Connecting Social and Natural Ecologies Through a Curriculum of Giving for Student Wellbeing and Engagement

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Abstract   Using hermeneutic phenomenology to aid the reader 'experience' the data collected, this study reports on 18 college students, 4 staff members and the author's trip to a remote island on the Great Barrier Reef. It is a story of the (re)discovery of the social and natural ecologies that bind us together, and of how explicit teaching and learning about these ecologies can make a difference to young people's abilities to consciously be part of, contribute to, and sustain these ecologies. A grounded theory of five dimensions of giving (to self, others, communities, environment, and the whole) is offered as a beginning framework from which to imbue teaching and learning with meaning and social concern.

Widening Our Circles of Care

Finding ways to engage young people, promote sustained behaviour change, and enable them to become more socially and environmentally conscious members of society is a constant challenge in environmental education (Heimlich & Ardoin, 2008). Given the growing social and environmental challenges facing us today, this issue is of increasing importance to address. For instance, in 2012, it was observed in the United Nations sanctioned *World Happiness Report* that 'we live in an age of stark contradictions … countries achieve great progress in economic development as conventionally measured; yet along the way succumb to new crises of obesity, smoking, diabetes, depression, and other ills of modern life' (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012, p. 3). This is situated in a context where the unsustainability of human-based practices has been widely recognised as having a negative impact on the health of the environment (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014).

Environmental education is placed in an ideal position to address these concerns; however, it is often only viewed as 'supplementary education' (Strife, 2010) where

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continuing criticism of programs include: a paucity of education *for* the environment, with little attention paid to the development of practical skills and opportunities for students to facilitate action; ineffectuality at bridging the gap between student personal beliefs and action; and a lack of incorporation of children and young people's understandings and experiences (Connell, Flen, Sykes, & Yencken, 2014; Cutter-Mackenzie, 2014; Nagel, 2005; Payne, 2014; Robottom, 1984; Tilbury, Coleman, & Garlick, 2005). The above is not aided by the highly contextual nature of environmental education pedagogies, where it can be difficult to identify generalisable frameworks that existing curricula and educational contexts can easily take up, with time posing a significant blocker to sustained change at institutional levels (Cutter-Mackenzie & Smith, 2003).

Finding ways to reinstill confidence in the transformative effects of environmental education is an important task for ensuring the continued incorporation of environmental education pedagogies and their benefits to students in classrooms today. Recently, the suggestion of humanising environmental education discourse has been proposed as a way forward, so that focus is placed not only on education for the environment or sustainability alone, but also on our psychological, cognitive, and emotional wellbeing (Strife, 2010). With increased national interest in incorporating mindfulness and wellbeing strategies in the classroom to promote student academic and mental health outcomes (KidsMatter, 2017; Mindfulness in Schools Project, 2017), a step further can be taken to emphasise the role of contributing to more collective levels of wellbeing (e.g., key environmental issues) through the incorporation of environmental education values and pedagogies. The present article presents a grounded theory of five dimensions of giving (to self, others, communities, environment, and the whole) as a beginning framework from which our circles of care can be widened to achieve these outcomes.

Why Focus on Giving?

Giving, social concern, or being something for someone or something larger than oneself is often an overlooked factor when it comes to examining 'meaningful happiness' and positive student outcomes (Nielsen, 2011, 2014). This is despite research across positive psychology, environmental, experiential and outdoor education, and values and service-learning education consistently demonstrating links between positive student outcomes and initiatives that aim to develop attributes and characteristics tied to generosity and service toward someone or something other than oneself.

For instance, positive psychology research has highlighted that 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 wellbeing, health, and longevity for not only the recipient, but also the giver (Brown, 2003; Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003; Post, 2005; Schwartz, Keyl, Marcum, & Bode, 2009).

These and other positive psychology findings have provided inspiration for several school initiatives worldwide (Slemp et al., 2017), although a focus of many has often been on individual signature strengths (e.g., VIA Institute on Character, 2017), rather than, for example, on the underlying social concern or giving elements of these attributes. For example, promoting student strengths and positive emotions related to 'strategic thinking', 'executing', 'influencing' and 'relationship building' has been explored in outdoor adventure education (Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010), wisdom in service learning (Bailey & Russell, 2010), and resilience in anti-bullying initiatives and outdoor adventure (Beightol, Jevertson, Carter, Gray, & Gass, 2012; Overholt & Ewert, 2015).

