

A CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF POVERTY REDUCTION AND BOYS' ENGAGEMENT IN OVERSEAS SOCIAL JUSTICE PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

A group of boys traveling to Vietnam to participate in a social justice program that focused on community development undertook a pre-departure program designed to challenge existing beliefs about the nature of such programs and the broader issues related to poverty alleviation in developing countries. The pre-departure program was intended to foster critical engagement, with questions relating to the effectiveness and impact of such programs, and the manner in which they are consistent with the boys' role as global citizens.

The boys involved were required to undertake a program of reflective writing and group discussion that allowed them to engage with multiple, contradictory, and often challenging perspectives and criticisms of such projects. Analysis of the boys' responses demonstrated the extent to which the process elicited a degree of confusion and disruption to their existing understanding of the issue, as well as a consequent construction of increasingly sophisticated and nuanced knowledge. Findings from this project provide guidance about the manner in which boys traveling to developing countries to undertake social justice programs can be prepared intellectually and emotionally for the challenging experiences that they will encounter.

Introduction

***Research Question:** "How might a critical exploration of poverty reduction facilitate Year 11 boys' engagement in overseas social justice programmes?"*

Since 2009, as part of the school's ethos of social justice and community engagement, St Kevin's College has been providing students with the opportunity to travel overseas to participate in community service and development work aimed at poverty reduction and alleviation. In 2016, a group of St Kevin's students travelled to Vietnam to undertake community development work at

a school in the village of Pa Ban, in the upper reaches of the Mai Chau Valley. I accompanied this group, as have I accompanied multiple groups in the past who have undertaken such projects in Nepal. The manner in which I sought to prepare them for this experience formed the basis of this action research project, and represented an opportunity to consider questions that had been raised in past programs. Globally, and across both academia and the media, there has been developing debate about both the social and economic impact of “voluntourism” projects, and the nature of the impact on a boy’s education that exposure to poverty in the developing world produces.

This project was undertaken so that the boys who travel overseas, or even to areas of socio-economic deprivation that exist locally, do so with the capacity to critically consider the purpose of their actions and to have a greater awareness of the inherent complexities of seeking to “do good” in an increasingly interconnected world.

The utilisation of action research as a research method enabled my professional practice to be subject to the iterative process of feedback and refinement that represents a fundamental principle of the method, and to develop the manner in which the boys’ understanding of the issues associated with the topic is developed over subsequent trips.

Literature Review

The theoretical basis for overseas social justice programs, such as the one that forms the basis of this research project, is situated within a distinctly constructivist paradigm that posits that student understanding is derived from experience and reflection.

The literature contains significant terminological variation with respect to the description of overseas social justice programs. For the purpose of this literature review, the terms *experiential learning*, *service learning*, *international service learning*, *voluntourism programs*, and *volunteer learning* are used interchangeably, with acknowledgement of the distinctions that exist, on the basis that they all involve students, typically from privileged backgrounds in developed countries travelling to less-developed countries for the purpose of undertaking some form of service activity.

In seeking to provide experiences that will allow students to enhance their understanding of poverty alleviation strategies, my intent with the pre-departure program was to initiate a degree of confusion on the part of the students, consistent with the approach espoused by Mezirow (1991). This approach is based on Mezirow's *Transformative Learning Theory* of student engagement with a "disorienting dilemma" (Howie and Bagnall, 2013, p. 817) that seeks to "shift one of [the students'] meaning schemas or meaning perspectives" (Howie and Bagnall, p. 817). The importance of providing disorienting dilemmas is described by Bamber and Pike (2013) as a fundamental component of international service learning.

The disorientation in this project was provided by alternative interpretations of overseas development assistance and poverty alleviation. Economists such as Moyo (2009) suggest that development assistance provided to developing countries has a negative impact on socio-economic growth and development by establishing a culture of dependency, and restricting economic opportunities in sectors provided by foreign intervention, such as that represented, in part, by programs such as those provided under the guise of experiential/service education. This is a counter-narrative also espoused by Easterly (2007), who is critical of aid and charitable work that is "self-serving" rather than effectively addressing the needs of the poor.

The *Transformative Learning Theory* model includes a detailed description of a process that seeks to build on exposure to the disorienting dilemma, specifically through a deliberative and reflective process that includes a "critical assessment of assumptions...acquiring further knowledge [and] a reintegration into one's life on the basis of...new perspectives" (Howie and Bagnall, 2013, p. 819). Essentially, this theory supports a constructivist model whereby student assumptions are challenged and the disorientation produced is used as the motivation to establish an enhanced understanding of an issue.

