sub-culture.

One of the first bridges to a deeper sense of the whole van experience, was the growing realization the students had that there was a high degree of community among the homeless. This was important as it was the seed for a growing awareness that perhaps these people had something to offer them [the students], that they were not victims, that there was more to this experience than what they first thought and felt. This growing identification of community was disorientating and surprising; it was a mismatch to their expectation and hence an opportunity for new learning to take place. In his reflection from the third month of the program Ben could sense the community “even without us”, and that perhaps this may have something to do with why the people were attracted to

the van. This feeling response was the gateway for deeper knowing and a revision of prior mind maps and concepts.

You know, when you are talking to them and you say, "Do you know this guy or who do you know here?" They know the others. This morning I sensed there was a real community among them, a real community even without us. While the van was there it was just the reason to gather at that spot. (BP, FG, 17.3)

Dan Dawson was able to identify that what appeared to be central to this concept of community was the need to feel valued and important; a need provided in the context of community beyond a cooked breakfast.

By coming to the Brekky Van they feel important – when they are on the street and no one talks to them and they are ignored they don't feel important, they feel like crap, where as at Eddie's Van they feel important (DD, FG, 15.6).

### **6.3.3 Establishment of relationship**

The beginnings of the shift in student consciousness from charity to respectful relationship, and in some cases change, especially when the reciprocal nature of true relationship began to appear in the student reflections upon their experience appeared towards the end of the program. Much of this shift was linked to the progression from seeing the homeless as an 'out-group', to the pre-personalisation of an 'in-group' they were engaged with. This shift was linked to an increasing resolution of much of the dissonance experienced early in the program. The program's ideological approach increasingly made sense to the students, and more students were reporting matches between their experiences of relationship and the ideals of the program. The role of the program mentors was to continually invite the students beyond a 'nice', charity-driven mindset, to reciprocal and respectful relationship.

The building of reciprocal and respectful relationships with the homeless is consistent with Kahne and Westheimer's challenge to the Service Learning community: "In the service of what?" As their relationships with the homeless deepened and the effects of the Social Analysis input in the classroom came into effect, the students began to see their involvement past altruism and giving,

aware of the contributions that they could make toward helping others, to caring and change. Service Learning Programs need to ask; "What values do Service Learning curricula model and seek to promote? What kinds of social and political relations do they ask students to imagine? What kinds of relationships develop between students and those they serve? What kind of society does Service Learning lead students to work toward?" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 592)

Holy Family's Service Learning Program centres on the kind of relationship developed between students and the homeless, that through classroom Social Analysis and reflection hopes to lead students to ask in a more realistic and respectful way 'why' with regards to homelessness. James Gofton in this journal entry began to appreciate that his volunteering on the van was not all about 'doing something for others'. In this reflection James came to an awareness of some degree of reciprocity. He sees the van as being about relationship, identifies that he gets more from the experience at times than do the homeless, notes his experience of acceptance and finally that it is often they who cheer him up. A distant journey from where so many of the students in the program began in January.

The best part about the van is being able to do something for people and making relationships that are very insightful. The best part about the morning is the sense of community that is experienced by a group of people on a rainy, windy morning when it's freezing cold. It's amazing how dedicated people are, both the students and the people that come to the van. I have felt most valued when a man constantly complimented me about my manner and how I approach life. I think I have gotten more out of our relationship than he has; which is incredible when you compare our circumstances. The most recent time I went out I spent the whole morning talking to two guys who seemed to be really good friends. They just accepted me for who I was. Sometimes the people out there are really good at cheering people up. (JG, EX, 6)

The reflection data from the Reframing and Disillusionment Phases provided the key material for an examination of student experience, as they moved into relationship and a more genuine experience of the world of the homeless. Initially the students had to reject some of their prior perceptions and mind maps and replace them with more informed observation and reflection. This is an important part of normalisation and much of the input from the Academic Framework Experience now began to make sense; it now had a real context to be analysed in. Having more experience, the students were now able to engage in reflection and discussion that questioned elements of the total van experience from some point of personal authority and experience. While still not complete, their discussions and reflections were to some extent based on their experience as well as values and attitudes brought to the van experience from pre-program mind maps.

The data from the Disillusionment phase was of particular importance as it moved students past any honeymoon experience and forced new insights. Again, had the program concluded at this point, leaving students with unanswered questions based upon partial knowledge and experience, it is questionable how valuable it would be both to the student and to the homeless. The energy of the Disillusionment phase with its questioning of prior beliefs and engagement with new attitudes, was the beginning of

real transformative learning. Experiential theorists and Service Learning practitioners (Kolb, 1984; Cone & Harris, 1996; Jarvis, 2004; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000; Sheckley & Keeton, 1997; Seider, 2007; Dunlap, 2007) agree that a period of surprise, disequilibrium, shock or cognitive dissonance is important for learning to occur. Transformative learning requires the student to question the foundations and prior learning that went into the formation of a given belief; to consider whether a given belief came about as a result of concepts tacitly accepted or as the result of a deliberate thought process. The trigger events associated with surprise, disequilibrium, shock or cognitive dissonance may lead to assimilation where “negative and inaccurate stereotypes and prejudices are maintained or reinforced” (Dunlap et al. 2007, p. 20), if not reflected upon with the assistance of a facilitator or mentor. This may well have been the case where some students reacted to the “hypocrisy” of the homeless telling them of the importance of finishing school and getting a job, where students reacted to “well dressed and articulate” people not attempting to find work and when some of the homeless were fussy about the food they were receiving.

However, if processed over time these same events or emotional reactions may lead to much deeper awareness and learning as worldviews are modified and expanded. The accommodation of new insights and awareness into mind-maps, may have an accordion effect where deeper cognitive processing leads to concepts being questioned and revised (Dunlap et al, 2007, p.20). From these processes, resolution, sometimes partially and sometimes in a more complete sense occurs if there is the active presence of a mentor or the reflection processes are mature.

The processes outlined above in relation to dissonance did not only occur individually. Much of the disequilibrium and dissonance was articulated and identified in the communal context of the Focus Group. Here the interaction and working through of reactions and concepts, often in the light of an alternatively expressed view, led to modification of worldviews (Seider, 2005). In some cases this did not happen and in the context of the dynamics of the group, prior beliefs and stereotypes were enhanced. As the participants were still adolescents, the impact of the peer group upon the dynamics of Focus Groups in particular was important to consider. Some of the rigorous Focus Group discussion may well have been ‘playing up to the group’ and some student attitudes may have been influenced by group thinking. Nevertheless the beginnings of



deeper relationships with the homeless and the parallel reflective journaling and Focus Group discussion were laying the grounds for the beginnings of transformative learning.

It was often from the strong discussions in the Focus Groups that students came to be able to express, in their own words, a deeper understanding of the purpose of the van and how it was in keeping with the ideology of Holy Family College. Hubbs and Brand see the value of this type of reflection in providing a conversation, a forum for students to interact among themselves and through feedback beliefs and reflections evolve. This inherently social process provides the writer [in the case of a class interactive team journal] or speaker [in the case of a Focus Group style reflection] an opportunity for testing beliefs and assumptions; a sounding board that allows students to examine values, concepts, and issues beyond their personal filters (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 67). In the ebb and flow of the Focus Group dialogue, the student is 'thinking aloud' and often during an intervention will shift, alter or confirm a view or belief, sometimes in a very subtle way.

In their day-to-day experience the students struggled to relate in a significant way with the Indigenous population that they met at the van. For the majority of the students this was their first direct contact with Indigenous people. The Indigenous community presented as a significant 'out-group' (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000) for the Holy Family students. The younger Indigenous people who came to the van presented quite differently to many of the other homeless, in that they kept to themselves and generally did not respond to prompts for conversation. While Ryan could identify that he was quick to label the Aboriginal youth, he was beginning to experience change as some degree of personalisation of the Indigenous community developed.

It's very easy to, like when you're in our position, to sort of judge them, and really easy to label them, its whatever you feel like, like with the Aboriginal kids but, if you actually experienced it, like, seeing them up front, and talk to them, it just changes your mind completely. And it's a lot harder to label them that way. It's like you're receiving; like justice. (RZ, FG, 17.3)

While their ability to connect with the Indigenous youth of their own age did change a little over time, it was only a slight change. The students however connected well with some of the older Indigenous people who tended to be on their own and were real characters: Uncle John, Auntie Annette, Uncle Bob and others. These connections were important for youth from an elite private school, as they were both crossing a taboo: talking to Indigenous people, and facing a significant fear, given their prior stereotypes of

Indigenous people. If the older Indigenous people had not been present at the van site, there is a danger that many of the students may have assimilated their experience of this community into their mind maps. The younger Aboriginal youth were not easy to connect with and did not appear to want any connection. This may very well have reinforced their prior stereotypes. The interactions with Uncle John and the others proved to be a positive trigger event, and eventually led to new and transformative learning for many. In facing their fears of engaging with Indigenous people the students were in the very middle of

the iterative process of examining the belief, testing it, and exploring alternatives to the belief resulting in transformative learning where the learner is ultimately changed, or 'transformed' through the process. Thus the learner's prior patterns of thinking would ultimately grow and change, or 'transform'. (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 63)

It would be naïve to believe that the attitudes of Holy Family students to Indigenous people would have been totally transformed through their van experience but important, non-romantic steps forward took place. Non-romantic, in that the relationships with Auntie Annette, Uncle John and others were hardly easy, comfortable, clinical or nice, but earthy with real ups and downs. The Focus Group discussions and the student journaling in this area were particularly important in illuminating "automatic thinking and habits of mind" especially when guided by the instructor, the teacher or facilitator of mediated learning as suggested by the Lens Model.

The students quickly learned that knowing people's names was important for the building of relationship and trust and ultimately for community. Personalisation is a key step in experience bridging the gap between theory and practice, prejudice and story, stereotype and reality (Green, 2006; Pracht, 2007, Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, Dunlap et al, 2007; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). There was a tangible sense of excitement among the students as they got to know particular names, and as those people welcomed them and in turn called them by name. For young adolescent men to be known by name by significant adults is important in their identity growth and sense of self. To an extent these same homeless individuals took up the role of mentor or facilitator so that a deeper awareness of the world of the homeless occurred for the students: an extension of the Cone and Harris model. As they got to know the names of more individuals at the van site, the increased personalisation became a conduit for reconceptualisations that included the sense of van community.

Another reconceptualisation was around 'story'. Many of the students had initially seen 'story' as a concept linked to an 'out-group' and hence for some, the gaining of information in an intrusive way. While this was understandable and may have been linked to a nervous need to 'do' something or to 'find something out', it may have kept some students confirmed in an 'us-them' modality. However others were able to engage with 'story' as a key element of relationship and in time, of friendship. As the story flowed from the relationship and did so more naturally, it became an important vehicle to take the students from viewing the homeless as an 'out-group' to an 'in-group'.

Just as 'story' in time became a vehicle for engagement at a deeper level, and resolution of dissonance and disequilibrium through student growth in understanding, so too did the ideology of the program become a conduit for deeper meaning. The relationship dynamics had changed to the point that the often-discussed skills of presence and guest had become more real and user-friendly. For some students these skills had become part of their mindset and so were unconsciously used; part of their Semantic Memory. By doing so the ideological approach of the program had become a conduit where by their expectations for the experiences they would have with the homeless were confirmed. This freed up cognitive resources for other 'insights': the presence of community, reciprocity, a deeper sense of story and the true purpose of the van (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 40).

The breaking open of strongly held cognitive-affective templates stored in the Semantic Memory is not easy. The stereotypes, expectations and images with which a student enters a Service Learning Program, have been developed and 'confirmed' by family, the media and peer group for a long period of time. As the Reframing Phase gave way to Awareness and Agency, some students still saw the ideology of the program as theory. Some were still seeing their role as 'helping the poor' or 'reaching out to those in need', and that the breakfast was their way of doing this. Through their journaling and Focus Group discussion, the genesis of a deeper awareness was beginning to appear. Their growing sense of 'community' proved to be the catalyst for this. As they engaged with the homeless and built relationships their construct map was being stretched. This accordion effect allowed for greater accommodation and less assimilation. In time the students would come to see that many of the homeless did not come to the van for the breakfast, but rather for community, the sense of belonging and welcome. This growing

awareness of community was important as it was not present in any of the student entry journals or in their expressed hopes or fears; it was a complete surprise.

The most enjoyable part of the van has been the willingness of the streeties to have a good conversation. I've found that to be a big reason why they would want to come to the van. The highlight has been my most recent morning. Each week I feel more at home with the people, as I get to know those in the community better. This was especially evident on my most recent morning, as I found myself saying hi to the majority of those who'd come to the van, knowing their name, and knowing a bit about each of them. I felt a sense of brotherhood and community, as I'd become almost part of the community. This is a really good feeling, and I think it's because of the way the Eddie's van works, in that it means we don't only provide food and clothing, but company. Doing Eddie's van for two whole terms means we'd see the van-goers enough not to forget them. (BP, EX, 6)

Another surprise for many students that came into awareness through their reflections were the reasons the participants remained involved in the program, especially during the winter months and as exams came closer.

#### **6.3.4 Meaning and significance: links and connections**

As many of the students entered the Awareness and Agency Phases of their experience, they began to reflect on 'why' they continued to be involved with the program. Many students had by now deeply personalised the homeless (Green, 2006) they were meeting each day. The students were generally now quite engaged with the experience of the service site, and in most cases had come to a point of resolution of the shock, disequilibrium and dissonance that had affected their earlier experience. Some students had responded with assimilation or partial assimilation of their experience, while most had moved to an accommodation of experience (Seider, 2007). This led to at least a modification of worldview. Tom Higgins' response indicated a deeper awareness of the nature of his relationship with the homeless and the growing sense of the reciprocal nature of this relationship.

I continue to do Eddie's Van because I have made lots of friends on it and it is fun to just talk to them; especially when coming from a place [Holy Family] where everyone judges you. They don't judge you. (TH, DJ, 8)

The differing levels of meaning that the participants associated with their reflected experience began to become clearer towards the end of the program. While Tom continued in the program aware of a growing sense of reciprocity, Zach O'Shea expressed his continued involvement in terms of agency; "I continue to be involved because I enjoy the short time I spend there; I get a sense of being wanted and I feel valued. I also get enjoyment out of them saying thank you as I feel as if I have helped them in some way" (ZO, DJ, 8).

Tom's and Zach's reflections suggest that there was a wide variance in how new learning was accommodated into student worldviews. In each situation, while change occurred and world views broadened, and concepts challenged and modified, how this happened and to what extent appeared to depend upon family and other external factors. In the following extract from a Focus Group, Chris is beginning to find deeper meaning and significance in his interactions with the homeless. While the students are growing in awareness of the dynamics of relationship, most have still not reached a point of reciprocity. The relationship is still basically 'for' the homeless person from their sense of agency. For Chris the program was not just a matter of ticking a box regarding some school based co-curricular thing, or a sense of moral obligation, but rather was personal, relational and respectful.

Well with what Sean is saying - you can give someone their basic needs - you can give them food and water and shelter and stuff - but if you do it in an impersonal way - a morally superior way - you are not respecting their dignity - you are not truly valuing the person - in addition to just helping the person - when you listen to someone - talk to them - you make them feel that who they are and what they have to say - is valuable kind of thing. (CH, FG, 3.5)

While Tom, Zach and Chris have all moved beyond a patronizing or charity-based approach to their van service, each has responded differently. Tom's response is quite personal and based upon perceived friendship. Zach is valuing his growing sense of compassion and agency, while Chris is conscious of the importance of how he approaches what he does. Given the relative homogeneous nature of their experience, the focus group discussions and the journaling, these differences may be explained by personality and family factors.

The ideology of the program stressed from the outset that each student must come to the service site as a guest in the lives of the homeless, being deeply present to them and respectful of their innate dignity. This ideology complimented the Social Analysis work dealt with in the Academic Framework Experience. Social Analysis enabled the students to understand more of the 'why' of homelessness, and the complex web of psychological and social reasons for many of the people with being 'on the streets'. The Service Learning Program of Holy Family was orientated to lead students towards change and not just charity. Over time this approach led to students' experiencing an accordion effect on their meaning-making as they too were 'touched' and effected by the program. This approach reflects the findings of Fenzel and Leary who found that

students involved in direct relationship with marginalized people over an extended period of time showed “an attitude of compassion for the disenfranchised of society, a greater level of commitment to wanting to work in their communities to help solve social problems and a stronger belief that they could make a difference” (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p.9).

While the Holy Family students were increasingly aware of the deeper nature of mental illness, and the part it played in the web of complicated factors that resulted in homelessness, they were increasingly aware of limits to their involvement. This was an important change for the students. For many of the students the giving facet of their worldview would have been boundless. The idealism with which they had begun the program was now tempered by both reality and the sociological input in the classroom. Limits, as such, are not ‘natural’ for the identity-forming adolescent; they want to do everything and believe they can do everything. This growth in perception that harnessed their energy and idealism, channelling it into a realistic assessment of what they could do displayed a deeper level of self awareness. Some students were aware that while they could not enact long term change in the circumstances of the homeless, they became aware that their own growth in empathy, people skills and compassion did add to the quality of life for the homeless. While reflecting on his relationship with Bruce, a homeless man living on the Goodwill Bridge (see quote page 150), Matthew Quinn came to a point where he realised that relatively small incidents can be the catalyst to someone ending up ‘on the streets.’ Matthew had moved past initial stereotypes and was now growing in awareness of how subtle and simple the reasons for homelessness may be. In doing so Matthew has moved to a deeper point of empathy, awareness and introspection where ‘Bruce’ could easily be him. Not only was Matthew able to reflect on very subtle cause and effect elements, but he came to a point of his own personal agency where his ‘role’ was neither to find Bruce a job nor to teach him coping skills, but to be a supportive presence.

An important event that assisted in the process of internalizing the power and importance of respectful and reciprocal relationships, was how student’s reflected on the role and relationship that City Council workers and other ‘professionals’ had with the homeless. Several times during the program Health Professionals, Social Workers and University students visited the van site and the students noted the difference in their

approach and the reaction of the homeless to them. To the students, the Health workers and others were 'outsiders' who were merely doing a job, whereas they valued the intimacy of the homeless as they shared with them how they [the Holy Family students] were different, were their friends and were welcome among them. The student progression to seeing themselves, in a relational sense, as an 'in-group' with the homeless was assisted by the presence of this obvious 'out-group' (Dunlap et al, 2007).

there was this guy who was not talking about us being do gooders but the Council people – the Government people – he was telling us how much he hated them. Because it is all just for show – they just come and come occasionally and don't do much. (CC, FG, 26.5)

This reflection comparing the role of the students to the Council Workers, while probably quite unfair, was a catalyst for them to grow in their awareness of the role of Eddie's Van. The Council Workers and other professionals were often working out of a different ideological model and had a more functional role in the life of the homeless. Their presence gave the students another reality to compare their actions to, and led to a deeper understanding of the purpose of the program. Again each student came to their own realization of what the program aimed to achieve in their own time. While their efforts were admirable, the perception of their role and the role of Eddie's Van hooked into their adolescent ego and desire for competition when they compared themselves with the Council Workers.

Over time there was a real engagement with the ideology of the program and interpreting what differing facets of the ideology meant for each student. The process of 'owning' and understanding the true purpose of the program and how each person came to this point in their own time and own way, was highlighted by Focus Group discussions about the nature of their interactions with the homeless. Some participants had unconsciously entered the program, seeing it as therapy and change, while others had seen it as a charity: they were there to feed the homeless or to help them get off the streets. At times in the same Focus Group discussion, different levels of transcendence were expressed by different participants, different interpretations of conversations with the homeless, different mindsets and possibly different understandings and levels of ownership of the theology and ideology of the program. What may have been disconfirming data for one participant was confirming for another. What one was surprised at, another saw as confirmation of an expectation held in Semantic memory. At times differences of opinion in focus group discussions were more the articulation of

'out-group' and 'in-group' thinking with its associated attribution. Other focus group debate mirrored the tension between those who had assimilated the data from their experience, compared to those seeking some form of accommodation. At other times focus group 'debate' was simply ego clashes between sixteen year old males in a boys' school.

The debates and discussions within focus groups aided by the facilitator provided a means for grappling with difficult concepts. Through personal articulation of their beliefs 'in process' and listening to others express their views, the students were clarifying for themselves just what they were trying to do and be in their relationship with the homeless. Discussions such as 'Why do we need to know their story?' and 'Who benefits from the van?' were valuable in giving the participants time and space to shift through their own beliefs and thinking. Testing the compatibility between one's lived experience and what is held in Semantic Memory is a process where the outcome is rarely black and white. The discussion in itself, with its questioning and debate, was important in moving 'automatic thinking' and 'preconceptions' on, and in doing so, raise awareness of prejudice and defensiveness. Regardless of how each person saw the concept of 'story' or 'benefit' or 'purpose of the van', the reflections pointed to the need to more deeply develop these elements of the program's ideology in the Academic Framework Experience to assist the students in their understanding of the concepts.

At times the processes of transformational learning, the tension between assimilation and accommodation, and conduit and accordion effects were limited by weaknesses in concept development during the Academic Framework Experience. The concept of 'story' was one such instance. Some students were confused and unsure as to what was meant by 'getting to know their story'. Another difficulty students wrestled with was a real understanding and appreciation of mental illness. One of the key differentiating factors in understanding homelessness, especially in an Australian context, is the factor of mental illness. Given the relatively comprehensive nature of Australia's Social Security system few people find themselves on the streets through necessity. Most people who are living on the streets are doing so as a result of the effects of mental illness often linked to substance abuse, violence or other key elements of the poverty cycle. Awareness of mental illness was important as it was a key filter that students needed to truly understand the presenting data from the homeless. The rational response "This person



is articulate, well dressed, well educated and has wonderful people skills so why are they living in this park?" could only be truly balanced and understood as one grew in awareness of mental illness and how it presented itself. Several students struggled to come to grips with this, and were looking for the more obvious presenting data like hallucinations or manic behaviours. Particular issues, such as the nature of mental illness and its effects, were potentially more able to move participants towards an increased accommodation based on a greater understanding of just why some of the homeless acted the way they did.

The subtle effects of Mental Illness, where by many homeless spend huge amounts of time on their own with their own thoughts, were not picked up by some of the students at first. They reacted to the strongly expressed opinions of the homeless and they could not see why apparently 'normal' people were not in employment. The internal-individual attribution by some of the students kept the homeless as an 'out-group' (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). When taken at face value comments like "They tend to be violent in the way that they are violent in speaking especially politics", "I'm a bit sceptical about these people at times, I think that some of what they talk about is complete rubbish", "some of what they say just does not add up" and "they seem to be hypocritical in discussion telling you to do something that they don't", were natural reactions if associated with relatively rational people. When looked at through an awareness of paranoia, depression and different forms of mania they paint a very different picture that most of the students came to by the end of the program. This discussion points to the importance of program mentors guiding students past an assimilation of their experience that may confirm prior stereotype or prejudice to an expanded, accommodated worldview. While some students remained locked in prior stereotype expectations of the homeless, others moved to a point where the truth or not of what the homeless were saying to them did not matter. Some so accommodated an expanded world view linked to mental illness, that they were able to respect the dignity of the person and not react to 'negative' responses from the homeless that they ultimately sensed were linked to mental illness. When Alex reflected that "we are not supposed to be going there to believe what these people are saying or not" (AMcK, FG, 2.3), he had come a point of valuing his presence to the homeless and had no need to critique or rationalise their response to him.

One area where the conceptualisation from the Academic Framework Experience was very effective in providing strong cognitive maps for experience to be made sense, of was in the area of 'their turf'. The extensive input around 'coming as guest' and 'being deeply present' meant that many students were able to see that the van – in a psychological sense – belonged to the homeless, and that when they were present at the van site they were on the homeless' turf, in their living room. This was an important change and insight, as adolescent young men are very competitive and the students of Holy Family have a very strong and proud association and identification with their school. They began the program embracing Eddie's Van as 'theirs', but in time began to see that even the van itself and the program were 'guests' in the world of the homeless; quite a mature insight. This insight had an accordion effect on the conceptualisation of some of the students who had moved beyond assimilation to accommodation. This expansion of their worldview now allowed for the letting go of a need to see Eddie's Van as theirs.

As the program drew to a conclusion, student reflections made mention of taking in data through 'sensing' or 'gut feelings' more and more. In so doing the students were not reacting to or interpreting the presenting objective data but looking for the meaning behind it. Much of the classroom work of Social Analysis centred on causal relationships linked with homelessness, and this led to an increasing attitude from the students that sensed that each homeless person had their own unique story. This 'sensing' suggests an expansion of both concepts and worldview past immediate, surface data. The students began to approach individual homeless people and just as 'coming as guest' and 'being present' had now become tacitly part of what they did, or tried to do, so they now came with an inbuilt sense of story – sensing story beyond the biography.

### **6.3.5 Past 'why' to acceptance**

The maturation of experience that each student reached towards the end of their six months on the program resulted in students reaching many conclusions and resolutions. Many students were aware of changed world views, of reconceptualisation, of accommodation of new knowledge and of genuine personal change. Much of the structural analysis, the cause and effect discussions that had been central or the second and third Focus Groups gave way in the final Focus Group discussions to an awareness

of learnings. Terms such as 'community', 'their turf', 'trapped' and associated 'in-group' or Structural Attribution mindsets, began to take over from the early program 'out-group' thinking. Many of the reflections late in the program had a theme of 'acceptance' about them.

One element of this acceptance was the naming that perhaps some of the homeless could not get off the streets and that psychologically it was safer for them to be where they were. This was an important insight that suggested that some of the participants had so taken into themselves the theology of the program, sense of story and awareness of mental illness that a new level of responding to the presence of the homeless on the streets emerged. It was no longer their fault. It was no longer an issue of laziness or a simple matter of picking up a phone and reconnecting, but a deeper psychological state and perhaps dependency. This process of discarding individual attributions in favour of structural ones was evidence of worldview change; from 'out group' to 'in-group' (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000). Many students had entered the program with strong stereotypes which included individual attributions that saw many of the homeless as "lacking drive or effort". These same students now were able to name an element of mental illness that could see the dependency of some of the homeless on the 'security' of this lifestyle.

The Academic Framework associated with Social Analysis looked at the poverty cycle, the cause and effect of mental illness and substance abuse and ability to handle stress. Guest speakers shared with the students about the complex web of relationships and factors that led to one being on the streets. Several students found that the 'penny really dropped' when they worked on the night van and saw yet another piece of the jigsaw puzzle of homelessness. Students in the Fenzel and Leary study identified the importance of "higher order learning, an integration of experience and philosophy and an application of theoretical principles to real-life situations" (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 11). Some of the best analysis began to take place towards the end of the program when the students began to feel that there was no longer an us versus them dynamic [out-group] in conversations. They could now just come up to a group of homeless people having a conversation and join in with the conversation hardly changing. Often the students only became aware of this 'ease' in conversation when they were journaling. This acceptance

increased and gave another facet to the students' sense of agency but only some were able to see the reciprocal nature of this.

But just as regards what they think of us – when we are talking to them I don't think they think these guys are from such and such place and they are such and such age and they try and do this – when they are talking to us they are quite deep in conversation, they are just talking to us as if we were another person – just a mate – but maybe if they sat down and thought about it they would see us as an outside influence or experience – but when we are talking to them – just as someone to talk to – we are just someone there for them. (ME, FG, 23.5)

While the sense of acceptance and community was strongly expressed and felt by most students, very few were able to identify the reciprocal nature of this. Myles' comment above, while identifying that the relationships with the homeless were beyond labels, [from the point of view of the homeless] and was just “as if we were another person – just a mate” he, and most of his peers, were unable to identify any reciprocity in the relationship. Perhaps many of the concepts that had been accommodated earlier in the program such as ‘presence’ and ‘guest’ had in time led to a conduit effect. Perhaps the learners found themselves so expecting ‘guest’, ‘presence’, ‘friendship’, ‘acceptance’, ‘welcome’ and ‘community’ that these were the “attributes of the experience to which the they were paying attention”. By so doing, the students' ability to stretch their world view even further to a deeper awareness of the gift the homeless had become for them was lacking.

### **6.3.6 Growing sense of Agency**

It is clear that “service within the context of a clear ideological framework can nurture adolescents' emerging identities” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 78) especially in the students' belief that they can ‘make a difference’. Adolescents need to feel needed and this need was strongly met by this program. Many of the homeless articulated their appreciation for what the students were doing and the students valued this. The final phase that all students experienced in service was that of Agency: a sense that they were making a difference. As stated earlier, each student experienced the program and reacted to the elements of the program in their own way and experienced the differing phases of the experience in their own time. While all of the participants experienced a sense of agency they did so at different levels of awareness that placed them along a continuum from charity to change. For some the van experience stayed at the level of “doing my bit for the homeless”.

