

International Education Research
Volume 4, No. 2 (2016), 1-13
ISSN 2291-5273 E-ISSN 2291-5281
Published by Science and Education Centre of North America

Investigating Meaningful Happiness and Wellbeing in College Students through a ‘Curriculum of Giving’ Outdoor Education Program

Thomas W. Nielsen¹ & Jennifer Ma²

¹ Faculty of Education, Science, Technology, and Mathematics, University of Canberra, Canberra, Australia

² Centre for Mental Health Research, Research School of Population Health, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

*Correspondence: Thomas W. Nielsen, Faculty of Education, Science, Technology, and Mathematics, University of Canberra, Canberra, ACT 2601, Australia. Tel: + 61 2 6201 5699; E-mail: thomas.nielsen@canberra.edu.au

Received: December 12, 2015 Accepted: April 19, 2016 Online Published: August 15, 2016

DOI: 10.12735/ier.v4n2p01

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12735/ier.v4n2p01>

Copyright © T. W. Nielsen & J. Ma**

Abstract

As part of a two-week outdoor education expedition, 18 high school and college students (11 males and 7 females) were engaged in evidence-based wellbeing activities, such as journaling, three new gratitudes, and meditation. Using a mixed methods approach, the aim was to investigate the impact of these activities — conceptualised as a ‘curriculum of giving.’ Wellbeing was measured qualitatively via interviews and journals, and quantitatively using the Flourishing Scale (FS) across four time points. Qualitative data showed that the wellbeing activities facilitated students’ connection and gratitude towards nature, promoted self-reflection, and a shift in values and worldviews toward social concern. Together with the quantitative data which showed a statistically significant increase in FS scores from pre-trip to post-trip, the results of this in-depth case study support the growing body of literature showing that forms of altruism performed regularly are beneficial to wellbeing and meaningful happiness.

Keywords: giving, meaning, wellbeing, outdoor education, students

** This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



Licensee: [Science and Education Centre of North America](#)

How to cite this paper: Nielsen, T. W., & Ma, J. (2016). Investigating meaningful happiness and wellbeing in college students through a ‘curriculum of giving’ outdoor education program. *International Education Research*, 4(2), 1-13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12735/ier.v4n2p01>

1. Introduction

1.1. Positive Psychology and Outdoor Education

In recent years, there has been a call for integration between the fields of experiential education and fields that share common philosophical roots, such as service-learning (Seaman & Gass, 2004) and more recently, positive psychology (Berman & Davis-Berman, 2005; Mackenzie, Son, & Hollenhorst, 2014; Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010). Here, researchers have suggested that unity and collaboration between the fields can provide effective reform initiatives, lead to the integration of research frameworks, enable research to be situated within a larger empirical base, and improve upon the efficacy of future education programs (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2014; Seaman & Gass, 2004). Given that positive psychology has encompassed the study of wellbeing and positive mental states such as happiness (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Veenhoven, 2008), life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), and psychological strengths (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Ryff, 1989) over the past two decades, a dearth of literature on the processes and mechanisms behind a wide variety of positive outcomes is readily available. As existing criticisms of adventure education programs suggest that the processes and outcomes behind positive development through adventure have been poorly documented and remain not well understood, interdisciplinary collaboration provides a fruitful pathway for studying wellbeing outcomes (Sibthorp & Arthur-Banning, 2004).

Recent studies integrating service learning, positive psychology, and outdoor adventure education have acknowledged the compatibility of positive psychology for studying student outcomes. Within an outdoor education context, student outcomes have been researched from a strengths-based approach, one which involves exploring and developing one's strengths and positive emotions (Passarelli *et al.*, 2010), through the construct of intentionally enhancing wisdom via service learning (Bailey & Russell, 2010), and resilience via anti-bullying initiatives and outdoor adventure (Beightol, Jeverson, Carter, Gray, & Gass, 2012; Overholt & Ewert, 2015). Alongside topics such as developing strengths, positive emotion, and resilience, recent movements within positive psychology have also highlighted additional fruitful constructs for study in outdoor contexts, such as giving. For example, studies have found that other-giving emotions and behaviours performed regularly are associated with feelings of happiness and life satisfaction (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2004), relieving negative states such as sadness and distress (Baumann, Cialdini, & Kendrick, 1981; Midlarsky, 1991), and promoting greater wellbeing, health, and longevity (Post, 2005; Schwartz, Keyl, Marcum, & Bode, 2009), where giving appears to be as potent as that of receiving for the giver (Brown, 2003; Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Schwartz *et al.*, 2009). This research base supports evidence from service-learning approaches which have found that students exposed to meaningful community service experience increased empathy, altruism, and academic outcomes (Billig, 2000; Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006). Based on these overlaps, the specific role of giving within an educational context has been outlined as a potential pathway towards increasing not only student wellbeing, but also community wellbeing and meaningful happiness across a wide range of contexts (Nielsen, 2011, 2014). The present article aims to build upon this literature by examining how intentional teaching of a 'giving curriculum,' one centred on altruistic thoughts and behaviours, can act to enhance existing outdoor adventure education programs and practices, and promote wellbeing and meaningful happiness in students.

