Grafting a Positive Psychology Perspective on to Your School Counseling Practice

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Today’s Agenda

• What is Positive Psychology?
• What is well-being?
• What’s happening in positive psychology including positive psychology in schools.
• For Counselors…embracing a comprehensive view of mental health.
• Why be happy?
• Is well-being buildable?
• If so, how?

Why be happy?

A Freudian legacy?

Freud thought the best we could hope for was “ordinary misery.”

I feel that life is divided into the horrible and the miserable.

--Woody Allen

What is Positive Psychology?

• Be as concerned with strength as with weakness
• Be as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst
• Be as concerned with making the lives of normal people fulfilling as with healing pathology
• Develop interventions to increase well being not just to decrease misery.


Maslow’s Positive Psychology

“Psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side... It has revealed to us little about his potentiates, his virtues, his achievable aspirations... It is as if psychology has voluntarily restricted itself to only half its rightful jurisdiction, and that, the darker, meaner half.”

--Maslow (1954)
Theoretical Foundations
- The Pleasant Life (Positive Emotions)
- The Engaged Life (Engagement)
- The Social Life (Positive Relationships)
- The Meaningful Life (Meaning)
- The Achieved Life (Accomplishment)

Each is Measurable  Each is Teachable

FULL LIFE = P+E+R+M+A
Positive Education and Counseling

Current Status
- Between 2000 and 2010 more than a thousand articles published.
- Academic Programs
- Professional Organizations: IPPA Conferences
- Books

The big idea is that happy players make for better players. Everyone in the facility, from coaches and players to personal assistants and valets, is expected to follow Carroll’s mantras regarding positivity of thought, words and actions.
(08/2013, ESPN The Magazine)
Learning and Teaching Fundamental Resilience Competency

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Regulation
- Optimism
- Mental Agility
- Strengths of Character
- Connection

Our Positive Education programs teach lifelong personal competencies to develop a boy’s resilience, an understanding of his own strengths and those of the teams he will collaborate with and lead.

What’s in it for my child?

In 21 replications, when the teachers learned positive psychology intervention skills and how to teach them to kids, it significantly:
- lowers depression,
- anxiety and
- bad conduct.

The kids who had the positive psychology literature courses were rated by their teacher as having:
- higher social skills
- their zest for learning is higher and
- their grades are better.

Martin E.P. Seligman PhD, APA, 2011 Annual Convention

The Penn Resiliency Program

- School-based group intervention
- For late elementary & middle school students (5th-8th grade)
- Based on CBT and social problem-solving and coping techniques
- Twelve 90-120 minute sessions

Measuring and Promoting Hope in Schoolchildren
- Optimism: What it is and its relevance in the school context
- Flow in Schools: Cultivating Engaged Learners and Optimal Learning Environments
- Cultivating mindfulness in students
- Positive psychology and school discipline
- Building Resilience in Schools through Social and Emotional Learning
How is a Positive Psychology Perspective Different from Traditional Approaches?

**Positive Psychology**
- Believes people care about much more than simply relief from their distress.
- People want to explore, express, and enhance strengths.

**Traditional Approaches**
- Aim to address basic human deficiencies.
- Focus on negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

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**Mental Health as Flourishing (PERMA)** *(Keyes, 2009)*

- **Hedonia**
  - Positive Emotions
- **Eudaimonia**
  - Engagement
  - Positive Relationships
  - Meaning
  - Accomplishment

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**Unpacking Hedonia**

**Emotional Well-Being**
- **Positive Affect**
  - cheerful
  - in good spirits
  - happy
  - calm and peaceful
  - satisfied
  - full of life
- **Avowed Quality of Life**
  - Satisfaction with life
  - Happy with life
  - Interest in life

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**Unpacking Eudaimonia**

**Psychological Well-Being**
- **Me or I**
  1. Self-Acceptance
  2. Personal Growth
  3. Purpose in Life
  4. Environmental Mastery
  5. Positive Relations
  6. Autonomy

**Social Well-Being**
- **We or Us**
  1. Social Acceptance
  2. Social Growth/Potential
  3. Social Contribution
  4. Social Interest/Coherence
  5. Social Integration