The benefits of my chosen approach, insofar as the broader goal of enhancing global citizenship is concerned, are linked to the provision of students with what Frantzi (2004) describes as the Deweyan concept of intelligent sympathy: "a sensitive responsiveness to the interests and rights of others...to attain a common vision that extends its scope beyond the self "until it approaches the universal'."

In designing a program that allowed students participating in the overseas social justice program to negotiate the complexities of this environment, it was critical to acknowledge the complexities described by Wearing (2001) as a paradox in which such educational programs have the potential to “endanger the very communities and environments that the volunteer tourist seeks to protect,” while still possessing “the potential for benefits in international co-operation, intercultural relations and peace-building” (Wearing, cited in Plum and Jorgensen, 2012, p.32). Plum and Jorgensen state that “immersive programming that leads boys blindly into a context to achieve culture shock and transformation in their perspectives can be mis-educative without a broader framework to interpret the social world” (p.32).

The use of a “disorientating” approach in a boy specific context is supported by Reichert and Hawley (2010), who highlight “the energizing effects of setting boys to tasks for which successful resolution was perhaps possible but by no means certain,” typical of an experiential learning program in which boys are engaging with a problematised experience in order to achieve a greater degree of understanding. Reichert and Hawley also identify the manner in which boys demonstrate a preference to pursue a personal narrative that links the “personal and scholastic dimensions of their lives,” consistent with a critical reflection on a personal experience of poverty.

In preparing students for an overseas social justice project, it is suggested by Larkin (2015) that the focus needs to be on “preparing students to ethically encounter Others and difference,” rather than providing a “pre-programme preparation for students focused primarily on risk management, with virtually no preparation for the local context.” Such preparation, according to Larkin, involves providing students with a mechanism through which they can negotiate the disruptions to their normalised world views that occur as they are exposed to global inequality – discomfort that represents “moments of tension as opportunities for learning.” Furthermore, Larkin suggests that, in “the absence of an intellectual framework to process and to begin to understand...boys began to withdraw, resisting the call to vulnerability and susceptibility intrinsic to [the learning process].”

The generation of such an intellectual framework should be the goal of a ‘purposeful pedagogy’: described by Ngo (2014) as being one of the mechanisms through which overseas social justice programs can avoid potential pitfalls such as perpetuating a simplistic ideal of development or normalising systems of dependence through funding and structural expertise. Therefore, inasmuch as the experience of travelling to Vietnam to undertake social justice work represents a transformative learning experience for the students involved, the literature would suggest that in order for these students to derive maximum benefit from the program, the travel component must be but one facet of a program designed with the explicit goal of inducing a degree of disruption and providing educative structures through which a deeper understanding can be constructed.

Research Participants and Context

St Kevin’s College is an independent boys’ school established by the Christian Brothers in 1918. The stated mission of the College is the promotion of excellence in learning, as well as facilitating human growth and liberation, so that students have both the desire and capacity to achieve a fullness of life.

The boys in this research project were 16 Year 11 students, aged between 16 and 17 years-old, who travelled to Vietnam as part of the St Kevin’s Outdoor Activity Program. Students were required to submit an application to be considered for participation in the program, and were vetted by the College leadership on the basis of their suitability for such an experience. This process took into account primarily behavioural factors, although students were also expected to provide a personal statement detailing their reasons for participation.

Consent to participate was provided by boys and their parents following a presentation about the research project that took place at the initial information evening for students travelling to Vietnam. The consent form that was signed by boys and their parents clearly described the extent to which confidentiality and student identity would be protected.

The Action

A series of lecture-style sessions, conducted by myself, were held with the group traveling to Vietnam in the months preceding their departure. In these sessions, the boys were introduced to a

range of perspectives on overseas social justice projects and foreign intervention in developing communities. These perspectives were intended to elicit a response, and as such, were sometimes deliberately controversial. Initial sessions detailed the history of the St Kevin's overseas social justice programs and the manner in which the College and World Youth Adventures (the organisation engaged by St Kevin's to organise the programs) determined the nature and destination of our commitment.

