

Building Relationships at The U School:
Refining and Enhancing Possi Circles

Emily Entress Clark, Amanda Masters, Yanan Shen, and Renee Stout

A Positive Psychology Service Learning Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
MAPP 714: Applying Positive Interventions in Institutions

Master of Applied Positive Psychology
University of Pennsylvania

May 6, 2020

Building Relationships at The U School:
Refining and Enhancing Possi Circles

Emily Entress Clark, Amanda Masters, Yanan Shen, and Renee Stout

A Positive Psychology Service Learning Project
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for MAPP 714: Applying Positive
Interventions in Institutions

Master of Applied Positive Psychology
University of Pennsylvania

May 6, 2020

Abstract

The U School is a district high school in the Innovation Network of Philadelphia Schools dedicated to preparing students from low-income and underserved communities for college and career. One of the primary structures that has been developed to provide personalized support for students is its advisory system, Possi Circles, representing the *Possibilities* for students at the U School. These non-academic advisory/support groups of 10-15 students and one faculty leader form during freshman year and remain together for the duration of high school. Research supports the central importance of relationships in helping students, particularly at-risk youth like those at the U School, find success in school and develop lifelong capacities for well-being and achievement. This paper presents a set of recommendations, rooted in the science of positive psychology, for optimizing the form, content, and implementation of Possi Circles, including: a defined pathway to successful Possi Circles with a progression of measurable milestones, additional curriculum for year one Circles, and suggestions for successful implementation.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
The U School: Situation Analysis	4
Introduction to Possi Circles	5
The Primacy of Relationships	6
Intervention Proposal: Refining and Enhancing Possi Circles	8
The Pathway to a Successful Possi Circle	8
Hope Theory	10
Self-Efficacy	10
Measurement and Evaluation	11
Curriculum Development	12
Suggestions for Successful Implementation	13
Recent Research on Programming for Adolescents	14
Restorative Justice Training for All Staff	15
Possi Circle Orientation	16
A Special Note In Light of the COVID-19 Breakout	17
Summary	19
References	20
Appendix A - Measurement and Evaluation of Possi Circles	27
Milestones Indicating Possi Circle Maturation	27
Possi Leader Reflection Form	29
Possi Student Reflection Form	30
Appendix B - Weekly Framework	30
Appendix C - Weekly and Monthly Topics	32
Quarterly Themes	32
Year One (9th grade) Curriculum	32
Monthly Themes	34
Appendix D: Sample Outline for Unit 2.2– Character Strengths	41
Appendix E: Sample Outline for Unit 3.1– Gratitude	55

The U School: Situation Analysis

The U School is a district high school in the Innovation Network of Philadelphia Schools dedicated to readying students for college and careers through competency-based learning focused on real-world problem solving (The U School, n.d.). It was founded in 2014 with a two-year grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, in large part to address a statistic: in 2013, only 18% of Philadelphia high school students made it to their second year of college (SDP College-Going Diagnosis, 2013). The name, U School, was developed by a focus group conducted by the Founding Principal, Neil Geyette. The “U” stands for user, implying that the U School is “user-centered” (N. Geyette, personal communication, January 29, 2020). Students graduate with the skills to become “urban designers,” solving real-world problems in their community by learning the skills to research, plan, design, and test their ideas (The U School, n.d.). The school currently serves approximately 240 students, 100% of whom are classified by the district as economically disadvantaged (District Performance Office, n.d.). School Climate Manager, Martín Blank, describes a high degree of inter-student conflict and misconduct during the school day. He acknowledges that students face many challenges that may influence their behavior and academic performance, including trauma, dangerous commuting conditions, violence, poverty, addiction and incarceration in their families, and unsupportive family environments. Still, he sees his students’ immense strength and believes in their future, which makes the work of the U School ever more important (personal communication, January 16, 2020).

The U School is one of a growing movement of innovation schools which exist within public districts but have greater flexibility and autonomy to experiment with scheduling, teaching methods, staffing, and designing curricula and programs to better meet student needs

and close the achievement gap (Innovation Schools, n.d.). Many of these schools aim to change the outcomes for students from low-income and underserved communities, or who face other barriers to graduation and subsequent college or career. By redesigning the school experience, it is hoped that innovation schools like the U School can more successfully empower students by exposing them to important factors for success, such as self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Maddux, 2009) and self-regulation (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006; Wigglesworth, Qualter, & Humphrey, 2017); and developing interpersonal skills including conflict management and avoidance (Yeager, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2013).

Innovation schools, because of their smaller size and flexibility, may also be able to respond more effectively to the emotional needs of its students, both in the moment and on a systemic level, by nurturing resilience, instilling a sense of mattering, and encouraging a growth mindset (Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Sitglbauer, Gnambs, Gamsjäger, & Batinic, 2013; Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Positive education, which has grown out of the positive psychology movement, encourages the pursuit of goals that value academic, character, and well-being, and dovetails well with the multifaceted needs exhibited by students at the U School and other innovation schools (Adler, 2017; Norrish, & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

Introduction to Possi Circles

The U School believes in the importance of relationships. One of the primary structures that has been developed to provide personalized support for students is their advisory system, Possi Circles, which meet each day for 20 minutes in the morning and 40 minutes in the afternoon. Possi Circles, representing the *Possibilities* for students at the U School, are non-academic advisory/support groups of 10-15 students and one faculty leader, which form during

freshman year and remain together for the duration of high school (M. Blank, personal communication, February 22, 2020).

Conceptually and procedurally, Possis are modeled on restorative circles, a practice which aims to heal relationships between individuals and build community. Circles have their roots in Indigenous societies and have become more widely utilized through the restorative justice movement (Clifford, n.d.). A *restorative* approach addresses problems from the perspective of healing and reunion, rather than seeking to punish wrongdoers; it asks, “What can we do to make things right?” and asks the wider community for support in this process (Clifford, n.d.). This framework can be used in schools to address problems, facilitate healing, offer support, build consensus, foster community, and celebrate (Mirsky, 2014).

In a circle of chairs, all participants are visible to one another and have equal prominence. In the same way, every member of the circle has equal voice and responsibility for supporting one another, finding solutions to problems, and asking for help (Clifford, n.d.). Conventions include use of a “talking piece,” which indicates who has permission to speak while everyone else listens without interrupting; a focus on issues and ideas, rather than people (avoiding blame placing); brief sharing on an open-ended question or prompt where everyone has a turn; courtesy and dignity; and ritual opening and closing practices (Clifford, n.d.). Once students begin to understand the expectations while in circle, misbehavior often decreases and the students begin to open themselves up to heartfelt issues (Mirsky, 2014).

The Primacy of Relationships

One of the goals of Possi Circles is to create a strong foundation of trust and respect between all Possi members, particularly between students and the adult Possi leader. Positive relationships with teachers have been shown to promote healthy development of social and

academic competencies in students, which in turn has an impact on student engagement in the classroom (Murray & Murray, 2004; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992). Student engagement often depends on the teacher's ability to meet students at a developmentally appropriate level (Hamre & Pianta, 2010; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). Improving teachers' interactions with students can improve their engagement and success (Gregory et al., 2014)

High-quality teacher-student relationships are especially crucial for at-risk adolescents, such as U School students, who face many challenges, including violence, chronic stress, and dangerous neighborhoods (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). For these students, close and supportive relationships with teachers can be the difference between success or failure in an academic setting (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012), and can act as one of the factors to buffer against the potential negative effects of challenges (Murray & Malmgren, 2005).

In the last two decades, researchers have shown how positive adult-student relationships can also increase a student's sense of belonging in a school environment (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). An adolescent's sense of belonging, defined as "the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment" (1993a, p. 80), is critical to their experience (Goodenow, 1993b). In particular, supportive teacher-student relationships are one of the most influential factors to increase an adolescents' sense of belonging (Uslu & Gizir, 2017; Wallace et al., 2012). Additional factors can include closeness of peer relationships (Uslu & Gizir, 2017; Wallace, Ye, & Chhuon, 2012), family involvement (Uslu & Gizir, 2017), ethnic belongingness in the school environment (Kiang, & Fuligni, 2009), and participation in school sanctioned activities (Wallace et al., 2012).

While advisory systems have been shown to be one of the most effective ways that schools can intentionally cultivate relationships between students and teachers (Shiller, 2009),

our informal conversations with both students and staff indicate that the experience across Possi Circles is not uniform. Over the past year, U School staff members worked to develop a comprehensive curriculum of quarterly themes and weekly topics in order to ensure that all Possi Circles serve as a solid home base for the students and contribute to a positive climate in the school. So far, members of the teaching and administrative staff have developed a curriculum for the first two quarters of ninth grade. While their hope is to continue building out a meaningful curriculum that will extend to the end of 9th grade and, eventually, throughout all four years of high school, time and energy are extremely limited resources and only one staff member has dedicated time in their weekly schedule for focusing on Possi curriculum development (M. Blank, personal communication, February 22, 2020).

