The Development and Implementation of a Positive Psychology Curriculum for Age Group Swimmers

Proactive Approaches to Meeting the Needs of Today’s Youth
Significant Issues

- 30% of US population are flourishing (Seligman)
- 9% decrease in flourishing between 12–18 (Keyes)
- Adolescent boys account for 90% all discipline problems, 80% of HS dropouts. (Gurian & Stevens)
- 35% of youth drop-out of sports each year
- Swimming one of two sports where male drop-out rate exceeds that of females (Woods)
- Decisions to drop-out are slow and progressive
Reasons for Dropping Out

- Negative experiences
- Other interests
- Lack of playing time
- Slow, progressive process
Self–Perception and Well–Being

- Self–perception was more a driving force than achievement.
- Subjective Well–Being (SWB) (Deiner)
  - Sense of optimism
  - Positivity
  - Willingness to accept challenges
  - Sense of support from others

How do we increase SWB?
Sport as a Transformational Activity

- Self–Reliance
- Inter–dependence
- Sense of meaning and purpose
- Structure
- Success is earned
- Identity development
- Service to others
- Fun and play
Transformational Outcomes

- Pride
- Personal ownership
- Accountability
- Acceptance
Supporting Youth Development

- Social Acceptance – Create/celebrate friendships, team culture, etc...

- Physical Competence – Put them in circumstances that, with some effort, they will succeed in.

- Enjoyment – Break up the training with games, etc...
Strengths-Based Positive Psychology

- Increases well-being
- Increases optimism
- Increases hope for the future
- Increases resiliency
- Leads to success in the future
Research for Positive Psychology in Schools

- Increases in self-efficacy
- Optimism
- Hope
- Academic performance
- Motivation
- Self-awareness
Research with Elite Athletes

- Use a signature strength to achieve excellence
- Find ways to capitalize on their strengths
- Use strengths to overcome obstacles
- Embrace optimism and positivity
Recognizing and Applying One’s Signature Strengths

- Attitude/will/mental toughness
- Value as a teammate
- Starts
- Turn skills
- Stroke technique
- Versatility
- Speed
- Endurance
- Strategy
- Training intensity
- Focus
- Coach-ability
- Willingness to take on challenges
- Other coach/athlete applications
Strength Applications

- Increases personal awareness
- Heightened ability to apply one’s strengths
- Greater ease with goal setting
- Increases in personal skill development
- Higher motivation
- Increased confidence
Viewing Problems/Difficulties from the Other Side

- What is right?
- What makes it right?
- What would be ideally right?
- What’s not yet quite right?
- What resources do I/We have to make it right?

Kurt Wright
Strategies for Viewing Problems From the Other Side

- Experiential Exercise

- Write down 3 strengths you have as a coach
- Write down 3 weaknesses you have as a coach
- Put a + next to strengths and a – next to weaknesses and tally.

- Notice your energy levels for each category. Which feels more energizing?
- Rate yourself in all 6 areas on a scale from −5 to +5.
The Other Side

- 3:1 Negativity ratio in our reptilian brains
  We are hard wired to avoid pain, therefore placing more attention on what can hurt/expose us

- We typically put more energy into our weaknesses than our strengths...But what we pay attention to manifests.

- What if we viewed all of our qualities as strengths, in varying degree's, to be developed?
The Other Side

- What is right?
- What makes it right?
- What would be ideally right?
- What is not yet quite right?
- What resources do I/We have to make it right?
Growth vs. Fixed Mindset

- Growth Mindset – Human qualities are manifested through effort. Failure does not exist. Experience, training, and personal effort (purposeful engagement) manifest expertise. 10,000 hours.

- Fixed Mindset – We are born with a fixed amount of intelligence, ability, and capacity for success/achievement.
Fixed Mindset

- Fixed mindset folks tend to view every encounter as a comment on their character, intelligence, or worthiness as a human being.
- “I must constantly prove myself” – Judgement.

- When any setback occurs, we default to judging ourselves. This manifests in thoughts and actions that limit potential. It’s all about feeling judged and avoiding failure. This leads to lower self-worth, less willingness to take on challenges, and less success.
Growth mindset folks have a belief in effort, and a love of challenge.

Greater resilience and more success results because their endeavors are not seen as a comment on their personhood. It’s all about improvement and effort.

The requires a 3:1 positivity ratio!
Stretching Ourselves

- We all need a combination of encouragement and support when trying new things.
- We also reserve the right to say no, not yet.

- Challenge by Choice!
- Encourage a team culture that celebrates growth.
- Recall past Mastery Experiences.
- Make mistakes on purpose—Laugh and have fun with it.
- Model a growth mindset.
- Teach a 3:1 positivity ratio
The Issue With Praising

- Praising people’s ability encourages a fixed mindset
  - Focuses on something static
  - Encourages the recipient to label themselves
  - Encourages excuse making.

- Praising people’s effort encourages a growth mindset.
  - Praise for doing what it takes to succeed.
  - Encourages us to have our own voice and be our own person.
More Strategies

- Allow experimentation. Teach a skill and let them practice it on their own.
- Encourage them to make perfectly good mistakes.
- Celebrate mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Expect full effort – The best you have on any given day.
- Be interested in their development, and hang in there with them when they experience setbacks.
- Believe in them!
- Constructive criticism helps them understand how to improve.
- Observe, learn, improve.
- Encourage an identity beyond the swimming pool.
More Strategies

- Ask them to develop a list of their personal strengths as they relate to swimming.
- Ask them to develop and implement their own goals, modeling a growth mindset, and process.
- Provide support and encouragement, and if needed, their mindset.
- Ask them to monitor their own growth.
- Refer them to the Clifton Strengths-Finder
Questions to Ask

- What mistake did you make that taught you something?
- What did you try hard at today?
- What are you a little better at today (after practice) than you were yesterday (before practice)? Why are you better?
- What is one area that you have made great progress in?
- Who inspired you today with their effort?

- This could be at the end of practice, with each swimmer given a chance to answer, and the others clapping or supporting the effort.
Discover and apply your strengths:
What do you do well that can apply to an area you would like to get better in?

Imagine your Best Possible Self/Your life as it could be. Write it down.

Three good things exercise. Could be a daily or weekly team activity. Ex. Friday afternoon’s write on a 3x5 card and give it to coach.

Gratitude
Questions?

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