2. Method

2.1. Background

The present study was borne out of collaboration between the expedition leader from the outdoor education program at the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra

(UCSSC Lake Ginninderra), and one of the authors (TWN). The expedition leader had run a successful outdoor education program with Year 11 and Year 12 students for over a decade, and based on TWN's research, wanted to more explicitly incorporate giving into the program. TWN was invited on the trip to aid in running activities and workshops, and researching the impact of the giving overlay.

The enhanced program had been designed to expose students to intentional activities aimed at promoting positive feelings, positive behaviours, or positive cognitions (e.g., being in nature, gratitude, giving, meditation) through a unified educational philosophy—a 'giving curriculum.' This approach differed from both positive psychology and various values education-type programs in general, in that social concern was conceptualised as a fundamental philosophy with which to apply various wellbeing strategies within a synergistic, pedagogical approach, where the meaningful life and social concern were seen as a fundamental component of our health and wellbeing. The shared aim was to investigate the impact of a giving curriculum on high school and college students' levels of wellbeing and meaningful happiness.

2.2. Participants

Eighteen students (11 males and 7 females) aged between 16 and 19 years of age participated in the current study. The sample was predominantly male (61.1%), and the mean age of the sample was 17.28 ($SD = 0.95$). Students were recruited from the Year 11 and Year 12 cohort from the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra (UCSSC Lake Ginninderra) Lady Musgrave Outdoor Education trip. Alongside the expedition leader and TWN, three staff members who had all been on previous reef trips attended: an academic with extensive outdoor education experience; an experienced scuba diver instructor, and a beginning teacher who had been on several previous trips. Parental consent identified which students were eligible to participate in the project. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Canberra's Human Research Ethics Committee and the A.C.T Education and Training Directorate.

2.3. Procedure

As part of an outdoor education expedition to Lady Musgrave Island, Year 11 and Year 12 students were engaged in wellbeing activities, conceptualised as a 'giving curriculum,' across a 14-day trip. Six days were spent travelling from Canberra to Lady Musgrave Island and back, and eight on the island itself. The trip comprised of two components, an outdoor education component that involved the integration of various wellbeing activities, and a research component that aimed to assess their impact. While these wellbeing elements of the program were integrated into the trip for all students, it was voluntary as to whether students wanted to partake in the research component. All students chose to participate in the research component.

2.3.1. Education Component

Apart from having opportunities to partake in outdoor activities, such as snorkelling, diving, and nature walks, students were provided with explicit and structured wellbeing activities on the island. These activities stemmed from existing evidence based wellbeing and positive psychology activities, such as journaling (Slatcher & Pennebaker, 2006), three new gratitudes (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), affirming one's most important values (Steele, 1988), performing acts of kindness (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008) and meditating on positive feelings towards self and others (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). The activities were tailored and further developed specifically for application in the school and outdoor education context by the teaching staff with a focus on social concern and giving. These activities included, 'sunset solitude,' 'sunrise warriors,' meditation, and 'SELF CARE AIMS' (Appendix). Across all of the activities, students were explicitly engaged in discussion around how the activities and philosophy around giving and social concern were aligned.