Additionally, almost a decade (2002–2010) of government-funded values education in Australia has identified important factors for improving student wellbeing and

engagement, such as the importance of using a shared values language, embedding student-centred and values-focused pedagogy, promoting values as an integrated curriculum concept, teaching and modelling values explicitly, and creating opportunities for student agency (Education Services Australia, 2010). However, nowhere in the final reports (Curriculum Corporation, 2006, 2008) have these findings been conceptualised in terms of the giving and social concern elements inherent in these interpersonal pedagogies, nor how they relate to 'meaningful happiness' and positive student outcomes.

Given that 'meaningful happiness' has been shown to provide resilience against adverse life experiences and deeper, more stable levels of happiness compared to 'pleasurable happiness' (Post & Neimark, 2007; Seligman, 2002), creating conceptual links between giving, social concern, 'meaningful happiness', and pedagogy/curricula therefore seems to be an important task that could help prevent activities and pedagogies from being treated in isolation or viewed as supplementary. Such an over-arching philosophy could help teachers and students understand how seemingly isolated activities (including existing daily tasks) can be cohesively connected for the promotion of individual and collective wellbeing. The present phenomenological case study aims to examine how the everyday activities experienced by secondary school students on an outdoor adventure education expedition present an opportunity for (re)discovery of the social and natural ecologies that bind us together, and of how explicit teaching and learning about these ecologies can make a difference to young people's abilities to consciously be part of, contribute to, and sustain these ecologies.

Background

The present study reports on data derived from a collaborative program run by outdoor education teaching staff at the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra (UCSSC Lake Ginninderra) and one of the authors. Lady Musgrave Island had been chosen by the expedition leader as the site for this long-running outdoor education expedition program as it was considered an ideal setting for bringing students out of their normal environment and routine and into nature. In this collaborative program, curricula for a 14-day outdoor education expedition was explicitly adapted to incorporate an underlay of meaning and social concern so that in addition to partaking in outdoor activities such as snorkelling, diving and nature walks, students were exposed to activities aimed at promoting positive thoughts, feelings and behaviours through an emphasis on the role of 'giving'. Specific activities included 'sunset solitude', 'sunrise warriors', meditation, and 'self-care aims' (please see Nielsen & Ma, 2016, for program details). Students engaged in discussion about how these activities and philosophy around giving and social concern were aligned throughout the trip.

Participants

Participants included 18 students (11 males and 7 females) aged between 16 and 19 years of age. The sample was predominantly male (61.1%), with a mean age of 17.28 ($SD = 0.95$). Students were recruited from the University of Canberra Senior Secondary College Lake Ginninderra (UCSSC Lake Ginninderra) Lady Musgrave Outdoor Education trip. Information and consent forms for the research component were provided to students and their guardians prior to commencement of the trip. Parental consent identified which students were eligible to participate in the project. All students chose to participate in the research component. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Canberra's Human Research Ethics Committee and the ACT Education and Training Directorate.

Data Collection and Representation

The aim of this study was to identify the dimensions, or ecology, in which a curriculum of giving may exist. Given the 'slippery' nature of qualifying 'giving dimensions' of teaching and learning, the researcher wanted to identify themes that resonated faithfully with the phenomenon as it was experienced in-situ. As such, hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 2016) was used to observe the nature of transactions of giving, and to assist the outsider (reader) to 'experience' some of this data via the reporting of significant 'moments'. Hermeneutic phenomenological data representation tries in evocative ways, not unlike poetry or story telling, to use language that reverberates the world of the phenomenon to the reader as it occurs. Since the essences of aesthetic and social phenomena often reside in experiential, abstract and immaterial spheres of 'knowing', the way we present such research findings to the outsider might be deepened by using writing that reveals the phenomenon as it occurs, rather than, or in addition to, simply using traditional reporting, residing largely in the researcher's ready-made conceptualisations and analysis.

Over the duration of the trip, 22 hermeneutic, phenomenological, significant 'moments' were recorded as handwritten field notes during or soon after observation, and later constructed into more complete writing at the end of a session or day. Out of this collection, a sample of five is presented to illustrate the repeated themes that emerged from 'open', 'axial', and 'selective coding' (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Other qualitative data in the form of daily student diary entries and recorded semi-structured interviews and group discussions were also collected to complement the phenomenological findings. This approach, accommodating for a collection of data that is both contextual and interpretive, aimed at assisting the development of a grounded theory of an ecology of giving.

