



Professional Learning
Research
Innovation

Learning in Practice

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About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Damien Whittington is the Middle School Chaplain at Barker College. His duties include conducting regular chapel services for students, staff and parents in order to make sense of the Christian faith in our modern age. Having previously studied a Master of Divinity, Damien enjoys upskilling students in critical thinking as he teaches Christian Studies, Mathematics and PDHPE. He is heavily involved in school life at Barker as he participates in school camps, boarding, music lessons, as well as coaching rugby and tennis.

How the Middle School encourages boys to look beyond themselves



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Abstract

Research suggests that providing adolescents with opportunities to look beyond themselves is critical in the development of emotionally intelligent, content, compassionate and successful adults. This article outlines some of the ways that the Middle School seeks to encourage this way of thinking and being. It has been encouraging to observe the personal growth and satisfaction that the students have gained from these experiences.

There is no doubt that the Middle School years are formative years in a boy's development (Barber, 1999; Barratt, 1998; Penman, 2004). They are growing, both physically and mentally and learning more about who they are and who they want to be. It seems significant then that these boys need to be provided with opportunities to 'look beyond themselves' during their time in the Middle School. Lythcott-Haims (2015) sees 'thinking about more than themselves' as an essential skill in preparing children for adulthood. It is in the Barker College Middle School that students are exposed to and participate in activities that allow them to look beyond the Mint Gates and to develop a sense of empathy for the bigger picture. Middle School House Groups provide the backbone for these lessons, helping to develop the 'whole person' in initiatives that encourage students to think about issues from different perspectives. In 2016/17, House Group and Middle School initiatives, combined with regular Chapel services, have allowed students to develop in this crucial area.

House groups in the Middle School have stood for many years as a microcosm of the Middle School, building community and creating a sense of belonging. It is in these House groups that students have been exposed to different initiatives that sit alongside the School's mission. In the last year, House groups have supported individual charities as a way of developing a sense of giving. More so, students have taken a real interest in these charities and looked to raise awareness to the same degree as material goods or money. Andrew House students for the last seven years have supported the TEAR Fund to raise awareness for those less fortunate in other countries. Matthew Arnot, the Head of Andrew House, states that "the appeal of the TEAR Fund is that rather than just giving to those less fortunate, it seeks to equip those who are less fortunate so they will become self-sufficient and able to provide for their family's needs in the future". Students are exposed to the basic needs of others and the difference that a small act of charity can make. Andrew House boys raise awareness around the school and then set up a stall where items can be bought for those in need. Each year, a new group of boys takes on this initiative and continue the good work of those who have come before them.

For over ten years, Boyce House has supported the Exodus Foundation through a can drive. Each student brings in a tin of food which is used by the Exodus Foundation to support those who struggle to afford basic necessities. Richard Clezy, the Head of Boyce House, says that "the small act of thinking about the needs of others, for even just a minute, helps instil a sense of thoughtfulness and kindness". It is these acts of kindness that developmental psychologist, Marilyn Price-Mitchell (2003), claims are responsible for real happiness in children. She states: "Unfortunately, we don't make children happy by simply enabling them to be receivers of kindness. We increase their feelings of happiness and well-being, reduce bullying and improve their friendships by teaching them to be givers of kindness". Another example of the acts of giving in the Middle School can be found in Pain House, who recently supported Darkinjung Barker with a book drive. Students and families were encouraged to donate books that they no longer needed so that they could boost the amount of reading material available at this campus. Campbell Smith, the Head of Pain House, used the analogy of families sharing to explain to the boys the importance of this initiative. This act of giving allowed students to dwell on the importance of education, especially reading, and how their donations would serve the needs of these students for years to come.

In addition to the charitable work and awareness-raising campaigns, Middle School students in Holt House have been encouraged to think beyond themselves in a new initiative introduced to recognise the fantastic work done by teachers in the School. Students were given the chance to nominate a teacher who had made a difference, someone who had gone above and beyond for the benefit of their students. In nominating, students were encouraged to write down the reasons they were nominating a particular teacher. Three teachers were chosen who received substantial feedback from students and who were presented with certificates in a Holt House meeting. The whole process challenged students to think about their experiences and determine key factors that made their learning experience more meaningful. It was affirming to see the reasons for nominating vary so much between students. Comments included: "She shows care for the students" and "She is very good at controlling Year 9 boys!". Altogether, the opportunity for boys to reflect on the work of others proved useful in building their emotional intelligence. Holt House will continue this initiative each semester, providing the students further opportunities to express their gratefulness.

Individual Middle School students have also looked to promote causes that they hold close to their hearts. Gurman Soni, one of the Middle School Seniors, shared a story with the Middle School during Chapel of the great work that Lifeline does for a boy he knows. Gurman organised for the Chapel offertories for one term to be used to support this worthwhile cause. He stated: "Through their services, they have brought a smile to many people's faces. With all your help, we can help these young children and give them a reason to live". The encouragement in the Middle School for these kinds of initiatives has helped students like Gurman to actualise their passions and it affords others the chance to see these endeavours.

Middle School Chapel, attended once a week by all Middle School students, provides yet another opportunity for students to reflect on the deeper things of life, something that they rarely get the chance to do. These services, led by Middle School Chaplain, Damien Whittington, allow the school community to pause in the busyness of daily routine. Whilst we recognise that many students come from different backgrounds and diverse belief systems, there is value for everyone in Chapel. At the very least, the community is challenged to think beyond themselves. An even better outcome being that they are able to grow in wisdom and character so that they become citizens who contribute more to society than they take. Perhaps even more importantly, is the hope that students can experience God and enjoy a relationship with Him.

Over the last year in chapel, students have experienced two series. The first was called 'Get your Timing on,' which was inspired by Chapter 3 in the book of Ecclesiastes. Students were encouraged to think about moments in life that are not straightforward and they explored timing in the areas of speaking, listening, joking, being serious, accepting ideas, critiquing ideas, tenderness, resilience, mercy and justice. Lythcott-Haims (2015) states that it is essential in this day and age for students to be able to think things through and figure things out for themselves, to "hold a concept in their brains and reason with it" (p176) before deciding on a solution. The second series was titled 'More to the Story,' which was inspired by Nobel Peace Prize winner, Daniel Kahneman's research on thinking fast and slow. Students heard about areas of life where their 'fast' brains operate, but how they often need their 'slow' brain to help them think critically and not to accept information at first glance. The Bible often represents situations that seem strange according to the 'fast' brain, but when the 'slow' brain is switched on, it can be seen how clever the Bible is in the way it makes sense of life. Students were encouraged to think about concepts such as loving your enemy, the benefit of silence and where self-worth comes from. In these series, students were challenged to look beyond themselves in the way they think and respond.

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