Teaching wellbeing and resilience skills to at need students

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Outline

• My background.
• Towards a positive university.
• Two projects:
  • The Positive PhD Program.
  • Trinity College and ‘Personalised wellbeing and performance plans’.
My Background

• Taught at 7 higher education institutions, across two countries (Australia/New Zealand), over the course of 24 years in academia:
  • Waikato University.
  • Massey University.
  • Canterbury University.
  • Open Polytechnic of New Zealand.
  • Auckland University of Technology.
  • Flinders University.
  • Melbourne University.
• I have been specifically focused on student wellbeing and resilience skills over the last 5 years.
Positive University

• Wellbeinginhighereducation.com
• TecMilenio University.
• 2011 Journal of Positive Psychology special issue: “The state of positive psychology in higher education”.
• 2016, June 2nd to 5th, Borba, Portugal. International Symposium on the Wellbeing University.

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The Positive PhD Program

- **The problem:**
  - Only 15% of students that enroll in a PhD complete. This statistic indicates a significant cost in human capital, industry funding, university resources and the mental health of students and families.
  - The main reason for lack of completion being **low resilience and wellbeing** along a lengthy journey.
  - Strong **unrealised** link between a person’s **wellbeing leading to academic engagement**, and then productivity, and then to subsequent better academic and social outcomes.
  - 10,000 new PhD students each year in the 40 universities in Australia - 26,000 universities worldwide.

- **The proposed solution:**
  - We **teach** explicit resilience and wellbeing skills.
  - Fit these skills and teaching within a **systems framework**, and fit them within the “university system”.
  - Utilise **assessment data** (data driven decision making), and **readiness for change** (i.e., receptivity to wellbeing programs), as key parts in implementation.
  - Utilise new knowledge from wellbeing and resilience science, and from online learning technologies.
The Positive PhD Program

• What this looks like:
  • An online wellbeing program that teaches PhD students the skills of wellbeing and resilience scientifically, quickly, practically and cheaply – enable and facilitate a positive PhD experience.
  • The Positive PhD Program involves 10 core skills modules that can be supplemented with an additional 4 modules depending on specific need.
    – Examples of the cores skills are valued based goal setting, strengths identification and use, and positive communication techniques.
    – Examples to the supplemental modules are cultural adaption (e.g., for international students), and language strategies.
  • Continual assessment, monitoring, and evaluation of wellbeing and resilience levels, and skills obtainment and use. This allows the PhD candidate to monitor their wellbeing and resilience (and share such reports with supervisors or support people), and allows for the Positive PhD Program to proactively identify relapse and intervene early, and to test efficacy of intervention delivery.
The Positive PhD Program

• How?
  • PhD students will learn a new module each week for the first 10 weeks – the majority of this time is between confirmation of enrolment in a PhD, and PhD start date.
  • Modules are delivered to the PhD student email address; they click on the link, and then complete the skill building module content.
  • Modules are designed to be completed in under 30 minutes – 10 minutes is comprised of teaching the knowledge around the skill, 10 minutes learning and practicing the skill, and 10 minutes discussing (via the community group) and / or journaling on the skill and planning for use of the skill (embed strategies).
The Positive PhD Program

• Ideal outcomes:
  • An enjoyable program that allows universities and PhD students to ascertain, measure, improve, and manage the wellbeing and resilience of PhD students.
  • A lower sense of isolation, and greater sense of belonging and connection to university and supervisors.
  • Greater impactful research outputs and greater translation of opportunities from their research because of engagement and enjoyment.
  • A doubling of completions from 15% to 30%.

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Trinity College
Trinity College

The opportunity:

- Melbourne university has a large number of international students – approx. 40%.
- International students in particular have challenges with high stress and low wellbeing.
- Trinity College accepts around 2,000 international students each year to do pre-work before starting Melbourne University.
- These are students in need of greater wellbeing and resilience.
Trinity College

- The solution:
  - “Personalised wellbeing and performance plans” (PWPP).
  - Acknowledge that wellbeing and academic performance are strongly related – it’s hard to do well academically when wellbeing is low.
  - Increase wellbeing and resilience before they come, and during their initial periods of acculturation.
    - Wellbeing literacy – “What does ‘wellbeing’ mean to you?”
    - Personalised wellbeing plans – The word ‘personalised’ just means that the plan is created specifically for each individuals’ goals and what is important to them. The word ‘plan’ means there is an intentional planning process.
    - Positive psychological interventions - Character strengths, Three good things, Best possible self, Maximising and satisficing, High quality connections.
Trinity College

- Details:
  - The PWPP is designed to be worked through with a mentor at Trinity College.
  - Comprised of a pre-departure pack + arrival pack + mentor sessions.
• Other resources:
  • Mentoring the student guide.
  • Train the trainer mentor guide.
  • Resources pack.
  • Videos.
Thank you

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