Results

From the coding of 22 phenomenological moments observed on the trip, five repeated themes emerged: giving to (1) others, (2) self, (3) communities, (4) the environment, and (5) the whole. In the following sections, we offer a representative phenomenological moment for each theme and support the discussion of these with qualitative responses from interviews and student diaries. The moments presented here are not exclusive to the category they represent, as a moment often contains elements of other themes within them. However, each of the moments is chosen to help the reader get a 'feel for' or 'experience' the category it best represents. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of participants.

Giving to Others

> *We are getting close to the island. After a bumpy two-hour ride across the strait, with some students feeling seasick, there is suddenly an air of excitement as everyone moves their way out to the deck of the boat to catch a glimpse of our new home for the next eight days. As the island reveals itself out of the coral-blue water, Caleb, a muscular student who is normally considered 'tough' and 'cool' by the other students can't contain his excitement and starts jumping up and down on the spot like a little child. Sandra, standing next to Caleb, quietly says, 'I have goose bumps!' They share a special moment, it seems, albeit each in their own manner.*

> *As we arrive on the island, one staff member is allocated to each group of students to help them set up their campsite. When the group I help complete putting up tents and organising their campsite, the head teacher asks a different group*

of students to help me with putting up my tent. Four strong lads patiently help me set up my campsite. While they are pottering around, discussing which goes into what and where, I am reminded that giving really is receiving. The generous act by staff of helping the students set up their campsites first, after a long boat ride in the searing sun, seems to make these gentle giants work with an extra motivation to help me in return. And they seem to feel really good about it too.

The above account of our first encounter with the island exemplifies how a culture was created on the trip in which students felt comfortable and safe with each other, and where it was natural to be generous with one another. This culture started already with the bus trip up to the reef, as Paul revealed in a discussion: 'I think the bus trip up here enables us to sort of leave this mask that people put on in, you know, normal society, to come here and to show their true honest selves. And when that happens you can see how good natured everyone is.'

What allowed students to 'take off their masks' (as in the above moment of seeing the island for the first time) and feel safe enough to be like excited children with each other, seemed attributable not only to being taken out of their normal setting, but also to the explicit program focus on generosity and care toward one another. This was often talked about as 'contributing to the team', which is an essential element of any outdoor education program. However, in this particular program, an emphasis was explicitly made on talking about the scientific benefits of giving at group meetings and finding opportunities to give. As a consequence, the staff and researcher observed many moments of giving to others, which included giving that seemed to stem as much from having created a culture of 'unsolicited' giving — a giving because 'it feels good', as one student put it — as it did from simply complying with program expectations. When asked to help, as in the case of the four students asked to help me set up my tent, students often went beyond basic requirements, and it was obvious that they enjoyed being generous to their fellow students as well as staff.

From a broader perspective, the emotionally safe environment created on the trip, inducing generosity and encouraging students to 'take off their masks', seemed to help the students tap into a different aspect of themselves; one that was more mindful and conscious of others in comparison to more 'everyday' self-centred living (e.g., technology, narcissism).

Giving to Self

The head leader has just finished teaching 'Self-Care Aims' to the students under the staff tarp. Straight after the session, Rebecca comes up to me, asking if I want to go for a walk. I am a little surprised, as I hadn't spoken so much with this student up until then, but I sense the urgency in her voice so I grab my hat and we start to stroll through the campsites.

As we walk, Rebecca tells me about battling depression and about being sad about the past. She tells me about regretting many of the decisions she has made in her life. Obviously, the group discussion about self-care has stirred up painful memories. But there is also an honesty and self-awareness present in her assessment, which makes her sharing therapeutic it seems. She wipes away a few tears, but seems happy as we finish the walk.

Later, she writes in her diary: 'Being on this island has helped me realise that I am allowed to be happy.'

The above example illustrates that the explicit teaching of self-care strategies promotes self-awareness and facilitates help-seeking and open discussion, which can be

potent, in particular for students who struggle emotionally with mental health issues. This positive change was also seen in the group cohort. When students were explicitly taught self-care strategies, their understanding of how to look after themselves shifted from basic needs such as 'having enough food and drink' and 'getting to sleep early' to more nuanced understandings of ways to look after themselves in relation to different domains (e.g., in terms of their creativity, autonomy, meditation and mindfulness).

> *I think it [Self-Care Aims] 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 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? (Dan)*

As research indicates that the benefits of giving to others wear off if one is not giving to oneself enough (Post & Neimark, 2007), an explicit focus on giving to self seemed an important part of the educational program on the trip. Certainly, the data collected indicates that as a result of being taught explicitly about giving to self, the students' awareness and language changed to accommodate the concept of self-care, and that they appreciated being more conscious of their own needs in addition to the needs of others.