Intervention Proposal: Refining and Enhancing Possi Circles

Our intervention consists of a set of recommendations, rooted in the science of positive psychology, for optimizing the form, content, and implementation of Possi Circles:

- Defined pathway to successful Possi Circles, charting a route toward the end goal of strong relationships with a progression of measurable milestones.
- Additional curriculum for year one (freshman year) of Possi Circles, based on the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 curriculum already designed by U School staff.
- Suggestions for successful implementation of Possi Circles.

The Pathway to a Successful Possi Circle

Neil Geyette, the Founding Principal of the U School, and Martin Blank, Climate Manager (personal communication, March 7, 2020), helped us identify the primary end goal of the Possi Circle structure: to build a micro-community of deep trust and support, exemplified by each student feeling comfortable asking for help from any fellow member of their Possi. Within

this larger goal is the hope that students in a Possi will support each other whether an adult is present or not. This means structuring the progression of the Possi Circle experience so that, ultimately, the students take control of the Possi, leading one another in the group, and taking care of the circle with agency. In the long run, older students may become Possi leaders for younger students and allow the Possi Circle apparatus to function as an autonomous, healthy ecosystem.

Toward this end, Possi Circles will benefit from enhanced structures that help leaders take advantage of the growing collection of group-generated topic outlines, slideshows, and multimedia resources (stored in online folders owned by the school), in a clear and logical way. Widespread adoption of a standard curriculum, currently being developed, and familiar routines at the daily, weekly, monthly, and year-long levels will support leaders and students in knowing what to expect. Additionally, we hope this clarity will free up energy for advisors to invest in implementing successful circles. With routine, familiarity, and a growing sense of trust, Possi Circles will begin to transition from adult-regulated to student-led. In the beginning, the adult group leader will moderate the sessions, initiate topic-related discussions, and facilitate student conversations. To move toward the goal of student leadership, leaders can encourage more student-initiated activities, find ways of giving students more agency and responsibilities, and provide explicit training for students to improve group skills, such as mindful listening. Some of these practices are already in place to varying degrees in the different Possi Circles. Scientific research on hope theory and self-efficacy lend rationale for our emphasis on this progression toward student leadership.

Hope Theory

Hope theory provides a way to understand how “intentional thoughts lead to adaptive action” (Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2011, p. 1). Snyder et al. (1991) distinguished hope as a human strength that can be revealed by three means: goal-thinking, or creating goals; pathway thinking, or developing multiple possible plans to reach the goal; and agency thinking, or having the drive to stick to the chosen plan. Marques and colleagues (2011) found that individuals with high hope tend to be successful in the pursuit of their goals. The experience of success, in turn, leads to more positive emotions, improving self-esteem and self-worth (Marques et al., 20). Since hopeful thought becomes more sophisticated as a child matures, adolescence is a critical stage of development (Snyder, Feldman, Shorey, & Rand, 2002). As adolescents are called to be members of their community, solve problems, and make decisions, it is imperative that they are taught to think through their actions and goals. Possi Circles can create an environment to help students begin to hone these capacities and to achieve their desired goals by explicitly teaching intention, motivation, and purposeful action as crucial components for achieving their vision of the future.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s belief in their own capacity to execute behaviors needed to produce specific performance goals (Bandura, 2010). Self-efficacy reflects one’s confidence in their ability to manage motivation and behavior. It is a skill that can be cultivated, which means that people can impact the conditions that affect their lives. Bandura (2010) notes that the school community is an institution that encourages cognitive self-efficacy. The belief structures of a staff create school cultures that can promote a positive atmosphere supporting the aspirations, interests, and accomplishments of the whole community. This culture

can then foster self-efficacy and model the persistence needed to continue striving despite barriers and setbacks. Self-efficacy is also a protective factor that supports students' resilience, or ability to overcome adversity (Hamill, 2003). The Possi Circle was originally intended to facilitate students' self-efficacy by providing opportunities for students to take on more leadership responsibilities within the group. The gradual and developmentally appropriate progression of having students take on additional responsibilities can give them an increased sense of confidence, build intrinsic motivation, and provide opportunities for positive reinforcement from the adult Possi leader.

Measurement and Evaluation

Measurements are essential to ensure that Possi Circles are indeed building toward the intended outcomes and to open the door for meaningful in-progress modifications, if needed. In Appendix A, we present a program for assessing the progression of Circles throughout the school year, including specific components, practices, and relational dynamics that should be present as the year goes on. These milestones, or checkpoints, should be communicated to all members of the Possi Circle, so they may assess their progress towards their goal, while revealing, in real time, those areas that need further attention or adjustment.

In Appendix A, we also suggest two new tools: the Possi Leader Reflection Form and the Student Reflection Form. The Leader Reflection Form will enable the leader (first the adult, then gradually switching to student leader(s)) to gauge their group's fidelity to the Possi curriculum and engagement with the content and form of the Circle. It provides space for valuable feedback and a means of identifying strengths and areas for growth. We recommend that this reflection form be utilized as a digital survey, such as a Google Form, to allow for aggregated responses across Possi Circles and over time. Alternatively, Possi leaders can use it in one-on-one

conversations with their partner teacher. The Student Reflection Form provides a similar function and may be issued at the end of each quarter as a way to enlist student involvement and support another level of meta-reflection.

Curriculum Development

When we reviewed the existing Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 framework and lessons, we noticed a trend toward informative lessons that create awareness of important themes and support student reflection. Adopting an Aware-Explore-Apply progression (Niemic, 2018), the materials we contributed for Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 place a stronger focus on taking action and making behavioral changes (see Appendix C). Based on a more action-oriented framework, students will be explicitly asked to apply Possi Circle topics to their personal and academic lives. The curriculum topics for the entire year follow a logical progression that builds upon previously gained socioemotional competencies. Also, with the intention of initiating a stronger link between reflection and action (answering the question “then what?”), we suggest incorporating the school mission of Love, Dream, Do into the weekly structure of the Possi Circles (see Appendix B).

In Appendix C, we also outline a year-long structure that embeds the weekly discussion topics within monthly themes. Monthly themes are a way of connecting the work of the individual Possi Circles with other courses and programs in a unified school-wide effort, and could easily be promoted through other school vehicles (e.g., class competition, student creative showcases, whole school projects). One way to do this is to create a Wellness Window (bulletin board) to post these monthly school initiatives and any community resources that may support the theme. To incorporate technology, the school can provide opportunities for students, teachers, and staff by encouraging Possi Circles to publish accomplishments and activities on

social media, the school website, or any public channels. Since the themes provide a structure for a whole school approach, the increased interaction with the listed themes could improve relationships, engagement, and academic focus.

We have provided a full week (5-day) curriculum outline for Unit 2.2. on Character Strengths (Appendix D) and Unit 3.1 on Gratitude (Appendix E). These curricular outlines provide a model for integrating the daily Possi focus, weekly topics, and monthly themes in cohesive units. We chose these topics intentionally. Character Strengths are a foundational construct of positive education (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Defined as the positive “capacities humans have for thinking, feeling, and behaving” (VIA Institute, 2019), understanding one’s character strengths can provide pathways for self-discovery, effective behavior, and beneficial relating. In addition, years of research on gratitude have shown that continual and habitual focus on gratitude has a direct link to individual well-being (Wood, Froh, & Geraghty, 2010), particularly for adolescents (Froh, Bono, & Emmons, 2010). Gratitude is also an important component of intentional and meaningful relationship-building (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008), which is one of the primary goals of the Possi program.

Suggestions for Successful Implementation

The effectiveness of our proposed intervention and the Possi System at large rely on the strengths of the relationships formed within each Possi. These spaces are built upon a core foundation of trust between the adult leader and student members. The responsibility to create open and safe spaces largely lies with the adult leader; they must be willing “to engage in topics that are outside of their comfort zone” to create a successful Possi Circle (N. Geyette, personal communication, March 7, 2020). For many, the challenge lies within the inherent nature of a Circle structure, where leaders step into the role of facilitator and fellow participant, rather than

teacher (Clifford, n.d.). There is a large disparity in the comfort levels of current Possi leaders which has resulted in varying levels of success of the Possi Circles at the U School (N. Geyette, personal communication, March 7, 2020). Below, we offer a few recommendations to build a foundation of knowledge and expertise for faculty members, hopefully increasing their confidence and willingness to engage with Possi Circles in a more meaningful way.

