

Best Practices - I

1. Title: Experiential Learning through Social Engagement (ELSE)

2. Objective of the Practice:

The New College believes that learning by doing can be best experimented by involving the students in social work activities. As social work is included as one of the extension activities in the curriculum for which two credits are to be secured, the college has identified it as an avenue for experiential learning.

The main objectives of Experiential Learning through Social Engagement (ELSE) include:

- Involving all students in socially useful productive work as part of the effort to develop them into well-rounded and socially responsive individuals.
- Utilising the social service opportunities as avenues for developing the skills of students.
- Focussing on developing qualitative skills like empathy, leadership, service-mindedness, group dynamics, and organisation skills, thus preparing them to face the challenges of life and career.
- Making students participate in the nation building process through social service-based learning.
- Contributing significantly towards addressing the developmental needs and social backwardness of the neighbourhood areas of the college.
- Creating avenues for instilling environmental sensitiveness among the students through social service activities.

The above objectives are met by streamlining the activities of the Extension wings and clubs of the college like NSS, NCC, Youth Red Cross, Rotaract Club and departmental extension clubs.

3. The Context:

As an institution with a proven track record of social commitment, the students and staff of The New College have been in the forefront of several social missions in the neighbourhood and adopted villages for the past several decades. For instance, every year the NSS conducts special camps in an adopted villages and involve students in several developmental missions in the village.

Every student is made to join one of the extension clubs, and it is mandatory for them to participate in some form of social service. The college has four units of NSS, two units of NCC, a Rotaract Club, a Youth Red Cross unit, a Red Ribbon Club, an eco-club named NEST, and a Citizen Consumer Club. In addition, there are extension clubs and sectional associations in the departments that organise social service activities using the expertise and resources available within the department. These Clubs include

- i) CSR Club, Department of Corporate Secretaryship,
- ii) Environmental Activity Club, Department of Economics,
- iii) Achievers' Club, Department of Commerce,
- iv) New Phy Club, Department of Physics,
- v) E-Society, Department of Sociology,
- vi) Crypto-Tech Club, Department of Computer Science,
- vii) Humanitarian Club, Department of English,
- viii) Khidma Club, Department of Mathematics,
- ix) Green Warrior's Club, Department of Botany,
- x) Enablers' League, Department of Business Administration,
- xi) Association of Ignited Minds, Department of Accounting and Finance, and
- xii) Newgen Enviro Club, Department of Biotechnology.

The social service wings of the college have significantly contributed to the development of the neighbouring areas and the adopted villages. Every NSS volunteer is expected to carry out 120 hours of social work in a year; besides, they participate in annual NSS camps conducted in villages. Besides, during occasions of natural calamities and disasters, the college community as a whole comes forward to help the affected by providing food, and other basic needs, and contributing generously for improving their conditions after the calamities.

The college used the services of the students in carrying out its village adoption programme funded by the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan scheme of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. Besides, the annual NSS camps have been conducted in villages adopted by the college in nearby districts like Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur.

4. The Practice:

Every student involved in social work gets opportunities to develop core skills like leadership qualities, interpersonal skills, communication skills, team work skills and presentation skills while engaging in extension works. As the social work initiatives include such activities as assisting weaker students from the neighbourhood schools, the activities are likely to prune the academic skills of students involved in such activities.

During the last five years the college adopted seven villages in Thiruvallur District of Tamil Nadu where the college conducted five special camps involving service activities like socio-economic surveys, medical camps, renovation of school buildings, cleaning the streets, laying of roads, plantation of saplings, and so on. Special awareness sessions are conducted in villages on disease prevention, hygiene, and protection of the environment. The college has provided substantial help to the self-help groups in villages by training them in such activities as phenol making and candle making to become microentrepreneurs. In all these activities, students of the college participate as volunteers. Key life skills are inculcated by the students during the process. As all the students are involved in different works during the camps, the activities during camps result in developing self-reliance among the students.

5. Evidence of Success:

Students who were actively involved in social service excelled in their academics, and their attachment to the society and their practical learning enhanced their maturity. Besides, the smartness and the skills acquired by the student leaders which enabled them to crack placement interviews easily. Another significant outcome of the programme was that the social service initiatives in general and the activity oriented learning involved in social work, in particular improved the attendance of students and the overall examination results of the college. Over the last five years the college engaged the students for donating 2258 units of blood through eighteen blood donation camps, which resulted in saving many lives. The medical camps conducted as part of the initiative served more than 1500 beneficiaries. During the last five years, the social service initiatives resulted in planting more than 15,000 saplings in the neighbourhood areas, adopted villages and in the campus. The college won 40 awards for social work during the same period. Regular beach cleaning drives carried out by the extension wings of the college enabled the Chennai corporation to keep the Marina Beach clean.

All the students who participated in the NCC activities developed proficiency in Hindi language by interacting with their north Indian counterparts during camps and social work activities. Participation in trekking, paragliding, parasailing, mountaineering, and Thal Sainik Camps, Republic Day Camps, Army Attachment Camp, and training in Indian Military Academy, Officer's Training Academy, and Combined Annual Training camps which also included social service activities, enhanced the endurance and other life skills of the NCC cadets. Programmes like leadership camps and youth exchange programme enhanced their employability skills.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required:

Primarily, the number restrictions in the clubs (NSS, NCC, YRC, etc) available in the college was the main obstacle to accommodate all the students. The problem was resolved by strengthening departmental extension wings. Secondly, the interventions in the adopted villages were most often limited to the days of the annual special camps. This has resulted in fewer follow up activities. Thirdly, the scarce financial support from government agencies for developmental activities in the adopted villages was a handicap in initiating many development activities. Further, the social engagement initiatives could not penetrate deep into problems like poverty and health issues faced by the people in adopted villages.

7. Notes:

Experiential Learning through Social Engagement was beneficial in two ways: students became socially sensitive, and they learned certain key skills while doing their mandatory social service. Social engagement, particularly in rural areas, enhanced their empathy, and consciousness of the living conditions of such groups like people from remote villages and the urban poor. The problems encountered by the children of neighbouring government schools and aided schools were recognised during field works conducted by certain clubs, and many departments in the college came forward to help them by involving their students in teaching the basics to the schools children.