Giving to Communities

> *Suddenly, a very loud sound pierces through the serene background soundtrack of shearwater chatter and gentle waves that we have become accustomed to on the island. The noise is a mixture of a large cracking sound, followed by a hollow thump and rattling of tree leaves. A hundred metres inland we discover what made the noise. A large tree has snapped its trunk close to the ground and fallen across the footpath that connects either side of the island. The many weeks of no rain in the area has made the trees dry and brittle. Luckily, none of the staff or students was close to this particular tree as it fell, but there are several birds either hurt or dead from the fall, and the footpath is now impassable. Some of the students are clearly upset. What should we do? What can we do? Some say we should help the birds. Some say we can clear the path.*

> *It is not long before our entire group, including a few of the other campers on the island, are involved in rescuing birds and bird nests, as well as clearing the footpath of debris. A saw and axe are retrieved to cut the fallen tree trunk into smaller pieces so that these can be removed from the footpath. Some of the staff do the more difficult job of taking away and putting down birds that are too injured to survive. All the students seem to be brimming with eagerness to help the wildlife and clear the footpath. The unfortunate moment has turned into a rather unique moment of the entire island community coming together in giving.*

> *After the footpath is cleared and the surviving birds and bird nests are relocated to other trees, the head teacher gathers the students around in a large circle. With a calm voice, he thanks the students for being so helpful and caring for the birds. He also acknowledges the shock and sadness that some of the students might be feeling, and he explains that such emotions are very natural in situations like this, and that the staff are here for them if they want to talk about it. He also talks about how such incidents are part of the natural environment, even though we so far had only seen the serene side of island. He gives a few options of what the*

students can do now in terms of activities, and once more thanks the students for their wonderful efforts. The students walk off in little groups, talking excitedly but sensitively about the incident.

Apart from exemplifying learning that occurs incidentally and provides educators with teachable moments to further the concept and practice of giving through an immediate and relevant experience, the above moment also signifies that when such incidents occur, the group ethos and culture already present has a significant bearing on how well these moments of giving can be made explicit, as well as on how well students can respond. When a language of giving, care, and community has already been established, it can be referred to during and after such instances; there is a shared language already in place, with which to debrief situations when needed.

Program expectations also encouraged students to seek out opportunities to give on their own, as when staff suggested that students might ask newcomers to the island if they needed help with carrying their luggage from the boat to the campsite, and several students put in swashbuckling performances when the opportunity arose. Campers on the island commented to staff on 'how well behaved these young people are', and some who had seen several school groups come and go said that 'this is the best group we have ever seen'. But as the head teacher commented that 'there is nothing special about this group of students compared to other teenagers', these comments seem directly linked to the ethos of giving to the island community that was established by staff and the program.

In a broader perspective, giving to communities widens students' awareness to include people and places outside of their immediate circles of contact. By encouraging students to be mindful and courteous toward the other campers on the island, a language and a culture was created in which students seemed more ready to respond when opportunities to give to the island community and its members arose.

Giving to the Environment

Finally. We are on our first night expedition to see the green sea turtle lay eggs, crawling through the sand dunes with only the light from the stars to guide us, so as not to disturb any potential egg layers with the bright light of our torches …

'Tell the others to follow me', the head teacher whispers. 'Tell the others that we should follow [the head teacher]', Bruce whispers to me. 'Tell the others that we should follow [the head teacher]', I whisper to Dan. As the message travels through the chain, stretching across the sand dune, my heart is beating faster. 'Tell the others to keep their heads down', the head teacher says, as he initiates another chain of whispers. Bruce, who is in front of me, is already crawling nimbly, and I make an effort to get even closer to the ground, as I pull myself up to the ledge of the sand dune.

There, as a black silhouette against the star-studded night sky, I see it. Its head bald and moving ever so slowly, its body and shell ten times as big. For a moment, it seems as if there is a magical union of the elements: Of the sound of the hauling shearwaters with the gentle waves coming ashore. Of the cool night breeze and the life affirming smell of the sea. Of us, human beings, an animal in our own right, with this awe-inspiring wild creature, exhausted by its efforts and sacrifice. As we lie there in silence, in a protective circle around this committed mother's labour, the glow of the stars seems to pour gently into my heart, making it swell up with an infinite sense of grace. For a moment, we are not only witnessing the miracle of life take place in front of us, we are part of it.