The things I have enjoyed about the van is the small sense of “achievement” or the feeling that you have done something good after you have come off the van. I don’t mean to say that in a sense of loud mouthing myself or being a big noter but you do feel like you have done something good after you have finished the van of a morning. (BS, EX, 6)

While Ben’s reflection would have assisted his growth in personal identity, it had social identity implications for “social identity is based on employing one’s agency collaboratively in constructing a better world” (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 24). A strong link now existed between the students’ sense that they had made a difference and the concepts and ideology of the program. Where as they had begun the program to “give back to the community”, “get more involved”, “do my bit” and “wanted to help others less fortunate than me”, their sense of what ‘that bit’ was had changed. Providing a hot breakfast early in the morning had become secondary to being part of a community, building friendship and being aware of ‘story’. Not only that but many students by the time of their Exit Journals, were reflecting that this change was giving them great satisfaction and meaning. In their Exit Journal reflections, many of the students expressed a great deal of satisfaction in having been involved in building community. Certainly one of the biggest changes expressed was in relation to the questions of why they stay involved in the program and were so faithful to it. The concept of ‘doing my bit’ was hardly mentioned here, while the quality of relationship, the fun and the sense of community were all important. The motivational energy had moved on from ‘doing my bit’ to a sense of the value of the relationship in itself; a deep tacit knowing of the true nature of the program.

During Focus Group discussion early in the program, most students had reflected that getting to know their peers was not important and that their effort and energy was solely centred on the homeless. While the focus of effort did not change from serving the homeless, towards the end of the program many journaling reflections made reference to the sense of community among the team. The students valued being part of a team that was ‘making a difference’; they were not working alone.

Not only were they not working alone but they were sharing a common ideology; firstly that of the program and then as students of Holy Family as an Edmund Rice school in the Catholic tradition. Whether the students ‘heard’ these terms with the faith nuances that adults charged with nurturing ethos and charism might, in one way was irrelevant as their ‘doing for others’ was now a ‘doing for others with others’ and that was what

mattered. This sense of shared doing gave the students an ego strength that they could not have achieved on their own. Not only were the students 'doing' or serving collectively but they shared about 'guest' and 'presence' collectively. Some of the most passionate Focus Group discussions centred on recalling times of 'guest' and 'presence' linked to associated names and stories. By working at this [industry] the students were "choosing an ideology and working to bring it to fruition" and in so doing were moving the identity process forward (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 24). Towards the end of the program there was a quite genuine pride that not only had they made a difference personally but collectively. The fact that the participants had remained in the same team for the entirety of the program and participated in Focus Groups with those team members, meant that they had a collective sense of both industry and agency. Even the fact that the majority of students had attended their van commitments for the majority of the time was important as this gave a sense of 'team industry'. The team and the individuals in it had made a commitment and honoured it.

Erikson predicates social identity on industry, or being able to achieve desired outcomes through one's actions. Actions that count have effects on the social domain and allow the individual to sustain relationships with other persons and social institutions. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 26)

Much has been made in this thesis of the concept of reciprocity. Reciprocity, the sense that any giving is truly a 'two way street'; that the giver in giving, receives. This concept was an important element of the program's ideology and is implied in the more overt behaviours associated with 'guest' and 'presence'. As the students came to a point of awareness of their own agency, some went deeper to a real sense of the reciprocal nature of this agency. Some could name that while they were providing a service for the homeless "they were giving to me as much as I gave to them" (JG, DJ, 6). Some went beyond any sense of give-and-take to a shared common humanity and sense of brotherhood where reciprocity was implied. However it would appear that the concept of reciprocity is a difficult one for adolescents to identify with, and it was only in the later stages of the program that some students began to name it as part of their conscious experience. Few students expressed ideas around "I have gained much more than I gave" or "the program has benefited me immensely". Only a couple of students expressed these thoughts. When asked by the Focus Group facilitator if they had experienced the homeless "being present to them", the students were readily able to do so, but these reflections did not come naturally in the journaling. The students were being welcomed, were very accepted, did have particular homeless support them when

they were doing it tough on the van, and were very aware of some of the homeless being 'present' to them, listening and being genuinely interested. Despite this, few of the students naturally articulated what they were receiving from the homeless and when asked 'who benefits?' many responded with reflections centred on the benefits to the homeless. While the students were able to articulate that they benefited from increased communication skills and being welcomed and accepted, many struggled to take this appreciation deeper to the level of awareness that they may have had happening to them exactly what they were hoping was happening to the homeless.

Perhaps the strong emphasis on 'giving', on coming as a guest and being servant espoused during the Academic Framework Experience, in itself blocked out thinking associated with reciprocity. The facilitator in several of the Focus Groups asked several questions that were 'suggesting' reciprocity but this was generally not picked up on. Some students from the 300 level theology course in Fenzel and Leary's study indicated "how the people they worked with inspired them with their thankfulness and determination and how people with so little materially, managed to be so strong and committed to living, and to be living in a simple fashion" (Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p. 12). The students in this study were significantly older than the Holy Family students and their reflections suggest more admiration than reciprocity.

Several students did reflect on what they were receiving. Morgan was able to express the great sense of acceptance he felt at the van away from the labels that were placed upon him at school. Myles had a great sense of acceptance too for who he is beyond labels and stereotypes, while Andrew Marchesi wondered "who is giving to whom?" Jack reflected on the concern one of the homeless showed to him the following morning after violence at the night van.

It would be of interest to see if there is any link between this struggle with reciprocity and the struggle the students had with the concept of the innate dignity of people. While some of the students grasped this concept very well indeed many struggled to articulate it. This struggle was especially linked to the struggle some students had with appreciating why people who presented as 'normal' would not be out looking for work or back with their families. Both of these struggles suggest the importance of reflection, the role of a mentor to ask the difficult questions and the ideology to be expressed in ways

that facilitate this movement in attitude. Any link between participant experience, ideology and the concept of reciprocity would be an important area for future research.

Student reflections late in the program would suggest that further work needs to be done in the Academic Framework Experience around forms of political action in an Australian context. Ideally the Holy Family program would hope to graduate future doctors, lawyers, clerics, teachers, carpenters and other professionals with both a social conscience and the skills for political action. If not, there is the danger that these very same students who have served so generously in a program such as Eddie's Van, could in the longer term, be contributing to homelessness for others by their own style of living and other unconscious actions.

When this [staying in a charity model] happens the Status Quo is maintained [that which created the situation in the first place]. No mention of changes that address the structural injustices that leave so many in need. This kind of service runs the risk of being understood as a kind of noblesse oblige a private act of kindness performed by the privileged. This approach cannot warm or nurture our common soul, nor create a sense of common responsibility, nor provide integral solutions to structural problems. (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 596)

In this context though, the intention of the Eddie's Van program was to provide Service Learning beyond charity to change. Perhaps the change that occurred was primarily within the students themselves, within their own identity and value system. This change may in time lead to structural change on a societal level. In attempting to form a "habitual political outlook", the Washington D.C. students in Youniss and Yates' study took three approaches towards agency:

First, some students recognised that the debating of political questions was itself a form of political action ... Secondly, some students argued that working at the kitchen, however small an act this was, constituted a productive political response to homelessness ...and third, many students projected themselves into the future, when they viewed themselves as having more power to affect social change. (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 80)

More needs to be done within the Academic Framework Experience to enhance student's sense of themselves as political agents. There is a real danger that the program, while valuable and one "of kindness and decency", could remain at "the level of raising self esteem and scholastic abilities in real-world contexts" and not be an agent for true citizenship.

Is Citizenship "Acting in a decent way toward people who live where we live" OR "Citizenship in a democratic community requires more than kindness and decency; it requires engagement in complex social and institutional endeavours. Citizenship requires that individuals work to create, evaluate, criticize and change public institutions and programs. Charity stays at the level of raising self esteem and scholastic abilities in real-world contexts, change – will focus on a transformative vision that takes things one step further. For them, it is the combination of service and critical



analysis, not either by itself, that seems most likely to promote interest in and insight into these complex social issues. (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 597)

Over the course of the program the students did grow in their sense of political awareness and responsibility, but saw this as limited given their key responsibilities as school students. Perhaps the program had developed in many students an agency centred on service and not so much a political agency. The classwork element of the program stressed that the key ideology of Holy Family's program was one of presence, and not insertion into, or provision of, programs to break the homelessness cycle. This tension was continually present among the young old boys [alumni] who provided the teams for Eddie's Night van. Alumni, upon returning from the night van experience, would frequently experience frustration at not being able to effect longer term change in the lives of the homeless.

It would be of interest to see if the students' involvement in this program increased their participation in other community service programs before and after graduation (see also Fenzel & Leary, 1997, p.12). In the six month period after the conclusion of this program, 18 of the 52 participants continued working on the new roster, 7 began working on Eddie's night van and 6 volunteered on camps for poor children over their summer holidays [Edmund Rice Camps]. Another 8 volunteered for these camps but could not be placed until later in their senior year. In the year since graduation ten of the fifty-three participants involved themselves with either Edmund Rice Camps or Eddie's night van. Few Holy Family students not involved with the Big Brekky program volunteer for Edmund Rice Camps or the Night Van in the years immediately after graduation.

### **6.3.7 Challenge to personal values**

One of the deeper reflections that many participants came to late in the program was that, despite their best intentions and friendship energy, they came from a different world to that of the homeless. This much deeper level of self awareness was a powerful reality check that enabled the students to be more real in their expectations of both what they were setting out to do individually and what Eddie's Van could achieve collectively. The experience of the students led them to become aware of these different worlds and yet, towards the end of the program, several reflections noted how easy it would be for an incident to take them from one world to another. While the students had become quite

sensitive to the nature of the world of the homeless, they had entered into that world to some degree and were now aware that they no longer 'reacted' the way that they used to. They had become quite aware of the reaction of those who had not had their experience of the homeless. The students' Semantic Memory was ready and able to process this data and make sense of broader conceptualisations. The 'in-group' and 'out-group' categories that Rockquemore and Schaffer identify appear to be added to by the students as they identified different ways of being 'in': belonging and yet not belonging. While aware of the world of the homeless, the students were conscious that they were not homeless and that their newly developed relationships were bounded by the context of the van and hence were different to other relationships in their lives.

As the program neared its completion, some of the student journaling began to reflect a questioning of personal values and a sense of what was really important in life. Some students had reconceptualised and transformed their worldview leading to a questioning of their prior value systems. The apparent happiness and contentment displayed by many of the homeless despite their drab clothing, often unkempt appearance, lack of a permanent residence and regular connection to family, led some students to reflect on what was really important for happiness. As a highly effective academic school, Holy Family stressed the importance of good grades and using their particular gifts to identify and work toward certain career paths. While noting the importance of this, some of the students questioned the balance or lack of balance they perceived Holy Family placed before them as what was important in life.

Holy Family always talks about the Holy Family community and how important it is. But there's a real danger in the Holy Family community just being what goes on at the school. To really be a community it needs to be part of the world outside Wilkins Street and that is why Eddie's Van and all the other things the school does like East Timor and Milpera are important. Edmund Rice started off by teaching poor children and being part of their community and Eddie's is just a continuation of that. If we didn't have Eddie's then Holy Family would be just like most of the other GPS schools which are places for privileged people to go and when they leave continue on that life of privilege without thinking about others. Some people may do Eddie's and leave school and never give it another thought but for others it may mean that they go on to consider everyone in a community not just those who are like us and do not challenge our view of society. (MQ, EX, 6)

As no pre- and post- test survey work was done as part of this study, it is not possible to know whether students held these values and attitudes prior to their van experience. Many of the students involved in Seider's research (2005, 2007) appeared to have strong parental, role model, faith, prior service, peer influence and other factors which led them to commit longer term to service. However it was the effect of the Academic Framework Experience that harnessed the prior influences and led both to deeper levels

of commitment and to modification of worldviews (Seider, 2005, p.7). Whether those students who perceived Holy Family as being 'out of balance' in its pursuit of academic excellence were influenced by parental factors such as life perspective, is unclear. However there can be little doubt that the Eddie's Van experience helped the students clarify their deeper values and beliefs and gave them an audience to articulate them. What is also clear is that there was a marked difference between the content of the student Entry Journals and Exit Journals. "Making a difference" and "doing my bit" and "helping others" had given way to "I will miss chatting to the friends I have made", "I have learnt so much more about myself" and "the sense of community around the van was the most powerful I have ever experienced"!

#### **6.4 EXPERIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCHOOL: HOLY FAMILY COLLEGE**

While the student experience was of the van community and their personal reactions to the homeless, the experience took place in the context of Holy Family College. Flynn (1978) suggested the importance of the informal curriculum of a Catholic school as being key to the development of an effective culture. Effective Catholic schools were those that had a rich culture and where the correlation between the expressed 'core business' of the institution and the lived experience of students of that core business was high. In the light of this, student expectations and reflections on Eddie's Van in the context of the culture of Holy Family are important.

In the Expectations Phase of the program many students identified one of the key motivators for their involvement in the program as the high regard Eddie's Van had within the Holy Family community and especially the word-of-mouth reputation that it had among the students. Many students had older brothers who had been involved in the van and spoke positively of their experience. Eddie's Van was often referred to in a positive light by the College's Principal and other members of the Administration, and many young past students who continued to be involved in the life of the College coaching sporting teams were volunteers on the night van. The profile of Eddie's Van was high in the College.

In their Exit Journals the participants were invited to reflect on the importance of Eddie's Van in the life of the College, now that they had experienced the program. Student reflections on the importance of Eddie's Van need to be situated with the context of adolescent idealism. On one hand students would have entered the program with an idealistic desire to serve, while on the other hand these same students may critique any tension they perceive between the espoused ethos of the school and the reality as they see it. From an ideological perspective there was a strong identification with Edmund Rice and the Christian Brothers as men of action in the area of Social Justice, and hence an imperative for students to be like-wise involved. Other student reflections spoke about the importance of Holy Family giving the students a 'holistic' education and that Eddie's Van was vital in providing same. In this the students were reflecting the belief that "academic subject matter, when disconnected from its social relevance is insufficient" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 34). The ideal would be

Programs that share an emphasis on helping students to identify and act on issues of importance to themselves and to society. As one teacher said, 'My goal is to empower students to rectify problems, to come up with solutions, and to join with other people so that they can become truly active citizens. Young people need to be taught to make democracy work, to engage civically, socially and politically'. (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, p. 35)

Many Exit Journal entries displayed a degree of male adolescent pride indicative of the competitive nature of single-sex male private schools. It would appear that the competition of the sports field evident among Brisbane's leading private schools, was present in the pride that many of Holy Family's students felt that "we provide this service" while they don't! These reflections were strongly expressed in response to the question whether this work [Eddie's Van] was core to what Holy Family should be about! This competitive reaction that Holy Family was a better school, appeared at times to be justified more from an adolescent 'one up man-ship', than a deeper commitment to Social Justice. Certainly their adolescent pride in what they were doing and their sense of agency was quickly compared to the apparent lack of commitment to the poor and marginalized by other elite private schools. Whether the maturity of these reactions paralleled the same energy that limited some students from grasping a deeper sense of reciprocity is not clear. What is clear is that while some students experienced full or partial confirmation of expectations linking their involvement with Eddie's Van with their pride in Holy Family, others experienced some disequilibrium. For some their sense of agency in 'helping the homeless' added to their adolescent pride in Holy Family.

Others experienced some dissonance as the values of their newly accommodated world view appeared to clash with their perception of Holy Family as a school for the wealthy. The experience of relationship with the homeless appeared to strengthen their awareness of the common humanity they shared with their new friends 'on the street', and heightened their sense of difference between their lifestyles and that of the homeless. This tension seemed to be magnified for some who felt that their experience of Holy Family's core business appeared to be at odds with the espoused ethos of the College. For some students their Eddie's Van experience led them to critique the religious ethos of Holy Family. The study of the work of Edmund Rice in the Religious Education classes, and especially his passion for the poor and for a system of schools for the poor as a way of breaking the poverty cycle, meant that some students had an increasingly negative view of Holy Family as a 'true' Edmund Rice school. Their Eddie's Van experience meant that they now had, and were experiencing, an apparent values clash between a College for some of Brisbane's wealthiest families, and the Ricean choice to be in direct relationship with the poor. While administration and faculty may reason that Holy Family was educating students for lives of future service some students were, as a result of their van experience, increasingly critical of what they perceived as tokenism and a values clash. Here Will Buse's reflection gains even more weight when seen in the light of his writing from his own sense of privilege: that he is one of 'rich kids' he is referring to (Dunlap et al., 2007).

I think the Eddies van is core to Holy Family as an Edmund Rice school, but I think that we need to be a school for a wider range of people, not just rich kids, as that is being a true Edmund Rice school. Eddies van is Holy Family providing an option for the poor, but I think that we are not really an Edmund Rice school, despite the Eddies van. I think that we need to be a school for a much wider socio economic demographic; rather than just rich kids helping poor people. (WB, EX.6)

The timing of the Exit Journals so close to the end of the academic semester and the conclusion of the program meant that no resolution of this dissonance and other disequilibrium was able to be achieved.

What is unclear in this discussion of student experience in the context of Holy Family College, is whether some students were unable to see their own 'prejudice' and 'privilege' regarding the role their school should play in issues of Justice. Just as affluent white students may struggle to identify their own 'white privilege' when confronted with issues of race, so too many students from an elite private school may be unable to identify their own privilege and its effect on their attitudes (Dunlap et al, 2007). This

same privilege may inhibit the accordion effect from affecting the expansion of their worldview.

This discussion of student experience in the context of the relevant literature concludes with an extended quotation from Chris Tunbridge's Exit Journal. In this reflection Chris, who initially struggled to engage with the homeless out of shyness, is able to touch on many of the themes alluded to in this discussion: the nature of homelessness, empathy, causes of homelessness, cause and effect, the fallacy of stereotypes, personalisation, agency, faith, community, ideology and adolescent development.

The program run by Holy Family does something about the homeless issue. In the local community, it has a very large effect, and acts as a support structure for the people on the street. My social analysing skills have grown, simply due to the understanding that everyone has a story to tell. Everyone has causal links as to why they ended up on the street. The important thing to remember when talking to the homeless is coming as a guest and not judging the decisions and actions the person has made. Who are we to say what was right or wrong- we weren't in that situation and if we were, we probably would have made the same decisions. As a result of this program, my Christian Faith has grown simply because of the understanding of the humanity of the human person as well as recognising that for every lost soul, there is someone trying to help them through their difficult time in more ways than one. Terms such as 'Presence', 'Guest', 'Dignity of the Individual' and 'Community' have more meaning as a consequence of the first hand experience of the street. Realising that you to come as a guest by not judging on first impressions and being present in conversations- really trying to listen and understand what they are saying. There is that idea that everyone on the street must be lonely and have no one. However there is a real community between the homeless people that many people on the outside don't see. Doing Eddie's van has made me proud to be a human being, knowing that people have the ability to help people in a time when there is so much violence and conflict. It puts everything in perspective. As a result of Eddie's van I understand the Catholic Social Justice Teachings more. Some of the terms initially just flew over my head without me taking very much notice. However, now, going out onto the streets and witnessing the homeless people I can connect with the social justice teachings and the reasons behind them. (CT, EX, 6)

For the students who volunteered to be on Eddie's Van there can be little doubt that it was an important and valued part of their Holy Family experience. While the experience helped develop important communication skills, it opened their eyes to a whole new world that they had previously not experienced. While all the participants in this study walked the journey from Expectations Phase to Agency Phase, they did so at their own pace and each in his own way achieved quite different levels of awareness and meaning.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS THROUGH THE LENS OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION.

The purpose of this research is to explore participant experience of a Service Learning Program in the context of an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary School. The study revealed that participants underwent common phases in their experience from Exposure Phase through to an Agency Phase. However, each student in the program elicited different levels of meaning from what they experienced, from surface understanding and awareness, to deeper to tacit. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss these findings through the lens of The Spiral Model of Service Learning which brings together the phases of student experience and the meanings they derived from them. Core to the Spiral Model are reflection upon experience, critical analysis, the active presence of mentors or guides, and an articulated ideology to give the Service Learning Program form and purpose. These elements remain present for the whole length of the program. This discussion of findings will examine;

- 7.2 Program Entry
- 7.3 Program Experience
- 7.4 Exiting the Spiral and entry to new experiences
- 7.5 Meaning-making from experience
- 7.6 Individual Stories in the light of the Spiral Model
- 7.7 Existential Change

This discussion will follow the stages of the Spiral Model, connecting them to the lived experience of the participants in the study.

#### 7.2 PROGRAM ENTRY

##### 7.2.1 Prior Experience of Service

Each participant enters a Service Learning Program with the influence of their family and other role models affecting their values, attitudes and beliefs. Each person brings their own unique personality to their experience of the program (Penner, 2002, p. 447). The

participants in the Big Brekky program at Holy Family College were all volunteers. Their self-selection influenced their experience and hence the data gathered for this research.

Of the fifty-three students involved in the program five had been involved in an extensive three week Immersion experience to East Timor the previous year. The immersion program involved the same principles that the Big Brekky program used of reflection, ideology and mentoring, and appeared to be a significant Framework Experience for those involved. Their East Timor experience influenced their expectations coming into the Big Brekky program, and their volunteering for Timor, as well as for this program, seems to suggest a prior disposition for this type of experience. Quality Service Learning experiences with continuous reflection upon that experience have great potential for “transformational thinking and social action is increased” (Green, 2006, p. 31). Of the 200 students in the Holy Family Year 11 cohort, 53 or 26% volunteered for the Big Brekky program on this roster. The previous year 10 of the 200 in this cohort volunteered to work in East Timor and five, or 50% of these were involved in the program this research is based upon. While these numbers are statistically too small to suggest significance, they may point to a prior disposition, family tendency towards involvement in Social Justice issues and possible increased involvement in social action as suggested by Green. Alex McKechnie in his Entry Journal reflected:

I volunteered for this program because I believe strongly in Social Justice and I wanted a way to help others less fortunate than me. I think the experience will be humbling and thought provoking. Holy Family has programs like this because making a real difference in our community is very important for us. (AMc, EJ, 2)

The Spiral Model suggests that students such as those who volunteered to work in East Timor less than twelve months before this program began, may progress further down the spiral, eliciting deeper meaning from reflection upon experience than might otherwise have occurred. Jack McMahon was part of the East Timor Immersion and his Exit Journal reflections have strong suggestions of deeper awareness and meaning associated with his Eddie’s Van experience. Jack may be engaged in a specification of his worldview; discovering a sharpened focus for commitment to service as much of his new learning would be reinforcing the frame already developed during his time in Timor (Seider, 2007). Jack displays a strong empathy, “but only if I’m ever in that situation [homelessness] myself will I fully understand it”, a real sense of reciprocity, “they’ve taught me a lot and shown me things I never would of learnt in a classroom, I was



accepted by them and I accepted the streeties”, and a realistic and humble sense of his own agency.

I don't think I have contributed anything major but I understand that my little effort might make the day a little easier for maybe 1 or 2 people, and that's a good achievement at 15. (JM, EX, 6)

Jack's reflection upon experience has led him to think more laterally, not blame and “look at people and think why they might be in that situation”. Jack's ability to engage in Social Analysis has grown as has his ability to use concepts effectively in context.

My reflection on homelessness in Australia after experiencing this program has completely changed from what I thought 6 months ago. I now know more of the reasons why people become homeless, and I have come to realise that, despite many of the homeless making errors that have led to their situation, it is mainly something they could never have avoided and most definitely don't deserve to live how they are. Homelessness is a state when someone is without a stable, safe, reliable place to call a 'home'. Stereotypes as homeless people as 'bums' degrades them as they don't deserve to be, I now know that these people are not how society labels them. Assumptions of the homeless people as being lazy and victims of themselves prevent most Australians from really seeing what the problems are and blind them to the human element of the people on the street. My ability to do social analysis has grown because I now understand the concept and can think about the issues I see through another perspective. (JM, EX, 6)

There is a clear contrast between Jack's Entry and Exit Journal entries from “I volunteered to get more involved and to experience something different from standard RE classes, I want to get better people skills and a more educated outlook on the homeless” (JM, ET, 2), to what is expressed above. While family values and personality characteristics have prepared Jack for this movement, the core features of the Spiral Model enabled the movement to go further to deeper levels of meaning. This premise is supported by the experience of progress down the spiral to deeper reflection of other students without Jack's family influence and values. Jack deeply integrated the ideology of the program into his approach to people and situations. While Jack saw his involvement as more of “a moral thing” he came to appreciate the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of what Holy Family aimed to achieve.

I think that seeing Christ in the poor refers to enacting our beliefs. In doing our little bit to help the person that we see Christ within, we are upholding our Christian beliefs in caring for everyone, who Christ himself represents. All these terms now mean more to me, all focussing on the dignity of the person. A community works for the good and dignity of all of its members, presence is the way you come to someone as a guest to give them that respect and promote the dignity of the individual. (JM, EX, 6)

Finally, in his last reflection, Jack has the level of awareness to see his approach to involvement in Justice issues linked to mindset, personal experience [memories] and priorities. Since graduation from Holy Family Jack has become involved in Summer Camps for children from disadvantaged backgrounds [Edmund Rice Camps], supporting Seider's premise that participation in Framework Experiences is one pathway to enhancing longer term commitment to service (Seider, 2005).

I believe I will intend to do something like this again and there is every likelihood I will if my current frame of mind sticks, yet I know that as my memories of this program fade my thoughts may change and my priorities may be re-organized, I hope I still have the mindset in the future to get involved in things like this again, although I know there is a possibility I won't. (JM, EX, 6)

Some students entered the program with strong parental influence linked to social justice but without prior Service Learning experience [see Louis Perrins 7.6.1]. Others entered the program with firmly held views and negative stereotypes about the homeless and homelessness [see Geoff McCluskey 7.6.4] and displayed evidence of change over the period of van service.

### **7.2.2 Conscious Awareness**

The process of internalisation begins with a period of conscious awareness raising. The Religious Education Unit and associated pre-brief exercises for Eddie's Van were a part of this. The nature of mental illness, the cause-effect modality of poverty in its many forms and the nature of homelessness all formed part of the Framework Experience that prepared students to more effectively engage with what they were about to experience. It was in this conscious awareness raising time, just prior to the commencement of the program and in its early stages, that participants were introduced to the ideology of the program. By enveloping the program in a rich tradition associated with great people of the past, the students were assisted in seeing that they were playing their role as 'makers of history' and that their agency was not only linked to the past but valued by the community they were serving from (Youniss & Yates, 1997).

The students were aware that what they were attempting to do was valued by Holy Family. In response to the daily journaling question, "Is this experience of value to our school family? Why?" the participants constantly referred to Eddie's Van as being "what makes me proud to be a Holy Family student", "it sets us apart from other schools", it is "what we should do, helping the less fortunate". Even though the program has only been in place since 2000 and the night van since 1999, many Entry Journal reflections referred to older brothers and past students who had participated in the program, valued it, found it meaningful and enjoyed it. There was a strong sense of building on 'tradition' although that word itself was not used.

While the cause and effect element of social analysis was quickly understood by the participants the genuine nature of mental illness needed time to be comprehended by them. It was not until the third or fourth visit to the van site that students were able to re-interpret the classroom input around schizophrenia, mania and other illnesses to link with their experienced reality of mental ill-health. Nurturing a concept into awareness does not immediately generate understanding of that concept in the field. But it was important that the data concerning mental illness be introduced to the students before the program, so they at least had an inner map to guide their reflections. Similarly considerable time was necessary for authentic understanding and engagement with the concept of 'story'.

Much more success resulted from the classroom work on presence, guest and the dignity of the person. The students struggled to engage with the homeless at first and were looking for ways to connect and "what to do" once they had connected. The ideology of the program gave the students a simple and doable theology or psychology to use. It made sense and worked. Moreover the classroom input on ideology gave the students both a language to use as they engaged with their reflection upon experience, a 'yard-stick' to measure how they were doing [an important element for adolescent young men] and a praxis that made apparent esoteric theology more real. By engaging with the theology of the program the students were able to frame that experience as they "sought out alternative ideological systems [from their parents] that can organize their understanding of the world and their role in it" (Seider, 2007, p. 631).

Part of conscious awareness raising that was related to the 'theology of guest' (Nouwen, 1975) was privilege awareness, where students were invited to reflect on their mindsets and value systems as white, healthy, educated, financially secure young men. "The realisation of social and economic privilege can be difficult to accept for those in the early stages of privilege awareness ...this denial can interfere with effective engagement in a diverse community" (Dunlap et. al, 2007, p.19). Some students unconsciously struggled to more deeply connect with some of the homeless as their experience of data from the homeless [a seemingly fit and articulate man] clashed with long-held family values [eg. "If you work hard you will do well"]. Consequently more energy needs to be expended in this area. Not enough work was done on this element of conscious

awareness raising early in the program, as many of the ‘triggers’ from the data led to a ‘divided self’ among some students.