2.3.2. *Research Component*

In order to evaluate the effect of the additional wellbeing and positive psychology elements to the program, three forms of data were collected: (1) semi-structured interviews, (2) daily journal entries, and (3) wellbeing surveys (Table 1). To track qualitative wellbeing change, students were asked to participate in recorded semi-structured interviews and group discussions with the researchers across the duration of the trip. Here, time would be set aside each day for small groups of students (three to five) to discuss and reflect upon their experiences with the researcher in response to pre-set questions. Student reflections and statements that arose during the set class periods for learning course material were also recorded. In addition to this, students were given journals before the trip commenced, and were encouraged to write daily entries detailing their thoughts, feelings, reflections, and gratitudes. To track quantitative wellbeing change, students were asked to complete a wellbeing survey across four time points: pre-trip (1 week prior), during-trip (last day on the island), post-trip (1 week post), and at 1 month follow-up.

Table 1. Data Collection Timeline

		Time points			
		Time 1 (Pre-trip)	Time 2 (During trip)	Time 3 (Post-trip)	Time 4 (Follow-up)
Data collection	First wellbeing	Second wellbeing	Third wellbeing	Final wellbeing	
method	survey administered	survey administered	survey	survey administered	
	one week pre-trip for	on last day on island	administered	one-month post trip.	
	baseline measure.	(Trip day 11).	one-week post trip.		
		Daily journal entries			
		recorded (ongoing).			
		Semi-structured			
		interviews recorded			
		(ongoing).			

2.4. **Measures**

Wellbeing was measured using the Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener *et al.*, 2010). The FS is a brief eight-item summary measure of the respondent’s self-perceived success in important areas of wellbeing such as relationships, engagement, meaning and purpose. As such, the FS was chosen as it comprises of facets that reflect components of meaningful happiness. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a seven-point scale, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) with the following statements: “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life,” “my social relationships are supportive and rewarding,” “I am engaged and interested in my daily activities,” “I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others,” “I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me,” “I am a good person and live a good life,” “I am optimistic about my future,” and “people respect me.” The eight items were summed to provide a single psychological wellbeing score that ranged from 8 (low wellbeing) to 56 (high wellbeing). The measure exhibits good psychometric properties on student populations, high internal reliabilities, and convergent validity with other psychological wellbeing scales (Diener *et al.*, 2010; Hone,

Jarden, & Schofield, 2013). In the current study, the cronbach alpha coefficient ranged from .47 to .89 across the time intervals.

2.5. Data Analysis

A concurrent mixed methods design was used for collecting and analysing the data, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time, integrated, and analysed in the context of a single study (Driscoll, Appiah-Yeboah, Salib, & Rupert, 2007). Qualitative data (e.g., semi-structured interviews, journals, and observations) was coded for main themes using the constant comparative method (Boeije, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and member-checking was employed to ensure validity of raw data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Student participant names were changed to protect anonymity. Quotes the researchers assessed as most potently representing the emergent themes were reported in the results section. Quantitative data (e.g., wellbeing surveys) was scored and analysed using IBM Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS, version 21), and a paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the wellbeing activities on student's scores on the Flourishing Scale (FS). FS total scores were compared across Time 1 (pre-trip) and Time 2 (during trip), Time 2 (during trip) and Time 3 (post-trip), Time 3 (post-trip) and Time 4 (1 month follow-up), and Time 1 (pre-trip) and Time 4 (1 month follow-up) to assess significant changes between the time points.

3. Results

3.1. Semi-Structured Interviews and Daily Journal Entries

The interviews and daily journal entries detailed a range of personal thoughts and feelings centred around three main overlapping themes: students experiencing feelings of connection and gratitude towards nature, self-reflection and assessment, and a shift in world-views towards social concern. Interestingly, though being connected to nature and the beauty of the island seemed to transport the students into the present, and became a conduit for them to experience a sense of inner peace and tranquillity, it also provided students the opportunity to reflect upon their life and the disparity of living on the island in "paradise" and the stresses and burdens awaiting them at home.

