



Professional Learning
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Service Learning Partnerships The Barker in Timor-Leste Program

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Learning in **Practice**

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About the Author

Matthew Lloyd is Head of Geography and Co-curricular Co-ordinator of Surf Life Saving at Barker College where he is teaching for his 18th year. Prior to his time at Barker, Matthew worked in the timber industry and then the Music industry for a promoter and as a manager of a band. He commenced teaching with the Department of Education in the Met South-West in 1987. Since then he has taught at Peninsula Anglican Boys' School, Peninsula Grammar School and St Luke's Grammar School. Matthew's family has always had a strong focus on community activities. Instigator of PGS and St Luke's Bike For Bibles Sydney to Canberra Rides to raise money for global literacy projects, Matthew has been able to turn his attention to service through Surf Life Saving and the Timor-Leste Project at Barker. Matthew has coached Rugby and Basketball, is a Rugby Referee (despite his knees!) and is a member of The College of Teachers at Barker College.

About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Service Learning Partnerships

The Barker in Timor-Leste Program



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Abstract

In late September this year, 11 students and two staff went to Timor-Leste to spend some time in communities in and around the capital, Dili. They also spent a weekend at a youth leadership course at Liquica, 45 minutes from Dili. The Rotary Youth Program of Encouragement (RYPEN) was a chance for our students to engage with students their own age from the Liquica district. This was the third year of this service learning partnership between Timorese students and those of Barker College.

Matthew: Elo!

Becora Community: Hi!

Matthew: Hi!

Becora Community: Elo!

Matthew: Botarde. H'au nia naran Matthew Lloyd. H'au maistrie Geography iha Barker College, Sydney, Australia. Obrigadu ba imi nia atensaun. Obrigadu ba h'au iha Timor; ida ne hau mai Dala hat ona iha Timor. Obrigadu. (1)

So began each of the sessions we attended either at one of the four communities we visited or at RYPEN at Liquica. The greetings were of such warmth, that the ice was immediately broken, bonds were forged and we were off and running when it came to our key reasons for being there, creating links and encouraging students from a range of age groups in their pursuit of English language skills.

(FOOTNOTE 1) *Hello. Good afternoon. My name is Matthew Lloyd. I teach Geography at Barker College, Sydney, Australia. Thank you for your attention. Thank you for having us in Timor. This is my fourth time in Timor. Thank you.*



Left: a welcoming sign as we enter Becora Community, Dili. Right: community members await formalities at Becora.

Service Learning has always been a part of how we do things at Barker. This is due to its potential to enhance student citizenship, to increase communication and reflective practice skills, to develop empathy and to extend student learning beyond the classroom (Bettencourt, 2015 in Walker, 2017). It is an aspect of education that closely aligns with many of the principles of Geography teaching in the 21st Century. Thus, when the opportunity arose to develop a program in Timor-Leste, it was jumped at.

Barker's program in Timor-Leste has four main components:

1. Fund-raising
2. Learning about Timorese demographics, history and culture
3. RYPEN – a chance to participate in and enhance a residential youth leadership weekend and
4. Community visits – visits to volunteer-run communities in and around Dili and close to the locations selected for RYPEN.

Fund-raising

Barker students and staff sponsor the RYPEN that we attend in Timor. In order to do so, we need to raise circa \$5000. Whilst this may seem somewhat of a challenge, the “bang for the buck” is phenomenal. Thus we set to raising funds via cake stalls and a Muffin Day. I am frequently encouraged by the acts of generosity of staff and students. A number of students (some being Barker Timor-Leste Alumni) came up to the cake stalls simply to make a donation, no calories attached. Likewise, a number of staff made generous donations to both the cake stall and Muffin Day. This is very affirming of the program as it illustrates that colleagues value what we set out to do. The pillar of Gratitude is sured up!

Another positive aspect of this year's fundraising has been the success of the Muffin Day. On past occasions, students have been billed, or worse, many have worn casuals and not paid. Thanks to the efforts of the staff, students were held more accountable this year. This is important, not just for the extra funds raised, vital though that be. More so for the thought processes involved, for the conversations that ensued with regards to Gratitude and the relative wealth that we enjoy and for the concept of holding people responsible. A number of pastoral care staff were dogged in their follow-up of recalcitrant non-payers. I thank them for their efforts.

Learning about Timorese Demographics, History and Culture

Timor has a rich and interesting history and a fascinating culture. The events of its recent history are highly significant in shaping the people. The country is only 17 years old. Almost every family has a member who has disappeared, “Gone to lunch in Jakarta”, been killed or who starved to death during the privations of the Indonesian Occupation. Our students visit Christo Rei, a large statue of Jesus on a significant hill above Dili Harbour, The Museum of Resistance, the Indonesian Gaol, the Portuguese Gaol in Au Pele, the Sparrow Force Memorial at Dare, the Dutch Fort in Maubara, Dili’s Motael Church, the Santa Cruz Cemetery (site of the Santa Cruz Massacre) (2) and Timor-Leste’s only World Heritage Site – Max Stahl’s VHS collection. This year we met Max Stahl. His address to the students, and the questions that followed, were fascinating. We also visited the Australian Embassy to add some Civics to the program. This year we were fortunate to be hosted by the Ambassador, Mr Peter Roberts AM. Here too, his talk to the students, and the questions that followed, were intriguing.