Recent Research on Programming for Adolescents

Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood (approximately 10-24 years of age), and is a distinct stage of not only physical change, but also neural, psychological, behavioral, and social development (Dahl & Crone, 2012). In particular, adolescence is characterized by increased sensation seeking, willingness to explore, strong sensitivity to social and affective (emotional) influences, and high motivation for prestige, status, and respect among peers and adults (Dahl, Allen, Wilbrecht, & Suleiman, 2018). Young people in this stage are primed for learning and are beginning to seek autonomy, identity, and connection to heartfelt goals (Dahl et al., 2018). This combination of attributes enables adolescents to respond rapidly, flexibly, and creatively to the changing social world they inhabit. Appropriate opportunities that support meaningful routes toward engagement, prestige, and social connection can help young people flourish (Dahl & Crone, 2012; Dahl et al., 2018).

Recent research has discovered that within the conditions of adolescence, traditional interventions, including school-based programs aimed at health promotion or prevention goals like anti-bullying, have not been very successful (Yaeger, Dahl & Dweck, 2018). Programs focused on direct instruction of social emotional skills (SEL) that teach coping methods are similarly ineffective for adolescents (Yaeger, 2007). Such programs work well with younger audiences, even into early middle school, but fall flat with older students, in large part because

they take the wrong approach, teaching information and ‘talking at’ students, and focus on the wrong things, such as risks and planning (Yaeger, 2007). The majority of programs critically fail to align with students’ preeminent desire to feel respected and be afforded status (Yaeger, Dahl & Dweck, 2018).

In contrast, successful approaches to building positive skills and preventing unwanted behaviors among adolescent’s work *with* their enhanced desire for respect and status (e.g., explicit endorsement of a behavior by older students) (Yaeger, Dahl & Dweck, 2018). The most effective SEL programs work indirectly by enlisting student involvement and making the classroom and school environments feel more respectful and egalitarian (Yaeger, 2007). A review of social- psychological interventions in education found that small, brief interventions could prove “small but mighty” when born out of the students’ subjective experiences of school (versus an outsider’s assessment) and which leverage existing structures and resources (Yaeger & Walton, 2011). Possi Circles are uniquely positioned to satisfy these requirements: they provide a space for students to express voice and choice, help shape the group experience, build relationships through daily contact with peers and an adult mentor, and explore targeted intervention activities, all within a structure predicated on respect and egalitarianism.

Restorative Justice Training for All Staff

As mentioned previously, Possi Circles embody a *restorative* approach, which addresses problems from the perspective of healing and reunion, rather than seeking to punish wrongdoers, and proactively cultivates a strong sense of community (Clifford, n.d.). This is a particular paradigm that is different from traditional school paradigms, which are more oriented toward hierarchy and punitive discipline. While all U School teachers are theoretically trained in this practice, some of the behaviors and structures that exist currently do not represent a restorative

approach (M. Blank, personal communication, January 16, 2020). It is also likely that founding teachers have received more in-depth training in restorative practices than newer faculty members. Therefore, we recommend that all Possi leaders and faculty members be required to participate in professional development in restorative practice as a renewal of the U School's commitment to a restorative approach.

Possi Circle Orientation

In a study conducted at three urban high schools, adequate advisor training was the most crucial predictor of meaningful teacher-student relationships (Shiller, 2009). Adequate training helped advisors better understand their students, facilitate meaningful conversations, and bridge cultural differences that might exist (Shiller, 2009). These studies highlight the importance of dedicating resources, such as professional development for the staff, in order to improve the U School's existing advisory structure of Possi Circles.

As Mr. Geyette stated, the key to Circles is routine and ritual (personal communication, March 7, 2020). Therefore, we recommend there be an in-depth Possi Circle Orientation at the start of each school year, for all staff. The orientation will include establishing school-wide Circle norms (e.g., arrangement of chairs; use of the talking piece; modeling vulnerability; and creating ritual opening and closing practices). Student behaviors are built on the reliability of the adult's consistency and clarity of intention, so giving adult leaders practice and comfort is crucial.

The first few weeks of a Possi Circle are critical for establishing the expectations and routines that will carry forward throughout the year (N. Geyette, personal communication, March 7, 2020), therefore, it makes sense for the training to be at the beginning of the academic year. Such a training will provide space for faculty and Possi leaders to practice and refine their skills

for facilitating Circles. It will also create a shared language with which all teachers can operate, which Mr. Blank noticed is currently missing from their campus environment (personal communication, January 16, 2020).

An initial orientation is not enough, however. The U School faculty will benefit from the regular opportunity, built into their ongoing school schedule, to learn from more experienced peer leaders, practice facilitating Circles, and explore new topics together. As a support and engagement activity, we suggest that Circle conventions be utilized during the weekly Friday faculty meetings. During this time, the previous week might be reviewed and the upcoming Possi topic can be explored as a way to build confidence and model expectations for the Circle process. While our suggestions for successful implementation would require a certain amount of energy to establish, we regard these high-level, systemic changes as powerful opportunities to help the adult leadership return Possi Circles back to their original intent: providing a constructive and proactive space for relationship building and community development.

A Special Note in Light of the COVID-19 Breakout

The U School, like all public schools in the state of Pennsylvania, has been closed as a physical campus since March 13, 2020 and will remain closed until further notice. Since World War II, the US has never seen schools across the nation shut down, as in the current case of the COVID-19 pandemic (Kamenets, 2020). According to UNESCO (“COVID-19 Educational Disruption and Response,” 2020), approximately 9 out of 10 schoolchildren are out of school worldwide. While we are unaware of the exact format that the U School has chosen for its distance schooling, we do know that every student at the school was administered a personal Chromebook, so it is possible that Possi Circles would continue in a virtual format. In that instance, Possi Circles could provide consistency and community to help students navigate the

current challenges and changes. In particular, efforts that keep teachers in regular touch with students can help reduce the negative effects of social dislocation and physical distancing, enhancing protective factors against emotional problems such as anxiety and depression related symptoms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

We acknowledge that the psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 breakout and its subsequent economic and health crises may hit U School families especially hard. Students' parents may lose their jobs in the economic down-turn, and this instability and insecurity can exacerbate pre-existing family conflicts and hardship. Parental job demands or health concerns may require students to take on a greater share of responsibility for care of siblings or other household duties, leaving less time to spend on academic work or on personal care. In the future, the economic uncertainty may lead to an increase in high school dropout rates (Jason, n.d.). The COVID-19 virus is also reported to spread at a higher rate in economically disadvantaged communities (Blakeney, 2020), such as that of U School students. As a result, in addition to the stress caused by the deprivation of quality time with friends, students may have to deal with the loss or serious illness of family members or other people who are close to them.

The specific lessons and skills that Possi Circles focus on (e.g., stress management, resilience skills, self-talk, mindfulness) can support students to better weather these storms, even if they do not have control to change what is happening around them. Protective factors of resilience are particularly important in this case (Torteya, Bogat, Eye & Levendosky, 2009), and to learn to identify and grow one's resilience through engaging in the Possi Circle virtually may decrease the negative impacts caused by physical distancing, while supporting high quality connections (Resnick, 2000). Fostering a sense of perspective, optimism, and "we're in this

together”-ness can help point students on the path toward eventual growth from adversity (Fredrickson, 2009).

Whenever schools resume physical classes, we feel strongly that Possi Circles will serve as a unique and vital asset to the U School to assist with that transition. When students return to school after the pandemic, there will be both a need and an opportunity for students to draw upon their resilience, share their stories, and continue to hone essential skills, all of which can be facilitated by the Possi structure. Because Possi groups stay together throughout the high school years, Circles will serve as a home base for returning students and will welcome new students. Possi Leaders, who have close daily contact with their students, will be able to monitor their condition and help them adjust more effectively, first and foremost by serving as a compassionate anchor point. It can be expected that students may struggle with (re)adjusting to school norms and structure, and Possis can ease this process through clearly communicated expectations and routines, while helping students form social bonds and consolidate healthy habits. The school-wide nature of Possi Circles helps students feel part of a larger whole, struggling through difficult times all together. The individual journaling exercises and the group work in Possis create space for crafting narratives and making meaning out of the experience of adversity (Smith, 2017). Students will need a safe and reliable space for building up their personal strength and reaching out to others more than ever, and Possi Circles are poised to be such a space.

Summary

The U School is built upon three simple and powerful core values: “Love. Dream. Do.” (Our vision, n.d.). Our goal of creating stronger relationships, designing a yearlong framework of curriculum, and providing suggestions for successful implementation to support adult Possi

Circle leaders will help the school live its mission and embrace its values. The Possi system has the potential to facilitate positive engagement with the school experience, support student growth, and prepare students for life after graduation.