"The serenity and peacefulness makes the island the closest place I've felt to heaven. There's no other place I'd rather be..." (Martin)

"... How can you put something so beautifully indescribable into words? Some people are lucky when they can experience something that changes their life. I am so happy to say that I am one of those lucky people." (Penelope)

"The sun kisses my skin gently as I run sand through my toes. I sit here thinking about how calm this island makes me. How I don't have to wake up stressed about school, or work, or family, or life... I wonder how I will cope when I finally get back to the stresses of Canberra. I wonder if I will feel this same peace anywhere in the near future. I really hope I do. I appreciate this island more and more each day. It has given me the inner peace that I have been searching for... This island has shown me things and emotions of mine that I never knew I had." (Rebecca)

Aside from the natural beauty of the island, the incorporation of the wellbeing interventions and giving curriculum facilitated increased knowledge and self-awareness of the students' own levels of wellbeing. For example, we observed that before SELF CARE AIMS was taught, when students were asked the question: "What are you doing to look after yourself?" responses were limited to taking care of basic needs such as having enough food and drink, getting to sleep early, and having time to relax with friends. After students were explicitly taught the SELF CARE AIMS, students expressed more nuanced understandings of ways to look after themselves. They could list more

areas in need of attention and elaborate on these as they related to their lives. What was also significant was how many of them, without being asked directly, talked about how useful they felt the activity had been.

“I think it was pretty good because it did cover a lot. And probably things that you wouldn’t normally consider to be so important for your overall wellbeing. Like things like creativity, like you don’t really think about.” (Kelly)

“I think it sort of helped me realise a lot of things that I was maybe missing out on or not as focused on that I should probably try to improve. Just for a way of remembering is good.” (Penelope)

“I actually thought it was a really, really clever acronym. I think I’ll probably look at it as I sort of go on through life a bit later and make a checklist that you know, is everything going okay? And you know, does it mean you’re happy? I think it’s very good to just be able to look at and use.” (Dan)

“I’ve been thinking about them a fair bit... Just how they all like... such a small little thing of words but they mean so much.” (James)

With the incorporation of the wellbeing interventions and giving curriculum, students also touched upon how they experienced a deeper sense of happiness and meaning, and how this profound shift in their values has deeply changed them and would influence their futures.

“I have felt a change in myself, which I think comes from the amazing underwater experiences but also the meditation sunrise warriors and the talks we have had on giving and self care aims... I feel as if I have grown as a person as well as being part of this team... Being here gives me a different kind of happiness which I have never really felt before, it’s such an amazing feeling.” (Penelope)

“What the work [the staff] have done has really added to the trip as well, all the gratitude sort of things have really added to the trip and I’m going to actually keep a gratitude journal and everyday write down three things I’m thankful for. And just really be thankful in my life for the little things. I appreciate hard work a lot more, and I appreciate all the work that goes into teamwork and how everyone pitches in and I’m just so thankful to have the opportunity to go on this trip, it meant so much.” (James)

“[the staff] taught me a lot, like taught me to stay calm in stressful situations and like to kinda step back and think about it and things like that... And whenever I feel stressed or down or things like that I’ll think back to those amazing two weeks.” (Tanya)

Some students, in particular, were driven to reflect honestly on their past and their character, which prompted realisations about how they could be better people.

“Their [people on the island] kindness has astounded me and has made me realise how selfish I have been, it’s given me time to reflect on my past and has given thought to regret but it’s also given me thought to repent, I’ve made many mistakes worth noting but no achievements. This needs to change.” (Bruce)

“This trip has changed my life. It has made me reflect on myself and my values. It has cleared my head and made me really focus on things that are important to me. I’m going back home with better values, thinking about what makes me happy and how to make other people happy.” (Dan)

“This trip has been like a breath of life into me and it has affected me so much. From this trip I’ll be taking away a different perspective about life, one where I’m more grateful for the little things. It has made me more aware of the world I live in and more mindful of myself... I know that when I get back to Canberra I’ll be a changed man in so many different ways. I can’t see my lifestyle being the same as it was two weeks ago.” (James)

Interestingly, as illustrated in the respective quotes from three different students who had previously attended the reef trip, when it was taught without an overlay of the giving curriculum, talked about how having the giving component made the experience more meaningful.

“I think this time with the expedition leader, there was a lot more personal reflection... [We were] encouraged to think about what the island meant to us and what the experience meant to us, so I think I was more reflective on this trip than last time.” (Kelly)

“I think that overall the way that the leader ran the trip sort of allowed us to take away more from it as a whole experience as opposed to just individual things we would see on a snorkel.” (Hayley)

“This time’s been a lot more focused on what you get out of the trip, instead of last year it was more like just go and have heaps of fun and go home. [I have] more understanding of teamwork and what it takes to put this trip together, and the whole giving, and what you get out of giving to other people, and how it can affect your life... I could probably just help people more than I used to.” (Georgina)

Overall, the student journal entries highlighted how the experience gave the students an opportunity to connect with something larger than themselves, to express awe and reverence for nature, and stimulated them towards re-evaluating their lives, and in many cases, facilitated profound shifts in their values and worldview.