From profound experiences like the above, to 'leaving the campsite cleaner than when we came', giving to the environment became an integral part of the experience of being on the island. At the beginning of the island stay, for example, the students were naturally so excited about being so close to the wildlife during snorkelling and diving that some could not resist the temptation of swimming up to the turtles and touching them. After informing the students that we want to respect the wildlife by not touching them and that we are guests in their environment, the students complied in the spirit of giving (and were in turn rewarded with long, magical swims with the wildlife, where they did not seem at all bothered with our presence). Giving to the environment and being grateful for it became a shared passion for the students during the trip, as reflected in their diary writing during 'sunset solitude' in particular.

> *I think we often forget that there are worlds totally separated from our own that we can experience only as a guest and when we can, it is with great care and privilege. (Kelly)*

> *This trip has been life changing, not only have I found a new love, but finding inner peace and clarity. All life on this island is amazing, all life in the ocean is stunning and I think I will do all in my power to help, maybe not as a job but as a life philosophy. I want my children to experience things like this because there is no other way to explain it but life changing, breathtaking. (Dan)*

The above quotes illustrate the reciprocal relationship with the natural environment that the students encountered on the island. From a larger perspective, this reciprocal relationship is something that all outdoor education programs have the potential to nourish, but which seem accentuated in a program like this because of its focus on giving. The natural environment gave of itself to the students through its beauty and novelty, but the students also gave back to it by way of the care and respect with which they interacted with the island and its wildlife. As a consequence, being in the natural world was a conduit for many wonderful feelings, thoughts and experiences.

Giving to the Whole

> *We are lying on the beach. It is a warm and pleasant evening. The stars are out and there are no clouds in sight. The only sound is that of the waves coming ashore. Even the shearwaters appear to have retired for the night. Paul, one of the students, and an amateur astronomer and expert in all things celestial, is pointing high up to the heavens with a green laser pointer. He is giving us a lecture on all the star constellations and planets visible at the moment. I can't help thinking that this is the most awesome PowerPoint presentation that I have ever seen! I am also in awe of how the students are so keenly interested in everything Paul is saying, asking lots of insightful questions. Paul, showing much talent for teaching, answers all questions measuredly and eloquently. As Paul explains and points to the farthest edges of our universe, the students' awareness is embracing the Pleiades, Orion, Venus — there is nothing beyond Paul's reach, it seems. And as he brings us with him to each of those places, it is as if we were all travelling with the speed of light on the laser pointer's beam.*

> *After Paul's talk, at the students' request, our musical staff member plays the guitar gently while the students are lying silently on the beach, looking up into the stars. Afterwards, as we are walking home to our camp, Dan comes over to me. 'This evening has been so awesome. I have never felt so calm in my entire life. I could just cry. That music made me think of everyone I have ever loved.'*

The above moment is illustrative of how the concept of giving and connection does not have to be confined to even the natural environment around us, but can go beyond the planet, to cosmological, abstract, and perhaps even spiritual dimensions.

This category also helps us realise that a giving curriculum has the potential to be about more than just overt actions. Connecting with the stars and planets through a lesson in the outdoors exemplifies that anything we connect with in a genuine and authentic way can be seen as an act of giving, or sharing, of ourselves. In such moments, giving and genuine connection are not confined to mere actions, but can include profoundly aesthetic experiences.

The theme was repeated in the students' diaries, where they referred to the universe or spiritual dimensions with gratitude and reverence.

> *I could stay here for eternity. Here is where the ocean meets the sand. Where the sun meets the horizon. Where the birds make their home. This is the place where you can sit against driftwood, staring out at the vibrant sun as it sets for another day. This is the place where you can sit, with wind softly touching your skin. Where you can watch birds soar over the crashing waves, and turtles glide through the open water. Here is the place I want to be for eternity. Here is paradise … (Rebecca)*

> *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)*

In sum, the 'whole' can mean different things to different people, and that is the purpose of calling it the 'whole'. It simply captures the idea that giving does not have to stop with the four layers of giving ecology described so far (others, self, communities, environment), but can go beyond the planet, to cosmological, abstract or even mytho-poetic dimensions of our lives. Whether one is spiritual, religious, or simply 'world conscious', feeling that one is encompassed in the 'whole' and giving to the 'whole' is a way in which we can give to something bigger than ourselves — something without limits even, conceptually or practically.

Discussion and Conclusion

The overall pedagogical intent of the curriculum of giving on the trip was to foster social and environmental connectivity and wellbeing. Because outdoor education trips invite giving in a variety of ways — to the team, the local community, the natural environment, and so on — we wanted to explore and identify an 'ecology' of social and environmental concern and offer educators the beginnings of a framework with which to engage their students in giving and, ultimately, the meaningful life.