Relatively few white students from privileged backgrounds will have first-hand experience with classism and racism from the victim’s point of view. The collision of the intellectual and the experiential results in a divided self. Their intellectual self may be isolated or fragmented from their experiential self, with respect to privilege and / or race, to the point that their experiential self cannot readily process these experiences. (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 24)

As will be discussed in the Reframing [7.2.7] and Disillusionment [7.3.1] Phase sections of this chapter, several students remained locked into an ‘us’ and ‘them’ mindset and reacted to apparent hypocrisy and dishonesty because of a lack of awareness of their own bias or prejudice resulting from privilege.

### **7.2.3 Expectations Phase**

The Spiral Model suggests that every participant in a Service Learning experience will experience the same phases or stages, but the level of meaning elicited from this experience will differ. In many ways the Expectations Phase began the previous year when the students volunteered for the program. While some volunteered because “my friends are doing it”, many did so because of the program’s reputation in the school, curiosity as to what the life of a homeless person would be like and a desire to “give back to the community” and “help those in need”. While motivations for involvement differed widely, the majority of students identified fears associated with agency: “I won’t be able to connect”, “I’m not sure what I’ll talk to them about”, “I’m afraid I will be rejected by them”. There was a strong stereotype of the homeless present in many of the Entry Journal entries, despite a number of students saying that they “had heard it was really good”, “you get to know the homeless really well”, and “they are great people”.

The value of identifying an Expectations Phase which will normally be associated with Conscious Awareness, lies in the linking of the idealistic energy of volunteers with concepts that will ensure harm is not done either to the clients or the participants. By engaging with participants’ expectations, mentors are able to begin building relationship with the participants and place expectations such as ‘helping those in need’ against longer term program goals such as reciprocity. They begin building reflection mindsets. As participants articulate hopes and fears they do so with a construct map that may be quite false. In the Expectations Phase most participants are quite open to be challenged in what to expect and how to react to it. It is important to challenge unreal expectations

and to affirm hopes and fears as being normal. As part of Conscious Awareness Raising program mentors need to harness the energy of the Expectations Phase to engage participants with the key concepts presented. The Expectations Phase need not be prolonged, as altruistic adolescents are often motivated not by theory, but by action. In many ways the input during the Expectations Phase was a form of Framework Experience that aimed to shape the participant's view of community and the role they could play within it. By placing their experience within a worldview where service is seen to be important, their prior worldview is either affirmed or challenged, and the participant knows, consciously or unconsciously that their service is important.

During the Expectations Phase of conscious awareness raising, the program mentors associated with this study focussed too much time and energy on safety and communication issues to the neglect of some key concepts such as 'privilege' and 'story'. 'Story' in particular was badly dealt with as the researcher himself assumed a level of understanding of the concept beyond where many of the students were at. Consequently it was only after several months of experience that the realisation that each person 'has a story' [a life journey that has led them to this point in time] began to become clearer to participants.

One advantage of placing a program such as Holy Family's within a culture where it's value is affirmed, is that there is a heightened expectation within students that "this will be a good experience". While this needs to be balanced with reality it leads to participants expecting the program to be worthy and beneficial. The natural heightened expectation soon met reality, whether it came in the form of a 5 am rise or a degree of anxiety as the van approached a group of strangers that at first sight met their every stereotype.

#### **7.2.4 Perception of Different Facets of the Experience**

As the participants entered the program site and the Exposure Phase of experience they began to perceive the different facets of the experience: age, gender, personality types, overt behaviours, etc. In this first experience of the 'reality' of the program beyond theory the participants began to develop relationship with their peers, the recipients of the service and with the varying elements of the experience.

As the participants' stereotypes and expectations met the reality of the van site there was a heightened level of feeling. While some students were scared and all expressed some anxiety, this heightened arousal meant that they were very sensitive to the different facets of the experience. The ability to 'see' is shaped by the nature of the task; the act of seeing is not only physical but mental and psychological; more accurately it has physical and social elements to it as well.

If we ask a room full of people to look around and notice everything they see that is blue, then have them close their eyes and name off all of the green objects in the room, the list of items perceived will typically be very short. When then asked to list the blue items, they will generate an extensive list; the assumption is made that the instruction was in some way meaningful and used the concept of 'blue' as a filter by which to make their perceptions. (Cone & Harris, 1996, p. 36)

The process of conscious awareness raising had sensitised the students to look for 'blue objects': data associated with mental illness, cause and effect, substance abuse, the poverty cycle, etc. Over time 'blueness' will disappear from consciousness and become part of the unconscious as the participant too becomes part of the scene; the reality. There is a human need to 'take in the surroundings', 'to orientate yourself', 'to get your bearings' and to find some form of psychological safety in doing this. Several students valued making themselves busy around the barbeque: buttering bread, lighting the barbeque, setting up tables and cooking. As the participants take in the varying facets of the experience, many attempt to keep busy as a way of quietly observing the facets of the subculture and as a form of self protection. In time the volunteer learns a different type of 'doing'; the ideology of the program.

The Holy Family students quickly developed their reality map. "There were more of them than what I thought", "the Aboriginals stayed away by themselves", "some were really friendly and came right up to the van", "they all knew Mr. Cuddidy", "there were hardly any women", and "some were really grumpy" gave form and shape to their experience. On a purely practical level students also needed to become aware of and learn the skills associated with the service, in this case running a barbeque for between 20 and 60 people early in the morning. For some this in itself had its own level of anxiety: the pressure of cooking four dozen eggs while a queue grows longer and in some cases restless.

One key facet of any Service Learning experience, is the initial relationship with the program mentor, the other volunteers, adults working at the service and the first group of recipients / clients that in varying ways make themselves known to the participant.

### **7.2.5 Establishment of Relationships**

The stages in establishing relationships at a service site are no different to that experienced in day-to-day life, nor any less important. The initial introduction to fellow team members and adults involved with the program is important as they are the ones who will help the participant, directly and indirectly, to make sense out of what they are experiencing. Relationship calls for the individual to move out of their comfort zone.

To step out of one's geographic and temporal spheres of influence and in to the spheres of others. Such a step is more complex than it appears, for in doing so, the learner is consciously giving up components of a strategy of power in order to learn about the other. (Tierney, 1993, p. 40 cited in Pracht, 2007, p. 16)

Any gathering of homeless will have those who readily approach strangers, appear friendly and welcoming and who gain some importance by being known by the van staff and volunteers. In time these people became 'gatekeepers' for the students to a deeper experience. Initially they helped lessen anxiety and helped to start the process of stereotype breakdown. This group were the ones whose names the students first came to know and remember. As this happened there was an energy shift in the relationships and atmosphere around the van.

Part of this energy shift was associated with the beginning of relationship with the ideology of the program; the taking of concepts such as 'presence', 'guest', and reciprocity from the classroom and engaging with them in the real world. The establishment of relationships was the building of bridges between experience and learning. For some participants their prior worldviews were being questioned and the framework presented in the time prior to the beginning of the program was supporting the development of new worldviews, modification of same and in some cases was being rejected.

### **7.2.6 Exposure Phase**

For learning to occur, emotional reaction to stimuli must be tempered by reflection and intervention by program mentors. Rockquemore and Schaffer identified three stages of

participant development in Service Learning. The first of these was 'Shock'. Shock is "an emotional and psychological jolt to a student's perceptions of reality" (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 16), though Green suggested a "broader range of emotional reactions" (Green, 2006, p. 205). Others refer to 'trigger events', "a situation or event where one is confronted with another's circumstances involving a great deal of disadvantage, making the former's privilege even more apparent" (Dunlap et al., 2007, p.20). Trigger events and periods of shock may create cognitive disequilibrium, a discomfort or confusion brought about by new information that must either be assimilated or accommodated into one's cognitive structure (Dunlap et al., 2007). Strong emotional responses to stimuli can be of great benefit for learning; dissonance is needed for stronger conceptualisation to take place and be personally owned.

What is unclear is whether internalization is best achieved by first framing potential experience by proposal of an alternative worldview and / or self-concept, followed by emotional responses to this shift (Seider, 2007). Or is internalization better achieved by "triggering events" and "transformative experiences" that lead to a re-examination of one's life choices and hence one's worldview? Participant experience in this study would suggest that while locating a period of framing at the beginning of a program is preferable, either approach could support internalization provided there is mediated reflection upon experience in the context of the ideology of the program. Some students responded positively to the frame-changing experiences at the beginning of the program, and their subsequent emotional responses confirmed their newly developing worldview. Others struggled with elements of the ideological input prior to service experience, and came closer to it through their emotional reactions. What is clear is that for the second approach to successfully bring students closer to internalization, a longer period of experience and mediated reflection upon that experience is needed. If this does not occur, students may well depart from a program in the midst of emotional reactions to triggering events, with limited or no learning, or even retaining prior prejudice.

The Exposure Phase associated with this program provided a rich dissonance for learning to occur. Several students were so out of their comfort zone that they remained at the barbeque for the majority of their first and second van visits. Others, in attempting to connect with some of the homeless, and still unsure of how to read body language, were out-rightly rejected, some by a group of Indigenous youth at Kurilpa Park, some by



a man in an advance state of hallucination associated with substance abuse at the Botanical Gardens and others by a group of alcoholic men at Wickham Park. While many of the homeless fitted the students' expected stereotype others were confused by being exposed to "well dressed, articulate people with mobile phones" or others who "drove to the van site" or "was an old boy of Nudgee College".

The acquisition of the skills necessary to connect with the people who came to Eddie's Van takes time, and could be likened to an apprenticeship period in skills attainment. As the classroom theory about cause and effect, mental illness, conversation tips and ways to connect and read body language were personified in real people standing in front of the students, some wanting to engage and some not, most of the students responded with enthusiasm. Contextual learning when motivated by real and felt needs, quickly becomes part of a person's biography. Many of the students reflected great changes in their ability to connect between their first and second visits. They "knew what to talk about", "how they would react", "who was easy to talk to", "who to leave alone". For some the awareness that they were able to connect with the homeless provided a sense of relief, probably associated with an adolescent need for 'success'. These emotional responses during the Exposure Phase were very necessary for the reflection process and prepared the students for personalisation (Green, 2006).

Prior service experience, as in the case of those students who had worked in East Timor, will enable students to be more prepared for the 'shock' of the Exposure Phase, but will not negate it. Surprisingly no student who had been to East Timor referred to this experience in any of their journaling or focus group reflections. However, students who had participated in the street retreat program, and had volunteered for Eddie's Night Van, made frequent reference to this experience as helping them build a more complete picture of homelessness and further develop relationships with people they had met in the morning.

### **7.2.7 Reframing Phase**

Quickly the students involved with the Big Brekky program adapted to their new experience. In their adaptation they needed to reframe their 'map', both physically and conceptually, of what the experience was like and potentially going to be like. As their

prior stereotype was broken down and rejected, there was a sense that the people the students were meeting were potential friends, a factor that was not mentioned at all in Entry Journals. The students were engaging in normalisation as they adapted to their new circumstances, felt comfortable in their new roles, began to build relationships and became “accustomed to the sight of poverty and viewed the deprivation of their clients as ‘normal’” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 17). One of the potential dangers of not strongly framing participant worldviews in the ideology of the program prior to engagement, is that the process of normalisation may well feed back into old ‘us’/‘them’ mindsets. These mindsets may even be strengthened if the academic framing has not alerted the participants to questions, concepts, attitudes and approaches that enable the student to more effectively engage with experiences foreign to what they had believed. If, as the Holy Family students came to view the situation of the homeless as ‘normal’, they were not invited to go beyond ‘normal’ to ‘why’ and ‘why not’, then students may be further locked into a charity model of service. While ‘normal’ may well be a secure place to begin to reframe a worldview, it may be a psychological state that accepts the poverty as the way ‘it is’.

Much of the energy for reframing came from their growing personalisation of the homeless and an initial sense of agency. Prior to the program many students had expressed fears that the initial experience would be “difficult and awkward”, “tough to relate to”, “hard to step outside of my comfort zone”, “unable to connect” and “I’m expecting to feel intimidated and awkward at times”. Green (2006) refers to “personalization” as the second key step in the recurring stages of reflection linked to Service Learning. Focus Group discussions and the daily journaling after site visits were increasingly full of ‘names’, people’s stories and anecdotes linked to ‘friendship’. As stereotypes broke down and were replaced by particular names, personal experience of acceptance, feeling appreciated and a growing sense of ‘story’, students began to sense a common human bond. Feeling sorry for ‘them’ was being replaced by “I was talking to Richard today and he and I love the same movies” (ME, DJ, 4)! “In the normalization stage, the ‘other-ness’ gives way to personal description” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 17).

Not all reframing reflects the sponsoring ideology of a program. Each participant comes to a Service Learning Program with their own biography, values and beliefs. Several

Holy Family students engaged in a process of modifying their previously held worldview as a result of their initial experiences. The prior stereotype of “lazy, dirty, smelly and bum” was quickly replaced. What was not replaced by some participants was the stereotypical reasoning associated with the causes of homelessness. “They could get a job if they wanted to”, “they are hypocritical telling us to study hard”, “they waste their money on drugs and alcohol”, and “why don’t they just reconnect with their families” all suggested initial reactions to the Framework Experience of ideology presented in the first weeks. These reflections could be seen to be individual attributions, “attributing economic inequalities to personal characteristics of the poor (lack of talent, drive, effort or loose morals). People tend to make individual attributions to explain other people’s failures” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19). One student in the first focus group cynically remarked, “We have to take off our shoes”! (AR, FG, 2.3), referring to the Framework Experience input relating to coming as guest. Others began reflections during focus groups with comments such as:

The problem that I find is that they don’t seem to try to get themselves out of the situation [before you interrupt me Alex], some of them do try, but most of them look for someone else to blame; the government, the Church, the rich guy down the street who does not help me, they want us to do something about their problem. Instead of them trying to get out of their own rut. (CD, FG, 2.3)

This element of participant experience will be discussed again in the Disillusionment Phase as it reflected both a philosophical reaction [reframing] to what they were experiencing, as well a personal reaction [disillusionment] in the context of relationship. However, as will be seen in the discussion on Deeper Awareness (7.5.2) several of these same students changed and reframed their conceptualisation as the program continued; almost a case of delayed framing.

Other students, depending on the nature of their predispositions related to parents, role models, prior experiences, faith stance or influence of peers, did modify and reframe their worldviews. Much of this reframing was linked to the students’ growing identification with, and ability to use, the ideology of the program and its associated skills. As they engaged with the concepts of guest, presence and dignity, many students found new meaning in their interactions and a form of agency that they had not anticipated. Many joined the program thinking it was about cooking a barbeque for homeless people and discovered that it was as much about building a sense of community as anything else. There was a real adolescent pride in discovering that they were able to build relationships of respect. In reacting to Ciaran’s reflection above, Alex displays a

reframed understanding of the purpose of the van centring on a deeper understanding of mental illness.

A lot of people here have gone there and seem to believe what these people are saying about getting off the street and stuff. We are not supposed to be going there to believe what these people are saying or not – we are supposed to be going there to listen, to come as a guest, but even if they say that they want to get off the street, they may subconsciously want to, they may want to, they may think that they want to, but subconsciously they are holding themselves back; but I don't think we are there to judge them. (AMcK, FG, 2.3)

In the process of reframing, critical prompts posed to students by mentors and facilitators play an important role. These critical prompts “revealed more observations, stories of people, and a more complex understanding of the homeless issue” (Green, 2006, p. 145). Critical prompts from program mentors push participant understanding past one-dimensional understanding to multi-dimensional. This occurs firstly through challenging participants to deeper interaction with the homeless directly and secondly through deeper reflection upon the program ideology (Green, 2006, p. 149).

One of the most significant areas of reframing was in relation to how the participants understood and engaged with the Indigenous people that they met at the van. Few of the Holy Family students would have known Aboriginal people personally and the stereotype many would have had of the Indigenous community would have been generally quite negative. The initial experience of attempting to relate with Indigenous people resulted in a degree of ‘shock’ and it took time for personalisation to occur. When personalisation did occur it came about through elderly Aboriginals. Significantly, the students were quickly able to intuit that it would take a longer time to build up trust with the Indigenous people and they seemed to understand and accept this. The relationship that the students were building with the other homeless led to an acceptance and understanding of their situation. This acceptance and understanding, while not personalised, seemed to be transferred to the Aboriginal community. Interestingly the individual attribution [they don't try to get a job, they are lazy etc] that some of the students applied to the general population of the homeless, was rarely applied to the Indigenous community. It was almost as if the students assumed structural attributions [social factors external to the individual, lack of political power, educational inequalities etc] (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19) for the Aboriginal population. Normally,

If students perceived their clients as similar to themselves, then they began to consider structural attributions. If they viewed their clients as dissimilar, undesirable, or unpleasant, they tended to retain the individual level attributions that they brought with them to the course. (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19)

Whether this was out of a fear of being labelled 'racist', or whether the students just sensed a more complex sociological phenomena present in this situation, is unclear.

### **7.3 PROGRAM EXPERIENCE**

The following three phases in student experience concentrate on the main body of experience after relationships and frameworks had, in general, been established. Once again, the Spiral Model would identify all participants as experiencing the phases outlined in this discussion, though the levels of meaning that the participants gleaned differed widely.

#### **7.3.1 Disillusionment Phase**

The term 'disillusionment' implies a 'let down' or a disappointment. Elsewhere in this thesis the term 'honeymoon' has been used to describe some of what participants experienced early in this Service Learning Program. After the Exposure Phase many program participants were obviously enjoying and valuing their van experience. They were feeling valued and accepted, were experiencing success at using many of the new skills they had been taught around presence and guest, were engaging with the adult community in an adult way and had successfully negotiated what they had originally perceived as being a 'difficult' challenge. Through all of this they felt they were making a difference. If the program had concluded at this point many of the more important lessons learnt by participants would have remained hidden. If the program had concluded at this point students may have exited this experience with prior stereotypes strengthened or an unrealistic view of poverty introduced to their worldview.

While not every student articulated disillusionment, all experienced difficult times or times of dissatisfaction. Some students continued to struggle to connect with the homeless and found this frustrating. Many, though not all, of these were quieter students whose social circle is not wide regardless of context. Some were out-rightly rejected in their attempts to connect while others were rejected by people they felt they had got to know well when they [the students] failed to live up to unreal expectations. A small number witnessed violence and aggression between the homeless and all experienced times when the homeless were 'grumpy', 'non-communicative', hypocritical or unappreciative. Many students experienced times of confusion when the presenting

disconfirming data did not make sense, and some experienced confusion concerning the purpose of the van, the role of story and the apparent 'one-way' movement of care and concern.

Times of disillusionment make any human experience more complete and as any relationship deepens it needs to go through the 'not so good' times. By extending the time element of their involvement with the homeless the students were able to see and experience a more complete picture of homelessness; see people they felt they had got to know well in bad times as well as good. Several students in their journaling referred to their relationships becoming more "genuine and real" after three or four visits and the skills of connecting, of presence and guest – more natural.

For some students their feelings around disillusionment came from primary [personal and immediate] experiences of being rejected when they approached someone for a conversation, or rudely rejected when offering people a second sausage and egg roll or not being welcomed upon arrival by particular individuals as they had been previously. Others experienced some degree of disillusionment in a more secondary [less personal and more indirect] way. This often occurred in Focus Group discussions when they became more conscious of reacting to the perceived purpose of the program and whether they 'should' be appreciated for their efforts. Many students appeared to quickly make sense of, and find meaning in, the disequilibrium experienced from primary experiences. Often they used these experiences to add to mind maps associated with mental illness or the effects of substance abuse. Others were rationalised in terms of the dynamics of developing relationships.

It is unclear to what extent many of the secondary experiences of disillusionment that were articulated, especially through focus group discussions, were coming from real experience or an intellectualisation. While some students did experience ingratitude during their service this was not a common experience.

A small group of students reacted quite negatively to some of the homeless. They did not like "being lectured to", felt the homeless were "hypocritical" and were "not really being honest". As part of growth in one's own identity, concepts such as privilege are important for self understanding. The realisation of social and economic privilege can be

difficult to accept for those in the early stages of privilege awareness. “This denial can interfere with effective engagement in a diverse community” (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 19). Most Holy Family students come from economically privileged families, with little life experience of unemployment, lack of education, racial abuse or personal rejection. Often trigger events bring awareness of socioeconomic privilege to the fore. This awareness can be accompanied by an internal struggle that may lead to greater empathy, understanding and a sense of our common humanity, or can be assimilated leading to reinforced prior stereotypes and worldviews. As Geoff, Ciaran and Andrew reacted to the presenting data from the homeless they appeared, at first, to be unable to identify their own privilege past an intellectual understanding.

Ciaran: I'm a bit skeptical about these people at times. I think that some of what they talk about is complete rubbish and what is wrong with them. Some of the things that they say don't really add up.

Andrew: As much as Brother Price would say that these people are on the streets and it is beyond their control, I still believe that even though a person could be born into an abusive aboriginal family – apparently they have no chance to getting out of that – I still believe that that is not true, that the fundamentals of our society mean there is a chance – that if you get your mind straight – some of these kids – you know – are into juvenile stuff, they do things – that is their choice, the fact that their parents do it and stuff like that has an effect upon them but it should not mean they have to be there.

Geoff: You relate to people that you have things in common with. Homeless people at this stage do not have anything in common with us. (FG, 2.3)

Perhaps this group of students were unable to see how the homeless they were meeting were similar to themselves and so saw them as an ‘out group’, “groups of which they are not members of” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19). By seeing the homeless as unlike themselves there was a tendency to project individual attribution on to them; individual explanations that attribute economic inequalities to personal characteristics of the poor (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19).

Trigger events such as being aggressively talked at by a homeless person tend to create cognitive ‘disequilibrium, “a discomfort or confusion brought about by new information that must either be assimilated or accommodated into one’s cognitive structure” (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 20). The role of the mentor and the reflection process in Service Learning is to invite participants to critically reflect on their experience. Critical reflection may result in an accommodation of this information [experience] into one’s worldview so that new learning may occur about others and oneself. This “accommodated learning is the ‘epiphany’, ‘illuminative’, ‘ah-ha’, or ‘light-bulb’ moments that cause increased awareness” (Green, 2006, p. 104).

However, as can be seen in the reflections of Ciaran, Geoff and Andrew above, the data from the new experience may be assimilated where by “new information is made to fit one’s existing view, potentially precluding learning” (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 20). Once a socioeconomic, racial or cultural trigger event occurs, the student may have no past experience upon which to draw to understand or adequately process the occurrence, hence the importance of pro-active mentors.

The role of service-learning facilitators is to identify this disequilibrium within the reflection process and assist students as they work through it. Service-learning based disequilibrium, when properly supported, can enable students to re-evaluate society, their place in society, their and other’s identity and perspectives on socioeconomics and race. Through reflection and discussion, students may begin to diminish the disequilibrium between their past the present experiences. (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 23)

This situation supports the importance of the Framework Experience prior to the commencement of a program. The skills of social analysis taught before and early in a program would assist students in making links between presenting data and cause and effect modalities. In the case of Ciaran, Geoff and Andrew these links did occur but not till later in the program, and after their individual relationships with particular homeless had grown. In the context of Framework Experiences built upon ideology and social analysis there is an increased likelihood that students will replace, modify or specify their worldview from such trigger events in ways more conversant with the sponsoring ideology.

### **7.3.2 Awareness Phase**

In an early stage of data analysis, consideration was given to calling this phase in student experience the Internalisation Phase. Thought was given to this as several students appeared to quite deeply internalise the ideology of the program. However the term ‘internalisation’ did not quite reflect the data. What was common to all participant experience was a period of greater awareness beyond the initial conceptualisation. Much of what the students were experiencing in this phase paralleled the Engagement Stage identified by Rockquomore and Schaffer. In the Engagement Stage, “students became engaged in the learning process because the people and situations they were studying in their course readings were not hypothetical examples, but real people with whom they had developed personal relationships” (Rockquomore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19) The content of both the daily journaling and the focus group discussions displayed noticeable change as the program progressed. New language and concepts began to



appear in discussions and reflections: community, communities, present to me, came as guest to me, old friends, comfort zone etc.

The use of new language and concepts suggested that the students were engaging with the program and it had not become mindless action. Their involvement was a deliberate action. The students were now deliberately using the language of 'presence', 'guest', 'story', 'community' and 'dignity'. This use of language in context reflects the middle stages of the 'Recurring Stages of Reflection'; increased understanding and connection to course content (Green, 2006). The key concepts of the ideology had gone past a 'trial' period where they were being tested in the reality of the van site. In almost every case the students valued the approach suggested by 'coming as guest' and 'being deeply present', and could see that it was credible and doable in that it led to a more genuine connection with the homeless. As they grew in awareness students were beginning to make deliberate choices to step out of their comfort zone and to take the concepts of presence and guest further than what had been presented in the Framework Experience period.

These choices and the taking of concepts further suggest that many students were finding resolution to any disequilibrium they had encountered in the Exposure, Reframing and Disillusionment Phases. Through reflection upon experience the students were invited to accommodate their experiences and "begin to revise their stereotypical ideas and develop them into more open, complex and accurate concepts. Cognitive accommodation processes are less likely to be associated with simple, negative and inaccurate stereotyping" (Dunlap et al, 2007, p. 25). By this Awareness Phase some students may have developed approaches to resolution of disequilibrium that 'worked for them.' Ideally a participant's response to trigger events and related experiences that cause disequilibrium would be to pause, reflect and process them in such a way as to lead to deeper learning. This process may not be a conscious one, but be unconsciously present as focus group discussions developed or in journaling upon experience. Once again, the role of mentors in this process would be significant.

The Social Analysis of the students was now much more complete and this led to greater awareness of the reality of life on the streets or in boarding houses. Connections and links were now being made and students appeared to be approaching people and

situations with a 'why' mindset. After some time this was not expressed consciously but came out in journaling and discussion. The question 'why' was not asked – it did not need to be - it was implied. Many of the constructs presented early in the program were now owned and used by the students to complete their mind-maps; each person has a story, innate dignity and perhaps mental illness. None of this 'just happened'. It had been a journey in itself linked to classroom input, group discussion, mentor intervention and personal journaling.

The influence of group dynamics was important in this phase. Many insights were named by particular individuals first, grappled with by others in focus groups and then began to appear in other participants' reflections. As will be seen later in this discussion the level of meaning that each person gleaned from using particular language and insights differed from person to person. In several Focus Group discussions, particular concepts underwent detailed examination, development and some degree of 'ownership' to assist in meaning-making, all in the one Focus Group. Guest [April 27<sup>th</sup>], who benefits and motivation for involvement [April 28<sup>th</sup>], equality [April 28<sup>th</sup>], personalisation [May 2<sup>nd</sup>], mental illness [May 2<sup>nd</sup>], should you agree with 'them' and presence [May 3<sup>rd</sup>], should we be appreciated [May 3<sup>rd</sup> & May 11<sup>th</sup>], community and friendship [May 23<sup>rd</sup>], values and priorities [May 26<sup>th</sup>] and humility and compassion [May 30<sup>th</sup>] were all themes developed extensively within the one focus group discussion. In all cases the discussion did not address the "perceptions of different facets of the experience" (Le Cornu, 2006), as this and the building of relationship, had already occurred. There was a degree of purposeful and deliberate intent about the discussions; a deeper level of awareness of the dynamics of the van site, of their relationships and of its meaning.

Many deeper levels of awareness were linked to feeling responses that contrasted with how the students felt early in the program. Students were more frequently articulating that they "felt accepted", "the homeless don't label us", "he was present to me", "I was really looking forward to seeing Bruce;" and were aware of other feeling responses. The nature of mental illness present in many of the homeless was now more understood by the students, and with this understanding came a deeper level of acceptance of the homeless regardless of their presenting data. The symptoms of mental illness that the students were aware of, and present to, were not a shallow adolescent focus on obvious difference. The students had personalised mental illness, it was no longer "this bloke

was really crazy and was talking to things in the air, hands going everywhere” (DJ, 2), but “I was talking to Steve and he was really fixated on this topic and aggressive about it, so I just listened to him” (DJ, 5). Through these reflections the ideology of the program was strongly present; “I realised that their mental condition should have no bearing over my relationship with them” or “every person is shaped by the experiences in life that they have had” (EX, 6).

The increased sense of empathy present in these reflections suggests that for many program participants the homeless had gone from an ‘out-group’ [groups of which you are not a member of] to an ‘in-group’ through time, reflection and relationship. Often in the normalisation stage (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000) individuals begin to view the poor as individuals like themselves and consequently make external or structural attributions [social factors external to the individual] to explain people’s circumstances: discrepancies in the economic system, lack of political power, educational inequalities (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 19). Much of the Awareness Phase and Agency Phase data reflect Rockquemore and Schaffer’s Engagement Stage of relationship, seeking causal links and solution seeking. While many of the students began to view their van experience less in terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ – more of an in-group - this increased personalisation was limited and the students knew this.