3.2. Flourishing Surveys

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the wellbeing activities on student’s scores on the Flourishing Scale (FS). Based on meta-analytic studies that show that positive psychology interventions significantly enhance wellbeing (Bolier *et al.*, 2013; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), it was hypothesised that the students’ scores on the FS would increase from baseline (pre-trip); however, it was unknown to the researchers as to whether the positive change would be sustained.

There was a statistically significant increase in FS scores from Time 1, pre-trip ($M = 46.11$, $SD = 3.27$) to Time 2, during trip/last day on island ($M = 48.89$, $SD = 4.17$), $t(17) = -3.329$, $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed). The mean increase in FS scores was -2.77 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.538 to -1.017 . The eta squared statistic (.39) indicated a large effect size.¹ No significant changes in FS score were found for any of the follow-up measurements. Instead, levels of wellbeing appeared to decline to baseline levels, though non-significantly, after the trip (Table 2). Together with the qualitative data, this suggests that the explicit teaching of the giving curriculum made an important contribution to the wellbeing of the students across the duration of the island stay, but that these effects did not appear to be sustained when the students returned to their daily settings. This was supported in follow-up interviews, where students commented on the difficulty of sustaining new practices in un-changed settings – e.g., “I wish we still had someone to meditate with like we did on the island” (Georgina); “I forgot about SELF CARE AIMS when I got home” (Kelly); “It

¹ This finding was replicated in the 2014 cohort with the same amount of participants (18).

was hard to remember the good feelings you had on the island when you were suddenly by yourself again” (Martin).

Table 2. Measures of Central Tendency and Dispersion for FS Wellbeing

	<i>N</i>	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Time 1	18	39	51	46.11	3.27
Time 2	18	39	56	48.89	4.17
Time 3	18	39	55	47.33	3.83
Time 4	17	32	56	46.41	5.83

Note. FS total score ranges from 8 (low wellbeing) to 56 (high wellbeing)

4. Discussion

The key question guiding this research was: how can intentional teaching of a ‘giving curriculum’ promote and enhance existing outdoor adventure education programs and practices? As evidenced by the Flourishing Scale administered before and at the end of the island stay, there was a significant positive effect on students’ wellbeing. Most telling, however, was the data from the semi-structured interviews and journal entries, where students spoke favourably about the educational program and reported greater constructive awareness of their state of mind, emotions and overall wellbeing; increased knowledge and experience of evidence-based interventions for increasing wellbeing; and enhanced learning experiences during their eight days spent on the island. The latter finding was supported, in particular, by the three students who had been on previous trips, as they spoke about how they had been fun and exciting too, but not as meaningful in terms of developing understandings and strategies. It was not just the island and its wildlife that was important to them, but also the awareness of, and strategies for increasing, individual and collective wellbeing that made the trip more meaningful and satisfying to them.

In terms of wellbeing sustainability, although the students expressed clear intentions to continue to feel greater wellbeing and happiness through use of the wellbeing tools learnt on the island, the non-significant results from the Flourishing Scale between any of the follow-up measures, seems to suggest a less optimistic picture. Here, follow-up surveys showed that the students’ wellbeing slowly returned to where it was before the trip. This further supports what we also already know from the larger literature: that our day-to-day practices are important when it comes to supporting and sustaining wellbeing (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). The challenge for educators is to help students translate the principles learnt from the educational program or intervention into their daily lives, where there are usually more problems and challenges, and certainly fewer of the novel experiences had on an outdoor education trip. Follow-up interviews with students confirm that many of them felt it was difficult to continue the wellbeing strategies—i.e., SELF CARE AIMS and meditation—when they were no longer part of the trip and supported by staff. In other words, if the day-to-day environment is key to sustainable wellbeing change, it seems necessary to implement in the day-to-day curriculum more of what created the positive change to begin with.