Students were introduced to the concept of the "white messiah complex" as it relates to foreign aid, and some of the arguments, grounded in economic theory, about the possible ramifications of charitable donations and contributions. Students were provided with personal accounts of individuals who, after having sought to provide assistance to disadvantaged communities through participation in social justice projects comparable to those about to be undertaken by the students, had become critical of particular aspects and elements of voluntourism programs. The intent behind this action was not to advocate for a particular perspective, or to present one approach as being intrinsically better or worse than any other, but to demonstrate the complexities associated with such programs and some of the issues that had befallen previous travellers along this path.

After each of these sessions, students were required to complete a reflective writing task, guided by a series of prompts, to encourage them to develop their own perspective and opinions on the material covered. Small groups of students were also interviewed about their responses.

Data collection methods and analysis

Data were collected from a series of reflective writing pieces, submitted via the St Kevin's College online learning management system, and interviews—both individual and in small groups—that were digitally recorded and then transcribed. The interview transcripts were supplemented with my own notes and observations.

Once the responses had been submitted and the interviews transcribed, they were subjected to a close textual analysis, the purpose of which was to identify emergent patterns and themes within the student responses that would inform discussion of the students' engagement with, and attitudes towards, factors and perspectives relating to poverty alleviation strategies and their own

participation within them. Particular attention was paid to evidence of disruptive experiences that promoted deeper reflection and construction of new understandings.

The approach to analysis was informed by the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an approach involving a highly detailed textual analysis of qualitative data that is grounded in psychological research, and which seeks to understand the effects of experiences on participants. Due to the idiographic nature of the data, and the focus on the experiences of the student with respect to their critical examination of and engagement with poverty alleviation strategies, IPA was identified as the most appropriate form of data analysis, and consequently formed the basis of the project.

As stated by Smith et al. (2009), “the existing literature on analysis in IPA has not prescribed a single ‘method’ for working with data...the essence of IPA lies in its analytic *focus*” (p. 79). In IPA’s case, that focus directs our analytic attention toward the boys’ attempts to make sense of their experiences.

During the analysis of the boys’ reflective writing and the transcripts of the interviews, three main themes relevant to the area of inquiry became apparent. These themes were:

- Benefits to self (the boys);
- Benefits to others (the recipients); and
- The efficacy of overseas social justice projects.

Each of these themes related to a different aspect of overseas social justice projects, looking at the impacts that such activities had on the various actors involved, as well as the manner in which the boys (the students) were engaging critically the issues raised.

The data were collected over three distinct periods. The first set of data (‘pre-intervention’) occurred prior to any intervention on my part. At this stage, the focus was on establishing existing attitudes and understandings. The second set of data (‘pre-departure’) was obtained throughout the interventions, which took the form of allocated readings and presentations to the group on specific topics related to poverty alleviations and the role of voluntourism. The final set

of data ('during experience') was obtained in Vietnam itself, while students were exposed to settings and environments, which until that point had existed primarily in an abstract sense.

Following the IPA analysis method described by Smith et al. (2009), annotations were made at each stage where there was an overt reference made to the benefits accrued by either the boys or the project recipients (across a range of scales: from individual children in the village that was the site of the community work, to a more general conception of the recipients of any program designed to alleviate poverty), or when there was evidence of critical consideration of the efficacy of a range of poverty alleviation strategies.

Further analysis of the transcripts resulted in the identification of passages whereby the response of the participant suggested a disruptive experience, or some degree of confusion on the part of the participant. Elements of the data that related to these categories were allocated a colour code and electronically highlighted accordingly. This allowed for the relevant passages to be identified within the full data set.

Discussion of Results

Pre-intervention

The first set of data collected related to the students engagement with the question about why they were undertaking the Vietnam program. At this point, the interventions, whereby students were introduced to a range of critical perspectives on the nature of voluntourism and service learning, had not occurred. The reflective writing tasks and subsequent small group interviews were concerned with establishing the existing attitudes and understandings of the boys.

The boys' responses typically related to the benefits that would accrue to the boys themselves as a result. Typical responses included: "It will give us the skills to travel overseas," "To help us learn about a different culture," and "To give us lessons we could never learn at school."

The conveyed attitude was perhaps best summarised by the boy who wrote, "It offers us a different experience and context for our ordinary lives...we can become enclosed in our lives

and just think of the life we live and not the broader community and world around us.” Of the 16 boys, all identified at least one benefit to themselves that would be achieved through participating in the process, whereas 11 made reference to the benefits that would be provided to the recipients of the project work that was ostensibly the program’s *raison d’être*.

