



The Helmsman Project: Giving At-Risk Adolescents Skills to Navigate Life's Journey and Make a Difference

The Institute for Positive Psychology and Education (IPPE), at Australian Catholic University, in partnership with the Helmsman Project, is leading an educational intervention project co-funded by the Australian Research Council to investigate an innovative, adventure-based, coaching program designed to build life-effectiveness skills in Year 9 students from schools located in communities affected by disadvantage.

The target group are adolescents who have potential, but are at risk of not fulfilling that potential for a variety of reasons, including socio-economic disadvantage.

It is well-established that inequality in educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups is due in part to factors such as academic self-concept, school engagement, aspiration, goal setting, identity development, and social support, which may explain why cognitive-based educational intervention programs only have limited success.

However, school-based extracurricular activities have consistently been shown to produce positive effects

in a range of academic outcomes. In particular, these programs appeared to have greater benefits for disadvantaged students than for advantaged students, thus reducing inequality rather than exacerbating it.

In this research, both the psychological coaching (PC) and outdoor adventure education (OAE) components will integrate evidence-based practice from strong theoretical backgrounds in the fields of educational, developmental, and coaching psychology. Although the integration of PC and OAE has been developed in light of the scientific literature, no empirical research has yet been conducted on the effectiveness of this integration.

Through the Helmsman Project it is anticipated that a range of psychological factors, including hope, self-regulation, and resilience, together with the well-being and engagement of the students, will be improved and as a result of their unleashed potential, the related academic outcomes such as attendance, academic achievement, and positive educational and career aspirations will also be enhanced.



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