While personalisation is an important step for meaning-making there are differing levels to it. As the students had participated on the van six or more times over several months, an initial personalisation had occurred where the homeless went from a stereotyped anonymous group to individuals beyond labels. This personalisation central to the Exposure Phase gave way to a Reframing personalisation where particular names were known, connections made and personal idiosyncrasies noted. By the Awareness Phase of student experience most of the participants had come to know a small group of the homeless quite well. These gatekeepers not only shared with the students on a deeper level, but did so in a way that suggested a genuine friendship to the students, eliciting varying degrees of reciprocity. These relationships had grown to the point where initial relationship data was able to be built on, follow up questions asked [“How did you go when you visited your mates in Sydney?”] and ‘off the cuff’ comments that led to deeper insights. During the Awareness Phase students now found that they had been conversing with particular homeless individuals from January till June and were now able

to identify the more subtle forms of mental illness: those things that were preventing other wise 'normal' looking people from engaging effectively in mainstream society.

This phase in student experience was especially important for their understanding of the Indigenous community. While the students as a whole never really connected on a deeper level with the younger Indigenous present at the van sites, they did connect with a small group of older individuals. These connections with Uncle John, Auntie Annette, Uncle Bob and others, enabled the students to come to a deeper awareness of the need for cultural sensitivity and that the presenting issues associated with connecting the Aboriginal community with the mainstream community and Government services was neither simple nor easy. These areas of awareness in themselves led to greater empathy and less racism.

The increasing levels of awareness associated with their experience on the van resulted in many changing attitudes displayed by students. There was a link between the attitudinal change and the students' awareness of broader factors associated with the triggering event, making it more understandable. Deeper levels of friendship, empathy for situations that they had previously reacted to, a growing sense of reciprocity, an appreciation of equality in their relationship with the homeless and a growing sense that they were just enjoying the van experience past any sense of duty, were all identified by the students. Awareness of these elements, a growing sense of what the purpose of the van really was and their sense that their skills had developed, now led to their final phase in experience: agency. They could make a difference.

### **7.3.3 Agency Phase**

The Spiral Model identifies that each participant exits a Service Learning Program with different levels of understanding and meaning of what they had experienced. Each student however exited the Holy Family program with a real sense of their own agency: that they had and could 'make a difference' in someone's life. It is difficult to underestimate the value of this realisation for adolescent young men. The nature of this difference differed from student to student; some felt proud that they had been able to provide food and clothing to people in need. Others valued the sense of friendship and respect that they had brought to the homeless. Others were proud that they had been able to be deeply present to people struggling with loneliness or mental illness. Some

were able to see that they had contributed to the building up of a sense of community at the van site. Many students were able to identify that they had been able to let go of their own needs and listen to people who needed to unburden themselves. Most of the students were conscious of the 'other-centeredness' in their engagement with the homeless and were proud of this.

Why each student did what they did differed from one to the next, and will be discussed later in this chapter, so too did the level of meaning that they elicited from the experience. However, the 'why' or motivation for involvement in the program, for staying committed, and the link between this motivation and their sense of agency, changed for most of the students. In their final journaling and focus group discussions many of the participants identified the element of fun and friendship as being important elements for both commitment and motivation. Many joined the program "to see what the life of a homeless person is like" and "to do my bit" for the homeless. Many of the students stayed involved and valued the experience because they were enjoying it and valuing the relationships that they had made. These relationships seemed to be experienced by the students as a form of agency in themselves.

In Entry Journals the word 'community' was not referred to at all. As they came toward the end of their experience the sense of community among the students and their awareness of it on the streets were palpable. Frequently in their journal entries students' identified a pride in their contribution to this sense of community and that this was what many of the homeless came to the van for. The term "more than just a food van" was used several times in student reflections. There was a growing sense that their coming as guest and attempting to be present had a communal effect as well as an effect upon individuals. They [the students from Holy Family] had helped build a sense of welcome and acceptance. Towards the very end of the program a growing number of students were able to identify the reciprocal nature of this acceptance and sense of community. As these elements were articulated in both focus group discussions and daily journaling, they confirmed the final stage of the 'Recurring Stages of Reflection'; Transformative Thinking (Green, 2006). In many instances the normal cognition and articulation present in student reflection had been so transformed from that present in the Entry Journals as to be hardly recognisable.

There was a strong sense of personal growth and change present in student reflections during the Agency Phase. Much of this growth was associated with increased communication and community building skills: ability to deeply listen, ability to maintain a conversation, use of open ended questions, ability to read body language, etc. Students identified gifts in each other that they were not aware of at the beginning of the program, and were quite relaxed articulating this. In so doing some students were able to reframe their image of some of their peers beyond the labels and stereotypes they had associated with them; past 'jock' or 'quiet kid' to "compassionate", "easily able to mix and get conversations going". The Holy Family community had invited them to 'minister' to a risqué group in society in an adult way. In so doing they had acquired, developed and become more aware of a range of personal relationship skills that had laid dormant. As they moved on from the program each student had a sense that they were more complete people and more able to influence the world. Many Exit Journals referred to "increased confidence", "better communication skills;" or as Morgan Cooney reflected;

My relational skills have grown over the last few months as a result of my conversational skills growing and the fact that I have become a lot less assuming and judging on first impressions as a result of doing Big Brekky. My communication skills have grown because I've had talk to people I've never met with completely different experiences to me. I am definitely more broad minded in thinking because my stereotypes of homeless people have been broken by talking to them and finding out who they really are. I've been able to read body language and my ability to read it has grown because that's part of conversing with someone and I've picked up feelings and emotions like when I asked about someone's son and they shifted a bit and dodged the question. (MC, EX, 6)

Part of their sense of agency was an often repeated reflection that their youth was important; that part of the reason they were so able to connect with both younger and older homeless was that they were young. Students seemed to appreciate that their 'youthfulness' was valued in itself and a factor in their agency. They had been able to connect with young people on the streets because they too were young, and they had been able to connect with the older people as "they love talking to kids". An element of their sense of agency was an adolescent pride that they had committed to a difficult task [getting up very early in the morning over a six month period and working with a sub-culture of people that society in general would see as 'difficult'] and that they did it well and saw the commitment through. Only one of the fifty-three students involved in the van during this volunteer roster period failed to honour his commitments. Louis only attended two times out of his rostered nine. Young people value a challenge and in successfully meeting it there is a sense of pride that will increase agency.

Much of the growing sense of agency experienced by the students was expressed in the context of their peer group, the other team members and Holy Family College. They were very aware that they were “Holy Family students” and that, to an extent, they were representing the College. Just as many had joined the program partly because of its sound reputation and the positive things past students had said about the program, they were now the ‘older students’ who would pass the program experience onto younger students. In doing so the students had a sense that they had “done well”. While there was an idealistic self and group assessment of their impact in many Exit Journals, there was awareness that what they had achieved was limited. The work in Religious Education classes had focussed on different models of service from charity to change. This work had affirmed that some have the role of charity, Mother Teresa of Calcutta being an example. Some were affirmed as having more of a change role, asking ‘why’ about unjust situations and attempting to use their gifts to break the cycle of poverty. From a sociological point of view the students were aware that what they could achieve was limited. While a large number of these students have already involved themselves in other Social Justice, Service Learning Programs since their involvement on Eddie’s Van, a possible topic for future research may well be an examination of involvement in service once they begin professional careers.

This crucial time in any Service Learning Program, when students make strong cognitive links between their experience and class content, must be a period where mentors invite students past awareness to agency. “If the students remain in the normalisation stage, it is easy for them to become reconciled to the fact that inequalities exist and slip into viewing those impacted by these inequalities as an out-group” (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 21). In some emotional responses to experience there is a movement forward, or change, that then disappears once the associated emotional energy dissipates. This reinforces the importance of placing experience in the context of a credible ideology and spiralling reflection cycle. In the midst of experiencing the ‘friendship’ and ‘acceptance’ from the homeless, students may well move toward ‘in-group’ thinking only to slip back to an ‘out-group’ mindset once the emotion subsides. The goal of Service Learning Programs must be to impact worldviews for the longer term.

For faculty using Service Learning, the ultimate goal is for students to master course content in a way that meaningfully shapes their understanding of reality and impacts their worldview. This final stage [Engagement] is when students will either reify their original worldview or integrate what they

have learned. Reflection at this stage should allow students to question assumptions, gather more extensive information, and then analyse their assumptions using what they have learning; through this process the students will be able to reframe their perspective and beliefs. (Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000, p. 21)

Perhaps the Awareness and Agency Phases of student experience here acted as a Framework Experience (Seider, 2007) in the midst of the Service Learning Program [as distinct from its usual place in pre-program preparation]. In doing so the classroom work and reflection upon experience played a similar role in replacing, modifying or specifying worldviews that a similar academic experience prior to a program may have done.

Finally in the context of agency there was a genuine humility associated with both the students and the program. The culture of Holy Family would suggest that the Big Brekky program is just something that the College community does and attention is not drawn to it. The students embraced this and they exited the program not with any 'medal ceremony' or 'newspaper headlines', but with a quiet resolve to get involved again, an appreciation that it has been a valuable experience or a sense that they had played their part in the traditions of the College.

This discussion of the findings in the context of the Spiral Theory of Service Learning now leaves the Phases that were identified as being common to all participants, and looks at the differing levels of meaning that students gained during this time. Some students will exit from a Service Learning Program with a sense of their own agency but with a relatively surface understanding of the meaning of the program. Others exit with a deeper appreciation of the meaning of the program, some a sense of agency coupled with such a tacit experience of meaning that they are on the edge of existential change.

#### **7.4 EXITING THE SPIRAL AND ENTRY TO NEW EXPERIENCES**

While some participants will exit a service program with a surface, deeper or tacit understanding of the program all will exit having experienced the phases outlined above. The Spiral Model suggests that each participant will exit a service program with a sense of agency; a sense that they too can make a difference. However, some will have a surface appreciation of this difference in the context of the program's ideology, some deeper and some will exit the program with an embedded ideology.



## **7.5 MEANING-MAKING FROM EXPERIENCE**

Bringing the meaning associated with experience into consciousness is the key to learning in an experiential context and forms the core of the Spiral Model. But despite the active presence of mentors, continuous reflection upon experience, social analysis and a rich and relevant ideology each student experienced and exited from the Holy Family Service Learning Program at different levels of awareness and understanding.

### **7.5.1 Surface understanding and awareness**

Few participants in this study, if any, exited the program engaging with the experience at a surface, information only level of understanding and awareness. Some students did struggle to depth the ideology of the program, some were unable to undertake more than the most basic social analysis, and some found it difficult to comprehend the true nature of mental illness and substance abuse and their effects upon day-to-day living and rational behaviour. Most students did show movement in both understanding and awareness past the 'sign' to the 'signified'.

Most if not all of the journaling and Focus Group comments from some of the program participants from the second half of the program on, contained some deeper and tacit reflections. Conversely there was a similar group of students whose comments, in the main, remained at a surface level. The majority of the students moved from surface to deep and in many cases tacit reflections during the course of the program. While in general the movement from surface to deep to tacit was lineal, there were often examples of each level of reflection interspersed through the whole of the van experience period.

The realization that each student ultimately came to differing levels of awareness, ranging from surface reflection and knowing, right through to existential change, is illustrated in these reflections from the Exit Journals at the very end of the program. Despite the work in Social Analysis and input about mental illness, these students still struggled to understand how some of the people they met could be on the streets. Their reflections are quite surface level with some little transcendence.

What I still have trouble with understanding is why some of these people are on the street. The council has a myriad of programs available to help these people get off the streets into low cost accommodation. So why are there still perfectly sane healthy people out on the street? (RO'B, EX, 6)

What still confuses me is when some of them buy alcohol and drugs, why don't they be stricter on themselves so they can try to break the cycle of homelessness. (MD, EX, 6)

The things that confuse me are the reasons that some of the people are on the streets and how come they can't just reconnect with their loved ones and leave the streets? I see people like Harry who has a car and I ask myself how come he has that luxury that some of us don't have and still live on the streets? I see the characters and I hear the stories of people like Bruce, Imogen, Andrew and Richie and I can't get over how they have come from that background to get to the way they are now! (TK, EX, 6)

Rory, Matthew and Tim were unable to make links between a person caught up in a mental illness and possibly advanced stages of substance abuse coupled with an inability to access programs, have the day-to-day discipline of budgeting and meeting financial commitments, break substance abuse and just reconnect with loved ones. Whether the stages of awareness reached by these and other students reflect prior dispositions, the effects of a particular experience, or there was a breakdown in the reflection process is unclear. Interestingly, these students at other periods during the program, came to quite deep levels of awareness of other issues such as 'presence' and 'mental illness'.

Other students, in remaining at a relatively surface level, were able to identify that their Eddie's Van experience had helped them grow in self confidence, in communication skills such as reading body language and had given them a chance to serve. In his Exit Journal reflection, Travis is very positive about his van experience but is unable to articulate a deeper meaning in his experience past mateship, increased skills and helping the poor. Many of Travis' difficulties were associated with communication challenges, and conversely he identified his success at meeting these as being important for him.

I found going out of my comfort zone and talking to a person that I have never met really difficult at first. I still find it hard to go out and talk to someone without a friend with me. My hardest situation was just the first day on the van. Not knowing what to expect. Fear of the unknown. My hardest situation was when I was talking to someone and we just ran out of things to say and there was this awkward silence. My self confidence has grown a lot because being able to go out and talk to people that you've never met before is great and boosts my self confidence. My ability to read 'body language' has grown. This is due to being able to approach people I have never met before and talk to them. (TC, EX.6)

Travis was proud of his commitment to the program and his ability to help those in need. He especially connected with a Peruvian man and their common love of football which gave them much to talk about. While Travis enjoyed the atmosphere of the van site he was unable to either name it as 'community' or see any reciprocity in it. Travis' rather simplistic stereotype broke down and he was able to see that the van was about more

than just feeding the homeless. Travis was able to name 'presence' as important to him; a real listening beyond words to understanding. While this meaning-making was not yet at the level of some other program participants it does indicate a movement in Travis from the beginning of the program.

I have seen mateship and friendship in my fellow team mates that I haven't seen outside of Eddies Van. I have a close friendship with a Peruvian guy I don't know his name but he use to be a chief and played soccer. So we had a lot to talk about. I've enjoyed meeting new people and the feeling that I may have helped someone. I have felt most at home when every time I go on the van there's always someone that says hello. I have felt a sense of Brotherhood when I see the homeless guys all together talking. I believe Eddies van has helped the homeless a lot. It has helped them find a place where they just don't get a free feed but someone to talk to about things that maybe they wouldn't get a chance to talk about among their peers. A stereo type I had before I did Eddies Van was that homeless people were people that lived in sewers and ate rats. That they didn't have lives. But that has all changed now due to Eddies van. It has shown me that homeless people are people that just have bad luck and don't eat rats. And that they are just lonely. Being present towards someone has become more meaningful to me. It has shown me just not to hear someone talk but to listen and understand their situation. (TC, EX.6)

Matthew Hansen found his first visits to the van site difficult as he struggled to connect with some of the people, especially some of the Indigenous people. But over the period of the van experience Matthew too has grown in confidence.

At first what I found difficult it was hard at the start to interact with people who are in a different financial state to what I'm used to and I did not know how to talk to them without offending them. That difficulty now is not a problem as I look at them the same way as I would anyone; I talk to them as my mates. The only thing I don't understand about homeless people is Harry and what makes someone like him tick; how he has a car and everything and how he just comes down for the Brekky – for the food and for the company. The hardest situation I have been faced with was on my very first morning going down to find some people for the Breakfast and saw the Aboriginals. I saw them and had to talk to them and was scared. (MH, EX.6)

Matthew did have a real sense of agency and was able to see that this went beyond the operation of a barbeque to relationships. Matthew is able to articulate that after some time he began to see the van experience as a stress release, and that while it gives the homeless a relationship, it "gives us one too". While it is important that Matthew was able to name this slightly deeper awareness, he seems unable to expand upon this or make links to other dynamics within the experience.

The thing I really enjoy about the van is getting into relationships with people and it takes your mind off the stress you might have and takes your mind into a different state; I relax and it is real. The highlight over the last couple of months has been everything in general; I really enjoy it and it is something I will keep on doing after the program finishes. My experience over the past four months has been diverse. I started off thinking all we did was just feed them food but I have realised that we give them a relationship and it gives us one too. I think all my intellectual skills have been brought up to a high standard because of all my great chats to the guys on the Brekky Van. (MH, EX.6)

The Exit Journal reflections would suggest that one group of students experienced the van as a positive experience exemplified by growth in confidence and communication skills, the making of 'friends', and a sense of helping those in need beyond the provision

of food, to relationship. Others appeared to go past this level of experience to a much deeper level of meaning.

### 7.5.2 Deeper understanding and awareness

In the following discussion (see Figure 7.1) different participant experiences of certain program themes such as presence, community, agency, purpose, and stereotype are examined in the light of the levels of meaning the participant gleaned from them. These levels of meaning reflect the spiral journey towards existential or deep inner change. This journey took some students past surface understanding with an emphasis on information itself, to deeper understanding which looked beyond the information to its meaning and significance, drawing links and connections. Others, in their search for meaning, came to tacit understandings, where the meaning-making was so effective that none of the original discrete features were identifiable – the eternal knowledge was now a part of the person’s biography.

In Figure 7.1 the right hand column is the actual text from the student reflections. In some cases a key word has been bolded for emphasis. The left hand column is the topic addressed and the middle column the awareness or insight that the student arrived at. It is important to remember that in some cases the student reflection was part of a wider discussion, and so to some extent is taken from its context. However the meaning of what was said does not alter. It is in the area of insight or awareness that meaning is found; meaning beyond the external, beyond the sign to the signified. Sometimes the insight is sociological, sometimes psychological and often relational. The researcher acknowledges his bias is selecting some text and not others.

**Figure 7.1 Deeper Insight / Awareness:**

Topic	Insight	Text
How a person could end up on the streets.	Often there is a particular incident that occurs that is the trigger or tipping point beginning the process to homelessness	“Most of them – there is a <b>trigger</b> that starts things up – they then go down from there”. Dylan.
The equality in the relationships formed with the homeless.	The relationships with the homeless often developed to a point that there was a freedom and honesty that allowed them [the students] to talk about personal issues.	“...they do treat you as if you are on the same level as them – <b>you can talk about stuff there that you would not talk about with your parents</b> ”. James.
Personal value of people.	As the students related to the homeless some were conscious	“I know it is not about material things but that is what society

	of an ever present tendency to judge them based on an identification with material things; we should not do it but it is ingrained within as part of societal values.	judges people on – material things ....society judges you on these sorts of things and so when you are trying to be equal it <b><u>has been drilled into you that you judge people on that ...</u></b> ! Dylan
Acceptance beyond stereotypes.	The homeless do not stereotype the students; they relate to them past any label of what school they attend.	"I don't think it [what school we attend] matters to them". Alex.
Power of the voluntary relationship.	The homeless really appreciate that the students are choosing to be there and it is not their 'job'; they are there for the relationship.	"I think that they [the homeless] think, 'would you be here if you weren't getting paid?' I think the homeless really appreciate that we do this voluntarily". Sean
The power of respectful relationship.	The importance in effective ministry and relationship at working hard to establish relationship before effective intervention can take place.	"they [the Council workers] have not worked hard to establish the link in the first place...the big difference between what we do and what they do is that they go out sort of thinking that they are fixing things and sort of making changes but they are really not; the are not really getting to know these guys – where as we are out there trying to really <b><u>get to know the guys and just be friends with them</u></b> ". Andrew
Nature of Friendship.	The students know that the context of and boundary for their friendship is their shared van experience so it is a limited contextual friendship.	"Our friendship is linked to Eddie's Van. We can't kind of be friends in the sense of every day in their normal day-to-day". Tony.
Who benefits from the van experience?	We [the students] have no right to expect that the homeless have to talk to us; it is an arrogant view to say that we are doing them a service.	"Maybe he just does not want to talk to you. I think that is a valid point – you don't always want to talk to someone". Louis
Who benefits from the van experience?	While the homeless enjoy the experience of having the van the students are benefiting more from the experience as they are gaining new relationships and insights.	"...we are remembering them then it's going to be more for us because we are the ones remembering them and what happened and they remember having a good morning...we are getting to know people but for them they are just having a talk; so it's probably better for us". Ben
Who benefits from the van experience?	The homeless benefit from the van as it builds a sense of community and belonging and provides a 'social' scene for the homeless who may be psychologically fragile.	"I don't think it matters who he is talking to provided they have someone to talk to. If there was not an Eddie's Van he would not have any social sort of life, anything to do socially. I think it is really important that they have someone to talk to otherwise they would go just completely mad". Nick
Who benefits from the van experience?	It does not really matter which student is there talking to them as long as someone is; therefore it [the van] is doing more for the individual particular student; they	"But it probably is more for our sake like it gives us a better understanding and they wouldn't really care who is there, they don't really care who they talk to".

	feel needed.	James
Who benefits from the van experience?	The initial motivation for serving on the van was to benefit the homeless; after that they realise that there is mutual benefit – but in different ways.	"It is important that someone does it [the van]; whether it is us or someone else and I think that whoever is doing it; they may benefit from it. The reason so many different people do the van is because it benefits the homeless people". Nick.
Who benefits from the van experience?	For some students their motivation was self centred in joining the van; they wanted to see what this experience would be like; now they can see that it has benefit for both groups. Deeper level of self awareness.	"I did not begin the van thinking, 'I'm going to help the homeless, I'm going to make a difference.' No, I thought 'I'm going to try this and see what it is like; a completely self centred thing – it is only now that we can see that it is beneficial to them as well". Louis
We are the guest in their house.	The van environment and culture is their house and not ours and so we must learn to relate according to their rules; we are the guest.	"...you are in <b>their house and so you go by their rules</b> ...when I first went out on the van and you did not know the rules. And now you are beginning to understand the rules of their house a little bit more". Rory
How easy it is to end up on the streets.	It is much easier than you would think to end up on the streets and it could happen to the students; they are not impervious from this experience. This reality could be their reality one day if life goes a particular way.	"It is very scary to think how small the instances are that cause someone to be homeless ...something like losing your wife could cause that ...you don't think that it <b>could be you</b> but <b>there is a chance that it could be</b> . They don't have the skills to deal with it". Matthew
Getting off the streets.	Getting off the streets is not the easy, rational decision they first thought it was; mental illness could mean that they just can't nor may wish to be somewhere else; it may be more secure for them there.	"Some of these fellows have been there that long that they don't want to leave the streets or <b>can't leave</b> ". Andrew
Getting off the streets.	Getting off the streets may require a level of sophistication; of skills and contacts that they are not capable of.	"There is this guy that I've been talking to who believes that he <b>can't get off the streets</b> ; he does not have the contacts nor the skills". Tom.
The nature of the friendship between the students and the homeless.	The homeless know that the nature of the 'friendship' is different; they [the streeties] chose not to swear etc in front of the students out of respect for them.	"...they look at us as mates and they do know that we are not going to be their mates outside of the context of Eddie's Van and they don't treat us as they would a mate from the streets, they don't swear when we are there....they don't just treat us how they treat their streetie mates, but they still want to be mates with us". James
The homeless community.	Even apart from the presence of Eddie's Van there is a real community among many of the homeless; they are not just all isolated individuals.	"...this morning I sensed there was real community among them, <b>a real community even without us</b> ". Ben
Relationships need time;	Even relating to the younger	"I'm sure that if we did this [the

especially with difficult people.	Indigenous people if the students had a long enough period of time they could build a relationship with them; relationship needed time.	van] for long enough we would be able to talk to even them". Louis
Three distinct communities.	The obvious presence of community that many of the other students identified is broken up by Matthew who can see community within community; each with their own characteristics.	"I have seen <b>three clear communities</b> ; the Eddie's Van community gathering in the morning ...secondly the homeless community how most of them stick together ...lastly I believe there is a small Aboriginal community that sticks together and backs each other up...!" Matthew
The nature of homelessness.	Homelessness does not necessarily mean not having a home. The common link is a lack of connection and belonging.	"Homelessness is caused by a lack of connection and belonging. Many of the people I have spoken to have a residence and possessions but <b>lack a connection and belonging</b> ". Jack
Why come to Eddie's Van.	It was not the light breakfast that attracted people to Eddie's Van but the sense of community and connection.	"...it hit me that maybe people were coming to the brekky van for something more; <b>the sense of community</b> ". Adam
Sense of Community.	The initial 'charity model' of we are going to help them has moved on to such an extent that Chris can see that the homeless community is often even friendlier than the communities he is a part of.	"There is a solid community established between the homeless; it can often <b>be friendlier than communities that we live in normally</b> ". Chris

### 7.5.3 Tacit understanding and awareness

The following Figure (Figure 7.2) displays some of the student reflections that suggest even deeper awareness or insight, suggesting the possibility that the student may have moved even further down the spiral towards existential change. In most cases the reflection centres on a personal reaction or awareness resulting from interactions with the homeless. The student has taken the new awareness into themselves and altered a prior belief or approach as a result. In some cases the students express a change in values or mind-sets as a result. The common thread through these reflections is the belief that in some way they [the students] will never be the same again and certainly will never view homeless people, and people in general, in the same way again. It is difficult at times to know where deeper awareness and tacit knowing begin and end; indeed it is probably a seamless garment of awareness, insight and change.