There was an apparent consensus that the work to be undertaken in Pa Ban and the disbursement of financial support was going to be incontrovertibly positive, since it would be satisfying a need that would otherwise not be met. Responses indicated that not only was the work going to have a positive outcome, but that the outcome would be significant, either in terms of scale, or in terms of the need being met. One boy asserted, “We’re going to help less fortunate people by building classrooms so kids can get an education.” Yet another argued, “We are taking the first step in quelling a long-standing poverty in remote Asian communities.”

It was significant at this point to note the language used in reference to the conditions that the boys were anticipating. The expectation was for a poverty-stricken environment full of people struggling to eke out a miserable existence while being largely ignored by the Vietnamese government, and remaining reliant on the intervention of charitable groups such as ours. In these initial responses, I did not discern any responses that indicated a critical engagement with this approach to poverty alleviation, or any curiosity about the domestic political, social, or economic factors that might be pertinent to the project.

Pre-departure

The purpose of the interventions had been to promote student engagement with the “disorienting dilemmas” described by Howie & Bagnall (2013). The responses produced through reflective writing activities and interviews demonstrated that there was a shift in the perception of the pending experience as a result of the readings and sessions that had been provided to the boys.

In terms of the benefits that the students were expecting to receive from the program, it was at this stage that there started to be a discernible shift towards a different type of benefit, from those that would perhaps be able to provide tangible benefit when utilised in future settings (skills, knowledge, etc.) to those that were grounded in interpersonal relationships. This was typified in an interview with Boy H, who stated, “it seems as if what I’m really going to get out of this is the

feeling and the experience...of maybe just sitting with these people and talking.” This idea was later referred to by Boy C, when he said, “I’m looking forward to...just interacting and maybe getting some new ideas about life and the feeling of helping someone else, giving someone else something rather than just sending money to them.”

The manner in which the boys considered the benefits that would be provided to the recipients also began to assume a more nuanced tone. Distinct from earlier statements, which assumed that something of great value (“giving these kids an education they wouldn’t otherwise get”) was being given to people who would otherwise have nothing (“barely the basic things required for human life”), responses indicated a clearer understanding of the setting in which the boys work would take place. As Boy H explained, “they might not be rich or well off, but it won’t be abject poverty, and we’re there to give them something that it sounds like they could use some help with to better their standard of living.” Boy G concurred: “in terms of helping someone in poverty improve a part of their life...that’s big for me, and I guess that with the government and World Expeditions supporting this, we know we’re going to doing something important.” In general terms, the boys had begun to base their opinions on the nature of the work that was taking place on specific information rather than generic assumptions about developing states.

The most significant changes between the pre-intervention and the pre-departure responses concerned the extent to which the boys were critically engaging with the nature of the project. One of the pieces of stimulus material provided to the boys prior to completing a reflective writing activity was highly critical of projects of this type and of the “white-messiah complex,” and represented a disorienting dilemma that was reflected in their responses. One boy expressed that his “initial reaction to this article was shock. I do not agree with her opinion at all...even though this is relevant to our trip as we are not experienced we should never shy away from helping just because we are not 100% sure about what we are doing.” Another “was surprised to read this. I didn’t expect an article highlighting such left-field views to be given to us, but by the same token, the author has come to an excellent calculated realisation about what we as ‘white kids’ can provide for a community in a developing country.”

In total, 15 of the 16 boys responded in a manner that suggested that they were, to some extent, challenged by the article. (The sixteenth response stated that “this just galvanised stuff [he] already knew.”) The responses had, at this stage, ceased to reflect an uncritical acceptance of the innate good that overseas social justice projects can provide.

A majority of responses involved some variation on an acknowledgement of the criticisms of those opposed to projects of this type, but highlighted that our project was doing everything possible to ensure that such potential problems were minimised. As such, the boys were now becoming actively involved in the evaluation of the benefits of our program. A subsequent interview saw Boy W explain his response to the article in a way that suggested that the intended disorientation was occurring, as students were becoming aware, in many cases for the first time, of the complexities of overseas social justice programs as described by Wearing (2001). He mentioned being thrown by the article: “That article confused me a little. It wasn’t something that I have ever worried about, or seen in magazines or anything...seemed like she really knew what she was talking about and had done a lot of research and had a lot of the experiences herself. Yeah, I’d never really thought about it...still not really sure what I think.”

