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Joshua Brown

Macquarie College, jbrown@mc.nsw.edu.au

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The Invictus wellbeing program: Cultural architecture and human flourishing

Joshua Brown

Coordinator English/History, Macquarie College, Wallsend, NSW

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Introduction

The Invictus Wellbeing Program (IWP) is a mental fitness and resiliency course that uses Dr Martin Seligman’s PERMA model to help achieve the wellbeing mandate set out in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration. This landmark document requires all Australian schools to foster the “social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians” (Barr, et al., 2008, p. 4). Schools can easily rely on the hidden curriculum or an assortment of miscellaneous approaches to take care of the “socialisation process” (Kentli, 2009, p. 83) without having a targeted approach with which to achieve the directive set out in the Melbourne Declaration. Through the implementation of Invictus, school leaders are able to tangibly demonstrate both their awareness of and engagement with the wellbeing responsibilities implicit within a school community.

Formation and structure

The Invictus Wellbeing Program was first implemented at Macquarie College in Newcastle, NSW in 2014. It is currently being run at St Philip’s College Cessnock, Charlton Christian School and Macquarie College. Invictus is a year long experience that engages students in a fourstage progression towards a Bronze, Silver or Gold Award. Participants take part in outdoor education, positive relationships, skill mastery and community service within the framework of four key elements. During each school year Invictus Coordinators function as “cultural architects” (Logan, et al., 2008) who seek to positively shape group dynamics within a cohort of students through the implementation of activities that put wellbeing theory into practice. The majority of learning and growth within the program takes place during the weekly Invictus meetings and term end

memory events. It should be noted that the delivery of the Invictus Curriculum has been most effective when timetabled into the school program. The Invictus Wellbeing Program is currently supported by Lake Macquarie City Council and Deakin University Alumni Community.

Unpacking the elements

Each term students complete a new element of the Invictus Program which culminates in a key memory event that leads to “spiritual impact, genuine friendships and a sense of belonging” (French, 2005, p.30). These events are the focal point of each term and participation correlates to eligibility for an Invictus Award.

Journey

During the Journey Element students are introduced to Dr Martin Seligman’s PERMA model of wellbeing and shown how the components can contribute to human flourishing. Participants are given an



Figure 1. Enjoying the boat journey

Invictus Journal that is used for activity completion and personal reflection. The use of a paper journal in conjunction with an outdoor camping trip is a conscious decision in light of Dr Mardie Townsend’s research on tactile experiences and natural environments which “ameliorate stress and benefit humans” (Townsend & Weerasuriya, 2010, para.

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2). Furthermore, the Journey Element gives young people the opportunity to experience the benefits of planning and preparation in order to manage change and enjoy growth. The Journey fosters selfreliance in a supportive context and allows participants to develop their personal decision making skills.

- Major Memory Event: A multiday journey in the outdoors.

Network

The Network Element uses Dr Shelly Gable's research regarding "active constructive responding" and "capitalisation" (Gable et al., 2004, p. 1) to enhance relationships. During the Network Element students are given specific skills for friendship building and community enhancement. Participants learn how to better identify and describe their emotions. Furthermore, Invictus Coordinators outline that it is 'OK' not to feel 100% happy all of the time in light of Dr Melissa Weinberg's discovery that "the setpoint for our happiness, according to the latest research, is about 80%." (Weinberg, 2015, para. 2). Much like homeostasis, the body regulates its mood based on efficiency and therefore it is not sustainable to feel euphoric all of the time. However, Weinberg notes that good mental health allows an individual to "recover their normal setpoint for mood" (Weinberg, 2015, para. 7). The Network Element also gives students the opportunity to enhance a specific relationship of their choice and practice learned optimism and gratitude.

- Major Memory Event: The revolving fire night



Figure 2. Building relationships about the fire

Master

Skill acquisition and "experiencing a sense of accomplishment" (Seligman, 2011 p. 237) both contribute to a person's sense of wellbeing and resilience. This element of the Invictus Wellbeing Program seeks to cultivate practical skills through the help of a qualified mentor. The transmission

of knowledge from one generation to another is an enduring legacy of the human experience and Invictus participants are invited to take part in this teaching and learning cycle. During the Master Element participants are encouraged to cultivate individual talents and passions, therefore experiencing a sense of mastery and selfconfidence. Central to the Master Element is the New Economics Foundation's Five Ways to Wellbeing (New Economics Foundation, 2016) and the 10,000 hours of mastery principle (Ericsson, Krampe & Clemens 1993). In addition, students are made aware of Ungar's notion that increased skill mastery results in a heightened capacity to contribute to the broader community (Ungar, 2012).

- Major Memory Event: The mastery film festival



Figure 3. Sharing skills

Serve

The Serve Element is the final stage of the Invictus Wellbeing Program and provides a focal point for the cumulative momentum built throughout the year. Invictus participants are encouraged to understand that serving others lays the foundation for a vibrant and harmonious community (Thoits, 2001). Service deactivates selfcentered behavior (Rubinstein, 2007) and brings satisfaction to both the provider and the recipient. Students recognise that true service is an act of partnership and does not demean the beneficiary. Intentionally structuring the Invictus Program with service as the final element allows participants to practically apply their prior learned skills. By engaging in service participants gain an outward focused and holistic worldview that acknowledges how every act of service ushers in a better world. Participants are connected with local and global causes that they can partner with. At Macquarie College these causes have included Asian Aid's H.E.L.P program in Indonesia and RAW Impact Cambodia.

- Major Memory Event: Longtable lunch in which Year 9 welcome Year 8 into the IWP.

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Figure 4. Hiking

Spiritual significance

Interestingly the 2008 Melbourne Declaration specifically requires all Australian schools to foster the spiritual wellbeing of students. Furthermore, The NSW Department of Education and Communities (2015) also requires that schools have a “comprehensive and integrated strategy [for] spiritual wellbeing” (p. 9). It should therefore be noted that authentic spiritual growth takes place in a safe environment where individuals feel comfortable to share their fears and doubts in order to progress towards a robust and personalised belief system. In a modern society of “materialism and individualism” (Eckerskley, 2006, p. 252), it is more important than ever that students are presented with a “holistic approach” (French, 2007) to spiritual growth that “involves them intricately interweaving domains of social, emotional, personal, physical, cognitive, linguistic, creative, aesthetic, moral and spiritual development” (French, 2007, p. 41). Invictus provides opportunities for these complex interactions to take place and therefore facilitates a multilayered approach to faith development that is experienced in the context of a safe ekklesia. Furthermore the etymology of ‘Invictus’ acknowledges the New

“*authentic spiritual growth takes place in a safe environment where individuals feel comfortable to share their fears and doubts in order to progress towards a ... personalised belief system*”



Figure 5. Interactive growing



Testament notion of being “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37) in the face of hardship, reiterating the intentional design of the program and the strong Christian underpinning that supports wellbeing in general.

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