References

- Adler, A. (2017). Positive education: Educating for academic success and for a fulfilling life. *Papeles del Psicólogo/Psychologist Papers*, 38(1), 50-57.
<https://doi.org/10.23923/pap.psicol2017.2821>
- Algoe, S. B., Haidt, J., & Gable, S. L. (2008). Beyond reciprocity: Gratitude and relationships in everyday life. *Emotion*, 8(3), 425-429. doi:10.1037/1528-3542.8.3.425
- Bandura, A. (2010). Self-efficacy. *The Corsini encyclopedia of psychology*, 1-3.
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations and career trajectories. *Child Development*, 72(1), 187–206. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00273
- Baumeister, R. F., Gailliot, M., DeWall, C. N., & Oaten, M. (2006). Self-regulation and personality: How interventions increase regulatory success, and how depletion moderates the effects of traits on behavior. *Journal of personality*, 74(6), 1773-1801
- Blackwell, L., Trzesniewski, K., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). Implicit theories of intelligence predict achievement across an adolescent transition: A longitudinal study and an intervention. *Child Development*, 78(1), 246–263.
- Blakeney, B. (2020, April 6). COVID-19 OUTBREAK: Coronavirus pandemic impact in Black communities may be disproportionately worse. Retrieved from <https://www.charlestonchronicle.net/2020/04/06/covid-19-outbreak-coronavirus-pandemic-impact-in-black-communities-may-be-disproportionately-worse/>
- Clifford, A. (n.d.). *Teaching restorative practices with classroom circles*. Center for Restorative Process, Developed for San Francisco Unified School District. Retrieved from <https://www.restorativeschoolstoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Teaching%20>

Restorative%20Practices%20in%20the%20Classroom%207%20lesson%20Curriculum_0.pdf

COVID-19 educational disruption and response (2020, April 6). Retrieved from

<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationrespons>

Dahl, R. E., Allen, N. B., Wilbrecht, L., & Suleiman, A. B. (2018). Importance of investing in adolescence from a developmental science perspective. *Nature*, 554, 441-450.

doi:10.1038/nature25770

Dahl, R. E., & Crone, E. A. (2012). Understanding adolescence as a period of social-affective engagement and goal flexibility. *Nature*, 13, 636-650.

District Performance Office. (n.d.). *School enrollment and demographics*. Retrieved from School

District of Philadelphia website: <https://www.philasd.org/performance/>

programsservices/open-data/school-information/#school_enrollment

Froh, J. J., Bono, G., & Emmons, R. (2010). Being grateful is beyond good manners: Gratitude and motivation to contribute to society among early adolescents. *Motivation and Emotion*, 34(2), 144-157.

Fredrickson, B. (2009). *Positivity: Groundbreaking research reveals how to embrace the hidden strength of positive emotions, overcome negativity, and thrive*. New York, NY: Crown.

Gregory, A., Allen, J.P., Mikami, A.Y., Hafen, C.A. & Pianta, R.C. (2014). Effects of a professional development program on behavioral engagement of students in middle and high school. *Psychology in Schools*, 51(2), 143-163. doi:10.1002/pits.21741

Hamill, S. K. (2003). *Resilience and self-efficacy: The importance of efficacy beliefs and coping*

- mechanisms in resilient adolescents. *Colgate University Journal of the Sciences*, 35(1), 115-146.
- Hamre, B. K., & Pianta, R. C. (2010). Classroom environments and developmental processes. *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling and Human Development*. doi: 10.4324/9780203874844.ch3
- Innovation Schools. (n.d.) Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/redesign/innovation/>
- Jason, A. (n.d.) Dropouts, Diplomas, and dollars: U.S. high schools and the nation's economy. Retrieved from <https://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/dropouts-diplomas-and-dollars-u-s-high-schools-and-the-nations-economy/>
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491–525. doi: 10.3102/0034654308325693
- Kamenetz, A. (2020, April 2). 9 Out Of 10 children are out of school worldwide. What now? Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2020/04/02/824964864/nine-out-of-10-of-the-world-s-children-are-out-of-school-what-now>
- Kiang, L., & Fuligni, A. J. (2009). Ethnic identity in context: Variations in ethnic exploration and belonging within parent, same-ethnic peer, and different-ethnic peer relationships. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 38(5), 732-743.
- Maddux, J. E. (2009). *Self-efficacy: The power of believing you can*. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 335-343). New York, NY: Oxford University Press
- Martinez-Torteya, C., Bogat, G. A., Eye, A. V., & Levendosky, A. A. (2009). Resilience among children exposed to domestic violence: The role of risk and protective factors. *Child*

- Development*, 80(2), 562–577. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01279.x
- Marques, S. C., Lopez, S. J., & Pais-Ribeiro, J. L. (2011). “Building hope for the future”: A program to foster strengths in middle-school students. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 12(1), 139-152.
- Masten, A. S., Cutuli, J. J., Herbers, J. E., & Reed, M. G. J. (2009). Resilience in development. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 117-131). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Mirsky, L. (2014). The power of the circle. *Making a Difference, The Educational Leadership Magazine*, 71, 51-55.
- Murray, C., & Malmgren, K. (2005). Implementing a teacher–student relationship program in a high-poverty urban school: Effects on social, emotional, and academic adjustment and lessons learned. *Journal of school psychology*, 43(2), 137-152.
- Murray, C., & Murray, K. M. (2004). Child level correlates of teacher-student relationships: An examination of demographic characteristics, academic orientations, and behavioral orientations. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(7), 751–762.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20015>
- Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners*. Boston, MA: Hogrefe Publishing.
- Norrish, J. M., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2009). Positive psychology and adolescents: Where are we now? Where do we go from here? *Australian Psychologist*, 44(4), 270-278.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (1st ed.). Washington, DC/New York, NY: American Psychological Association/Oxford University Press.

- Pianta, R. C., Hamre, B. K., & Allen, J. P. (2012). Teacher-student relationships and engagement: Conceptualizing, measuring, and improving the capacity of classroom interactions. In S. L. Christenson, A. L. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of research on student engagement* (pp. 365-386). Springer, Boston, MA.
- Pianta, R. C., & Steinberg, M. (1992). Teacher-child relationships and the process of adjusting to school. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 1992(57), 61-80.
- Resnick, M. D. (2000). Resilience and protective factors in the lives of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 27(1), 1–2. doi: 10.1016/s1054-139x(00)00142-7
- SDP college-going diagnosis: The school district of Philadelphia. (2013). Retrieved from the Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University:
<http://sdp.cepr.harvard.edu/files/cepr-sdp/files/sdp-sdp-cg.pdf>
- Shiller, J. T. (2009). “These are our children!”: An examination of relationship-building practices in urban high schools. *The Urban Review*, 41(5), 461.
- Smith, E. E. (2017). *The power of meaning: Crafting a life that matters*. New York, NY: Crown.
- Snyder, C. R., Feldman, D. B., Shorey, H. S., & Rand, K. L. (2002). Hopeful choices: A school counselor's guide to hope theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(5), 1061-1070.
- Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., et al. (1991). The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-difference measure of hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 570-585.
- Stiglbauer, B., Gnambs, T., Gamsjäger, M., & Batinic, B. (2013). The upward spiral of adolescents' positive school experiences and happiness: Investigating reciprocal effects over time. *Journal of school psychology*, 51, 231-242.

The U School. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://uschool.philasd.org/>

Wood, A., Froh, J., and Geraghty, A. (2010). Gratitude and well-being: a review and theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review* 30(7), 819–829. doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2010.03.005

Uslu, F., & Gizir, S. (2017). School Belonging of Adolescents: The role of teacher–student relationships, peer relationships and family involvement. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 17(1).

VIA Institute. (2019). Retrieved from <http://www.viacharacter.org>

Wallace, T. L., Ye, F., & Chhuon, V. (2012). Subdimensions of adolescent belonging in high school. *Applied Developmental Science*, 16(3), 122-139.

Yaeger, D.S. (2007). Social and emotional learning programs for adolescents. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 73-94.

Yaeger, D. S., Dahl, R. E., & Dweck, C. S. (2018). Why interventions to influence adolescent behavior often fail but could succeed. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 101–122. DOI: 10.1177/1745691617722620

Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational psychologist*, 47(4), 302-314.

Yeager, D. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2013). An implicit theories of personality intervention reduces adolescent aggression in response to victimization and exclusion. *Child Development*, 84(3), 970–988.

Yaeger, D. S., & Walton, G. M. (2011). Social-psychological interventions in education: They're not magic. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), 267-301.
doi:10.3102/0034654311405999

Appendix A - Measurement and Evaluation of Possi Circles

Milestones Indicating Possi Circle Maturation

Over the course of a school year, particularly freshman year when each Possi first comes together, Possi Circles should undergo a natural progression of growth, moving toward deeper trust, communication, and student leadership. The milestones below are meant to transparently communicate the goals of the Possi Circle, assist in framing clear expectations, and provide a means of assessing the coherence of the Possi as a whole, as the year goes on. They proceed from learning the conventions and expectations (norms) of Circle time, to deepening trust and subsequent sharing from the heart, to gradual transition from adult leadership to student-led Circles. Exact timing remains to be seen, but this is the progression that we would expect to see; stalling out at a certain point indicates the need for the group to reflect on why that is and what the members need in order to move forward. Principal Neil Geyette (personal communication, March 7, 2020) contributed many of these points.