During experience

The interviews that occurred during the experience in Vietnam overwhelmingly reflected the disorientation that had occurred as a result of being immersed in an unfamiliar environment, and being regularly required to engage critically with what was being experienced, through my continued stimulation of discussion and questioning of responses.

During the work on the school in Pa Ban, and later that evening, a range of boys were asked to revisit the question of the purpose of their participation, in a deliberate reference to the initial reflective writing piece that had been completed before any interventions. There was an overwhelming sense of confusion, but also evidence of a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the impact that overseas social justice programs are able to provide. Boy N provided an especially illustrative response: “I don’t know. I’m not sure about this. Just not sure. I couldn’t ever be sure. Does it matter if I’m not sure? I don’t think so.”

He continued: “I’ve got a weird analogy. You’ve got a wooden bucket that’s falling apart. We’re here to tape up some of the holes. It’s not our job to make it a metal bucket...so we’re holding the water while we have to, and I guess they’re building a better bucket. Vietnam is an up and coming country, we’ve seen that. What is it, like the 25th biggest economy or something. They’ll get there.”

In explaining his analogy, Boy N was clearly demonstrating the manner in which the disorienting dilemmas to which he had been exposed were resulting in the Deweyan construction of more sophisticated understandings and knowledge. Similarly, this implied an increasing degree of critical engagement with the questions pertaining to overseas social justice programs and poverty alleviation – questions to which the boys had only recently been exposed as a result of their experiences within the pre-departure interventions and the time in Vietnam itself.

Even in instances where the focus was on the benefits that the project provided for both the boy themselves and the Vietnamese recipients, there was far less certainty. In reflecting on the fact that the project benefited only the village of Pa Ban, Boy X said, “I can’t help but have the feeling that the whole way through, although we were doing something good it was very much one school in one village in one region of one country kind of things...and I don’t know...I felt like the bigger picture...I don’t know that it wasn’t a massive change but it was still something positive...we definitely did something that we can call good, but was it really life changing for anyone?” Similarly, Boy S, was discomfited by the plaque that was erected in recognition of the group’s work in the school: “The plaque that they had on the building, where it said, renovated by St Kevin’s College...it’s kind of promoting the fact that we’ve come and done this when it’s supposed to be a selfless act, and by doing that we’ve sort of taken it in a righteous fashion. I think I would have preferred it to have remained anonymous.” More generally, the students were left questioning the extent to which they had actually contributed to the broader goal of poverty alleviation, and the extent to which their presence in Pa Ban had had significant benefit to the people that they had travelled to Vietnam in order to help.

After the program was complete, all sixteen of the boys expressed their support for the idea that “the school in Pa Ban is a better place because of our action.” There was far more nuance when the question was posed about the extent of the improvement and the nature of the improvements

that we had provided. In the initial, pre-intervention reflective writing task, only 2 of the 16 boys agreed with the statement that “sending money directly to the village would be a better way to achieve a positive outcome than us travelling to complete the work ourselves.” Revisiting this same question in a group discussion, and when presented with the earlier responses, there was an acknowledgement by a majority of the group that their position had evolved. Boy D asked, “Can we change our minds? I think the only benefit to us being here rather than sending the money is that we got to see it. I don’t think that us being here made any difference to what would have happened if we had just sent the money.” This was promptly challenged by Boy H who said, “But now we see them as being more like us...and us doing it, we got the experience, and maybe we’ll want to go and do something more...isn’t that just as important?” This final discussion, which continued in a similar vein, with the boys debating the relative merits of the work that they had completed, provided ample demonstration of the extent to which they had engaged with the complexities of poverty alleviation and developed a far deeper understanding of their capacity to positively impact their world.

Conclusion

It is apparent that the use of disorienting dilemmas is an effective way of enhancing the extent to which boys engage with overseas social justice programs related to poverty alleviation. It became apparent that the most effective means of facilitating this process of disorientation was through direct experience; the reflection and confusion that occurred in response to the boys’ first-hand experiences in Vietnam was more pronounced than those that were more abstract and theoretical by dint of them taking place in their normal school environment. Although the ideas to which they were exposed prior to departure started the process of engaging critically with actions such as those that they undertook, boys were quick to confirm that in many cases they had forgotten about specific sessions or reflective writing pieces until they were reminded of them explicitly in discussions that took place in Vietnam.