**Figure 7.2 Deeper Awareness: personal response and suggestion of Existential Change.**

Topic	Personal awareness	Text
Mental Illness	Although Steve presented as normal Alex was conscious of relating to him as a broken human being just like himself and that there was an underlying reason for his homelessness. There is degree of solidarity present.	"I had begun to feel quite comfortable with Steve but his paranoia, although not making me disregard him as a <b>human being just like me</b> , reminded me that although he may seem normal he is <b>on the streets for a reason</b> ". Alex
Acceptance and empathy.	A group of the students who have not done Eddie's Van were laughing at an obviously homeless youth on the train coming to school. Josh is able to have a deep empathy for him and sense that some series of life experiences have led him to be where he is.	"... <b>you have no idea of the sort of experience, the story that he [the fellow on the train] has had</b> . Like, obviously he did not look like he had been treated so well in his life and if I had not been on Eddie's Van – otherwise I would not have seen that side". Josh
Reciprocal Presence	Matthew found the homeless person's energy was focussed on him; reaching out to him from his life experience.	"...he was sort of relating to me about my life from his experiences; it was the first time that a homeless guy was <b>really present to me</b> ". Matthew
Reciprocity and acceptance.	Andrew here values the deep sense of personal acceptance from the homeless and as a result wonders who is actually helping whom? This level of adult acceptance would be significant for an adolescent.	"Also it feels good to help out people <b>[though sometimes I wonder who helps who]</b> and I enjoy the feeling of <b>acceptance</b> that some homeless provide to us". Andrew
Two way relationship.	Chris is so much caught up in the positive energy of this moment that he reflects that they [the homeless] were coming into his life as a guest and giving to him what he had set out to give to them.	"...he was asking me questions as well. He was laughing with me and he smiled and said goodbye and patted me on the back. They would wave to us when we were driving away. I felt like this because <b>they were coming as a guest to me</b> , and being open and friendly and making me feel accepted as well". Chris
Dignity of the Person.	Nick has come to this deep awareness that dignity is all about the person regardless of age, material possessions, station in life and more; it is about acceptance.	"To me when you think of dignity it would be like disregarding age and disregarding material possession and just having a talk to them <b>as the person that they are</b> ...the dignity of the person can be shown if you just ignore their age or how they are different to you and just accept them as a person". Nick
Should they appreciate us?	Sean has come to an awareness that it is important not to be a mat to be walked on in ministry and that in true relationship no one really 'owes'. There is a deep freedom in his reflections.	"I don't think we are 'owed' appreciation. I still think that in a sense they should appreciate what we do. They <b>don't owe us anything and we don't owe them anything</b> ". Sean
Should they appreciate us?	Matthew can see that the	"We should appreciate them as



	homeless have changed them [the students] and that as a result we should appreciate them just as they should appreciate us; it is a human interaction component beyond the labels of homeless or student.	well. We have all agreed here that <b>they have changed us</b> – that they have taught us certain things, so in a way it is sort of mutual – we give them breakfast – they teach us how to respect the person, how to speak to a person”. Matthew.
Should they appreciate us?	Chris can see that the homeless do appreciate them but more importantly the relationship is all about free choice; the student’s choice to be there and the homeless person’s choice to come.	“I don’t know that I think that they should appreciate us but I think that they do. It is like our choice to be out there and their choice to come. <b>They just do appreciate it – they don’t have to</b> ”. Chris
Dignity and personal freedom.	Anthony’s comment was in response to a discussion where some of the students realised that some homeless people want to be on the streets and others can not leave there. Anthony takes the issue further to suggest that regardless they have a personal right to live out their lives as they wish; a deep respect for their dignity. To allow someone to freely choose what you may believe is not best for someone shows a depth of empathy and understanding of human freedom.	“But even if they don’t want to leave it is still <b>their right</b> for them to be on the street”. Anthony
Empathy and understanding from relationship.	Morgan’s relationship with the homeless and in particular with the Indigenous youth has led him to a degree of empathy and understanding that those with ‘no relationship’ can not come to. Not only that but those with no relationship can stay in the cruel stage of making jokes at the misfortune of others based upon stereotypes. Morgan’s reflection clearly implies that it was worth it!	“People were asking how was it, was it worth it? I then recalled some of the situations with young Aboriginals with sniffing paint etc; I told them it was quite sad and stuff ...But the people who did not do Eddie’s Van just like sort of got the view that they are all trouble and they are all, just like, say big jokes about it like just Aboriginal kids sniffing paint and thought it was funny. <b>For us it was different!</b> ” Morgan
Relationship can lead to radical change past stereotypes.	Few Holy Family students would have ever spoken to an Aboriginal youth. Here Jack sees way past any prior stereotype through relationship. It is almost as if by relating to them the reality of the situation, of who they are, has come true for him.	“It’s very easy to, like when you’re in our position, to sort of judge them [the Aboriginal kids], and really easy to label them, its whatever you feel like, like with the Aboriginal kids but, if you actually experienced it, like, seeing them up front, and talk to them, <b>it just changes your mind completely</b> . And it’s a lot harder to label them that way; it’s like you’re receiving – like justice”. Jack
Receiving from the homeless.	Here Chris can clearly identify that Steve was present to him and was very conscious of when the students were feeling left out or uncomfortable and would make an effort to bring them into	“Steve was always the one you could go and talk to if you felt uneasy or anxious about talking to some of the others. He always gave us advice, but even though some of it may not have been

	conversations. Steve was truly caring for them and Chris can appreciate this.	appropriate, we appreciated his concern. He was probably one of the few who were also <b><u>'present to us'</u></b> when we spoke to him, which felt like he was really interested in what we had to say". Chris.
Receiving from the homeless.	James has experienced the homeless giving to him; cheering him up, accepting him for who he is – a realisation that despite their lives being so different – the homeless person has given more to him than he has given to the homeless person.	"I think <b><u>I have gotten more out of our relationship than he has:</u></b> which is incredible when you compare our circumstances. They accepted me for who I was; sometimes the people out there are really good at cheering people up". James
Acceptance for who you are.	Morgan has experienced an area in his life where he is totally accepted and related to simply as himself beyond labels and this acceptance has come from the most unlikely source; homeless people.	"I would say I like going out because they are <b><u>people who just want to talk to you</u></b> – they don't want to talk about 'school work' Morgan or 'sports Morgan' they just want to talk to Morgan which I like so I go back". Morgan
Being part of something beyond themselves.	Matthew is able to see that the community around Eddie's Van is not only their family but allows them feel that they belong to something beyond themselves and in so doing feel important and valued.	"...about building up a sense of community – it is sort of like their family – like some of them don't have anyone else but themselves and maybe a few other relatives and when they come to Eddie's Van they maybe feel that they are part of something greater than just themselves". Matthew
The whole person.	Sean has come to deep sense of the dignity and worth of each person beyond the externals.	"I think I have become a more accepting person ...I've stopped just seeing the materialistic outside and I've begun to look at <b><u>the deeper person on the inside</u></b> ". Sean
This could happen to anyone.	Not only has Grant come to see the homeless as if they were family but can see that being on the streets could happen to anyone according to life's circumstances and chance. Grant also can see that his life is now much richer and each homeless person is a possible mate.	"...through out this experience I find I am less judgmental of the homeless and have learnt to see them as if they were <b><u>my brothers and sisters. This could happen to anyone.</u></b> I no longer walk through King George Square seeing the men on the benches as 'bums' but now as <b><u>possible mates.</u></b> I feel I have helped those individuals to have a slightly better life and in their turn <b><u>they have enriched my life</u></b> ". Grant
Dignity of all people.	For Alex all people are sacred and worthy of the same respect you would give to those closest to you; this cuts across any suggestion of earning respect or judgement or any person being better than another.	"I feel that inside of me I have become a much better human being for the experience as the van has helped me realise that <b><u>all people are sacred</u></b> and deserve the same respect that I would give to my mates and my family". Alex
The homeless do not need our pity.	For Ben the homeless have a great dignity and worth and do not in any way need nor ask for our pity.	"You should not feel bad for them – you should feel bad about yourself if you are not doing anything for them". Ben

<p>Perspective – what is really important.</p>	<p>Matthew has come to a point where he can see that the homeless have a wonderful perspective on life and have simple needs; friendship and acceptance. He has become aware that his own reflections and what he values have changed as he reflects upon his interactions with the homeless and the meaning of life beyond homeless and OP's [entrance levels for University] and sport etc.</p>	<p>"...when you get home and you go to bed and kind of reflect upon it – it is kind of a cleansing kind of experience for you because you kind of feel better the next day. That is what you are talking about and that is what you are thinking about – like you are not thinking about all the little things like what subjects you have to do or what homework you have to do, sport etc. You are <u>thinking about life, about bigger issues</u>, people on Eddie's Van don't care about all that sort of stuff; they just care that they have a friend and stuff like that". Matthew</p>
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The program's hope would be that many participants would carry with them deeply empathetic and compassionate attitudes and a sense of reciprocity in relationship as they move on from their van experience into post school life. The van program was never intended to be an end in itself. The program was never intended to be a way of improving the communication skills of Holy Family students nor a means to teach lateral thinking. These and many other skills appear to be by-products of the program. The program was always about serving in a direct and respectful way, to hopefully lead the participant to an awareness of his own dignity and that of those they served. The program was always promoting the ideal that in serving in this way, the students would come to a point of awareness where they would realise that in serving they were indeed being served.

## 7.6 INDIVIDUAL STORIES IN THE LIGHT OF THE SPIRAL MODEL

One of the principal criticisms of research into Service Learning is centred on the concern that the identified effects of service may be explained by self selection factors such as family of origin or personality type, and may have little to do with the service program itself (Seider, 2007). The following discussion follows the journey of several individual participants over the six month period of involvement with the Holy Family Program, and attempts to identify any movement towards Existential Change within that period. Each individual comes to a service program with their prior beliefs and values, often the result of the socialization within family. While immediate articulation of meaning linked to reflection would reflect the effect of this socialization early in the program, as

time went by change across participants may be explained by program elements as well as family and personality variables.

The Spiral Theory would suggest that each participant in an extended Service Learning situation experiences six phases: Expectations, Exposure, Reframing, Disillusionment, Awareness and Agency. In the following examination of individual participants experience of Eddie's Van not all articulate a clearly identifiable 'Disillusionment Phase'. While some were out-rightly rejected by the homeless, or had times of boredom or a sense of futility, all participants struggled with the program at some time even though they may not have named this either in focus group discussions or in their daily journaling.

The process of meaning-making and making the ideology of a Service Learning Program your own mirrors, reflected the stages of Progressive Internalisation identified by Le Cornu (2006). Each participant will find meaning in the experiences of a program at the level of Surface, Deeper or Tacit change. Some of the participants that this section examines rarely go past a surface level of meaning-making during their van experience, others touch deeper understanding, while one or two touch on possible elements of existential awareness and change.

#### **7.6.1 Louis Perrins.**

Of the fifty-three students involved with the Holy Family program during the research period one produced quite unique data. Louis Perrins was clearly an intelligent young man but while he attended all four focus group discussions he only participated in the van experience on two occasions. Louis' contribution to focus group discussions was significant, but to a large extent, given the paucity of actual van experience, was based more on prior belief and attitudes rather than reflection upon actual experience. Analysis of Louis' focus group discussions input shows a high level of intellectualising and quite strongly held prior beliefs.

Louis' brief experience of the van does come through in the data. He does reflect that he "was a bit hesitant at first to talk" and that "some sat by themselves and you had to learn how to read their emotions". In his Expectations and Exposure phases Louis engaged

Tony in conversation for quite a long time and this went a long way to break open Louis' stereotype.

He knows a lot about sport. He didn't really tell us how he ended up on the streets but we were only talking to him for about half an hour, but it was kind of weird because you expect these guys to be crazy or stupid – but this guy was pretty together, pretty smart. You could just tell by the way he was speaking. He was quite intelligent. He told us some of his experiences at school and about his family. (FG, 17.2)

The breakdown in Louis' stereotype of homeless people and his building of a more real concept map were constricted by his limited field experience. From his limited experience Louis was able to name that “they are people, I had never really thought of them as people before but as scenery, in the background, but that has changed now”. The site where Louis volunteered had quite a large Indigenous population living close by and Louis approached them and again, had his stereotype challenged as they “weren't picking fights or anything”. Despite Louis' quite negative stereotype, “It is different to the image I often have of them – when I get to the train station at night coming home from Rugby training and I see them – 9 out of 10 times – asking you for money. You just have to step past them. It is annoying”, he is able to articulate from his little bit of actual relating that “if we did this long enough we would be able to talk to even them”.

Louis' family background, level of intelligence and/or personality enabled him to see that “when they are at Eddie's Van it is kind of like private, it is their area”. From his prior values base and belief system Louis was able to see that the homeless are on the streets “because of certain circumstances” but then, probably incorrectly, assumed that the homeless he was meeting at Kurilpa Park were “from educated backgrounds, where as some of the ones in the city may not have ever known anything different”.

Louis' reflections that are based on actual experience show that he, like the others involved with the program experienced the elements of the Expectations and Exposure phases and to some extent the Reframing Phase. Louis did have strong prior stereotypes and his limited experience did challenge these. He reframed his experience noting that many of the homeless were good conversationalists, intelligent, loved sport and had something to offer the community. Louis did attempt to use the ideology of the program and ‘be present’ to the “pretty creepy looking bloke” and this did lead him to be able to recognise the homeless beyond ‘scenery’ to people whose life circumstances had led them to be homeless.

There was this bloke who had tattoos all over his face – he had done them himself – pretty creepy looking bloke – I did not really understand what he was saying but that did not stop me from trying to

listen, trying to give him my full attention and that is pretty well all you can do in that kind of situation. I was just listening the entire time. He really appreciated me listening to him for all of that time. (FG, 17.2)

Many of Louis' other interventions during focus groups appear to be intellectualisations of his prior beliefs and attitudes as well as based upon the theory work of the Religious Education classes. This tension between the data gained from intellectualising, distinct from lived experience was present in Green's research. Those students who "participated in the service experience made direct connections to the contemporary issue of homelessness" far better than those who participated only in the research reflections (Green, 2006, p, 192). Louis engaged in quite strongly-felt debates with other focus group members. Do you agree with what the homeless say or not regardless of the presence of a mental illness? What is the effect of Eddie's Van? Whose needs are getting met through the van [who benefits]? What is the motivation for involvement? What is the nature of 'dignity' Can you be equal with a homeless person? In each case Louis responds from his own prior belief system and world view, rather than from reflection upon experience. Each of the issues that Louis engaged with was of a philosophical or political nature.

Louis felt that some of his peers were "humouring or patronizing the homeless" when they just agreed with what they were saying while attempting to be present. Louis' belief that "I think you have to challenge them as well as to why they have those views" did not have the opportunity to be tested over time, as it was not based on real life experience of conversing with people with varying degrees of mental illness. Louis' willingness to engage in debate with other students in the focus groups about issues such as motivation for doing the van, can you be equal, who benefits from the program etc., may have been a defensive response to his lack of presence on the van and not having shared van experience to cement a new relationship with his own peers. The other members of Louis' team and those in the focus group, had seven or eight van experiences on which to base reflections. Perhaps if Louis had six months of relational experience to reflect upon, he may have altered or modified his views.

On one occasion, Louis suggested that other members of the focus group were displaying "arrogance". They "come with this arrogant view that we're doing them a service and they should respect us by talking to us". On other occasions he suggested it was "completely selfish our going out there and doing this if it is for our benefit". Perhaps

if Louis had shared more experience on the van with his peers he may have seen that in reality they were quite humble in their approach to the people who came to the van and in their motivation for involvement. Louis appears to be intellectualising out of prior beliefs and values which clash with the beliefs and values of the other participants as they process their experience. When Nick Nagle suggested that “to help the homeless was why Eddie’s Van began”, Louis’ response, while limited by experience, does suggest that he has developed mindsets that react to patronizing charity.

That may be the reason it started but it is not the reason we started, none of us here had any prior experience of it, before this program, so what is the reason you signed up – you weren’t thinking, “I’m going to help you, I’m going to make a difference!” You would have thought, “I’m going to try this, see what it is like”. You want to see what it is like. A completely self centred thing – it is only now that we can see that it is beneficial to them as well. (FG, 28.4)

When the facilitator invited the group to comment on their understanding of ‘coming as guest’ Louis again had little experience upon which to base his reflections. Nick Nagle suggested coming as a guest meant “you are not above them – you are being equal”. Louis reacted to this and intellectualised from his prior belief about equality being a social equality based on age or qualifications. To Louis you could not be ‘equal’ with the homeless as they were much older. Nick’s understanding, from a different family background, is now reflected through the lens of his lived experience of the van. Louis then reacts to the concept of ‘showing people dignity’ and sees it as patronizing.

Louis: Saying that we’re supposed to give dignity implies that we are coming from a higher level and we are coming down to their level.

Nick: Yeh, but when you try to be nice to somebody, like even if they are not homeless – if is someone who is older than you or a lot younger than you – the dignity of the person can be shown if you just ignore their age or how they are different to you and just accept them as a person. (FG, 28.4)

In addition to these debates Louis frequently made generalisations and interpretations of the van context that were clearly not informed and appeared to come from his prior value and belief system. Louis interpreted the reaction of some Aboriginal people as “being bitter towards us; they did not like us because – they enjoy the breakfast and stuff but I don’t think they like being helped”. Later in that same focus group Louis felt that the Aboriginals “got angry at us because we were neutral and not aggressive – when we don’t react they sort of get more angry – they could interpret it as ‘You think you are better than us because you don’t get angry and stuff’”. Based on only two visits to Kurilpa Park, Louis reflected that “a few of the guys there were kind of resentful about the fact that we do have money”, “it is resentment of the private school thing” and “it is hard to dignify the person when you can sense that they do resent you”. The researcher

was one of the faculty members who worked with Louis' team at Kurilpa Park and neither he nor any of the other team members from their seven or eight visits reported 'resentment'.

Louis is quite an intelligent and articulate young man and his comments on arrogance, motivation for involvement, and on the effect of the van on the homeless, all suggest quite mature attitudes beyond a charity model. However these articulations are coming from his prior perceptions and are not based upon his own experience of 'reality' on the streets. Louis' comments on dignity, equality, resentment and on the educated nature of the homeless who come to Eddie's Van compared to others in society, show a strong lack of contextual experience and relationship with the homeless where his 'theories' could be tested and modified. Louis, perhaps because he lacked enough van experience to reflect upon or time to practice skills, showed a much shallower understanding of presence and guest compared to most other participants. Louis' van experience supports the need for a prolonged engagement in the field to produce a depth of experience. There is a higher chance that Louis' conceptual map would have changed to reflect the reality of the streets and the goals and ideology of the program had he the depth of experience over time. The absence of any comment associated with reciprocity, the sharing of story, the deeper nature of mental illness, the presence of community, growth in a sense of agency and increased sense of self would all suggest that Louis' van experience remained at a surface level. This is in spite of family attitudes that may have provided the possibility for much greater depth.

### **7.6.2 Nick Moroney**

Nick Moroney began his Expectations and Exposure Phases in a similar way to many other participants. He was attracted to the program by its reputation and the fact that his older brother had participated and valued the experience. Nick expressed his hopes and fears in quite a sociological way. He wanted to "have a better understanding of homelessness and its associated issues, as well as the circumstances of how homeless people become homeless" and "hoped to gain a valuable insight into what is one of the most prominent issues that face urban Australian society today" (EJ.2). Right from the beginning Nick was able to name that Eddie's Van was "central to Holy Family's ideology as it is best to use the ideals of the founder [Edmund Rice] through action" (EJ.2). Nick



identified that the school was a “well resourced private school and has the means to support the logistics of the van” (EJ.2).

Nick too was confronted by the reality of the van situation, but was quickly able to stand back from his reaction and be aware of the stereotypes that he had in his own mind. This ability to observe his own thinking processes was quite sophisticated at this point in the program.

The first time I went I thought there would be sort of drug addicts reclusive sort of people and that sort of stereotype of people on the street but then when you come there you see that some of them are just sort of normal people. It is a shock to see the stereotypes you have in your head. Then you realise then that 90% of them are just like you and me. (FG, 16.2)

This level of awareness past a surface understanding of the van situation led to Nick quickly reframing his experience. He was able to name that they are “just like you and me” and was able to remember some individual’s names and begin building relationships quite quickly.

The first time I met Harry he said that he had been going to Eddie’s Van ever since it had been started and that he knew Mr. Carey and Mr. O’Neill and all the teachers. I introduced myself to him and he talked away and we talked about the sausages and all of that. Small talk like that the first time but the second time I felt we really connected. (FG, 16.2)

Nick quite quickly progressed to a deeper level of awareness. In only his third van visit he went beyond his comfort zone and attempted to engage with a group of ‘difficult’ homeless men who were off to the side on their own. Nick seemed to quickly grasp the concept of ‘coming as guest’ for he did not attempt to interrupt their conversation “and so for the first five minutes I just listened and did not try to join in the conversation because I really wasn’t sure what they were talking about. It was not something that I could relate to”. Nick was able to be in the group and not need to converse.

As Nick continued to reframe his inner map of what the world of the homeless was like he began to enter the Disillusionment phase. He began to make connections between class discussions on mental illness and his experiences on the van, and experienced some of the violent reality of the van when a regular guest to the van assaulted an apparently disabled homeless man in a wheel-chair.

Last time I went out I experienced some of the paranoia that we have been talking about in class with this guy Michael. He was saying how all the cops are corrupt and that the Government is out to get him and he wants to shoot John Howard and all these other things – very cynical and skeptical about the Government and against any sort of establishment basically. Also there was this guy who bashed another bloke and Mr. Finn said that of all the guys on the street Rivers is probably the only one that he does not really like. Because of his aggressive sort of nature and his personality. (FG, 27.4)

As Nick entered the Awareness Phase he was able to articulate clearly what 'coming as guest' and 'being present' meant to him. Nick used the phrase "not what you want them to be" which suggests quite a deep understanding of the freedom necessary to accept difference. When engaging with homeless men who clearly had some form of mental illness, Nick was able to be present to the person in contrast to some students who reacted to what the homeless were saying and felt they were hypocritical. To Nick 'coming as guest' meant.

Not judging them. Not thinking "You crazy old codger! That did not really happen". Just seeing them for who they are and not what you want them to be. Yeh, when I was talking to the guy – Michael – he was clearly had something wrong with him and he said that he liked how I listened to him and to his ideas about the government and stuff. I was not necessarily agreeing with him but I was listening to him. (FG, 27.4)

Nick's sense of Agency expressed itself through the ideology of the program. He could see the value of 'being present', sharing story and building a sense of community where people could feel welcomed and accepted. In none of Nick's reflections did he express 'charity' statements linked to fixing the homeless up or getting them jobs etc. Nick's sense of presence and guest grew to quite a tacit level of understanding, where he went beyond a sense of 'not judging' to becoming aware that this approach now translated into how he positioned himself: sitting below or beside them rather than over them and how he spoke to them. In this focus group discussion Nick is reflecting on how you would respond to a homeless person who is saying things you clearly do not agree with.

It is a sign of respect to them. When you are standing up and looking down on them it makes it hard. Even in your speech you have to have great respect for them as a human being. I think that part of coming as a guest means that it is not part of that – see you would not do that – you would not come as a guest and have conversations about things such as politics – and I think that its – you can't apply that analogy – you have to be aware of the Social environment when you are talking to them, they are three times your age with a lot of psychological problems. I think it is a different sign of a different type of respect – even more respect. (FG, 27.4)

Nick's reflection is suggestive of existential change as he is able to name a deeper level of respect, a respect for the person's innate dignity regardless of what they are saying, how they present, what form of mental illness they may have. Nick feels challenged or invited to have "even more respect". Nick seems to be suggesting that when you are in relationship with someone who is broken in some more obvious way, you bring an even deeper level of respect to that relationship, a special respect that in some way honours who they are as people.

Being part of a guest is saying like, they are above you in some ways, while with your mates you are completely equal. Metaphorically when you come as a guest to someone on the street you show a deeper and different level of respect. (FG, 27.4)

In many of the discussions that took place in focus groups about the purpose of the van, whether the homeless should appreciate what the students do, and what the students felt the homeless thought of them, Nick brought much deeper levels of awareness. While aware of his own agency, an agency based not so much on what he could do for them but more the quality of his presence, Nick displayed quite mature insights. Nick was able to see that Harry's actions [one of the key gatekeepers who directed how and where the barbeque should be set up], "give him more of a purpose in life – if he is going to every single van – that gives him something that he can look forward to and do as his responsibility". Nick was able to see that while some homeless may judge them as "rich kids trying to help out" most of the homeless did just appreciate them for who they were.

As Nick moved on from the program his Exit Journal took on some of the sociological tone that was present in his Entry Journal. Despite this Nick reflected that "I have really enjoyed the experience of simply going out on the van and speaking to homeless people with my friends from Holy Family. My highlight would be speaking to Tony, with my friends, about his alcoholism, and how we all shared in him trusting us enough to speak about that. This is where I felt most valued from a homeless person, and most accepted" (EX.6). Nick did not feel that he had changed personally from the experience, other than gaining "first hand experience" upon which to base beliefs. Nick concluded his Exit Journal by expressing his view of the need for 'change' approaches to issues of justice, reflecting the work of Kahne and Westheimer (1996), and those groups such as Eddie's Van, "while admirable", only address the symptoms of problems. Nick expresses his desire to work in the future to address the cause of much of the injustice within society.

The last message Jesus said to his followers was, "Go and love others as I have loved you", and in my opinion, this is all that is needed to address social justice. I believe that I will do something along the same lines as this in the future, however perhaps towards the needy in Brisbane. I think that I could better address Social Justice issues by addressing the cause of these Social Justice issues, and preventing them from ever rising or re-arising. I think that whilst talking to the homeless and feeding them is an admirable act, it is nonetheless only addressing the symptoms. Homelessness in Australia is caused from the gross injustice that is present in the economic systems of not only Australia, but the entire world. The concept of gaining profit for both individuals and corporations is always at the expense of someone or something else. (EX, 6)

While Nick's reflections do suggest elements of existential change, he still struggles to see the need for both the Eddie's Van type of 'ministry' as well as those that work for structural change.

### 7.6.3 Tom Higgins

Tom's experience journey begins with the Expectation Phase. "I was a little bit anxious, not sure what to expect or how it is going to go. I volunteered to do the Big Brekky because I enjoy participating in Social Awareness projects. I have been told the Big Brekky van really helps the homeless. I hope to become more socially aware of homelessness and change how I and my friends view homeless people" (EJ.2). Quickly Tom entered the Exposure Phase and began the process of reframing. He began to find simple ways of connecting with the homeless. "'Yeh,' I said, 'look at the birds, there are heaps of birds here hey!'" and that got him talking" (FG, 16.2).

Tom was easily able to name the strong stereotype with which he came to the program, and by his second focus group discussion was able to emphasize with the homeless and their situation. Tom was already at a point of being able to name that these apparently normal people just "can't do it", an insight beyond a surface experience to deeper meaning.

TH: And I sort of had only seen the negative things about homeless people, like the tramp and problem causers, so my perception was really negative about them, and I had never talked to them, but now I can see what it takes to live and normal life and I can see why they can't do it, like the guy I was talking to today, he knew that if he wanted to have a family he would need about \$800 a day and he knew that he could not get a job like that and so he felt he was unable to live our kind of life, he felt you needed connections to get anywhere and he did not have them ....

Facilitator: So some of the people you have been talking to actually want to change their lives.

TH: I think he was talking about how he had tried to but he now feels that he can't do it. (FG, 16.2)

In none of Tom's focus group or journaling reflections did he articulate boredom, frustration, hurt or anger that may be associated with the Disillusionment Phase. The key elements of both the Reframing and Awareness Phases were strongly present in Tom's reflections as he developed strong relationships with some of the homeless. The example of an older student volunteering on the Big Brekky team as a 'mentor' for him, and this student's respectful relationship with the homeless, modelled for Tom what Eddie' Van was about.

Like the Year 12 who was with us today – he just walked straight in and started talking to people. Where as the rest of us were around the BBQ he just was straight off into talking to people and doing it really well. He was so comfortable in the situation and knew a lot of people there. He was like catching up with them. He probably had not seen them for a while and so today he was catching up with them. (FG, 16.2)

Tom's ability to engage with the processes of Social Analysis was strong, especially around the complex reasons for homelessness and the difficulties of escaping from that

situation. Tom had visited East Timor the previous year for an Immersion experience and would have been at home with Social Analysis. Tom's reflection would suggest that he quickly internalised the ideology of the program to a deeper level.

Bob kept talking about how it is too hard to get another job and stuff and that the ones you can get are really hard work and really poor pay. Bob is an Aboriginal bloke. Bob kind of looks like the stereotype but he does not act like it, for example the conversations that I have had with him have been really intellectual. Like, intelligent conversations, like about the meaning of life, meaningful things about life and he kind of speaks slowly – with a lot of pauses and a lot of thought about what he was going to say. Bob believes that he can't get off the street. He believes that he does not have the contacts and the skills to get a job to get the money and to get off the streets. (FG, 30.3)

When the facilitator asked the group what they thought 'coming as guest' and 'being present' meant, Tom was able to articulate these concepts in a way that showed he had a personal ownership of them. These concepts were real for him and had given him a way and reason to connect. In this focus group discussion members of the group are quite disillusioned about the homeless using drugs and alcohol and not appearing to want to extricate themselves from this situation. Geoff is not impressed, and sees Tom's approach as "justifying them", whereas Tom would see it as understanding of and an empathy for a complex situation. Tom's reflections would suggest a deeper meaning-making process past a surface approach. Tom is attempting to 'come as a guest' to the person's choice to use drugs – appreciating that it is not as simple as might be suggested. Tom is able to see the deep link between 'guest' and 'presence'; "you can't have one without the other".

TH: That's what this coming to them as a person is all about – it is looking past the stereotypes to the person. You don't go looking for percentages – you just go there. It is like what Pricey is talking about – it is coming to them as a guest. We have not been in the situation that they have been. They might go to bed, scared and having night mares about alcoholism and stuff.

GMc: See, there you go – justifying them.

TH: So, to stop them going crazy many of them turn to drugs or alcohol – I'm not saying that this is right; they need some sort of release.

Being present you are listening to what they are saying – and when you come as a guest you are not making judgments. You can't have one without the other. (FG, 30.3)

As time went by Tom developed quite a tacit understanding of what the van was about. He clearly recognised the presence of "a real sense of community around Eddie's Van", the nature of the friendships formed, and was able to see the power of 'being present'. "It is like we are friends – but we are friends through the Eddie's Van – like I was talking to this guy with Jack and we were also on the night van and when we are finished he asked us, "When will I see you next?' When is the next time you will come out on Eddie's Van type of thing". This presence gave Tom a strong sense of Agency; that by listening you are making a difference. Tom's sense of agency was linked to his contribution to building a sense of community and friendship around the van, and he recognised clearly that this

was the main reason people came to the van. “A couple of guys that I was talking to they really did not want the food – they had eaten previously – and just wanted to talk and were there for the friendship”. For much of the second half of the program Tom so made the ideology of the program his, that the skills of presence and guest had become just what he did, how he engaged with the homeless. This tacit understanding of what the program was about allowed for even deeper understanding to surface.

Tom’s Exit Journal indicated that Tom’s volunteering on the van took him well past a surface experience to something deeper, and at times he has articulated elements that suggest deep personal change, existential change. Tom was able to name that the poor “live in the present and don’t worry about superficial problems” and are “people just like us”. Tom was one of the students who most clearly articulated a link between faith and his experience of service. “Being a part of this program does make me proud to be a Catholic, Christian and Holy Family student, because all three believe in Edmund Rice and Jesus who taught us to care for the poor and the needy”. The ideology of the program had come to be truly owned by Tom and “the terms presence, guest, dignity of the individual and community mean a lot more to me than if I had just learnt them on the board because I have experienced them and used them”. Finally Tom has come to a point in his experience where he felt that,

I understand that they [the homeless] are people just like us and they are no lesser human being. This experience helps you to understand the people of your town. I am glad I did this program it has taught me a lot about the homeless and myself. I believe I am a better person from it. Edmund Rice taught us to help those outside our window. We help people over seas in other cities. But the most important people to help are those on our front footstep. Eddie’s van might be able to teach the students how our life could be if we were born under different circumstances or we make some bad decisions. (EX, 6)

#### **7.6.4 Geoff McCluskey**

Geoff McCluskey involved himself strongly in the focus group discussions. Geoff intervened often to challenge the right of the homeless or anyone for that matter, to not speak with you respectfully. Geoff’s journey of experience during this program is at times confusing and complex. Geoff engaged frequently with the concept of stereotype early in the program and appeared to struggle with the central ideology of the program: that Eddie’s Van was about being deeply present to the people on the streets, coming as guest into their lives, respecting their innate dignity and through this build a community of compassion and care.