Beginner Level:

- ☐ The purpose of Possi Circle is clearly understood and communicated by the adult leader
- ☐ Daily routine is clearly understood (for morning session and afternoon session)
- ☐ Group has a talking piece
- ☐ Students arrive to Possi on time
- ☐ Students assist in setting up chairs in a circle with no obstructing objects in the middle

Intermediate Level:

- ☐ Community agreements are created, feel personally relevant, and are universally understood
- ☐ Adult leader models participation, shares genuinely
- ☐ Students demonstrate respectful language while in Possi
- ☐ Students ask questions of their peers
- ☐ Students observe the talking piece convention, i.e., one speaker at a time
- ☐ Group can do a Circle with everyone adhering to the norms
- ☐ Students begin to adopt Possi jobs and roles (e.g., choose an opening quote)

Advanced Level:

- ☐ Circle is successfully used to mediate disagreements or injury done between group members
- ☐ Students make suggestions for improvements on the content (i.e., topics or activities), or form of Possi time, indicating ownership, psychological safety, and initiative
- ☐ Adult leader actively shares leadership roles (e.g., introducing a new topic) with students
- ☐ Students demonstrate comfort with approaching adult leader for help, guidance, or meaningful sharing (during or outside of Possi time)
- ☐ Students demonstrate comfort with approaching peers for help, guidance, or meaningful sharing (during or outside of Possi time)

Possi Leader Reflection Form

Possi Leader Weekly Reflection				
Name:			Date:	
Possi Number:				
1. How closely did you stick to the planned Possi outlines?				
Completely	Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not closely	Not at all
2. How closely were students participating in the facilitated activities?				
Completely	Very closely	Somewhat closely	Not closely	Not at all
3. List three specific questions or prompts that led the group into deeper conversations or students toward deeper insights. [This will help you create a bank of valuable conversation resources.]				
1. 2. 3.				
Please add any comment to the questions (if any):				
4. What will you do differently next time?				

Possi Student Reflection Form

Student Quarterly Reflection				
Name:			Date:	
Possi Number:				
1. How often do you ask for help from another student in your Possi Circle?				
Often	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
2. How comfortable do you feel asking help from another student from the Possi Circle?				
Comfortable	Slightly comfortable	Neutral	Slightly uncomfortable	Uncomfortable
3. When no adult is present, how likely do you think students will support each other in the Possi Circle?				
Very likely	Likely	Somewhat likely	Not much likely	Unlikely
4. How comfortable would you be if you were to lead a Possi Circle?				
Comfortable	Slightly comfortable	Neutral	Slightly uncomfortable	Uncomfortable
5. How comfortable would you be if you were in a Possi Circle led by an older student?				
Comfortable	Slightly comfortable	Neutral	Slightly uncomfortable	Uncomfortable
Please list any change you would make to make the Possi Circle a better experience for a student entering the Possi Circle next year:				

Appendix B - Weekly Framework

The existing structure of the Possi Circles is organized in a basic weekly framework:

	Morning Meeting (20 min.)	Afternoon Possi (40 min.)
Monday	Circle, Unpack the Weekend	Refresh on the Week Plan, Business (Naviance Tasks Etc.)
Tuesday	Journaling (Art Response /Question of the Day Response) Circle Share-Out	I (Individual Socio-Emotional Activity)
Wednesday	Journaling (Art Response /Question of the Day Response) Circle Share-Out	We (Collective Socio- Emotional Activity)
Thursday	Journaling (Art Response /Question of the Day Response) Circle Share-Out	Reflect on Success of the Weekly Plan, Create a Plan for the Following Week (In Pairs)
Friday	Public Sharing of Week Plan, Circle	Fun Day (Let Students Choose an Enjoyable Activity to do Together)

We recommend connecting the daily themes to overarching topics of Love, Dream, Do. in support of the school mission and a general focus on self-awareness and building relationships.

	Morning Meeting (20 min.)	Afternoon Possi (40 min.)
Monday - Self	Circle, Unpack the Weekend (with a focus on self)	Refresh on the Week Plan, Business (Naviance Tasks)
Tuesday - Love	Journaling (Connection to Love) Circle Share-Out	I (Individual Social-Emotional Activity)
Wednesday - Dream	Journaling (Connection to Dream - future thinking) Circle Share-Out	We (Collective Social-Emotional Activity)
Thursday - Do	Journaling (Connection to Do - action orientated topic) Circle Share-Out	Reflect on Success of the Weekly Plan, Create a Plan for the Following Week (In Pairs)
Friday - Relationships	Public Sharing of Week Plan, Circle (with focus of community and relationships)	Fun Day (Let Students Choose an Enjoyable Activity to do Together)

Appendix C - Weekly and Monthly Topics

This outline provides a year-long framework of weekly and monthly topics for engaging the school community, building relationships, and promoting the school mission of Love, Dream, Do. This framework supports teacher choice and differentiation of activities based on the student group. The monthly themes can be reorganized to accommodate other school initiatives, national monthly observance (e.g., March is National Nutrition Month, April is Stress Awareness Month) or the grading schedule (for interim discussion, report card reflections, or goal setting). Each month has an identified topic, connections to positive psychology (for further research), and ideas for lessons.

In the following table, the quarterly themes and lesson topics for Q1 and Q2 were previously developed by the U School faculty (indicated in black text). We have made a few additions to the first half of the year and suggest lesson topics for the remainder of the school year (indicated in green text).

Quarterly Themes

Q1: My Path to the U
Q2: What are my scripts?
Q3: Who do I want to be?
Q4: How do I want to be known?

Year One (9th grade) Curriculum

Theme	“I” topic	“We” topic
Q1: “My Path to the U”	1.1 Identity (strengths, kung fu)	
	1.2 Personal Identity “Philly Map”	
	1.3 I Am From poem	Remix into We Are From...
	1.4 Values	
	1.5 Norms: What is community?	Agree on community norms
	1.6 Service Learning Planning	
Q2: “What Are My Scripts?”	2.1 Mental health: EPOCH scale of adolescent well-being	Create own group pillars of well-being
	2.2 Character Strengths	Aware-Explore-Apply
	2.3 Self-Care Plan	
	2.4 Affect System & Human Emotion	
	2.5 Identity	
Q3: “Who Do I Want to Be?”	3.1 Physical health & gratitude	Positivity resonance
	3.2 Power of intentions and self-efficacy	
	3.3 Growth mindset	How to build on team dynamics
	3.4 Dealing with stress	
	3.5 Daily Habits	
Q4: “How Do I Want to Be Known?”	4.1 Mind-body tools	Practice breathing, meditation, mindfulness
	4.2 Self-Talk	
	4.3 Future Possibilities	

	4.4 Resilience	
	4.5 Review of topics Letter of advice to next year's 9th graders	Letter to myself to open first week of next year school

Monthly Themes

September: Shine On

During this month, we will shine a light on the positive at the U School. The U School is full of possibility and has a lot to celebrate. This year, we are creating a wellness community.

Connection to Positive Psychology: belonging to a community, importance of body language

Connection to Possi Themes: (1.1) Identity, (1.2) Personal Identity

Ideas for Activities: Take class photos and create collage on the classroom door, showcase clubs/school groups on the morning announcement, create a hashtag where students can post pictures of their Possi group, discuss the power of a smile and the importance of body language

October: It takes a village

During this month, we will bring awareness to community values and norms. We will learn about personal values, what it means to be part of a community, and the value of relationships.

Connection to Positive Psychology: Community, social norms, relationships

Connection to Possi Themes: (1.4) Values, (1.5) Norms - what is community

Ideas: Create and post class norms, create a class handshake or motto, complete interview project by interviewing three teachers/staff members about their life experiences, showcase a different faculty member each day on the announcements

November: W.A.T.C.H. (Words, Actions, Thoughts, Character, Habits)

During this month, we will bring awareness to personal strengths and how to be a contributing member to a community.

Connection to Positive Psychology: character strengths, community building

Connection to Possi Themes: (1.3) I am Poem, (1.6) Service Learning Project, (2.2) Character Strengths

Ideas: Take the VIA Youth Survey to receive a rank-order list of character strengths, discuss signature strengths, list everyone's top strengths and recognize when strengths are used, showcase groups/clubs on the morning announcements, create a class bulletin board, reach out to local church or organizations for student volunteer opportunities

Resources: VIA Youth Survey at <https://www.viacharacter.org/>; Character Strengths

Interventions: A Field Guide for Practitioners (book) by Ryan M. Niemiec.