The interventions and learning activities that occurred prior to departure can be considered to represent the “broader framework to interpret the social world” that Plum & Jorgensen (2012) considered to be a necessary component of experiences that had the potential to produce a culture shock in an immersive experience comparable to that which occurred in Vietnam. It can

therefore be concluded that the pre-departure program that I ran as an intervention for the purpose of this action research project provided a structure and context through which they could process their experiences in Vietnam, and that it was these experiences that represented the truly disorienting dilemma.

When seeking to adopt a global perspective on issues such as poverty alleviation, there is, almost by definition, a necessity to provoke in students a consideration of events and perspectives beyond their personal experience. This experience has shown that such learning activities are supported by engineering situations whereby students are disoriented and forced to reconcile new, and often confronting, information with existing knowledge.

Future practice will be informed by this approach, with further consideration being given to the form that the pre-departure intervention program should take so as to maximise the framework of critical inquiry that program boys will take with them overseas. Students alluded to the fact that it was often only when they were prompted to consider the tasks that they had completed prior to arriving in Vietnam that they fully appreciated the implications and relevance of these sessions.

It also became apparent that in a program whereby disorienting dilemmas are provided, the relationship between the teacher and the student has the capacity to vastly enhance the extent to which the student engages with the dilemma. I was fortunate in that many of the students that I travelled with to Vietnam were those with whom I already had a positive relationship; this meant that when I presented them with challenging, and sometimes controversial material to provoke a disorienting dilemma, there was a faith in my actions and motivation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the students with whom I did not have an existing relationship required confirmation from the group as to the legitimacy of my deliberate challenging of accepted wisdom and beliefs.

Further to this, because of the constant conversations I was having with the boys in Vietnam, I was conscious of the need to continually make them aware of the issues that had been discussed prior to our departure, and to remind them of the positions that they had taken in their reflective writing tasks. This ongoing discourse proved to be a key component in developing the boys' understanding, and would be an approach that I will advocate strongly to staff who participate in future overseas projects. The better the relationship with the boys, the more authentic the

conversations that are produced: it was shown that through these conversations the boys engaged deeply and in an overwhelmingly impressive manner with the world around them.

Reflection

This process has been a fascinating opportunity to explore some ideas that have been germinating at various locations inside my skull since I became increasingly involved in the process of helping students engage with overseas social justice projects. Challenging assumptions, and then guiding students through a process of developing their knowledge on a much more conscious level, seemed to embody – to me at least – a vast amount of what is good about our profession. Sitting with the young men with whom I had travelled through Vietnam in the latter stages of our journey, and hearing them, of their own volition, have an insightful and reasoned discussion of some of the issues that had been raised through this action research process was a definite highlight. Although conversations of this ilk had occurred with varying degrees of frequency with boys who had participated in previous projects, the sense that such thinking and discursive consideration was a key component of the Northern Vietnam program left me with the sense that the boys were likely to take more from the program than packs stuffed full with fake designer goods purchased in the Hanoi markets.

The process also served to reaffirm just how much additional benefit can be derived from having positive relationships with the boys that I teach. Spending two unbroken weeks in a small group environment enabled myself and the colleague with whom I travelled to get to know these young men in a way that is difficult to replicate in the classroom. There is little doubt that the conversations that transpired around poverty alleviation, and the willingness of the boys to grapple with possibly contentious questions were all the greater because of the dynamic that had been achieved. It certainly appeared as if the reluctance of boys to offer opinions and engage in some of the challenging reflections was reduced as relationships within the traveling party developed, suggesting that in future programs of this nature there would be an early focus on doing what is possible to establish an environment that is conducive to such conversations.

I must further acknowledge the boys with whom I traveled to Vietnam, were, simply put, brilliant, as were the boys with whom I have previously walked through Nepal, and whose thoughts and reflections provided the initial idea behind this research project. Mr Stephen Russell, the Headmaster of St Kevin's, has been a great supporter of overseas social justice projects in general, and my participation in the IBSC Action Research process in particular. My hope is that this project can represent some contribution towards the ongoing benefit of future students pursuing these opportunities that are placed in front of them.

The specific demands of this project have required practical support from the College, and the mentoring provided by Mr William Doherty as Deputy Headmaster has been invaluable. This has complemented the awe-inspiring efforts of Mr Bruce Collins, IBSC Action Research team leader/guru, whose wisdom, guidance and "caffeination" could not have been greater.

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