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*Health is not simply the absence of disease: it is something positive...*
—Henry Sigerist (1941, p. 100)
Mental Health as Flourishing

Hedonia

Flourishing

The Full Life

PERMA

Eudaimonia

An comprehensive view of mental health

High Mental Health

Flourishing/Thriving with Mental Illness

Flourishing/Thriving without mental illness

Low Mental Health

Languishing/Surviving with Mental Illness

Languishing/Surviving without mental illness

Where youth are succeeding and where they need help:

Four-Front Approach to Assessment

Based on Outcome Goals, it becomes Crucial for Counselors and Students/Clients to Consider:

1) Deficiencies or Weaknesses of the student
2) Strengths and Assets of the student
3) Deficits and Destructive Forces in the student’s Environment
4) Resources and Opportunities in the student’s Environment

(Wright & Lopez, 2002)

Outcomes and Assessments

- Positive Affect
- Subjective Well-Being/Happiness
- VIA Inventory of Strengths
- Engagement/Interest/Flow
- Meaning
- Social Support/Attachment
- Optimism
- Hope
- Self-efficacy

Fig. 1.4 More frequency of each component of mental health in the past month. U.S. adolescents, ages 12–14. in 2002 (Data from the child development supplement) (% x 1,263)
Different Questions and Conversations

- What are the obvious and hidden strengths, resources, resiliencies, and competences contained in the student’s story?
- What are the competing stories—the stories of clarity, coping, endurance, and desire that exist simultaneously with the confusion, pain, suffering, and desperation?
- What already exists that can be used in service of the student’s goals?

Strengths Talk

- Talk about a time you felt hopeful about your life and circumstances. What was going on in your life that made you feel hopeful?
- How do you manage to hang in there instead of giving up?”
- Who will be the first person to notice when things start getting a little better in school? What will they see?
- How have you reminded yourself to keep moving forward during these more difficult times?

Positive Psychological approaches to counseling suggest we should strive not to restrict ourselves to repairing or fixing weakness because such actions will not necessarily make our students stronger or happier.

Counseling Strategies: To name just a few

- Solution-Focused Brief Therapy
- Quality of Life Therapy
- Hope Therapy
- Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy
- Well-being therapy
- Positive Psychotherapy
- Penn Resilience Project
- Strengths-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
Positive Psychotherapy for Depression

- 14 Sessions, 12 exercises

Examples:
- Using Your Strengths
- Three good things
- Life Summary
- Gratitude visit
- Active and constructive responding
- Savoring

Why be happy?

Barbara Fredrickson
University of North Carolina
Check it out on YouTube

What’s Good About Positive Emotions?

- “...they open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and creative.”
- “...positive emotions allow us to discover and build new skills, new ties, new knowledge and new ways of being.”

Positive Emotion jolts us into a different mode of thought!

Upward Spiral of the Benefits of Positive Emotions

Positive emotional experience may lead students to pursue their interests more vigorously and think more expansively about subjects of interests. Related approach behavior may facilitate the development of relationships with other students and teachers that would make learning an increasingly collaborative and rewarding process.

Are positive emotions related to better physical health and longer lives?

- The Nun Study: (Danner et. al, 2001)
- Handwritten autobiographies from 880 Catholic nuns, composed when participants were a mean age of 22 years, were scored for emotional content and related to survival during ages 75 to 95.
The Nun Study (Danner et al., 2001)
- Only positive feelings predicted longevity
- Age 85: 90% of most cheerful quartile alive; 34% of least cheerful quartile alive.
- Age 94: 54% of most cheerful quartile alive; 11% of least cheerful quartile alive.

Positive Emotions Build Durable Physical Resources
- "We need to take more seriously the possibility that positive emotional style is a major player in disease risk."

