

**Jacolyn Norrish, Positive Education: Geelong Grammar School Journey. Oxford University Press, 2015**

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The Geelong Grammar School does not usually bring to mind one of the great educational institutions. Yet, it is considered one of the outstanding boarding and day schools in Coria, Australia. For those of us interested in a character education, it is one of only a very few schools where every aspect of the school is focused on "positive education". The term is used as a catch all for social and emotional learning, mindfulness, well-being, character strengths, positive purpose, and positive accomplishment where students are encouraged to flourish.

The goals seem to resonate with what has been called "positive psychology". Indeed, the father of

that discipline, Professor Martin Seligman from the University of Pennsylvania, has trained the staff at Geelong in many of the skills listed above. He has brought a number of professionals on his staff to work with the staff of the school to implement the goals of positive education.

With 1400 students and a staff of 400, the school has set as its goal for students to "flourish". The word is also the title of one of Seligman's books, whose sub-title is "A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being." Seligman's definition of happiness involves "positive emotion", "engagement as flow", and a "meaningful life". The school embraces these principles and develops the activities that make the ideals concrete and substantial.

So, for example, mindfulness training at the school helps students identify what they are feeling in the present moment. If they are anxious or depressive, they can choose to re-direct their emotions to something more positive. If their thoughts are scattered, they can through various exercises learn how to focus, sharpen their intention and purpose, and enter into a state of "flow" (the concept was developed in a book by that name written by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (don't try to pronounce the name). In developing a "meaningful life", Seligman and the school emphasize learning to use one's capability in serving something larger than oneself.

Since the school is associated with the Anglican Church, it seems like a natural fit that the goals of the school are similar to a religious institution. Judaism and Christianity teach acts of loving kindness, humility, compassion, and divine love, and a host of other virtues that are similar to what positive psychology and positive education call human strengths. Seligman, for example, has identified 24 of these strengths which he writes are inherent within all humans. But they need to be developed through practice.

Since everyone seeks happiness, psychology has used the scientific method to illustrate how well-being and flourishing, synonyms for happiness, can be identified and measured. For example, through MRI images of the brain, acts of gratitude generate brain activity that produces positive responses in feeling and bodily behavior. Even when we experience suffering, through training the mind we can become more resilient as we cultivate grit. Professor Angela Duckworth, who also participated in the training of Geelong staff, wrote a book with that title.

The emphasis on training the staff is not only because they are the ones to train students, for the staff needs the training for themselves if they are to become effective models for the students. Geelong also reaches out to parents and community leaders and engages them in the practice of positive education. For children to experience well-being, the nurturing they receive at school needs to be reinforced at home and in community organizations. Only then will a child's world make sense and lead to a life of purposeful action.

Although Geelong can do much as a boarding school and an expensive day school, we can all learn how to implement the ideals and activities that will help our children flourish.