4.1. Strengths and Limitations

The program presented with many notable strengths stemming from the staff’s ability to implement the giving curriculum within the existing outdoor education program. For instance, in order for the program to create positive transformation in its students, staff were required to understand, translate,

and apply the curriculum of giving flexibly to each specific teaching context, as well as possess the capability to model the principles of giving and social concern themselves. We believe that a large element of the program's success was attributed to the capabilities of the staff, suggesting that working closely with staff in the training and implementation process would greatly benefit the translation of the curriculum of giving principles. It should also be noted that the present study would not have been possible without the openness and willingness of the staff to have the outdoor education program evaluated by the researchers. This enabled us to observe an already established outdoor education program, capturing real students, in a real learning context, thus, supporting the ecological validity of the study.

The study also presented with a few limitations due to the nature of being an in-depth case study. For instance, our sample size ($N = 18$) was small, limiting the generalizability of our findings to the wider population. Future studies may benefit from assessing the impact of such programs within a larger student population, and in varied contexts. In addition to this, as the program was designed to expose students to a range of activities that they could freely choose to partake in, activities were not assigned to students, and there were no control groups. As such, we could not explicitly distinguish the effect of being on the island and in nature, from the wellbeing activities. However, as the aim in this project was to provide a whole experience for the students, and to explore how this overlay could add to and complement the wellbeing effects that already occur through outdoor education, we viewed this as supporting a holistic approach to improving wellbeing, as well as mirroring a classroom context.

4.2. Conclusion

The giving curriculum — a phrase used in this study to encompass evidence-based components of meaningful living and wellbeing— was not a set curriculum. It was not even a model or framework as such, but rather a philosophy with an underlying foundation of giving and social concern. As such, the tools and activities employed in a program that are encompassed by this philosophy can, in principle, include a number of various strategies and activities, but what seems important is to collaboratively develop a shared vision and language when implementing and engaging with these, such as was observed in this study.

Naturally, it is hard to dis-entangle the benefits from simply being in nature with that of the explicit wellbeing strategies employed in the program. However, rather than seeing the two aspects as separate, the educational program in this study allowed for seeing being in nature as an opportunity to give to the natural environment, and thus expand students' awareness of the dimensions in which it is possible to give. From respecting the wildlife to leaving the campsite cleaner than when we found it, giving and social concern was seen as philosophy of being, rather than just an 'add on' to existing curriculum. Being in such an 'ecology of giving', involving giving to our natural environments as well as our social relationships, had a positive impact on the participants.

However, the fact that our data showed that the benefits of the wellbeing strategies taught on the island wore off as students returned to their normal context highlights that schools often find it difficult to support effective wellbeing interventions in their daily curriculum. It seems that if swimming with green sea turtles is a somewhat easy way to feel elation within oneself and 'at one' with something greater than oneself, then the next step might be to try and re-unite with such feelings when doing a service that is less glamorous. If meaningful happiness is found in being something for others, then it seems possible it can be found in anything that is of service to others. The challenge is one of finding nuanced ways of self-care and social and environmental concern that are embedded seamlessly in daily life. This will require reconfiguring our understanding of giving as merely an overt act that solely benefits the receiver, to giving as an essential practice for promoting individual and collective wellbeing, of which can appear in many contexts and forms.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to the staff members on the 2013 Lady Musgrave Island trip, and the eighteen students who all took part in the research project. We would also like to acknowledge the substantial in-kind support provided for this project by the Lake Ginninderra College and the University of Canberra.