What Good are Positive Emotions in Crises?
Studying Resilience and Emotions after 2001
Fredrickson et al. 2003
- Assessed in early 2001
- Trait resilience
- Psychological resources
- Assessed after September 11
- Depression
- Psychological resources
- Positive emotions

Folkman’s Original Model

Folkman’s Revised Model

The Benefits of Frequent Positive Affect:
Does Happiness Lead to Success?
Sange Unutmaz		Laura King
University of California, Santa Barbara		University of Missouri—Columbia
Ell Dweck
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and The College Organization

The authors suggest a conceptual model to account for these findings, arguing that the happiness—success link exists not only because success makes people happy, but also because positive affect engenders success.

...the evidence suggests that positive affect—the hallmark of well-being—may be the cause of many of the desirable characteristics, resources, and successes correlated with happiness.
“If someone offered you a pill that would make you permanently happy, you would be well advised to run fast and run far. Emotion is a compass that tells us what to do, and a compass that perpetually stuck on north is worthless.”

--Daniel Gilbert


Can we become lastingly happier?

Happiness is Relatively Stable

What we imagine will happen: Permanent effects

What actually happens: We adapt very quickly

(Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978)

"When we have an experience-- hearing a particular sonata, making love with a particular person, watching the sun set from a particular window of a particular room -- on successive occasions, we quickly begin to adapt to it, and the experience yields less pleasure each time. Psychologists call this habituation, economists call it declining marginal utility, and the rest of us call it marriage"

--Daniel Gilbert.
Positive Psychology interventions teach skills that are sustainable and enjoyable. They build pleasure, engagement, and meaning.

Is it possible to increase and sustain happiness?

Sonya Lyubomirsky
University of California Riverside

Three Good Things

- Three Good Things. Write three good things that happened each day for a week. The three things students list can be relatively small in importance (‘I answered a really hard question right in Language Arts today’) or relatively large in importance (‘The guy I’ve liked for months, asked me out!!!’). Next to each positive event, write a reflection on one of the following questions: ‘Why did this good thing happen?’ ‘What does this mean to you?’ ‘How can you increase the likelihood of having more of this good thing in the future?’

Happiness Enhancing Strategies

- Count your blessings: Express gratitude for what you have (either privately—through contemplation or journaling—or to a close other) or convey your appreciation to individuals whom you’ve never properly thanked.
- Cultivate optimism: Keep a journal in which you imagine and write about the best possible future for yourself or practice by looking at the bright side of things.
- Avoid over thinking and social comparison: Cut down on how often you dwell on your problems and compare yourself to others.
- Practice acts of kindness: Do good things for others, whether friends or strangers, either directly or anonymously, either spontaneously or planned.
- Nurture relationships: Pick a relationship in need of strengthening and invest time and energy in cultivating it.
- Do more activities that truly engage you: Look for activities at home and work that challenge you and provide opportunities to use strengths.
- Replay and savor life’s joys: Paying close attention, take delight, and go over life’s pleasures and wonders—through thinking, writing, drawing, or sharing with another.
- Commit to your goals: Pick one, two, or three significant goals that are meaningful to you and devoting time and effort to pursuing them.
- Develop strategies for coping: Practice ways to endure or surmount a recent stress, hardship, or trauma.
- Learn to forgive: Work on letting go of anger and resentment towards others who have hurt or wronged you.
- Practice religion and spirituality: Becoming more involved in your church, temple, or mosque, or reading and pondering spiritually-themed books.
- Take care of your body: Engage in physical activity, meditation, smiling and laughing.
Questions for School Counselors

- Should well being be taught in schools?
- Whose responsibility is it?
- What is the role of the school counselor in not only reducing mental illness but in increasing well being?
- How can school counselors make use of the science of positive psychology to be flourish both personally and professionally?

Resources

- Popular books based on empirically sound research.
  - Martin Seligman, Flourish
  - Barbara Fredrickson, Positivity
  - Sonja Lyubominsky, *The How of Happiness* and *The Myths of Happiness*
  - M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*

- Internet based resources.
  - Complete positive psychology measures: [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org)
  - Readings, videos, and podcasts highlight recent research on well-being, gratitude, empathy and other positive states: [www.greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu) and [http://ggia.berkeley.edu](http://ggia.berkeley.edu)
  - Seligman’s Positive Psychology Center: [www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu)

- School Resources.