Twenty-two hermeneutic phenomenological moments were observed, out of which five repeated, distinctive categories of giving emerged existing on a continuum from self to the whole — from micro to macro cosmos (see Figure 1). In a similar way to how Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model helps us broaden our perspective to factors influencing the self, the categories developed in this article may help to provide schools and educators with a grounded theory of how to implement a giving curriculum in varied and novel ways. A diary-writing session, for example, using gratitude as a positive emotion with which to reflect and take stock, can be a subtle way of giving, if we take giving to be synonymous with any positive action, emotion or thought directed towards either self (e.g., 'I am grateful for my health') or someone or something outside of self (e.g., 'I am grateful for my friends'). Likewise, connecting with the stars and planets through a lesson in the outdoors, might be seen as a 'giving curriculum' because anything we connect with in a genuine and authentic way is equally an act of giving of
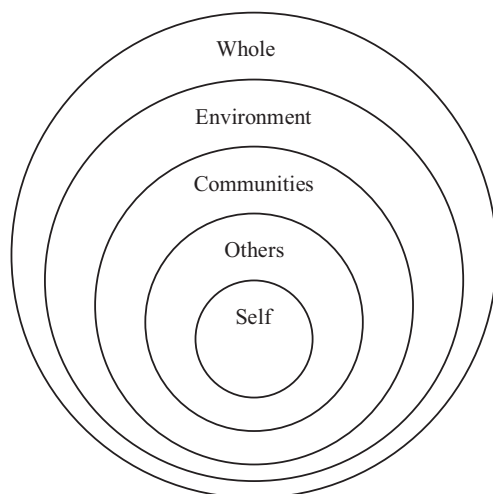
FIGURE 1   The five dimensions of giving.

ourselves to someone or something beyond ourselves. In such moments, giving, or connection, can involve one or all of the human faculties — cognition, affect, or action — and for this reason a giving curriculum might have the most potential when implemented as an overarching philosophy or 'attitude of mind', rather than *just* a physical action (e.g., raising money for a cause).

Some schools may be engaging students in giving to others and communities via peer tutoring (giving to others) and fundraising (giving to communities). However, providing opportunities and strategies for students to give to self and the whole might be rarer, simply because these categories seem intricately linked to a broader giving ecology and intent of fostering meaningful living — an understanding that is still underdeveloped philosophically as well as educationally. The beginning framework presented here, which introduces an over-arching philosophy in which one can self-identify activities as opposed to adhere to a set 'curriculum', has the potential to engage young people with a greater practical understanding of how they can not only better give to themselves, but also to others, communities, the environment, and the whole. This could be enacted in ways meaningful to young people, based on their worldviews and experiences, and in turn, help foster socially and environmentally conscious attitudes and behaviours.

In conclusion, in the past we have had a focus on acquiring knowledge in schools, and in more recent times, a strengthened focus on emotions and feeling good about oneself. Today there seems to be a need to define a new and third space in relation to education. This third space might be articulated around connection, relationships and being something for others. Only when we are something for others, the larger literature as well as our findings support that is it possible to have meaningful happiness and wellbeing — the pillars, we argue, of academic engagement. Suffice to say that while a curriculum of giving seems a simple idea, the refinement and furthering of an evidence-based theory of giving and the meaningful life has implications for not only education but also our lives as a whole. It is hoped this study contributes to the development of such a theory, and inspires further research in the area.

Acknowledgments

Conflict of Interest

None.

Keywords: ecology, giving, grounded theory, wellbeing, phenomenology

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Dr Thomas William Nielsen is an Associate Professor at the University of Canberra, Australia. A member of the 2009–10 National Values Education Project Advisory Committee, he has served in several of the Australian government's values and wellbeing education projects across Australia. He is the recipient of national teaching awards, including the 2008 Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning. Dr Nielsen advocates a 'Curriculum of Giving', his research showing that giving and service to others increase wellbeing and academic outcomes in students — something much needed in a Western world with high youth depression and suicide rates.

Jennifer Ma is a PhD student with the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University (ANU). As a recipient of the ANU/NHMRC Centre for Research Excellence in Suicide prevention scholarship (2015), her research aims to promote suicide prevention through the better identification of suicide risk and protective factors using the interpersonal psychological theory of suicide (IPTS) as a framework. She hopes to utilise her research to aid in the development of future scales and intervention programs.