Left: Climbing the 585 steps to Christo Rei. Right: At the entrance to Santa Cruz Cemetery.

RYPEN (Rotary Youth Program of Encouragement)

This program challenges our students. Many sessions are predominantly in Tetum. It is hot. Some activities are not clearly explained. Some sessions are conducted in a spartan classroom with all participants sitting on the floor. The toilets are squat toilets. It is difficult. However, these challenges when risen to, allow for growth. This year’s student group did a good job of raising their concerns in a respectful and positive fashion. “Respectful discourse” (Heath, 2017, p. 5) ensued. They participated well in the weekend’s activities. Many students listed the experience as a big positive when they evaluated the whole trip. Amongst a number of highlights was when the Timorese participants dressed our students in tais, the native dress, for the Saturday night concert. This was a great honour. Duckworth (2016) writes, “Grit is passion and perseverance for very long-term goals. Grit is having stamina.” In Liquica, grit was evident in more ways than one! I commend our students for sticking out the trying aspects of the program. Theirs was a very gritty performance.

(FOOTNOTE 2) On November 12, 1991, an estimated 270 East Timorese were massacred at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, by Indonesian troops. The civilians were participating in a funeral procession marking the death of Sebastio Gomez, a young FRETILIN leader who had been killed by the Indonesian military. Footage taken by Max Stahl was smuggled out, changing the World’s view about happenings in East Timor at the time.

Community Visits

These are exhilarating experiences for all involved. The trips in to these communities certainly fall into the realm of Exploring New Territories. Typically they start with a gathering and welcome. A tias ceremony is standard. The local cloth, scarf like in appearance, is draped over the visitors' shoulders and warm welcomes follow. Then the anthem Patria is sung. I wish every Barker student could experience this. The people of a new nation who have struggled, at huge cost, for independence sing their anthem in a manner that is exhilarating to the point of tears. After formalities, and often a bite to eat, everyone breaks into age-based groups. English language games, for example rousing renditions of, "Heads, shoulders, knees and toes" and the reading of basic primers or children's books that we take, sees a rapid breakdown of any pre-existing barriers. Leaving is a one hour (minimum) process, such is the warmth of the bonds built.

The Benefits of Barker's Participation in Timor-Leste

Of great concern to me when instituting this program was the fear of being FIFO Volontourists. I was most concerned that the program be of an on-going value to the people of Timor, not just a feel good experience for some rich Australian kids. Measurement of this was to prove difficult. Some digging by a third party has allayed my fears. Feedback from folks on the ground in Timor has indicated that the program is achieving goals on both sides of the Timor Gap.

First, the Barker students' participation in the RYPEN conference changes it from being a local event to being an "international" conference. This elevates the conference, making it more prestigious for the Timorese students who graduate. This will hopefully lead to broader job opportunities for RYPEN graduates in the long run or for a greater willingness for family members to financially invest in their education.

Second, the Timorese students have opportunities to improve their English speaking skills. A number of local students seek to spend significant time with Barker students and staff over the course of RYPEN in order to practise and expand their English language speaking. This also will hopefully lead to parents investing in education, particularly for English classes.

Third, varying degrees of effective leadership are modelled as the Australian students are often more confident and extroverted than their Timorese counterparts. Over the three years that the program has run, a number of our students have commented, in a respectful fashion, about the difference in skill levels when it comes to initiative and leadership activities. They comment that attributes and skills that they take for granted are not evident in many of the groups with which they are involved over the course of the weekend. As a consequence, our students express a new gratitude for the level of education that they have received.

Fourth, many leaders in Timor-Leste have historically been removed violently, meaning that the community as a whole is downward looking. Both the Portuguese and Indonesian occupations have left a cultural legacy wherein maintaining a low profile was prudent. As Timorese students interact with the Barker students, both at RYPEN, and also during community visits, there is a boosting of the Timorese students' confidence.

Fifth, making friends with the Barker students and having international guests makes the Timorese students feel special and important. It helps them feel that their future is important. Both sets of students swap Facebook addresses and the relationships continue well after we are back in Australia. A sense of wonder and pride is expressed when we tell gatherings that we study Timor-Leste in our classes in Australia. They are rather chuffed at this revelation.

Finally, visiting the community projects which the Rotary Youth Leadership Award (RYLA) graduates have started, elevates the projects in the eyes of the local community because international visitors have come specifically to see their program. There is a boost in the confidence of the organisers which will hopefully lead to additional community engagement and support. An example of this was a community centre in Dili. The area had had a history of gang related issues. The community centre that we visited was set up on the balcony of a local volunteer's family house. Two (fairly dated) computers had been sourced and a number of RYLA graduates had volunteered their time to engage in a range of activities to upskill various sectors of this community. A drop in the gang crime rate had ensued and was clearly attributable, in part, to the work of the community centre. The pride with which we were shown through the centre was palpable. The simple act of listening and seeing cost us very little. The encouragement to the facilitators was clearly displayed. These folks have an amazing love and drive for their people. Barker students and staff are inspired by their generosity and love for their fellow citizens.

In each of the students' evaluations, a form of, "I will definitely be more grateful for everything I have in my life in Sydney" was evident. Through service, inquiry and rhetoric gratitude was realised; thus enhancing thriving in Barker and in Timor-Leste.

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