References

- [1] Bailey, A., & Russell, K. (2010). A way to wisdom through service and relationships. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 32(3), 317-321.
- [2] Baumann, D. J., Cialdini, R. B., & Kendrick, D. T. (1981). Altruism as hedonism: Helping and self-gratification as equivalent responses. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 40(6), 1039-1046. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.40.6.1039
- [3] Beightol, J., Jeverson, J., Carter, S., Gray, S., & Gass, M. (2012). Adventure education and resilience enhancement. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 35(2), 307-325.
- [4] Berman, D. S., & Davis-Berman, J. (2005). Positive psychology and outdoor education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 28(1), 17-24. doi:10.1177/105382590502800104
- [5] Billig, S. H. (2000). Research on K-12 school-based service-learning: The evidence builds. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(9), 658-664.
- [6] Boeije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality & Quantity*, 36(4), 391-409. doi:10.1023/A:1020909529486
- [7] Bolier, L., Haverman, M., Westerhof, G. J., Riper, H., Smit, F., & Bohlmeijer, E. (2013). Positive psychology interventions: A meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC Public Health*, 13(119), 1-20. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-13-119
- [8] Brown, S. L. (2003). An altruistic reanalysis of the social support hypothesis: The health benefits of giving. *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising*, 42, 49-57. doi:10.1002/pf.48
- [9] Brown, S. L., Nesse, R. M., Vinokur, A. D., & Smith, D. M. (2003). Providing social support may be more beneficial than receiving it: Results from a prospective study of mortality. *Psychological Science*, 14(4), 320-327. doi:10.1111/1467-9280.14461
- [10] Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130. doi:10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- [11] Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R. E., & Smith, H. L. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125(2), 276-302. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.125.2.276
- [12] Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 97(2), 143-156. doi:10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y
- [13] Driscoll, D. L., Appiah-Yeboah, A., Salib, P., & Rupert, D. J. (2007). Merging qualitative and quantitative data in mixed methods research: How to and why not. *Ecological and Environmental Anthropology*, 3(1), 19-28.
- [14] Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness. *Science*, 319(5870), 1687-1688. doi:10.1126/science.1150952

- [15] Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377-389. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.84.2.377
- [16] Fredrickson, B. L., Cohn, M. A., Coffey, K. A., Pek, J., & Finkel, S. M. (2008). Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1045-1062. doi:10.1037/a0013262
- [17] Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- [18] Hone, L., Jarden, A., & Schofield, G. (2013). Psychometric properties of the Flourishing Scale in a New Zealand sample. *Social Indicators Research*, 119(2), 1031-1045. doi:10.1007/s11205-013-0501-x
- [19] Kabat-Zinn, J. (1982). An outpatient program in behavioral medicine for chronic pain patients based on the practice of mindfulness meditation: Theoretical considerations and preliminary results. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 4(1), 33-47. doi:10.1016/0163-8343(82)90026-3
- [20] Keyes, C. L. M., Shmotkin, D., & Ryff, C. D. (2002). Optimizing well-being: The empirical encounter of two traditions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), 1007-1022. doi:10.1037//0022-3514.82.6.1007
- [21] Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The how of happiness: A scientific approach to getting the life you want*. London and New York: Penguin Press.
- [22] Lyubomirsky, S., Sheldon, K. M., & Schkade, D. (2005). Pursuing happiness: The architecture of sustainable change. *Review of General Psychology*, 9(2), 111-131. doi:10.1037/1089-2680.9.2.111
- [23] Mackenzie, S. H., Son, J. S., & Hollenhorst, S. (2014). Unifying psychology and experiential education: Toward an integrated understanding of why it works. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 37(1), 75-88. doi:10.1177/1053825913518894
- [24] Midlarsky, E. (1991). Helping as coping. In M. S. Clark (Ed.), *Prosocial behavior* (pp. 238-264). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [25] Nielsen, T. W. (2011). A curriculum of giving for student wellbeing and achievement - 'how to wear leather sandals on a rough surface'. In D. Wright, C. Camden-Pratt, & S. Hill (Eds.), *Social ecology: Applying ecological understanding to our lives and our planet* (pp. 151-164). UK: Hawthorn Press.
- [26] Nielsen, T. W. (2013). *Self care aims*. Retrieved 16 June 2014, from <http://www.thomaswnielsen.net/resources/self-care-aims/>
- [27] Nielsen, T. W. (2014). Finding the keys to meaningful happiness: Beyond being happy or sad is to love. In A. Batthyany & P. Russo-Netzer (Eds.), *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology* (pp. 81-93). New York: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-1-4939-0308-5
- [28] Overholt, J. R., & Ewert, A. (2015). Gender matters: Exploring the process of developing resilience through outdoor adventure. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 38(1), 41-55. doi:10.1177/1053825913513720
- [29] Passarelli, A., Hall, E., & Anderson, M. (2010). A strengths-based approach to outdoor and adventure education: Possibilities for personal growth. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 33(2), 120-135.
- [30] Post, S. G. (2005). Altruism, happiness, and health: It's good to be good. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 12(2), 66-77. doi:10.1207/s15327558ijbm1202_4