In the Expectations Phase Geoff described his motivation for involvement in the program more subtly than many of the other participants. Geoff was “interested in what people living in those conditions are like”. He hoped to “gain knowledge of what these people are like, their background and what makes them tick and keeps them alive. I want to see what makes them different from us – how they got there [not intended to be derogatory]”. Geoff’s expectations had an ‘us’ and ‘them’ edge, and an implication that these people were really different. A deep appreciation of the commonness of the human condition would be one feature of Existential change. Geoff at this point in his experience did not appear to be at that point of appreciation.

As Geoff entered the Exposure Phase he was “a bit nervous to start with”, but quickly it became “a lot easier cause you knew some of the people and so if you did not get in contact with new people you could go back and talk to them again”. Geoff felt that “you were accepted and that most of the people are accepting”. It is important to note Geoff’s qualifier: that ‘most’ of the people are accepting. Many participants have a honeymoon-style time at the beginning of service experiences where their youthful enthusiasm and optimism meets an apparent need. Geoff was already a little guarded in his reflections. He quickly learnt what topics the homeless liked to talk about and how to connect, and that “it was easier because you were not judging them on the stereotype anymore”.

I suppose it has a bit to do with judging a book by its cover. I suppose the stereotype is that they smoke, they drink, they don’t have money, they don’t have a home – but you really have to look outside of that – to get into a good conversation with them. Even though some things are a stereotype, the reality is that a lot of them do have a mental illness and a lot of them are drug addicted – yet you have to go past the stereotype to find a common experience that you can share about. (FG, 2.3)

In his Reframing Phase Geoff and some of the other participants appeared to break down their stereotype of the homeless and then re-stereotype them. Gone were the obvious ‘smelly old man’, ‘drunk’ and ‘bum’, and these were replaced with ‘not appreciative’, ‘argumentative’ and ‘opinionated’. It may almost have been a case of projection. Geoff’s ‘making sense’ of this element of his experience appeared to remain at a surface level. Geoff experienced the homeless as “they tend to violent – not in the way of hitting people or something but in the way that they are violent in speaking”. Where as some participants saw “finding a common experience” as a reciprocal element of relationship, or referred to equality in relationship, Geoff appeared to see it at the surface level of ‘finding a common topic’ to talk about. While understandable at this early time in the program, the ideology was challenging the students to go beyond this.

Over the coming weeks Geoff and some of his team found it difficult to go past re-stereotyping of the homeless as non-appreciative, argumentative and opinionated. In focus group discussions, Geoff and other members of his group engaged in debate around “bad people”, “criminals that come out of abusive and criminal families compared to the normal population, upper class and middle class families” and “those who have been in prison”. Whether this discussion was genuine or not, whether they were ‘playing up to the facilitator’ or partly joking is unclear. What is clear is that very little of Geoff’s reflective material shows evidence of a tacit or existential understanding of what the program was about. Even if this dialogue was not completely honest it would be difficult to maintain the falsity for the entire focus group.

In Geoff’s final focus group discussion he clouds many of his reflections in intellectualising and so it is difficult to know what is reflection based on experience, and what is prior stereotype or prejudice.

Going back to Ciaran’s point, the opinion of the homeless, people take opinions based upon the relationship or the amount of respect that they have for the other person and so therefore if a doctor tells you to do something, you agree with that because you have a high degree of respect for their position within society. But, the homeless people, and this is going to come out wrong but, they are probably the least respected people in society. It is pretty easy to work out, most of them spend it on drugs and alcohol. (FG, 30.3)

At times Geoff’s re-stereotype appeared to be a block to deeper awareness. The old adage “you see what you want to see” seemed to come into play. Geoff commented frequently on the lack of honesty among many of the homeless.

A lot would lie about their story. They don’t tell the full story. Because they are either ashamed of it or they are embarrassed to tell somebody else it – and I suppose that is probably one of the reasons why they are on the streets – I guess they are embarrassed by what has happened or don’t really want to revisit the matter so therefore it ends of easier to stay on the streets. Some of it is a lot of rubbish. Lots of what they say is hypocritical; obviously it is based upon what they have not done but it is very hypocritical of them to tell you to do something that they have not done and lots of it is just made up – it is what their opinion is and they don’t take what other people’s opinions is into that – I suppose because they have so much time to think about it, what their opinion is during the day, that is not being mean or anything but they do, it turns out that they are fixated on that opinion and that that is the right view or opinion and that no one else’s opinion is correct. (FG, 2.3)

Whether Geoff’s perception is based on reality or not is unclear. Few people ‘tell the full story’ in relationship and other participants reflected on the level of trust that they developed with some of the homeless, the depth of their conversations and the sense of friendship they valued. What is clear is that Geoff allowed himself to focus on whether a



person was telling the truth, whereas the ideology of the program and the experience of other participants went past this 'surface' data to the person; regardless of whether they were being honest. This very much became Geoff's Disillusionment Phase and blocked access to a deeper level in the Awareness Phase in his experience.

Geoff's apparent surface appreciation of the dynamics of the van site and the relationships there, contrasted with his appreciation of the meaning around 'getting to know the story' of the homeless. The program ideology suggested that each person 'has a story' and that we are called to be aware of this and respect this. Some of the participants interpreted this as needing to know the elements or facts of a person's story. In Geoff's group Andrew Romano struggled with this and saw it as an invasion of privacy. Geoff saw the value in 'sharing story' as responding to people's need to talk about problems, as at a deeper level, "you learn more about someone when you know what their history is and what their beliefs are – than you do about talking to them about a topic such as sport".

As Geoff progressed through the Awareness and Agency Phases of his experience he valued that he was "someone that they could talk to as they have no one else to turn to". In one of his final focus group discussions Geoff articulated that one of the goals of the program was "to learn a little about ourselves as well" and especially "how we react around other people we share nothing in common with". Geoff summed up his own understanding of the personal dynamics that he brought to the program, and only slightly changed when he reflected: "You relate to people that you have things in common with. Homeless people at this stage do not have anything in common with us". It is important that we do not read too much into Geoff's statement, as immediately after this Martin Walker remarked, "We really have not met them yet"! to which Geoff replied, "Exactly"! Perhaps Geoff was saying that he and his peers had not really got to know the homeless as people and therefore had nothing in common to share. Either way, Geoff appears to have exited the program with a relatively surface understanding of the nature of reciprocal relationship.

Towards the end of the program Geoff appeared to move a little in his approach to whether or not the homeless were telling the truth. Even though he still felt that he "would not approach homeless people on the streets now just because he had been on

Eddie's Van", he had come to a point where he could see what 'presence' and 'guest' meant – he could see that he had changed.

Presence is respecting them for their opinion. It does not matter what you're opinion is – you just have to agree with them and go along with them. I think my example would be – I'm getting better over time – at the start when someone would bring up something like – their political opinions – something like that – I'd often argue with them and argue my point but they would not see it – in that way and they would get very angry about it and that sort of thing – eventually I changed that and now – I tend to just go and listen to them or whatever. (FG, 3.5)

Geoff was able to see that many of the homeless came to the van for more than the food. "The sense of atmosphere, it gives them somewhere to go in the morning – something to do and somewhere where they can feel a part of something in life. Where they might not in other parts of the day". However while reflecting on whether the homeless should 'appreciate' what the Holy Family volunteers were doing for them, Geoff was again blocked into an adolescent need to be appreciated and struggled to see past that need.

There are some people who think it is their divine right for us to be waiting on them – we should be providing food and don't really respect the fact that we go out – out of our way and spend so much money to get them that stuff – some of them are a little disrespectful of what we do – but then that is made up for by the others. (FG, 15.6)

It is possible that the input in the Religious Education classes, the interventions of the program mentors and his own reflection may have led Geoff closer to some deeper awareness as he exited the program. In his final focus group Geoff was able to reflect,

When you understand the situations that have led them to that stage; that is respecting their story, their person. It is not necessarily their fault that they are there where they are. Respecting their particular circumstances. (FG, 3.5)

In reflecting on the role of the program within Holy Family College, Geoff may have been inadvertently articulating something of his own experience over the six months when he said,

in other schools – in schools that don't do this kind of program – don't get this experience and the stereotypes that we were talking about at the start of the term stick for them and the stereotypes that stick for longer periods of time seem to stay more solid and um – and kind of grow on what the stereotype is rather than breaking them down. (FG, 15.6)

There is little doubt that Geoff is a highly intelligent young man and his reflections are a valid articulation of some of the processes of experiential learning. Some of his insights were quite deep, while in other instances he appeared to be blocked by stereotype and unable to see beyond it. While some students struggled to see the van site as 'belonging to the homeless' and remained in an 'us'/'them' mindset where the homeless came to 'our' van, Geoff had no problem with seeing the van site as theirs. Geoff even went as far as drawing a comparison where,

They want to catch up with them [the other homeless], it is also like a social meeting point for them. Basically it is their place, it is where they meet for a chat, it is their culture. It is their kind of 'coffee shop'. It is their 'middle of the Queen Street Mall'. (FG, 15.6)

Geoff could see that the van could not solve the issue of homelessness and that “we are at least looking at the problem – we may not be solving it but at least we are asking why or how? We don’t have the answers – that is not our job”. Geoff’s Exit Journal mirrored his daily journaling and focus group input: a mixture of surface and deeper insight and awareness. While “they had a lot of denial about what put them there [on the streets]”, “all the homeless like the fact that they get to express their views on other people even if they don’t want our opinion”, and “the people who tried to be serious were hypocritical”, Geoff was still able to see that “it must be hard living on your own with nothing”. While acknowledging that some of the homeless could not leave the streets “as they had a phobia”, as he exited the van experience Geoff was still highly critical of many of the homeless and believed that “They have the power and support to get themselves off the street and, mental illness or not, they should not have the power to spend our money and time on alcohol and drugs”.

#### **7.6.5 Nick Nagle**

Nick Nagle saw his involvement in Eddie’s Van as part of the holistic education that Holy Family provided. In his Entry Journal he saw the Big Brekky as an opportunity that the school provided, as interesting, something that he had never experienced and from it he would gain a better understanding of homeless people (EJ, 2). Nick’s Exposure Phase saw his prior-stereotype affirmed to some extent but stretched. Nick was surprised that homeless people ‘had girlfriends’ and wanted to attend football matches but at the same time felt that “the stereotypes have not broken down but just been personalised for me more, rather than taken away”. But as Nick reframed, he quickly named his sense of Agency: “I won’t get bored because I get a lot of satisfaction out of helping these people; you are actually doing something”. Nick maintained this ‘us’ helping ‘them’ modality through the whole program.

As Nick reflected, many of his prior assumptions came to the fore. In the following reflection Nick recalls his first meeting with an Aboriginal man.

Dan, I would have said that for some aspects he is very similar to what I would have thought would have been the stereotype of the homeless person; like he sort of moves around in labour, unskilled jobs – doesn’t really want a job, I don’t mean to be racist but there are a lot of Aboriginal homeless

people and Dan is an Aboriginal. I think he is what I would have thought of a homeless person. Except that he was really nice and stuff. In terms of his personality he is not like my stereotype of a homeless person in that he is really nice and personable. (FG, 17.3)

As Nick reframed, his concept of what a homeless person would be like widened. As he met well dressed and quite articulate people at the van, he had to let go of his restrictive, limiting, parameters. “I don’t know his name but he had glasses and his hair all done – this guy sounded real sophisticated – more than a lot of people at this school!” Nick quickly became aware of the power of knowing someone’s name and this helped him to connect with a wider circle. As time went by Nick still clung to some sort of stereotype or need to stereotype. It would appear that while other aspects of his experience went beyond a surface understanding, Nick was unable to let go of the ‘us’/‘them’ modality that meant he had a need to continually fit the homeless into some mind map, some image of what they should be like. Even after several months on the van Nick recalled:

Sometimes I get the feeling that the people that we sort of see in the city they appear a lot dirtier and have no money and stuff. I get the impression that sometimes the people we meet on Eddie’s Van are not in that sort of position; not as destitute. There seems to be a difference between the people with a lower sort of accommodation and those on the streets. (FG, 17.3)

While Nick’s reflection does indicate some degree of Social Analysis and ability to comprehend that ‘one model does not fit all’, Nick seems to be unaware that he is still attempting to ‘label’ or categorise the people with whom he is attempting to build relationships. As part of the curriculum unit associated with the program the students watched the Australian movie ‘Tom White’, a movie that follows the journey of a successful architect from life in the suburbs to destitution. Nick uses this movie to make sense of what he is experiencing on the streets in Brisbane.

In Religious Education class we watched this movie called, ‘Tom White’. I thought there was an obvious step between when he was in squat and when he was on the street begging for money – there was almost an obvious step to go further away from mainstream society. So when he was in the squat and whatever was sort of the people that we meet on Eddie’s Van rather than the people begging on the street. (FG, 17.3)

As Nick engaged with the Awareness Phase of his experience he was able to define his own concept of presence. Even here Nick wanted to “really listen, even if you absorb a little bit of what they are saying, so you can ask them about that – they get the impression that you are really interested”. This quite surface approach to presence would clarify Nick’s approach to the purpose of the van and his difficulty in reaching an awareness of reciprocity. In his reflection Nick refers to “being equal with them” or “not being above them”, but at the same time his focus group input, perhaps linked to an adolescent need to ‘make a difference’, kept returning to Eddie’s Van being a wonderful

program that helped the homeless. When Louis suggested that this approach was arrogant Nick's response was that "someone had to help them". In the subsequent discussion motivation of involvement in the program and agency were confused.

Nick's choice of language "this guy who was quite mad", "he had this really odd perception of how the world works", "it was sort of crazy", "clearly a lot of people out there are completely insane" may have kept him locked into an 'us'/'them' mindset that perhaps blocked his awareness from deeper and certainly from tacit and existential insights. Nick however does have the awareness to change his approach to fit the person he is talking with. In engaging with the person "who was completely insane", Nick chose to listen and nod his head, while with Andrew, he was able to relate in a way that he felt that he did not have to agree with everything he said.

He is really intelligent and, I don't know, but he is probably, has a few mental issues but – he is fairly intelligent and he understands how the world works quite well and in that situation I feel it is much easier to confront him about certain things, rather than someone who has really lost the plot. (FG, 28.4)

The researcher, as one of the classroom teachers involved with the curriculum unit, had shared with the students how one of the homeless had improved in his mental health over the years of the program. Nick obviously had latched on to this and used this belief as evidence of the agency of the van ministry. Nick did not see his nor anyone else's volunteering as arrogance, nor his belief that he was helping people in need as arrogance. Nick simply saw a need and value in attempting to meet this need. Nick's belief in the purpose of the van had become a 'conduit' and the data that he was experiencing was confirming his beliefs. These beliefs kept Nick in the mindset that "the van is for them", and probably blocked some movement towards reciprocity and certainly towards existential change.

But if Eddie's Van was not there so that he had someone to talk to, I don't think it matter who he is talking to provided they have someone to talk to – it matters – today I talked to this guy who I asked him what does he do and he just told me that he just sits at home all day and comes out to these, if there was not an Eddie's Van he would not have any social sort of life, anything to do socially. I think it is really important that they have someone to talk to otherwise they would go just completely mad. I'm not really concerned for who is doing it as long as someone is. (FG, 28.4)

Ben Pincus and Louis challenged what they perceived to be Nick's view on the question of 'who is the van for – who benefits'? Nick reflected that others in the discussion were confusing what people were doing and why they were doing it.

Everyone seems to be saying that it is all about us just because we like to go there but I think that the thing to them is not so much who is doing it so long as it is happening – which is what everyone has been saying. But it seems that someone has to do it or someone is doing it, whether it is us or

someone else and I think that whoever is doing it – they may benefit from it. But the reason so many different people do it is because it benefits the homeless people. (FG, 28.4)

In the final focus group the topic of the dignity of the person was raised. Nick quickly suggested that it meant that “you are not above them, you are equal with them”. Nick links dignity with an acceptance of the person for who they are. It is unclear whether this reflection supports the Spiral Model by illustrating that Nick has moved towards a deeper internalisation because of the length of time of his involvement, his reflection upon experience, the ideology of the program and the mentoring he received.

That you are on the same level as them. That – you are not above them – being equal. To me when you think of dignity it would be like disregarding age and disregarding material possession and just having a talk to them as the person that they are. When you try to be nice to somebody, like even if they are not homeless – if it is someone who is older than you or a lot younger than you – the dignity of the person can be shown if you just ignore their age or how they are different to you and just accept them as a person. (FG, 28.4)

Nick reflects that “it is the atmosphere of Eddie’s Van that attracts them”, “they like it how we just talk to them”, they appreciated what the volunteers did and felt it was “nice what we do”. In his reflections Nick continually indicates that the potential for future growth in awareness is present. While reflecting on a man who was a past student of an exclusive private school, Nick observed the cause and effect sequence that led to him being on the street and that “it could happen to anyone”. Nick had a level of awareness that could grasp that although this man had only been on the street for a short time he did not see himself as homeless in the same way that others who came to the van were. “He still sees homeless people as different even though he is one himself. He really tries not to be noticed as a homeless person”.

Perhaps Nick’s inability to name either a depth of relationship or reciprocity may be associated with Nick’s own upbringing where, in his own words,

I’ve spent my whole life associating with and talking with people who are relatively well off and not the sort of problems that these guys get into and I find it really interesting to talk to people who actually have had some hard sorts of times – and who are also sort of worse off economically situation to me. So I sort of understand society a bit more. (FG, 26.5)

Nick’s van experience was a rich one for him. He felt that he learnt a lot about people he had never known and that he was now much more accepting of all people. Significantly Nick had come to a point of realization that being on the streets was not necessarily the person’s own fault and that it could happen to him. “I have learned to appreciate that it’s not peoples own fault when they end up on the street, it was unfair of me to think that I would never let my self go down that path”. Nick grew in awareness as the van

experience progressed. He was impressed by the happiness of the homeless and this led him to reflect “I have also really seen the truth in the saying ‘Money can’t buy you happiness’ the people on the street have next-to-no money but many of them still really enjoy their lives”.

At no stage did the researcher discuss his theory with the participants of this study and yet Nick was able to sum up his experience in terms of phases.

My experience can be described in 3 distinct phases. The first is part where I was really scared. The best way I can describe it is like the first dance you go to you want to ask girls to dance but you don’t have the guts and you don’t know how. The second phase was the one where I really learnt how to talk to people I don’t know and general interpersonal skills. The final phase was becoming close friends with different people. (EX, 6)

Nick journeyed all the phases from Expectation to Agency, but many of his insights and engagements with his experience remained at a surface and sometimes ‘deeper’ level. In Nick’s final focus group he compared going to a soup-kitchen as part of a school ‘street retreat’, with the atmosphere around Eddie’s Van. For Nick, the soup-kitchen was ‘their place’ and “we go to them” while with Eddie’s Van, “we set it up and they come to us”. So as to facilitate future change the role of the mentor in the Spiral Model would be to gently invite Nick to reflect on the language he has used and the concepts implied in them and to challenge some of the premises for his beliefs and attitudes. Like so many of the other participants in this study Nick felt a connection to the person of Jesus through his experience, and felt that the ideology of the program made sense to him, but struggled to link this element of faith with the Institution of the Church.

I don’t really feel my Christian faith has changed. I’m not going to go to Church anymore just because of this. To some extent though I have discovered more about the Christian faith and its applications in today’s world. When I see Jesus in the homeless, I see very loving people that seem to enjoy life despite the situation they are in. Presence and guest mean a lot more to me now. I actually have to listen to people now and not just pretend. And not just think they are idiots if they think a different way to me. (EX, 6)

#### **7.6.6 James Gofton**

Like so many others at Holy Family James Gofton was attracted to the Big Brekky program by its reputation. Unlike many other participants James began his Entry Journal by hoping that “while I would have the chance to help others I hope that I can learn from them too”. Immediately there is something in James’ approach to the program that sows the seed of reciprocity. James’ family life, life circumstances and personality would have prepared him to utter such a hope and expectation in service. The Spiral Model would

suggest that the key elements of a direct, relational, mentored, ideologically rich and reflective approach to Service Learning would develop this or any prior disposition. In his Expectations and Exposure Phases James is clearly hoping to 'be of service' and discover what life on the streets is like, but initially feared that he may not have the communication skills necessary to truly connect (EJ, 2).

Very early in his van experience James had the special experience of someone 'sharing story' with him. While this was valuable James had still not come to a deeper awareness of 'story' and still had the concept that it was "finding out about them".

One time there was this guy, Pricey was telling us to 'be present' to the people and sort of find out their story and ask them how they had been and what was their life like. There was this guy and I did not even start the conversation and he said "Oh, come over here and talk". And we sat down and he started going on about his life story and stuff – and he was telling us all the stuff that we were supposed to find out – it was quite funny. He told us that we were great doing things for the less fortunate and it is good that you are doing it. Do well in school! (FG, 27.4)

This sharing of story enabled James to begin to reframe just what he thought the reality of the world of the homeless would be like. James appeared to have a 'readiness' to embrace the ideology of the program as he quickly came to quite a deep understanding and awareness of what 'presence', 'guest' and 'innate dignity' meant. For James it was almost as if he grew in awareness as he reframed. For James 'presence' meant: "To be there for the person, just, even if you don't want to be and even if you don't care about them at all – just to give them that impression. At least to start with – then if there is some kind of a relationship there it will go from there – it will build". Where James differs from Nick Nagle, is that he, while acknowledging that you are 'giving them the impression', is seeing this as a bridging stage to a deeper and longer term relationship. This awareness has already been scaffolded on James' experience as he reflected that "the guys who open up really easily are the ones who know you are listening and paying attention to them". James' comment is all the more significant in that he too experienced the disillusionment phase where things were not all nice and comfortable. "Sometimes we are not welcomed when we show up – probably that last morning that we went out we probably did not feel as welcome – because the people were a lot less friendly".

Quite early in the program James comes to quite a deep awareness of what 'guest' means, and as the program develops this awareness becomes quite tacit. James so encompasses this approach in his relating that he is not even aware that he is doing it. Other members of James' Big Brekky team commented on his ability to 'be in that zone'



and 'really be with them' when he was talking to the homeless. Once again James differed from Nick Nagle. Whereas Nick concluded his journaling talking about the homeless coming to 'our van', James is quite clear in his understanding that by coming as guest we

go to their place – to their park - it is their park – and not sort of be like, "This is our breakfast and you're here taking our food!" You are kind of there and being a guest in their place. (FG, 27.4)

James actually finds himself making deliberate choices in his physical stance as he attempts to 'come as guest' and 'be present'. "It is not looking down on them. Even physically – if they are on a chair and you sit down on the ground that makes a difference. That kind of makes you feel sort of lower – even physically – and that kind of helps".

While James had a real sense of agency in serving the barbeque, he was quickly able to see that the homeless came to Eddie's Van "for the sense of community" as well as for the meal. Towards the end of the program James wore his school uniform on two occasions while serving on the van and this led him to an awareness that the homeless did not label and just accepted the boys for who they were. "They have not cared at all – they treat me exactly the same – they did not even notice". The Eddie's Van experience enabled James to go beyond the stereotype he had of homeless people and "before Eddie's Van you probably never thought of them as actually people – you never really got to know them, they were just like an object or something – a group in society that no one really wants to have anything to do with". James progressed down the Spiral towards existential change so much during the program that in his Exit Journal he reflected how he one day saw one of the homeless on the bus on his way home. He quickly went and sat next to him and chatted away to him, a thing that he would never have done prior to the program.

During his Reframing phase James engaged with the issue of what causes homelessness. As the weeks progressed James developed a good friendship with Bruce and in doing so came to some quite deep awareness of just how an apparently successful man like Bruce could end up sleeping on an inner city bridge. James reflects that one of the common denominators for homeless people is in how they handle times of crisis.

What seems to happen is just how they deal with it – like with things that they are given in life – I'm not saying that necessarily deal with it badly – they just deal with it differently. Especially family –

his wife – he had been with her for forty years or something and that is really going to screw you up if she had died – so his gambling away his money is understandably. It makes sense. (FG, 8.6)

James' empathy and awareness of his own agency would indicate that progressive internalisation of the ideology of the program was occurring. In his last focus group while reflecting on why Holy Family should offer a program such as Eddie's Van, James, after acknowledging that it is what a Catholic school should do reflects "You are supposed to help other people and this is a way of doing that – like obviously you can help anyone – that is not the only reason why we should be doing it ...well cause, we get a lot out of it too". James has come to some degree of a sense of reciprocity. He came to an awareness that while he is serving them they are giving to him as well.

James would appear to have travelled quite a long way down the Spiral to some degree of internalisation of the ideology of the program. Not only has he sensed the reciprocity and depth in his own application and use of 'guest' and 'presence', but in reflecting upon his own agency – what he does for the homeless – he comes to realise that it too is linked to 'presence'. While many other participants would still focus on the barbeque or even the providing of clothing or conversation, James has moved to a point where he can see that his presence is the most valuable thing he can contribute.

JG: That is like, what did Mitch call it, don't walk in front of them cause they may not follow, don't walk behind them cause they may feel pushed to do things, walk with them and be their friend – and that is sort of the whole aim of what we do. Like you are not trying to fix their situation – you are just trying to be with them through their difficult times, which is probably the best thing we can do.

Facilitator: It is a bit like the difference between sympathy and empathy; sympathy – feeling for and empathy – feeling with.

JG: And Yeh, sympathy you can just throw money at them but with empathy you have to be – literally on the street with them. (FG, 8.6)

When asked by the facilitator of the last focus group what they would miss about Eddie's Van, James' reply had little to do with providing food or clothing but rather

I'll miss Bruce, I'll actually miss seeing him, he is awesome. And yeh, just getting up early in the morning and being with them – with people – yeh, you don't get to do that sort of thing often – it is sort of being our one chance to do that. Before this – if you saw these people on the street – if you went up and talked to them they would say – 'why are you talking to me – go away' – it would be just like going up to some normal person in the street – some stranger and just talking to them – and they would look at you funny – but now I'd feel comfortable talking to them because we have built a relationship. (FG, 8.6)

In his final Exit Journal, James, in reflecting on what he enjoyed most about Eddie's Van said,

The best part about the van is being able to do something for people and making relationships that are very insightful. The best part about the morning is the sense of community that is experienced by a group of people on a rainy, windy morning when its freezing cold. It's amazing how dedicated

people are, both the students and the people that come to the van. I have felt most valued when a man constantly complimented me about my manner and how I approach life. I think I have gotten more out of our relationship than he has. Which is incredible when you compare our circumstances. The most recent time I went out I spent the whole morning talking to two guys who seemed to be really good friends. They just accepted me for who I was and were even able to make fun of me by the end of the morning. Sometimes the people out there are really good at cheering people up. (EX, 6)

James exited the service program identifying that he had learnt much. He had learnt that often “it is not their fault that they are homeless, I used to look down on people like that, but now I look up to them”. “My people skills have improved significantly”. “I have also learnt to accept them for who they are, for instance if someone is lying to me I can just accept them as a person and ignore the story”. “I have learnt to be more present to people and I have broadened my views on homeless people”. James’ experience over the six months of Eddie’s Van has led him through every phase of student experience, and has resulted in him reflecting on that experience in such a way as to progress significantly towards existential change. This progression would positively affect how he engaged with people in future service situations. Already, in his post school years, James has volunteered and been involved with both Eddie’s Night Van and Edmund Rice Camps. James was one of the few students who made reference to both the Edmund Rice and Catholic Social Justice Concept of “seeing Christ in the poor” in his reflections. James concluded his Exit Journal by reflecting that

By being with the people on the streets I have been able to see the more “beautiful” aspects of life. This is being able to “see Christ in the poor”. The term presence has become more meaningful to me now and I try to be “present” to people in everyday life. I believe that doing eddies van has made this possible. The fact that our school provides a service for the poor says something about it to begin with, but the fact that the students actively partake in this service means something more. (EX, 6)

The stories of these six van participants were included in this discussion chapter to allow for the data from individual students to have more unity and flow. In including these reflections the focus was not the ‘theme’ nor ‘phase of experience’, but rather the participant’s overall experience in the light of their meaning-making from experience, their progression towards Existential Change.

## **7.7 EXISTENTIAL CHANGE**

For Existential Change to take place, for the process of internalization to be complete, the person must be continually engaged in reflection upon experience at both the deep and tacit levels. It is possible that students could experience Eddie’s Van for a six month period and still come away from the experience believing that it was simply a food van

for homeless individuals, run by caring youth from a privileged school. These same youth could simply 'tick' Eddie's Van off on a list of achievements or tasks they wished to accomplish during their time at Holy Family. Others could share the same experience and come away with profound attitudinal changes and mindsets that will influence them for the rest of their lives. While the van experience was rich for all of the participants it appeared to be in their awareness of the reciprocal nature of the relationship, the deeper purpose of the van, the deeper impact of mental illness and in a meshing together of 'presence', 'guest' and 'story' to form a powerful sense of the dignity of each person, that some students were able to experience a profound change that would lead to a deeper, personal, moral awareness.