December: You'd Better Check Yourself

During this month, we will bring awareness to the importance of well-being and sharing your best self with the community.

Connection to Positive Psychology: Self-care, PERMA

Connection to Possi Themes: Mental health: (2.1) EPOCH scale of adolescent well-being, (2.3)

Self-care plan, create group pillars of well-being

Ideas: Create bulletin board of positive ways to care for yourself, host a music and dance session, have a class puzzle build to engage in a de-stress activity

January: Renew You

During this month, we will learn how to celebrate everyday by examining ways to rejuvenate the mind, body, and soul for the new year!

Connection to Positive Psychology: emotional regulation, intentions, WOOP

Connection to Possi Themes: (2.4) Affect system and human emotion

Ideas: Lesson to introduction breathing and meditation, goal set with WOOP, create a bulletin board of class intentions, organize goal buddies for support and feedback, discuss importance of sleep, revisit self-care plan

February: Heart to Heart

During this month, we will bring awareness to a healthy heart and the power of gratitude. We will focus on how surrounding ourselves with people who support and elevate our progress contributes to our well-being.

Connection to Positive Psychology: importance of physical health, gratitude, connect back to strength spotting

Connection to Possi Themes: (3.1) Physical health & gratitude

Ideas: Learn basic facts about heart health and mind/body tools, write a gratitude letter, write them a thank you note to an important person in your life, write a letter to your favorite teacher, create a walking club to get moving, have a class dance off, create a gratitude tree

March: Am I there yet?

During this month, we will bring awareness to our intentions and how they impact our choices and reactions. Spring is often associated with renewal, so it's a great time to look inward and take a moment to renew your intentions.

Connection to Positive Psychology: intentions, decision making, self-efficacy, growth mindset

Connection to Possi Themes: (3.2) Power of intentions and self-efficacy, (3.3) Growth mindset

Ideas: Lesson on growth mindset, follow up on goal setting and WOOP, revisit the bulletin board on class intentions, make growth mindset banners to hang in the hallway or on the classroom

door, reflect on an upcoming project to create a timeline for checkpoints then revise and collaborate on the work with a goal buddy if possible

Resource: Mindset Scholars <https://mindsetscholarsnetwork.org/learning-mindsets/>

April: The Upside of Stress (National Stress Awareness Month)

During this month, we will bring awareness to the impact of stress and our daily habits.

Connection to Positive Psychology: daily habits, brain plasticity, curiosity

Connection to Possi Themes: (3.4) Dealing with stress, (3.5) Daily habits

Ideas: Lesson on how stress impacts the brain, follow up lesson on the impacts of breathing and meditation, list ways students are impacted by stress to identify healthy ways to overcome the stress, create a living wall to increase oxygen in the school or classroom, laugh, create a chill center in the classroom to help de-stress

May: My future possibilities (National Mental Health Month)

During this month, we will bring awareness to personal empowerment and mindfulness.

Connection to Positive Psychology: self-talk, mindfulness, cultivating optimism

Connection to Possi Themes: (4.1) Mind-body tools, (4.2) Self-Talk, (4.3) Future Possibilities

Ideas: Create a list of positive ways to combat negative self-talk, create a bulletin board of positive affirmations, write and post positive affirmations around the school cafe, hallways or bathrooms, revisit self-care plan, complete the best possible self-activity

Resources: Intro to mindfulness featuring athletes and hip-hop artists (3.5 min.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=up3MZuYkf-g>; 3 min. guided audio practice: "SOBER

Coping Space (and others <http://mindfulnessforteens.com/guided-meditations/>)

June: The Realness of Resilience

During this month, we will bring awareness to resilience that targets the core beliefs of the U School - Love, Dream, Do.

Connection to Positive Psychology: resilience, love, future thinking, action-oriented goals

Connection to Possi Themes: (4.4) Resilience, (4.5) Review of topics and letter of advice to next year's 9th graders


Ideas: Lesson on resilience protective factors, have the class participate in a hula-hoop challenge, form a compliment circle, build a trust walk

General Resources:

- Character Lab Playbooks: “Evidence-based ways to build character in kids.”
<https://characterlab.org/>
 - *Concise presentation of research into topics such as Gratitude, Grit, and Self-Control, focused on actionable advice.*
- Greater Good in Education: "Science-based practices for kinder, happier schools."
https://ggie.berkeley.edu/?_ga=2.218351769.1643116124.1583111781-442962385.1583111781
 - *A wealth of resources on such themes as teacher and student well-being, prosocial academic instruction, and positive school relationships.*
- The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want by Sonja Lyubomirsky
 - *Accessibly written book by a leading researcher and practitioner of Positive Psychology. Includes dozens of practical activities to increase well-being from a variety of angles (e.g., investing in social connections, living in the present, committing to goals)*

Appendix D: Sample Outline for Unit 2.2– Character Strengths

2.2– Monday Lesson

 <p>Possi(bilities) Lessons</p>	Topic:	Character Strengths
	Possi Year:	1
	Lesson #:	2.2 - Monday Focus – Self <i>Intro to Concept</i>
	Objectives:	HOS Links:
<p>Explore concept of character strengths in order to celebrate individuality</p> <p>Identify opportunities to discover personal strengths</p> <p>Develop a common language of strengths to recognize and value core strengths</p> <p>Implement strengths to increase success on personal and academic journeys</p>		
	Additional Resources: VIA website	<i>Character Strengths Interventions: A field guide for practitioners</i> by Dr. Ryan Niemiec

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: Think about your favorite person. This could be a friend, family member, or someone that you look up to (parent, teacher, mentor, athlete, singer, etc.). Describe the characteristics of your favorite person, listing as many qualities as possible.

As a whole group, have each student share out at least one characteristic.

While students are sharing out, write each characteristic on the board to create a common list. (We will use this list throughout the week.)

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct Instruction Style – Explain:

What are Character Strengths?

Character strengths are:

- positive traits that are morally valued
- can relate to the fulfillment of the self and others
- can help to shine light on what is good
- can be a common language identifying the positive
- can provide a new and different way of looking at the world

Make use of technology to show that the VIA website and review the 24 strengths

Ask students – Why do character strengths matter?

Share out a few answers then explain why character strengths matter

Direct Instruction Style – Explain:

Why do Character Strengths matter?

Character strengths matter because:

- there is a connection to improving positive outcomes in life
- there are supporting factors of resilience and happiness
- there can be an increase in improved self-esteem and lowered levels of stress

This week, we will learn about character strengths to increase personal success both in our academic and personal lives.


Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Now that students have general information about character strengths, have students set a prediction.

Exit Ticket: Now that you have a general understanding of character strengths, predict your top five strengths.

(We will use this information tomorrow.)

2.2– Tuesday Lesson

 <p>Possi(bilities) Lessons</p>	Topic:	Character Strengths
	Possi Year:	1
	Lesson #:	2.2 - Tuesday Focus - Love

Objectives:	Explore concept of character strengths in order to celebrate individuality	HOS Links:	
	Identify opportunities to discover personal strengths		
	Develop a common language of strengths to recognize and value core strengths	Materials: (include links to worksheets / activities)	Additional Resources: VIA website <i>Character Strengths Interventions: A field guide for practitioners</i> by Dr. Ryan Niemiec
	Implement strengths to increase success on personal and academic journeys		

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: From yesterday's lesson, how would you describe character strengths to your best friend?

Share out a few answers to check for understanding and build a common language

Redirect and review from yesterday as necessary

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct Instruction Style – Explain:

- VIA comes from Values in Action.
- Using Character Strengths allows us to tap into a strengths-based approach. This may be a process, a behavior, or a mindset that can be used in both your personal life and in your academic life.
- Since each person has different strengths, having the mindset of strengths can help build an appreciation of the positive and can provide a new and different way of looking at the world.
- Understanding personal strengths and spotting strengths in others can be powerful!

Complete of the VIA-Youth survey online <https://www.viacharacter.org>

Print if possible and have students keep strength list in their notebook


Have students review their top five strengths

Share top five with a partner if time allows

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Exit Ticket: List your top five strengths. From yesterday's prediction, how close are your predicted and survey-given strengths? Do you agree with the survey results? What is your biggest surprise?

2.2– Wednesday Lesson

 <p>Possi(bilities) Lessons</p>	Topic:	Character Strengths
	Possi Year:	1
	Lesson #:	2.2 - Wednesday Focus - Dream

Objectives:	Explore concept of character strengths in order to celebrate individuality	HOS Links:	
	Identify opportunities to discover personal strengths		
	Develop a common language of strengths to recognize and value core strengths	Materials: (include links to worksheets / activities)	Personal Strengths Sheet
	Implement strengths to increase success on personal and academic journeys		Additional Resources: VIA website
			<i>Character Strengths Interventions: A field guide for practitioners</i> by Dr. Ryan Niemiec

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: Remember from yesterday - Using Character Strengths helps us to tap into a strengths-based approach. This may be a process, a behavior, or a mindset that can be used in both your personal life and in your academic life. Identify one way you think you could use this information at home and at school.