- [31] Post, S. G. (2011). It's good to be good: 2011 Fifth annual scientific report on health, happiness and helping others. *The International Journal of Person Centred Medicine*, 1(4), 814-829.
- [32] Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(6), 1069-1081. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069
- [33] Scales, P. C., Roehlkepartain, E. C., Neal, M., Kielsmeier, J. C., & Benson, P. L. (2006). Reducing academic achievement gaps: The role of community service and service learning. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 29(1), 38-60. doi:10.1177/105382590602900105
- [34] Schwartz, C. E., Keyl, P. M., Marcum, J. P., & Bode, R. (2009). Helping others shows differential benefits on health and well-being for male and female teens. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10(4), 431-448. doi:10.1007/s10902-008-9098-1
- [35] Seaman, J., & Gass, M. (2004). Service-learning and outdoor education: Promising reform movements or future relics? *Journal of Experiential Education*, 27(1), 67-86. doi:10.1177/105382590402700106
- [36] Sheldon, K. M., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2004). Achieving sustainable new happiness: Prospects, practices, and prescriptions. In P. A. Linley & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in Practice* (pp. 127-145). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. doi:10.1002/9780470939338.ch8
- [37] Sibthorp, J., & Arthur-Banning, S. (2004). Developing life effectiveness through adventure education: The roles of participant expectations, perceptions of empowerment, and learning relevance. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 27(1), 32-50. doi:10.1177/105382590402700104
- [38] Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 65(5), 467-487. doi: 10.1002/jclp.20593
- [39] Slatcher, R. B., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2006). How do I love thee? Let me count the words: The social effects of expressive writing. *Psychological Science*, 17(8), 660-664. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01762.x
- [40] Steele, C. M. (1988). The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 21, pp. 261-302). San Diego, CA: Academic Press. doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60229-4
- [41] Veenhoven, R. (2008). Healthy happiness: Effects of happiness on physical health and the consequences for preventative health care. *The Journal of Happiness Studies*, 9(3), 449-469. doi: 10.1007/s10902-006-9042-1

Appendix

1. Description of Wellbeing Activities

1.1. *Sunset Solitude, Gratitude and Journaling*

Sunset solitude was an activity designed to provide participants (both staff and students) with a period of daily peaceful reflection. Participants were asked to find a comfortable spot on the beach where they would sit alone with their thoughts, amidst the backdrop of the sun setting. Sunset solitude was an opportune time for students to write down their daily “three things I am grateful for,” as well as record their reflections and insights in their journals.

1.2. *Sunrise Warriors*

'Sunrise warriors' was a daily forty-minute morning activity for students to wake up their bodies with a mixture of yoga and martial arts exercises. The first twenty minutes consisted of light stretching and yoga, and the last twenty minutes were dedicated to more rigorous, martial arts type exercises. Mindful movement, awareness of the body, and being in the present was emphasised during these sessions.

1.3. *Meditation*

A simple form of progressive muscle relaxation meditation was used, whereby students were guided towards bringing their consciousness to the body and then relaxing each part of it. Towards the end of the 15-20 minute meditation, giving was included into the meditation by getting the students to visualize someone in their life, past or present, with whom they would like to share some of the peace that they were feeling in the meditation, and to visualize sending that peace from their hearts and minds to them. This approach combines two types of meditation that have a strong evidence base of increasing health and wellbeing: body scan meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 1982), and loving-kindness and compassion meditation.

1.4. *Self Care Aims*

SELF CARE AIMS (Nielsen, 2013) is an acronym that is based on research that shows that in order to be able to give to others effectively we also need to give to ourselves (Post, 2005, 2011). SELF CARE AIMS encompasses twelve evidence-based areas of self-care that have been linked to the promotion of health, happiness, and wellbeing. These include: Sleep, Exercise, Love and laughter, Food, Creativity, Achievement, Residence, Environment, Autonomy, Income, Meditation & mindfulness, and Study (the world and self). The aim of the acronym is to provide a reference tool, or checklist, that can be used to assess how one is faring overall, as well as in each of the domains. Students were introduced to the acronym during semi-structured discussion groups, where they learnt about the benefits of the broad range of wellbeing indicators. The SELF CARE AIMS workshop was also used to assess students' prior knowledge of ways to care for oneself, as well as to assess how well they thought they were faring in the domains.