Why some students came to these deeper levels of awareness and not others, is outside the scope of this study. But there can be no doubt that some program participants came to quite significant levels of awareness and change, all were 'touched' in some way. Some like Matthew Quinn came to a great realization of what was really important in life. After his time on the night van Matthew found himself lying in bed reflecting on his experience. "That is what you are thinking about, like you are not thinking about all the little things like what subjects you have to do or what homework you have to do, sport, etc. You are thinking about life, about bigger issues, people on Eddie's Van don't care about all that sort of stuff, they just care that they have a friend and stuff like that" (MQ, EX.6).

As Matthew exited the program his awareness of what is really important in life has been challenged and to some extent changed. The Spiral Theory and the experience of this study would suggest that Matthew may have not come to this point of awareness had his experience been limited to just one or two visits to the van site, with little or no reflection nor an ideology to give the experience greater meaning.

## **7.8 CONCLUSION.**

The process of learning in an experiential setting formed the basis of this discussion of the theory of experience within a Service Learning situation. Using the Lens Model for Service Learning as developed by Cone and Harris (1996), this study explored participant experience of the service program in an Australian Catholic Boys' Secondary

School. The study concluded that there are identifiable phases that every participant experiences within a prolonged and direct Service Learning Program, but that each participant will go through these phases in their own time and draw different levels of meaning from their experience. The exploration of student experience and especially with regards their meaning-making within the context of that experience led to the development of the Spiral Model of Service Learning that added to the Lens Model by identifying the various stages of meaning elicited by students from experience. Using the identify formation work of Erikson (1968), Youniss and Yates (1997) and the progression to Existential Change (Le Cornu, 2006), the Spiral Model identified 'exit' points on the spiral that acknowledged the different levels of meaning from experience identified by students. The exploration of participant experience identified core elements that assisted deeper understanding and meaning from experience: critical analysis, ideology, reflection upon experience and the presence of program mentors. The presence of these elements assists participants move further down the spiral towards Existential Change, from Giving to Caring, from Charity to Change, assisted by other pre-program factors such as parental influence, prior experience, religious faith, role models and significant life experience (Seider, 2005).

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the findings and provide conclusions related to participant experience of the Service Learning Program at an Australia Catholic Boys' Secondary School. Increasingly Service Learning is becoming a part of the educational landscape of Secondary Schools. In the United State of America, Service Learning in some form has been present in schools, Colleges and Universities for over thirty years. The form that Service Learning takes in each instance varies widely. In many instances American Service Learning resembles what Australian educators would call 'work experience' or a form of work experience. Many studies have pointed to the role of Service Learning in supporting academic excellence, in building civic pride and responsibility and in leading youth to an increased sense of personal agency.

For many educational communities, and especially for the Catholic school system, Service Learning and other extra-curricular activities have provided a form of Social Capital. As Catholic schools seek ways to be more 'mission effective' in an increasingly secular world, some have looked to Service Learning as a bridge between the academic curriculum of the school and the founding ethos of the community. Many Catholic schools conducted or sponsored by Religious Orders claim a special relationship with the charism of their founders, and some educational leaders are seeing Service Learning as one way of tapping into this charism.

The aim of this research was to examine the experience participants were actually having within the Service Learning Program of Holy Family College. A by-product of this research was to see if these experiences correlated with the articulated goals of the program and the espoused 'core business' of the school. This examination of participant experience would hopefully highlight those features of the Service Learning Program that were most effective and led over time to a deeper level of personal values change. Finally this research explored the relationship between the participant experience of the program and the sponsoring institution for the program [the school], and asked whether this experience led to a tension linked to a lack of correlation between espoused values

and reality, or was it a key entry point to a more credible educational community in the context of the claimed ethos. The study followed the experience of fifty-three sixteen year old volunteers in Holy Family College's Service Learning Program over a six month period, as they worked on the 'Big Brekky' program with the homeless people in inner city areas of Brisbane, Australia.

## **8.2 DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH**

As this study explored adolescents perceptions of experience in Service Learning settings, it invited a qualitative research design which offered the researcher opportunities to observe, listen, interpret and question the meaning and significance students gave to their experience of working and relating with the homeless of the inner city. The epistemology of Constructionism was adopted, as it suggests that realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature. This certainly applied in this specific Service Learning context. Within this Constructionist world view an Interpretist approach was undertaken. An interpretive epistemological framework was adopted as it aimed to produce 'interpretive' accounts of phenomena, rather than law-like generalizations. The intricate web of relationships that formed the interaction between Service Learning participants and their 'guests', suggested that this social world could only be understood from the standpoint of individual actors providing the researcher with contextual information (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106).

The Service Learning sites involved in this research were highly particular, allowing quite unique and 'thick' relationships between the homeless and the participants in the study to develop over time. The very nature of the data gathered, invited an interpretive approach that allowed the researcher to gain a sense of the meaning the students constructed of events and experiences in their weekly interactions with the homeless (Crotty, 1998). This approach was quite appropriate as human situations "can only be understood from the standpoint of the individual actors" (Candy, 1989, p. 3). Each time the students visited the van sites they interpreted events and situations and responded to their interpretations in situations vastly different to their everyday lives. The world of the 'streets' defies clinical definition, and the symbols and meanings used and given by

those who live, work or volunteer in this world were highly individual. Each student's experience of the van community was unique.

The highly personal nature of student participation in this program led to the study gaining its theoretical impetus from that stream of qualitative research known as Symbolic Interaction. The highly contextualized, individual and value-laden nature of a Service Learning Program centred on working with homeless people, lent itself well to the social theory of Symbolic Interaction. The study created a richness of data that allowed the patterns of interaction between the participants in the Service Learning Program and the guests of the program to emerge. The study sought to understand the actors' experience; the way they constructed their experiences and the meanings they attached to them. What was of vital importance was not observable social actions but rather the subjective meaning of such action (Sarantakos, 2005). The depth and richness of 'data', the layers of relationship and the complex web of meaning that are generated in the street van context [as well as a school context] led to an intimate link between the actors involved.

A case study approach was adopted for this study. As case studies allow for naturalistic everyday, cultural and interactional phenomena to be studied in their own right and in their own territory (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p. 316), it was very suited for the study of participant experience in a relational context. As this study investigated a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context where the boundaries between phenomenon and context were not clear, and multiple sources of data were used, case study was ideal (Yin, 2003). The use of case study allowed the researcher to examine a very particular context; the participant experience of young men from a Catholic Secondary school working with homeless men over a period of time. As such it was clearly bounded. Each case study has its own dynamics and as one examines them, sub-questions to the Research Questions and even the Focus Group and journaling questions emerged. The use of case study allowed an issues / questions matrix to flow from the participant journaling and the Focus Group data.

The use of case study for this research allowed analysis to take place as the data were collected. This led to evolving Focus Group and journaling questions that would more clearly allow participants to express what their experience of the program was. The use



of case study allowed for an extensive use of pattern-matching where the experiences of one van team were compared to another, or where participant reactions to particular situations were compared. The use of case study allowed the researcher to at times concentrate upon particular incidents, and at other times to observe broader dynamics, thus allowing themes, topics and key variables to be identified and isolated (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 317). Case study was an effective way of producing a thick description of both the research context and participant experience.

Data for this study were collected primarily through an analysis of the transcripts of Focus Groups and each participant's journaling after each van experience. A pre-and-post program 'Entry' and 'Exit' journaling allowed for some degree of comparison to be made between hopes and fears, goals and expectations and what the participant felt they ultimately achieved and experienced. This data were supported by both the researcher's field observations and the researcher's diary. The data collection began in late January 2006 and concluded in late June 2006. During the data-collecting period participants took part in four Focus Groups of an hour's duration, and wrote up personal journals after each of their eight van experiences. The data from both the Focus Groups and the journaling were used to identify the key questions for the next round of data collecting. As the participants interpreted and reinterpreted their experiences on the van, new and varied issues arose that they had not anticipated in the Entry Journaling. In keeping with the principles of Symbolic Interactionism the data were coded and new questions formulated in response to particular language used, the nature of participant reaction to what the homeless said and did, their own sense of relationship developed over time and their interaction with previously held beliefs and stereotypes.

### **8.3 FINDINGS**

The findings from the analysis suggested that there were specific phases in the participant experience. These phases mirrored the journey that the participants experienced over the six months of their involvement in the program. The phases that reflected the findings were:

- Expectations Phase
- Exposure Phase
- Reframing Phase
- Disillusionment Phase

- Awareness Phase
- Agency Phase

Within each phase several themes and sub-themes were identified such as 'gatekeepers', 'acceptance and welcome', 'knowing their name' and even questions such as 'Why are they there?' and 'What is the purpose of the van'? These themes and sub-themes emanated from the ongoing analysis of the data.

The research subsequently concluded that direct, relational Service Learning within the context of a strong ideology and mediated reflection upon experience, can lead to significant personal attitudinal and values change: internalization. While some participants only touched upon levels of deeper awareness in their relationships with the homeless and within themselves, some students came to quite deep levels of awareness and in some cases, existential change. In the light of these conclusions the Research Questions were re-examined to determine to what extent they have been answered by these findings.

## **8.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ADDRESSED**

### **8.4.1 Identification of Research Questions**

The research problem identified at the beginning of the study and the resultant review of literature, led to the formulation of three research questions which changed slightly over time. The evolution of the research questions unfolded in response to the experience of the researcher, the ongoing interaction with the focus group data and dialogue with the participants. The research questions were:

#### **Research Question One:**

What features of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College impact on participant experience?

#### **Research Question Two:**

What changes are there in the meanings participants give to their experiences in the Service Learning Program over time?

#### **Research Question Three:**

How do participants perceive their Service Learning experience in terms of their personal world view and the world view promoted by the school?

These research questions are not only faithful to the key time element in participant experience, but provide a framework in which the summary of findings was presented. The research questions are closely related, going from the immediate and strongly impacting, to change, to a wider world view and finally to the relationship with the community in which the program takes place.

#### **8.4.2 Research Question 1**

What features of the Service Learning Program at Holy Family College impact on participant experience?

The student participants in Holy Family's Service Learning Program strongly reflected the importance of relationship with the homeless people. In their pre-program 'Entry' journals, they articulated the excitement and enthusiasm of becoming involved, and a fear that they would be rejected and 'not make a difference'. Almost no reference was made to building any sort of relationship with the homeless and if they did, it would be at a 'functional' level. The students' 'Exit' journals were full of stories of relationship with the homeless, of people that they now called friends and of significant events that they had shared with the homeless. There were stories of a growing relationship with their peers from school, not a relationship based on sport or curriculum, but on a shared 'life experience' in which they felt they had made a difference. The students truly valued getting to know the names of particular homeless and were able to identify this as a key entry point to a deeper and more meaningful relationship with the homeless. All of this reflected the importance of Holy Family's program being both direct and relational. Right from their first van experience, the students were 'out there' chatting with the homeless and getting to know them, rather than standing behind a serving counter at a soup kitchen or sorting out clothing to be sent to a sheltered workshop.

If the participants' experiences had been a one off experience of working on Eddie's Van, there can be no doubt that much of the insight and awareness that the participants came to would never have occurred. The fact that the program invited students to participate on the van roster for a period of six months enabled them to build relationships, see past initial stereotypes, appreciate the reality of street life past any honeymoon period or unusual event, and have time to grow in the skills of Social

Analysis, in awareness of the true nature of mental illness and to own the ideology of the program.

Cone and Harris' (1996) Lens Model for Service Learning requires both reflection upon experience and the presence of mentors who will mediate the experience for participants. The length of time of the program, coupled with the constant reflection upon experience, led many of the students through the stages of Internalisation identified by Le Cornu (2006). It was through the written and oral sharing and reflection that students were able to name new perceptions, grapple with concepts and move beyond previously held beliefs. The wrapping of the program in a strongly articulated ideology centred on both the Gospel of Jesus and the charisma of Edmund Rice, gave the students a language and concept map to assist in their growing internalisation and refinement of ideas. By constantly being challenged to 'be present' to the homeless, to recognise their innate dignity and to 'come as a guest' into their lives, the students were able to come to levels of awareness and insight they would not have thought possible at the beginning of the program.

The mere fact that the program was based upon 'doing' in respectful relationship meant that the participants had a strong sense of agency, of making a difference in people's lives (Moore, 1990; Youniss & Yates, 1997). For some, this meant that they were simply providing a hot breakfast and some warm clothing on a cold winter's morning, while for others they were part of a process that was building community, helping to give meaning, and being a significant presence in someone's life while also recognising that the homeless were often reciprocating these gifts.

Participant experience was impacted by the direct and relational nature of the interactions between the participants and the guests of the Service Learning program. In placing these interactions in a clear ideological context over a length of time the participant experience matured and deepened. The program participants experienced further impact through their mediated reflection upon their experience leading to the identification of issues and growing insight linked to meaning.

### **8.4.3 Research Question 2**

What changes are there in the meanings participants give to their experiences in the Service Learning Program over time?

The length of time of the program was probably its most defining factor. The fact that the researcher made the decision to use identifiable phases as the framework in which to discuss the findings, points to the importance of time. Every participant experienced change over the course of the program, some more than others. Because of the reflective nature of the program and the length of time of participant involvement, issues arose that would not normally have occurred in a one-off or short term exposure. Several key questions arose from the Focus Group discussion and the individual journaling:

- Who benefits from this program?
- Why can't they get off the streets?
- What does it mean by 'coming to know their story'?
- Should they appreciate what we do for them?
- What is the purpose of the van?
- What truly is mental illness?

Each of these key questions was strongly debated, and over time students clarified their beliefs around them and responses to them. At first the nature of the mental illness of some of the homeless was not obvious to the participants, and some reacted strongly, labelling them as hypocritical and simplistically suggesting that they should just "save", "access government services" and "get a job". Over time the majority of the students came to a point of realisation that "they can't get off the streets", "the streets are their security blanket", "they have experienced a trigger that led them to homelessness" and "it is not as simple as I thought". It took time for the students to get over the honeymoon period, especially with the homeless who were very friendly and easy to talk to. Over time and in subtle ways they began to notice small signs that an apparently 'normal' man could be quite manic or paranoid.

The reciprocal nature of the program as espoused by the College took time for many students to grasp. Some never did. The sense that they were 'coming to make a difference' in the lives of poor homeless men stayed with some participants right until the end of the program, while many moved past this and did so quite early in the program. Over time the stereotypes that the students held quickly disappeared, and were at first

replaced by a slightly more sophisticated but still patronizing stereotype that took time to discard. Over the course of the program more students were able to identify that they felt accepted and welcomed by the homeless. Several students were able to see that there were times when they were feeling a little down, and the homeless cheered them up. The homeless made deliberate decisions to include them and welcome them.

It took time for the true nature of the program to go from theory taught in the Religious Education classroom to an owned value. Even though the students were taught right from the start of the program that the hot breakfast and clothing provided were simply a means of connecting with the homeless and building relationship, many students did not appreciate this. Perhaps the sense of easy agency provided, by giving students an opportunity to cook a hot breakfast on a cold morning, kept the students at this level of purpose for some time. It was only when the students became aware that many did not come to the van for the breakfast but for the sense of community, that change occurred. Reflecting Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, it took time for the students to see that the homeless could get food, shelter and clothing from other sources and that it was the catching-up with friends, the conversation and the sense of welcome around the van that was important. Many students did not even use the word community in either journaling or Focus Group discussion for the first month or so of the program, but were doing so constantly by the end of the program. Over time every participant was able to name the sense of community around the van, identify that it was key as to why many came to the van, were able to identify different levels and types of community around the van, and to realise that this was ultimately part of the purpose of the program.

The dynamics of the relationships that the participants developed with the homeless took time to be identified and articulated. Over time the participants came to know particular names and developed 'friendships' with particular homeless men with whom they connected more easily. Towards the end of the program many of the participants were able to articulate that while they were 'friends', they were different friendships to those they shared with mates at school, and were different to the friendships that the homeless had with other homeless. At first some saw the 'story' element of the ideology of the program as a direction to "get to know details of the homeless", and over time grew in the awareness, through reflection, that everyone 'has a story' and regardless of the detail, to be 'story aware'. One of the most significant 'changes in meaning' over time

centred on the power element of their relationships with the homeless. In no time the participants became aware that they were in 'their' [the homeless] living rooms and were 'guests' in their lives. While some participants never truly grasped the full reciprocity of the relationship with the homeless, many did. Many were able to see that while the homeless benefited from the sense of community, the food and the clothing, students benefited too in gaining friendship, a sense of agency and acceptance beyond labels.

Some of the homeless as well as the teachers involved with the program, became the 'mediators' (Cone & Harris, 1996) of the experience and gatekeepers over time. Especially on difficult occasions when there was tension or violence around the van, it was some of the homeless that the students had got to know well and felt accepted by, who interpreted what was happening for them. Early in the program the students generally were not aware that the homeless were giving to them in these situations, but this awareness, in most cases, did eventuate over time. In some cases the struggle participants had with naming the reciprocal nature of the relationships around the van could be linked with a natural, adolescent egocentricity.

As the students moved out of their comfort zone around the BBQ and began finding it easier to approach the homeless, they grew in their willingness and ability to connect with more difficult people. The ideology of the program inviting them to 'be present' and to 'come as a guest' to the homeless began to change how they saw the homeless, how they approached each situation and what they now expected to come from this interaction. Many quickly moved beyond an adolescent need for a 'feel good' response from the homeless for their morning to be meaningful.

Over time program participants experienced attitudinal change in how they perceived the purpose of the program and the life situation of the homeless who came to the van. Over time the maturation of the students' experience and their deepening relationship with the homeless led to deeper levels of insight linked both to the sharing of story, the purpose of the van and the difference between a 'charity' or 'change' model of service. The length of time of the program allowed for the program ideology to be understood, personally owned and linked to practical skills in relating.

#### **8.4.4 Research Question 3**

How do participants perceive their Service Learning experience in terms of their personal world view and the world view promoted by the school?

As the study progressed a tension arose between the ideology of the program and the value and belief systems of some participants. The Holy Family Service Learning Program invited participants to develop a respectful relationship with homeless people and aimed to create such an atmosphere around the van. The program's central belief was in the innate dignity of each person. Participants were to approach the homeless with a sense of this dignity, coming as a guest into their lives and once there, striving to be deeply present to them (Nouwen, 1975). While no student rejected this ideology at an intellectual level, some initially struggled with the presenting data from the homeless. Some of the homeless presented as 'normal', as quite clean cut, as articulate and with no obvious mental illness. Some students reacted quite strongly to the apparent hypocrisy of the homeless telling them to value education and to get good jobs when they apparently had dropped out of school at an early age and obviously were not earning a living. Some students reacted quite cynically to the work done in Religious Education classes about the poverty cycle and the nature of mental illness, and strongly expressed beliefs that given the nature of Australian society anyone who wanted to could 'make it' and that all that was lacking was the will to do so. Underpinning this reaction was a lack of understanding of the subtle insidious nature of much mental illness and the complexities of issues that could and do lead people to homelessness. Over time and through reflection many of the students who initially expressed these beliefs ultimately did change and moved to deeper levels of understanding and a more empathetic approach.

Some students however did not make this movement and in their Exit Journals when asked what surprised them about the program, still articulated that they could not work out how or why people could not just go and get a job, could not access the many Government services available and could not just 'move back home' and reconnect with family. The students who expressed these beliefs were reacting to homeless people whom they had got to know quite well and were, to all intents and purposes, quite 'normal'. Others however, in relating with the same homeless people were subtly aware of mental illness and its effect upon them.



Some students, especially early in the program were looking for 'fault' in the homeless. While they did reject their initial stereotypes as being untrue, i.e., "lazy bum", they quickly re-stereotyped the homeless as being in difficult situations but still capable of getting off the streets if only they would attempt to do so. Many of those students who reached quite deep levels of awareness and existential change, were able to come to a point where they could identify that many of the homeless were psychologically locked into life on the streets, were dependent on addictive substances, were impaired through a lack of education or skills, did not have support systems and often simply did not have the money and skills to handle job interviews, budgeting, paying a bond, etc. Several students came to a point where they could identify that even if the homeless could get off the streets they had a right to choose to live this way.

As the program neared its completion many of the students were able to articulate their perception of the purpose of the van program. Several made reference to the Social Analysis work done in class, and spoke strongly about the power of the relationships they had developed with the homeless and the benefit of this. The students compared, rather idealistically, their relational approach to working with the homeless to that of many of the Government workers whom they perceived as just doing 'it' [relating with the homeless] because it was their job. Very few of the students took their participation in the program to the political level of engagement as suggested by Kahne and Westheimer (1996). This probably reflects more on the nature of Australian society and our political system, than it does on any lack of idealism or energy in the youth involved.

Very few of the students articulated a 'Jesus' reason for their involvement in the program or for their continued participation in it. The ideology of the program at Holy Family College was primarily focused by the Gospel of Jesus and the articulated charism of Edmund Rice, the founder of the Christian Brothers. While the teachers involved with the delivery of the curriculum element of the program through the Religious Education classes were working from a faith model, and constantly linked the innate dignity of the person, the theology of presence and the theology of guest back to the example of Jesus, few students naturally made this link. Comparatively few adolescents would articulate a world view in which the person of Jesus was central to their meaning-making processes. While this world view was what motivated the staff of the program and the

philosophy behind the program, it was not often owned by students except in an indirect way in that they had an adolescent pride in attending an “Edmund Rice School” or “Christian Brothers’ School”.

In many and varied ways during the study the value and belief systems of the students’ parents continually came through in asides and small judgemental statements from the students. Some students continued to struggle with the reality of mental illness in apparently ‘normal’ people, and hence could not understand why they continued to be ‘on the streets’. The Social Analysis work done through the Religious Education classes also at times caused a clash in mindsets and belief systems. Were the homeless victims? Were they helpless? The work done with students to develop a mindset of ‘story’, that each person has a story [a journey that has led them to be on the streets], and the analysis work done on the web of factors such as the poverty cycle, led the students to question previously held stereotypes. But some still struggled with this.

In many ways the world view of Holy Family College would suggest that ultimately a Service Learning Program such as this has to be about change and not charity. The relational elements of the program and the framing of the program by concepts such as guest, presence and innate dignity of the person, all pointed beyond a ‘hand out’ model to genuine change in both the students and the homeless. However, many students still struggled with this and its associated sense of reciprocity. Many students were locked into a sense of agency in that they got up early and went out and fed and clothed those “poor, homeless people”.

Few students in any school would be clearly aware of the espoused core mission of their school, but they would be aware, at a cultural level, what the school values and claims to value. The students lived experience of the school culture would be rich. There can be no doubt that the students of Holy Family would be strongly aware of the articulated values of the College. The students would be constantly reminded of the importance of excellence, of ‘doing one’s best’, of the importance of academic rigour and of making and giving a good public impression of the College. Participation in the life of the College and especially in the co-curricular life of the community is strongly valued and promoted at Holy Family, and the 95% plus level of involvement among the student body in some form of co-curricular activity testifies to this.

While only about one in four students would practise their Catholic faith in terms of attendance at weekly Eucharist, the students would be very aware of Holy Family being a Catholic school. What this actually means to them is questionable. Supporting projects in third world countries like East Timor, raising money for charities and involvement in Service Learning projects such as the College's relationship with a refugee secondary school, Eddie's Night van, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Big Brekky program are frequently extolled by the College administration and student involvement encouraged. Among the students there is a strong tradition that to be involved in 'Eddie's Van': the Big Brekky program is 'cool'.

This study asked students whether Eddie's Van was 'core' to the mission of Holy Family. There was a strong affirmation of this from almost all of the students in the study, with most noting that involvement with the poor was "what Edmund Rice did", "what a Catholic school should be about" and "made them proud to attend a Christian Brothers' School". Quite a few students compared Holy Family with other elite private schools in the Brisbane area and saw Holy Family as offering a far more holistic and superior education to them, as we "did things like Eddie's Van". Time and again this comment was made more out of a sense of adolescent one-up-man-ship rather than from a deep ideological stance. For several students Edmund Rice was a doer and Eddie's Van was their way of doing.

A small group of students did perceive quite a strong tension between the value system in which the Service Learning Program was situated, and their perception of the value system 'lived' by Holy Family College. The academic emphasis, at times seen to be excessive by some students, was at odds with the "live one day at a time" and "happiness is about people" value system the homeless lived by and were content with. Some students reacted to the clash between the apparent historical roots of Holy Family as an Edmund Rice school being 'for the poor' and 'established to serve the poor', and the present high fees that totally excluded the poor. A number of students felt that it was only Eddie's Van that linked many of the student body with 'real' people beyond the walls of the College and that there were a number of suburbs of Brisbane that many Holy Family students would never have entered.

While all the students in the study valued Eddie's Van most of them were also proud of how the College operated Eddie's Van by not drawing public attention and especially media attention to it. The students were proud of how they [and the College] just got in and did it and did not big-note themselves. Few, if any of the students saw Eddie's Van as tokenism, and the relatively large number of students who have since continued after the data collecting period to involve themselves both on the van and in other Social Justice initiatives such as Edmund Rice Camps, would suggest a deeper commitment to and ownership of the core values of the program. For some students involved in the study, Eddie's Van was seen as the exception in the whole school culture, while for most there was an adolescent pride that "we were doing our bit and making a difference".

The participant's experience of the program led to an awareness of tension between many pre-program values and attitudes and the core philosophy or world view of the program. As students engaged in Social Analysis and reflection upon experience some of this tension was resolved, elements clarified and personal values more deeply owned. While identifying with much of the social justice world view that the program was based upon few students readily identified with those elements linked to the institutional Church and its motivation linked to the Gospel of Jesus. A degree of pride and ownership of the program was identified as associated with an adolescent pride in their school as the context for both identity and meaning.

## **8.5 CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The following conclusions are attempts to identify and understand the significance of the experience adolescent boys have while participating in a Service Learning Program in an Australia Catholic Boys' Secondary School. These conclusions are limited to the extent that they reflect participant experience in one particular program, in one national culture and with one particular homeless population.

### **8.5.1 Direct and relational service.**

If an educational community's Service Learning Program is seeking to lead youth to a point of personal existential change in terms of values and mindsets, then there can be little doubt that a program that is both relational and direct [person to person] is much

more effective in achieving this goal. No program can be truly relational unless it is conducted over a long period of time. When youth are engaged directly with the elderly, the handicapped, refugees, the sick or the homeless, they are brought into a space where their personhood is 'touched' by the other. This interaction can lead to the breakdown of stereotypes, the growth in the sense of 'story' and the growing realisation of the power of our shared humanity beyond labels. When this direct contact is also placed within the context of respectful relationship, it has the potential and power to challenge previously held prejudice and beliefs so as to generate more inclusive and accepting attitudes.

### **8.5.2 Reflection upon experience in a mediated setting**

While service undertaken in both a direct and relational way will undoubtedly impact upon a person, it is only in reflection upon the experience that a person's value system can be challenged and changed. There is a real danger that without reflection, experience may just reinforce previously held prejudice and bias. Cone and Harris' Len's Model (1996) encourages participants in Service Learning to reflect with the assistance of a mentor or guide. The mentor or guide has a sense of the overall goals of the program and the hoped-for attitudinal change that the experience may elicit. Through guided reflection, whether it is journaling, discussion groups, focussed questioning, interviews or meditation, the participant is invited to interact with the stimuli of the service experience, and in doing so, challenge and critique the assumptions and beliefs that may have underpinned previously held stances. Reflection when coupled with the element of time, also allows for the experience to gain some degree of maturation beyond initial exposure and some honeymoon period to greater reality. Both the time and reflection elements also allow for a deeper acquirement of analysis skills and the identification of possible 'gatekeepers' to a more valid experience.

### **8.5.3 Service in the context of a rich ideology**

Service can not be performed in a values vacuum. Youth have a need to see themselves as people who can and will make a difference, makers of history. Youth desire to belong to causes and movements bigger than themselves. An ideology provides the service

learner with a rich context of values, beliefs and processes that provide a context for their actions. The ideology from which service is performed provides the community and the volunteers with a rich language and set of processes with which to make sense of what they are experiencing. Imagine 'Greenpeace' without some sense of ecology or 'Amnesty International' without an engagement with Social Justice, human rights or a belief in non-violent protest! As the learners' time in a service programs lengthens, their reflected interplay with the ideology will help them make sense of and gain meaning from their direct and relational experiences. Part of Grant's exit journal reflection suggests how important he found the ideology of Holy Family's program in helping him make sense of his service.