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct Instruct Style – Explain:

- From the VIA website, each person has all 24 Character Strengths, and we can cultivate any of the strengths.
- The strengths are a combination of traits and virtues that grow and develop with use.
- Strengths may be underused or overused, so check the balance of use!
- With Character Strengths, the top five or six are called Signature Strengths.
- Signature Strengths usually help define the core of who people are and how they interact with the world.
- An easy way to think about Signature Strengths is the 3E's – essential, effortless, and energizing. Meaning, they are essential to who you are, they feel effortless to use, and you feel energized when you use them. They feel comfortable and natural.

Create a Personal Strengths Sheet – identify signature strengths, describe it in your words, what it might look like and sound like in real life.

Post this sheet in a common space in the room or students can keep in their notebook as a daily reminder of their strength.

Note: This sheet could also connect to goal-setting learnings. Students could review goals or set upcoming goals around strengths – a signature strength OR a strength they want to improve. This is an opportunity to deepen understanding or achieve optimal use of an identified strength.

Optional if time allows: Watch video (17:36 min.) “Newark Boys Chorus School and the VIA Survey” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxBcn599-Qk>

While watching the video, look for ways that the students used strengths at home and at school.

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

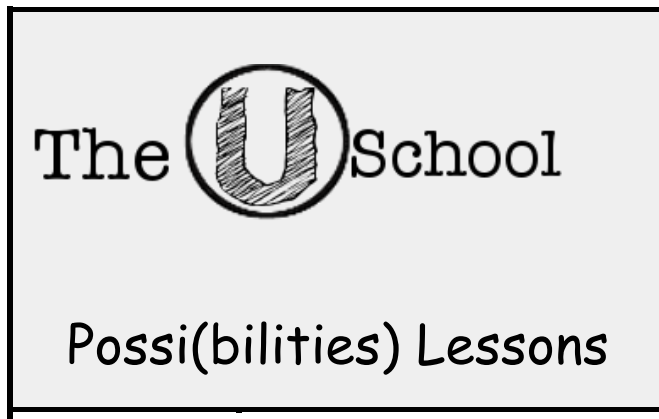
Exit Ticket: The survey reported the rank order of your strengths. Identify your favorite strength and describe how you believe you share this strength with the world.

Questions to consider: How does the strength make you feel when you are using it? Can you give an example of this strength showing up in your actions, thoughts, or emotions? Do other people ever mention that they see you using this strength?

Personal Strengths Worksheet*Name:* _____

Directions: In the box provided, identify your Signature Strengths in ranking order. Describe the strength in your words. What might it look like and sound like in real life?

Signature Strength	Describe the strength in your own words	Describe what this might look like or sound like in your life
#1		
#2		
#3		
#4		
#5		

2.2– Thursday Lesson**Topic:**

Character Strengths

Possi Year:

1

Lesson #:2.2 - Thursday
Focus - Do**Objective:**

Explore concept of character strengths in order to celebrate individuality

Identify opportunities to discover personal strengths

Develop a common language of strengths to recognize and value core strengths

Implement strengths to increase success on personal and academic journeys

HOS Links:

Materials:
(include links to worksheets / activities)

Aware, Explore, Apply handout

Additional Resources:
[VIA website](#)

Character Strengths Interventions: A field guide for practitioners
by Dr. Ryan Niemiec

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: Identify one way that you see character strengths in action in real life

Share out with a partner

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct Instruction Style - Introduce *Aware, Explore, Apply* as a framework to help students explore and discover the use of strengths.

AWARE: Build awareness of strengths by sharing the personal sheet of strengths
Share out with a partner - What surprised you? What was not surprising? How do you define this strength in your own words?

EXPLORE: Allow exploration of strengths
Share out with a different partner – are there strengths that support or encourage other strengths? Consider if there is a balance of overusing or underusing strengths.

APPLY: Find ways to apply strengths in personal and academic life
Using the Personal Strength Sheet, which of your Signature Strengths support your success at school and at home? Explain how using your strength could increase your success.

Note: The Aware-Explore-Apply framework comes from the book:
Niemiec, R. M. (2018). *Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners*.
Boston, MA: Hogrefe Publishing.

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Exit Ticket: Be on the lookout for strengths – You can also spot these strengths in others. In order to let someone know you see their strength, what might this sound like for you?


Aware, Explore, Apply Worksheet

Name: _____

Directions: In the framework provided, work through the process of Aware, Explore, Apply. Think about the following questions and share your thoughts. Be prepared to connect with a partner and share your answers.

Framework	Think About	Your Thoughts
AWARE: Build awareness of strengths by sharing the personal sheet of strengths	What surprised you? What was not surprising? How do you define this strength in your own words?	
EXPLORE: Allow exploration of strengths	Are there strengths that support or encourage other strengths? Consider if there is a balance of overusing or underusing strengths.	
APPLY: Find ways to apply strengths in personal and academic life	Using the Personal Strength Sheet, which of your Signature Strengths supports your success at school and at home? How could using your strength increase your success?	

2.2– Friday Lesson

 Possi(bilities) Lessons	Topic:	Character Strengths
	Possi Year:	1
	Lesson #:	2.2 - Friday Focus –Relationships
Objectives:	Explore concept of character strengths in order to celebrate individuality Identify opportunities to discover personal strengths Develop a common language of strengths to recognize and value core strengths Implement strengths to increase success on personal and academic journeys	
	HOS Links:	
	Materials: (include links to worksheets / activities)	List of Character Strengths to refer to during the lesson Additional Resources: VIA website <i>Character Strengths Interventions: A field guide for practitioners</i> by Dr. Ryan Niemiec

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: Without using your notes, list as many of the VIA Character Strengths that you can remember.

Have the student with the highest number share out their list as a recall of information.

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct Instruction Style – Explain:

Now that we explored Character Strengths all week, let's rethink and identify a person in your life that you respect. This must be a person that you have personal interactions with on a regular basis.

Think of the 24 Character Strengths and identify 4 to 5 strengths that this person displays during their interactions with you (and the community).

Once you have identified the strengths, explain how you see this person using the identified strength. Elaborate on how their use of this strength impacts you and your life.

After brainstorming this information, write a letter to this person explaining how you see them being strong in sharing their strengths with you and the community. You can express to them how this interaction impacts you and your life.

Once this letter is written, set a goal to meet with this individual and share the letter with them.

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Exit Ticket: This letter is a moment of gratitude. How are you feeling about sharing the letter with them? How do you think they will respond?

Strength in Action Worksheet

NAME: _____

Directions: Now that we have explored Character Strengths all week, let's rethink and identify strengths in action.

Step 1: Select a person in your life that you respect. This must be a person that you have personal interactions with on a regular basis.

Write the name of your person on the line provided: _____


Step 2: Think of the 24 Character Strengths. Identify 4 to 5 strengths that this person displays during their interactions with you.	Step 3: Once you have identified the strengths, explain how you see them using this strength.	Step 4: Elaborate on how their use of this strength impacts you and your life.
#1		
#2		
#3		
#4		
#5		

Step 6: After brainstorming this information, write a letter to this person explaining how you see them being strong in sharing their strengths with you and the community. You can express to them how this interaction impacts you and your life.

Once this letter is written, set a goal to meet with this individual and share the letter with them.

Appendix E: Sample Outline for Unit 3.1– Gratitude

3.1– Monday Lesson

 <p>Possi(bilities) Lessons</p>	Topic:	Gratitude	
	Possi Year:	1	
	Lesson #:	3.1– Monday Focus– Self <i>Intro to Concept</i>	
	Objectives:	<p>TODAY: Explore concept of gratitude to build personal well-being</p> <p>FUTURE LESSONS: Tues: Identify opportunities for cultivating gratitude</p> <p>Wed: Develop strategies for practicing gratitude and expressing it to others</p> <p>Thurs: Explore the research showing how gratitude can build relationships</p> <p>Friday: Students identify a fun activity to do together.</p>	HOS Links:
<p>Materials: (include links to worksheets / activities)</p>			<p><u>Resources:</u> NPR Article: If you feel thankful, write it down. It's good for your health.</p> <p>Article: Why gratitude is good</p> <p><u>Materials:</u> Helpful for students to have a journal for writing personal reflections.</p> <p>Need white boards & capacity to play audio.</p>

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Introduce the topic of the week as gratitude. Ask students to do a quick worksheet; reinforce that their answers will be private and for their eyes only. You'll revisit these questions at the end of the week.

On a scale of Very True/Somewhat True/Somewhat False/Very False, rank the following:

- I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a long list.
- I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
- Thinking about the things I have (that others might not) gives me joy.