I don't believe my Christian faith has grown in this experience. I have been raised in a Christian family and those values were always there however, I believe I have found I can see God and Christ in people by being present to them. I have learnt more about aspects of Catholic Social Teachings not only through eddies van but in the classroom. I believe the best outlook I have attained from this experience is my new ability to come as a guest and be present to the human dignity in every person. I am proud to be part of the experience because it helps me grow as a person. I think I will definitely do something like this again. If not Eddies Van because of school commitments I plan on being apart of Eddy Rice Camps to help the hard done by children. (GE, EX.6)

## **8.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE LEARNING**

This research is important for the future of Service Learning in Australia and especially so for schools in the Catholic sector.

During the 1980's and 1990's in Australia, as the number of Religious Brothers, Sisters and Priests in Catholic schools rapidly decreased, the sponsoring Religious Orders sought ways to maintain and guide the ethos of their schools into a possible future with no members of their order present in the schools. Much work was done by the individual Orders in ensuring that the charism of the Religious Order was understood and owned by the lay staffs of those schools. Despite the best efforts of very committed and hard working staff, it is possible that the ethos of many Catholic Secondary schools may have been kidnapped by an alternative agenda of the increasingly socially upmarket clientele of those schools. At times it is difficult, despite all the rhetoric, to see a link between the expressed founding charism of the schools and the present day reality. Service Learning based in a strong ideology and coupled with theological reflection, may be a real and effective way to assist Catholic secondary schools to recapture a Gospel spirit.

This research demonstrates the effectiveness of Service Learning in an Australian context. It also points to the importance of moving away from 'one off' and 'indirect' initiatives, if the sponsoring educational institution hopes that participating students will internalise values, mindsets and beliefs which may possibly lead to existential change. As the sense of 'community' within wider society comes under increasing strain, this type of direct and relational Service Learning could effectively model for youth the value of community in all its forms.

Many of the reflection practices used during this program and the role of mediated learning within the program, have much to offer the increasing number of community engagement initiatives in Australian Secondary schools and Universities. Even simple programs such as younger secondary school students tutoring recently arrived migrant and refugee students in English, would greatly benefit by the placement of such a program in a strong ideological context and reflective practice pedagogy.

The rapid growth in 'Immersion Experiences' where Secondary school and University students travel for short intensive periods to third world nations such as East Timor, India, the Pacific Islands and South Africa could also be enhanced by the principles and practices of this study.

In all of the above the central implication for Service Learning coming from this study would be the constant need to place any program within a clearly articulated and owned ideology. For students to understand the 'why' of the program and the future promise of such a program for them as agents of change and makers of history, the ideological basis for the program is paramount. Within such programs reflection upon practice is vital. Reflection will, if mediated, increasingly lead participants to deeper levels of internalisation and possible existential change.

This study has confirmed the research of Seider (2007) in the necessity for providing a strong Academic Framework Experience for participants to serve from. This Academic Framework Experience, when associated with the continuous development of the program's core principles and beliefs, supports the Identity Development work of Youniss and Yates (1997) and Erikson (1968). The impact of reflections upon experience (Mabry, 1998; Green, 2006) was confirmed by the findings of this study as

was the ability of these reflections to move participants further along the meaning-making process (Le Cornu, 2006). As a result of these findings it would be important for schools working from an ideological basis to place their Service Learning Programs in a clearly articulated ideological context, and ensure that program facilitators assume a proactive mentoring role for participants. Where possible Service Learning Programs need to be relational and for an extended period of time, if hoped-for change in personal values and beliefs is to be realised. Finally, this study identifies the importance of Service Learning not to be seen as some 'added extra', but be deliberately linked to curriculum, with reflection upon experience being integral to the program's pedagogy if there is to be movement towards Existential Change and positive engagement with the ethos of the sponsoring institution.

## **8.7 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Service Learning in Australia is still a relative newcomer to the educational scene, and internationally Service Learning of a direct and relational nature within the context of a strong ethos is not that common in Secondary Schools.

While Kahne and Westheimer (1996) and others have suggested that there is a strong correlation between Service Learning and Political engagement in the post-school years, little research has been done to identify the nature of the link between a student's ability to reach levels of existential change, a direct and relational program and the values and attitudes of the adult mentors, especially the family. American studies have suggested that participants in Service Learning Programs are more likely to be engaged in volunteerism in their post-school years. There can be no doubt that there is a significant difference between the socio-political psychology of American society with its emphasis on civic duty [the Peace Corps, Jesuit Volunteer Service and extensive College Service programs], compared to Australia. Do programs such as Holy Family's lead to a higher level of volunteer participation in the longer term in an Australian context?

This study has examined participant experience of a Service Learning Program in a Catholic all boys' Secondary School. Research into the effects of service upon young women and their journey into a sense of personal socio-political, civic and moral identity would be of great value.



In the context of the Catholic school and its call to be both an agent of evangelisation and catechesis, is there a correlation between the family faith background of participants and their ability to 'theologise' in the midst of reflection linked to a direct / relational Service Learning Program? Similarly what role could 'Theological Reflection' and the Pastoral Cycle play in assisting students in Service Learning Programs such as Holy Family's depth a deeper level of awareness and a personal experience of faith from such a Service Learning experience? While acknowledging the importance of Cone and Harris' Len's Model of Service Learning, future study linking this model and Le Cornu's process of internalisation could enhance and build on the contribution of the Spiral Model developed in this study. Such a study could assist faith communities to better engage with Service Learning curricular and models.

Finally, this study, looking at participant experience of a particular Service Learning Program, begs the question to explore the relationship between the ideology of such a program and the program's ability to enhance the mission effectiveness of a Catholic school, especially in the charism of the founding vision.

## **8.8 CONCLUSION**

In an increasingly automated world in which education is often perceived to be at the beck and call of success linked to numbers and materialism, it is rare for adolescents to be moved towards internal, personal change linked to values and perceptions and even rarer for existential change to take place. The Service Learning Program that this study was centred on led students to varying but important levels of personal change in values and perceptions. During the Exposure Phase of the program many of the participants were confronted by the strong presenting data of just who the homeless were. This data shattered the previously held stereotypes that so many of the students had as they realised that "they are just like us". By the end of the program, as the participants reflected on what the program had meant to them, some students were able to identify that the homeless did not label them as privileged children from a wealthy school in the stereotypical way that they had labelled the homeless. As Morgan Cooney said, "I valued my time on Eddie's Van because when I was with them [the homeless] I was not school work Morgan, or sports Morgan; I was simply Morgan"! If more of us could come to a similar point where we value others, value self and are valued by others for simply the wonderful people that we are, our world would be a better place.

## **Summation.**

This research concludes that there are identifiable phases in participant experience within a Service Learning Program. All participants will travel the journey of experiencing these phases, but the depth of meaning and awareness that participants will glean from their experience will vary. While a variety of factors will influence a participant's ability to come to deeper levels of meaning and awareness, program factors do play an important role in leading participants further towards Existential change. These insights will contribute to our understanding of stages in experiential education.

This study confirmed for the researcher the importance of placing Service Learning within a rich ideological context for deeper meaning to be attained. A model for Service Learning, the Spiral Model, has been developed that acknowledges that participants will exit a service experience with differing levels of awareness and meaning from surface to deeper, to tacit and in some cases to Existential Change. This study confirmed the importance of a direct relationship between participants and those they serve, as well as the importance of service taking place over an extended period of time. At the core of the Spiral in the Spiral Model were the elements of continual reflection upon experience, the active presence of program mentors / facilitators, critical analysis and a clearly articulated program ideology that may lead participants further down the spiral of meaning and awareness.

This research listened to the articulation of participant experience of their service experience and it is hoped that this thesis is rich with the students' voices. This research took place in the context of a Catholic Secondary School in the Edmund Rice tradition and it was this tradition that informed much of the program's ideology. This study has confirmed for the researcher that Service Learning, when informed by the key criteria outlined above, can act as a bridge between a school's ideology / ethos and a student's acceptance and ownership of that ethos. As a case study this research's findings are limited in that they explored participant experience of one program, in one boys' only secondary school in Australia. However this research has ultimately contributed to a greater understanding of the processes taking place within participants in a Service Learning context, has contributed to stage theory and to the conceptualisation of reflection linked to experiential learning and ethos.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1**

#### **Information letter to Parents / Guardians and participants.**

Information Letter to Parents of participants.

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** AN EXPLORATION OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF THE SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM AT AN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOL.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DENIS MCLAUGHLIN

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** BROTHER DAMIEN PRICE

**PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dear Parents,

Your son has been invited to participate in a research study through the Australian Catholic University about the Service Learning [Big Brekky] program. The purpose of the study is to ascertain what participants are experiencing as they work on the Service Learning Program.

For several years now Holy Family College has sponsored the Big Brekky program, and while we believe it is good for all involved, we are unsure of what students are experiencing as they participate in this program.

This research will require your son to work on the 'Big Brekky' van a minimum of five times over a six month period, make short journal entries after each van experience and participate in a focus group [a type of discussion group] about their van experience after every second experience of working on the van. Each focus group will be audio taped to capture all participant responses to questions asked during the focus group. The focus group will be facilitated by an experienced facilitator external to the College and will take place during the Religious Education class.

Working on the 'Big Brekky' van will require that your son arrives at school between 6.15 am and 6.25 am depending upon the day he is rostered. Membership of a Big Brekky team will mean that your son will have to plan his commitments well so as not to clash with academic, cultural or sporting meetings or practices. As a member of a Big Brekky team your son may be spoken to disrespectfully by a homeless person and may witness some aggression between patrons of the van. Since the start of Eddie's Van in August 1999, no volunteer has ever been in any way assaulted by a homeless person but the College can not guarantee that this will never occur.

By participating in this research we believe that your son will be contributing significantly to what we know about the effects of such a Service Learning experience upon participants. The 'Big Brekky' program is quite unique in Secondary Schools both here in Australia and overseas. The vast majority of former volunteers have highly valued their van experience and by participating in this research your son will assist us to find out why and to learn from this. There is a high likelihood that this research will be published to inspire other schools, like Holy Family, to set in place similar relationships with disadvantaged communities such as the homeless.

It is important for you to be aware that your son is free not to participate in this research and / or to withdraw from it at any time without having to provide his Religious Education teachers with any reasons. Such a withdrawal will not in any way lead to academic penalty. Your son's choice not to participate in this research or to withdraw will simply mean that he will join the 'Social Justice Unit' of the Religious Education Curriculum in the second semester when working on the Big Brekky van is not subject to research.

As the findings of this research may be published the location and participants will be given pseudonyms (or pretend names); this means that any reference to what your son might say or write will be attributed to the pseudonym that he is given.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Student Researcher [Br. Damien Price, Phone 3214 5438] or to the Principal Supervisor [Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin].

Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin can be contacted on 36237154 in the school of Educational Leadership at the Australian Catholic University, McAuley Campus, P.O. Box 456, Virginia, Queensland, 4014.

During the course of the research participants will have the opportunity to check the transcripts of the focus group discussions so as to check that what is recorded is what they intended to say. At the end of the study, possibly sometime during his Year 12 year, the findings of the study will be reported back to your son.

This research study has the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University, the Director of Edmund Rice Education [Queensland], Dr. Bill Sultmann and Mr. Peter Chapman [College Principal].

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way your son has been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Student Researcher or Supervisor have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Campus  
P. O. Box 456  
Virginia, Q'ld. 4014.  
Tel: 07 3623 7294  
Fax: 07 3623 7328

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree for your son to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Investigator [Br. Damien Price].

Yours truly,

Br. Damien Price  
Student Researcher

Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin  
Principal Supervisor

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Information Letter to Participants.**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** AN EXPLORATION OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF THE SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM AT AN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOL.

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DENIS MCLAUGHLIN

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** BROTHER DAMIEN PRICE

**PROGRAMME IN WHICH ENROLLED:** DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study through the Australian Catholic University about the Service Learning [Big Brekky] program. The purpose of the study is to ascertain what participants are experiencing as they work on the Service Learning Program. For several years now Holy Family College has sponsored the Big Brekky program and while we believe it is doing good for all involved we are unsure of what students are experiencing as they participate in this program.

This research will require each participant to work on the 'Big Brekky' van a minimum of five times over a six month period, make short journal entries after each van experience and participate in a focus group [a type of discussion group] about their van experience after every second experience of working on the van. Each focus group will be video and audio-taped to capture all participant responses to questions asked during the focus group. The focus group will be facilitated by an experienced facilitator external to the College.

Working on the 'Big Brekky' van will require that you arrive at school between 6.15 am and 6.25 am depending upon the day you are rostered. Your membership of a Big Brekky team will mean that you will have to plan your commitments well so as not to clash with academic, cultural or sporting meetings or practices. As a member of a Big

Brekky team you may be spoken to disrespectfully by a homeless person and may witness some aggression between patrons of the van.

By participating in this research we believe that you will be contributing significantly to what we know about the effects of such a Service Learning experience upon participants. The 'Big Brekky' program is quite unique in Secondary Schools both here in Australia and overseas. The vast majority of former volunteers have highly valued their van experience and by participating in this research you will assist us to find out why and to learn from this. There is a high likelihood that this research will be published to inspire other schools, like Holy Family, to set in place similar relationships with disadvantaged communities such as the homeless.

It is important for you to be aware that you are free not to participate in this research and / or to withdraw from it at any time without having to provide your Religious Education teachers with any reasons. Such a withdrawal will not in any way lead to academic penalty. Your choice not to participate in this research or to withdraw will simply mean that you will join the 'Social Justice Unit' of the Religious Education Curriculum in the second semester when working on the Big Brekky van is not subject to research.

As the findings of this research may be published the location of the sites, name of the school and participants will be given pseudonyms (or pretend names); this means that any reference to what you might say or write will be attributed to the pseudonym that you are given.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Student Researcher [Br. Damien Price, Phone 3214 5438] or to the Principal Supervisor [Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin].

Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin can be contacted on 36237154 in the school of Educational Leadership at the Australian Catholic University, McAuley Campus, P.O. Box 456, Virginia, Queensland, 4014.

During the course of the research participants will have the opportunity to check the transcripts of the focus group discussions so as to check that what is recorded is what you intended to say. At the end of the study, possibly sometime during your Year 12 year, the findings of the study will be reported back to you.

This research study has the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University, the Director of Edmund Rice Education [Queensland], Dr. Bill Sultmann and Mr. Peter Chapman [College Principal].

In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Student Researcher or Supervisor have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
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Tel: 07 3623 7294  
Fax: 07 3623 7328

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the Investigator [Br. Damien Price].

Yours truly,

Br. Damien Price  
Student Researcher

Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin  
Principal Supervisor

\*\*\*\*\*

**APPENDIX 2**

**Parent / Guardian and participant Consent form.**

**CONSENT FORM.  
Participants Copy.**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** AN EXPLORATION OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF THE SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM AT AN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOL.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DENIS MCLAUGHLIN

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** BROTHER DAMIEN PRICE

I ..... (the parent / guardian) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, the Big Brekky program, associated journaling, interviews and focus groups, audio / video taping of focus groups, realizing that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT / GUARDIAN: .....

SIGNATURE:..... DATE .....

NAME OF CHILD: .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

..... DATE .....



**ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS.**

I ..... understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realizing that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. I have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, the Big Brekky program, associated journaling, interviews and focus groups, audio / video taping of focus groups, realizing that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: .....

SIGNATURE: ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....

DATE: .....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: .....

DATE: .....

\*\*\*\*\*

**CONSENT FORM.**  
**Student Researcher's Copy.**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** AN EXPLORATION OF PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE OF THE SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM AT AN AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BOYS' SECONDARY SCHOOL.

**PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DENIS MCLAUGHLIN

**STUDENT RESEARCHER:** BROTHER DAMIEN PRICE

I ..... (the parent / guardian) have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, the Big Brekky program, associated journaling, interviews and focus groups, audio / video taping of focus groups, realizing that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

NAME OF PARENT / GUARDIAN: .....

SIGNATURE:..... DATE .....

NAME OF CHILD: .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

..... DATE .....

**ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS.**

I ..... understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realizing that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. I have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, the Big Brekky program, associated journaling, interviews and focus groups, audio / video taping of focus groups, realizing that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: .....

SIGNATURE: ..... DATE .....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....

DATE: .....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: .....

DATE: .....

### APPENDIX 3

**a. Questions and Open coding for Entry Journal.**

**b. Draft Focus Group 1 Questions.**

**c. Sample Entry Journal reflections**

**a. Entry Journal Questions.**

- Why did you volunteer to participate on the Big Brekky van?
- What do you hope to gain from this experience?
- What are you concerned about / afraid of?
- What did your parents say when you told them you were going to take on this role?
- What impression have you picked up from other students who have volunteered on the van about the experience?
- What do you expect the experience will be like?
- Why do you think Holy Family College has a van like Eddie's Van?

**a. Entry Journal Coding**

Entry Journal Question	Open Coding and number of responses
Why did you volunteer to participate on the Big Brekky van?	<b>Excellent reputation</b> [23] New challenge [11] Good experience [14] Wanting to help [10] Admiration of mentors [6] Mates [2] Develop people skills [3] Social Justice [3] Curious about the homeless [7] RE beyond the classroom [6]
What do you hope to gain from this experience?	Relationship with homeless [5] Not sure [4] Personal skills [9] Appreciate own life [7] <b>Understand homelessness</b> [32] Giving back [7]
What are you concerned about / afraid of?	Safety [6] Not making a difference [4] Being awkward / uncomfortable [16] <b>How to connect with the homeless</b> [17] Not challenging self [3] Not sure [6]
What did your parents say when you told them you were going to take this role on?	<b>Good idea / supportive</b> [40] Indifferent [5] Very positive at a deeper level [16] Concerned [2]
What impression have you picked up from other students who have volunteered on the van about the experience?	<b>Worthwhile and rewarding</b> [35] Eye opening [7] Grow in compassion [4] More self aware [4] Good relationships with homeless / peers [6] Valuable life insights [6]
What do you expect the experience to be like?	Eye opening [10] <b>Good experience leading you to relate to the homeless</b> [28] Difficult and challenging [25] You make a difference [2] Whole new world [6]
Why do you think Holy Family College has a van like Eddie's Van?	Provide a wider education [5] In keeping with ethos of College [7] <b>College has responsibility to serve the wider community</b> [24] Care for less fortunate [21]

### **b. Draft Focus Group 1 Questions.**

How did you feel as you arrived at the van site? Why do you think you felt that way?  
What was your most awkward moment or difficult moment on the van and why?  
What was the highlight of your morning and why?  
Did anything surprise you during the experience? Why?  
How did you feel as you packed up? Why?  
Were you feeling different to when you first arrived? If yes, why do you think this was so?  
Was your morning on the van a valuable experience for you? If yes, why? If no, then why not?  
How were your expectations of the van experience different to your actual experience?

### **c. Sample Entry Journal reflections**

Entry Journal Alex McKechnie

**Why did you volunteer to participate on the Big Brekky van?**

*Because I believe strongly in Social Justice and I wanted a way to help others less fortunate than me.*

**What do you hope to gain from this experience?**

*A greater understanding of homelessness, and to feel as if we've managed to help.*

**What are you concerned about / afraid of?**

*Being shunned or abused, not making any difference, not being able to cook well enough.*

**What did your parents say when you told them you were going to take this role on?**

*They were happy I was going to be helping others, but annoyed at having to drive me in to school early.*

**What impression have you picked up from the other students who have volunteered on the van about the experience?**

*That most people are eager to get out there and actually experience Eddie's Van.*

**What do you expect the experience will be like?**

*Humbling, though provoking.*

**Why do you think Holy Family College has a van like Eddie's Van?**

*Because making a real difference in our community is very important for all.*

Entry Journal Jack Coghlan

**Why did you volunteer to participate on the Big Brekky van?**

*To get more involved and to experience something different than standard RE class.*

**What do you hope to gain from this experience?**

*Better people skills and a more educated outlook on the homeless.*

**What are you concerned about / afraid of?**

*Awkwardness when communicating with the homeless.*

**What did your parents say when you told them you were going to take this role on?**

*That they supported me in doing it, and by the sound of it, it sounded like it would be very much worth the effort.*

**What impression have you picked up from the other students who have volunteered on the van about the experience?**

*That it's a really eye-opening and interesting experience to part-take in.*

**What do you expect the experience will be like?**

*I expect the experience will be difficult and awkward at first, but eventually will become intriguing to get to know those homeless.*

**Why do you think Holy Family College has a van like Eddie's Van?**

*To get the students involved and more aware that there are people, even in our own city, much less fortunate than us.*

## APPENDIX 4

### a. Extra daily journaling questions.

### b. Focus Group questions for each of the four Focus Groups.

### c. Preparation for Exit Journals.

#### 4a.

#### Extra daily journaling questions.

##### Visit One:

- \* How did you feel as you were driving down to the service site?
- \* How did you feel when you first arrived?

##### Visit Two:

- \* How did you go with today's challenge? [To go beyond the group of homeless people who are very friendly and stay close to the Barbeque.]
- \* Names and incidents I will remember?

##### Visit Three:

- \* How did you go with your challenge? [To stay for a longer time with one person or with one group and get to know them a little more.]
- \* Did you experience any of the following 'feelings' this morning; when and why? [Comfort, at home-ness, relaxed, valued, awkward, acceptance, fear, fun.]

##### Visit Four:

- \* No new questions.

##### Visit Five:

- \* Were you aware of trying to come as a 'guest' into the lives of these people? How did it feel? Did this mindset make a difference?
- \* Were you able to 'be present' to the people you met this morning? When did you succeed? When did you not quite make it? Why? Does trying to be present make a difference?

##### Visit Six:

- \* Write the 'story' of your time on the van this morning. Especially focus on your feelings and your reactions to the people that you met and served. The following questions may help in your story.  
## How was it connecting with the people that you have come to know well? Did you handle 'difficult' people better than you would have a couple of months ago – how and why do you think this? In your story tell us about any sense of community at the van site and within your team. Did you come as a guest? How do you know you did? Were you present? Did you sense the 'dignity of the person' as you worked on the van? What do the homeless do for YOU? Do you think this kind of activity is important for Holy Family to do? Why? Do any of the following words come into your story: hope, community, rejection, sacred, welcome, hurt, fragile, acceptance, friendship, difficult, lonely, scared, honour - why do they?

##### Visit Seven:

- \* How have you changed over the last couple of months of doing the 'Big Brekky'? Why?
- \* If there is one lesson you are learning on Eddie's Van what would it be? Why?

##### Visit Eight:

- \* What has surprised you about your Eddie's Van experience over the past months? Why?
- \* If a student from another school asked you – "Why do you do Eddie's Van?" or "Why have you continued to do Eddie's Van?" What would you say?
- \* How is Eddie's Van core to what Holy Family should be about OR Should it be core to what Holy Family is about? Why?

4b.

### **Focus Group Interview Guide Questions - Round 1**

#### **Introduction**

Facilitator introduces herself, discusses the context and rationale for the focus group interviews, and establishes the ground rules.

#### **Guide questions**

1. Tell me about your first experience on Eddy's Van.
2. Was your second experience different? How was it different? Can you explain why it was different?
3. Have you noticed any change in your relationship with the other members of your team? Are you getting to know them better? If so, how is this happening? Is it different from being on the same sporting team or in the same class? How is it different?
4. Have you noticed any growth in confidence in yourself; in your speaking skills, your conversation skills, or your listening ability?
5. Are you growing in awareness of the life of homeless people? What would be an awareness that you have now that you did not have a month or so ago?
6. Do you think you will get bored doing the van? Why or why not?

### **Focus Group Interview Guide Questions - Round 2**

#### **Introduction**

Facilitator reminds participants of the ground rules.

#### **Guide questions**

1. I would like each of you to think of someone you have met while working on Eddy's Van. Tell me about this person. Why did you pick this person to talk about? How is this person like or unlike the stereotype of homeless people you may have had before working on Eddy's Van.
2. Does knowing the person's name make a difference to your relationship with them? Why do you think this is so?
3. Before you started on Eddy's Van how did you feel about approaching homeless people? What about now? Are you surprised that you can do this? Why?
4. Are there people you would not approach? What is it about these people that makes you feel this way?

### **Focus Group Interview Guide Questions - Round 3**

#### **Introduction**

Facilitator reminds participants of the ground rules.

#### **Guide questions**

1. You have had a 4 – 5 weeks break from Eddy’s Van. Did this make a difference when you next went? Anything else happen at this time you want to talk about?
2. Brother Price uses the word ‘present’ or ‘presence’. What does this word mean? Give an example of when you believe you were present.
3. Brother Price also talks about ‘coming as a guest’. What does this mean? Give an example of when you believe you practised coming as a guest.
4. We are asked to respect the dignity of every person. What does this mean? Give an example of when you believe you practised this.
5. Think of one person you have met at Eddy’s Van. From what he/she has told you, why do you think he/she are homeless?

### **Focus Group Interview Guide Questions - Round 4**

#### **Introduction**

Facilitator reminds participants of the ground rules.

#### **Guide questions**

1. Why do you think homeless people come to Eddy’s Van?
2. What do you think the homeless people who come to Eddy’s Van think about us?
3. What do we gain from participating in Eddy’s Van?
4. Do you think this is a project that Holy Family should be doing? Why or why not?
5. What or who will you miss when you are no longer on Eddy’s Van?

#### **Conclusion**

Participants are thanked for their participation in the focus group interviews.

4c.

#### **Preparation for Exit Journaling.**

**Name:** Put your name at the top and when you save the document save it simply as your name: eg Ben Summers will save his simply as “Ben Summers”.

*“One of the greatest things a person can do is to plant a seed that will one day grow in to a great tree that will give shade to people they will never know”.*

**Over the past few months each of you HAS made a difference in the lives of fragile people. Many of these people are misunderstood. Many are looked down on. Many are confused and suffering mental illness. None of them have the gifts and opportunities you have. You – by your efforts have made their lives more real, more complete, more secure. You have built a sense of community.**

#### **Section 1**

- **Set out which venue your team went to.**
- **Who was in your team?**



- How well did you know them at the start of this program?
- Can you now recall how you felt the first time you went out on the van? Why did you feel this?
- What can you remember about your first morning?

#### Section 2

- What gifts and abilities have you seen in any of your fellow team members as a result of doing the program?
- What incidents do you remember? Recall them. “I remember there was one morning when ....!”
- What streeties have you got to know really well? Tell me about them. Recall some of their stories or characteristics.

#### Section 3

- What did you find really difficult at first? Why?
- How are you with that difficulty now?
- What has been another difficulty that surfaced over time?
- Why?
- What still confuses you or you don’t understand about the situation of homeless people now?
- What was your hardest situation and why?

#### Section 4

- What have you really enjoyed about the van? Why?
- What would have been your highlight over the past several months and why?
- When have you felt:
  - a. Most valued
  - b. Most ‘at home’
  - c. A real sense of community
  - d. A sense of Brotherhood
  - e. Most accepted

Why do you think you felt this way?

#### Section 5

- What has been your story – your experience on the van over the past four months? What has been happening inside you? What has been YOUR experience? What phases have you gone through?
- Has your self confidence grown? Why? Have you felt valued and needed? Have you been able to contribute something significant to society?
- Have you become aware of gifts you did not know you had? What are they?

#### Section 6

- Do you think your relational skills have grown over the last few months? Why?
- Do you think your communication skills have grown over the last couple of months? Why?
- Can you identify which particular skills have grown?
- Do you think you are more of a lateral thinker now? [More broad in your thinking?]
- Has your ability to read ‘body language’ grown? How and why?

#### Section 7

- What would be your reflection on homelessness in Australia as a result of this program?
- Names: What is homelessness? Types of people? Stereotypes? Assumptions? The reality? Mental Illness? Abuse? Loneliness? Blame?

- **Has your ability to do ‘Social Analysis’ grown? Why?**

**Section 8**

- **Do you think your Christian faith has grown as a result of this program? Why? Why not?**
- **When people talk about “seeing Christ in the poor” what do you now think that means?**
- **Do the terms ‘Presence’, ‘guest’, ‘Dignity of the individual’, ‘Community’ mean more for you now? Why?**
- **Does doing something like Eddie’s Van make you proud to be a Catholic / a Christian / a Holy Family student? Why?**
- **Do you think you will ever do anything similar to this again. Are you more likely to? Why? [Not necessarily with homeless people but as some sort of volunteer with the needy.]**
- **Catholic Social Justice teaching asks us to be in solidarity with the poor, to make an option for the poor and to value their worth and dignity? Does this make more sense for you now as a result of your time on Eddie’s Van? Why?**

**Section 9**

- **Would you recommend the van experience to someone else? Why?**
- **Are you glad you did the program? Why? Why not?**
- **Are you a better person because of it? How?**

**Vital to do these two questions:**

- **Do you think Eddie’s Van is core to Holy Family if it is to be a credible Edmund Rice school? Why?**
- **What does Eddie’s Van do for Holy Family? Why do you believe that?**

**Conclusion:**

**What final comments would you like to make? Any idea or observation that is not mentioned above?**

**Thanks for all you have done and for your support.**

**God bless,**

**Damien and Conor**