In a few words, what does gratitude mean to you? How would you define it?

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct Instruction Style – Explain:

What is Gratitude?

- Students pair-share definitions. Designate one person in the pair to write a combined definition on the board.
- Share with them that there are varied definitions
 - “Being aware of and thankful for positive or meaningful things in your life.”
- Four components of gratitude
 - Shared understanding of what it is/ cultural relevance
 - Emotions of gratitude (feelings such as awe, appreciation)
 - Attitudes of gratitude (how often do you rely on gratitude)
 - Expression of gratitude (behaviors such as saying thank you)
- Gratitude is a re-focusing of our attention on positive experiences instead of negative ones.
 - Review Negativity bias: Our brain automatically tends to notice and remember negative events. Counteract that by focusing on positive events to help balance our memories.
- Building awareness and noticing positive things:
 - Taking time to appreciate things you wouldn't normally do, take for granted
 - Feeling grateful vs guilty (tie this to their exit ticket reflection from Mon)
 - Aware of what you get/experience and getting able
 - Aware of things you don't have to think about

Two video options:

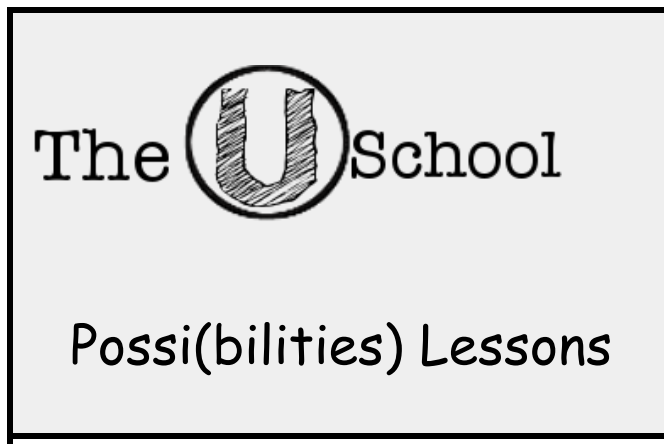
- [Video from Kid President- 25 Things to be Grateful For](#) (cute and a bit young but helpful to see the wide range of things you can be grateful for.)
- [Gratitude is Good for You](#) (3 mins) -- Explains some of the research of gratitude.

This week, we will learn about gratitude to increase our own well-being and our relationships with those around us.

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Journal prompt: Now that you know a little about gratitude, how does it feel for you to talk about gratitude? What emotions come up? (Gratitude, guilt, irrelevance, etc.)

Exit ticket: Start to notice things that you are grateful or thankful for. We'll discuss tomorrow, so your job is to come to class with a few examples of things you're grateful for. How will you record those things that come to mind?

3.1– Tuesday Lesson**Topic:**

Gratitude

Possi Year:

1

Lesson #:3.1– Tuesday
Focus– Love
*Individual Activity***Objectives:***Explore concept of gratitude to build personal well-being***TODAY:**

Identify opportunities for cultivating gratitude

FUTURE LESSONS:

Wed: Develop a few strategies for practicing gratitude of the self and expressing it to others

Thurs: Explore the research showing how gratitude can build relationships

Friday: Students identify a fun activity to do together.

HOS Links:**Materials:**

(include links to worksheets / activities)

Resources:[How gratitude changes the brain.](#)[10 Ways to Become More Grateful.](#)**Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):**

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: From yesterday's lesson, how would you explain gratitude to your sibling, cousin, or family member?

Share out a few answers to check for understanding and build a common language.
Redirect and review from yesterday as necessary

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Focus for today: How does gratitude influence your own well-being?

Group Activity:

As a group, listen to [this NPR](#) article aloud. (3 min playtime - 5 mins total)

Have students think about these guiding questions as they listen:

- According to the article, why is gratitude good for you? How does it promote well-being?
- What is one thing you hear that surprises you?

After listening, discuss your answers to the questions as a large group. (10 mins)

- Advisor can share the research: gratitude matter because:
 - Feel more positive emotions towards yourself
 - Feel more connected to others
 - Feel more optimistic about your future
 - Improved sleep quality

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Personal Reflection: Shout-Out Activity. (10 mins)


Students are reflecting on what they appreciate in the different areas of their life.

Shout-Outs in your Life Worksheet**Name:** _____

Directions: Think about all of the different areas in your life. These shout outs are private, you won't share them with anyone. But think about the good things in each of these groups of people. What would you give them a "shout out" for?

Prompt	Shout Out
Give a "shout out" to your friends - what do you appreciate about them?	<i>I appreciate my friends because ...</i>
Give a "shout out" to your home life - what do you appreciate about it?	<i>I appreciate my home life because ...</i>
Give a "shout out" to your school - what do you appreciate about it?	<i>I appreciate my school because ...</i>
Give a "shout out" to your family - what do you appreciate about them?	<i>I appreciate my family because ...</i>
Give a "shout out" to your YOU - what do you appreciate about yourself?	<i>I appreciate myself because...</i>

3.1– Wednesday Lesson

 <p>Possi(bilities) Lessons</p>		Topic:	Gratitude
		Possi Year:	1
		Lesson #:	3.1– Wednesday Focus– Dream Group Activity
Objectives:	<p><i>Explore concept of gratitude to build personal well-being</i></p> <p><i>Identify opportunities for cultivating gratitude</i></p> <p>TODAY: Wed: Develop a few strategies for practicing gratitude and expressing it to others</p> <p>FUTURE LESSONS: Thurs: Explore the research showing how gratitude can build relationships</p> <p>Friday: Students identify a fun activity to do together.</p>	HOS Links:	
		Materials: (include links to worksheets / activities)	Resources: How Gratitude Helps Friendships Grow.

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Pair Activity

Each person selects one item from their Shout Out Activity they feel comfortable sharing publicly. For 2 mins, Person A shares their example - Person B practices active listening and, when conversation pauses, asks “Why?” or “Tell me more?” Switch roles.

**Adult may need to show an example of what this looks like.*

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Direct instruction & Conversation

How did it feel to talk to each other about something you appreciate?

Today, focus on how appreciating others and yourself can help build relationships with others.

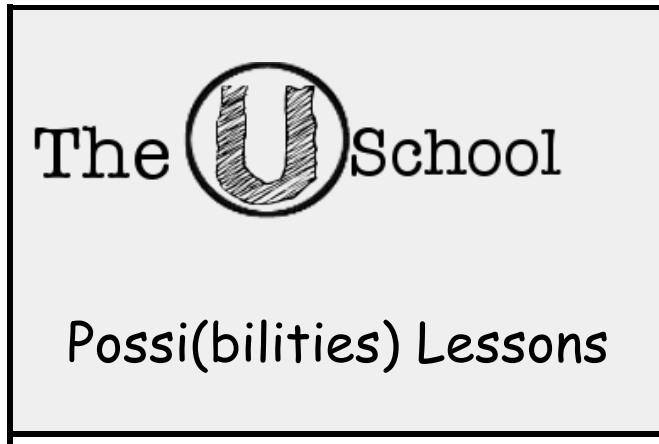
Discussion:

- Relationships are like ... _____? (Have students fill in their own metaphor that relates to their life.)
 - I.e.: Dancing with someone,
- How can appreciation improve your relationships?
 - Suggestions: Responsive to another person's moves, need to anticipate what other is going to do, appreciation for someone's skill or confidence, positive emotions going back and forth
- Research has shown how gratitude can help build relationships.
 - Appreciation for something someone does for you
 - Feel closer to someone who is willing to be helpful
 - Proactively build relationships - you're investing your emotion in them.

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Journal: Think about your shout out's -- choose one person who has been influential in your life. It can be someone who has believed in you or someone who you admire for their strength. In your journal, identify that person and write a few sentences about why you chose that person.

3.1– Thursday Lesson



Topic:

Gratitude

Possi Year:

1

Lesson #:

3.1– Thursday
Focus– Do
Reflect & Plan Ahead

Objective:

*Explore concept of gratitude to build personal well-being**Identify opportunities for cultivating gratitude**Develop strategies for practicing gratitude and expressing it to others***TODAY:**

Explore the research showing how gratitude can build relationships

FUTURE LESSON

Friday: Students identify a fun activity to do together.

HOS Links:

Materials:

(include links to worksheets / activities)

Resources:[An Experiment in Gratitude: YouTube Video](#)**Materials:**

Need capability to watch video & hear audio.

Notecards, envelopes & pens.

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: We know now that gratitude is about being aware of good things that happen in your life. What is one good thing you have noticed in the last 24 hours? What did it mean to you? How can you increase the likelihood of it happening again in the future?

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Group Activity

Take a moment to re-read your exit ticket from yesterday. What feelings come up as you read it?

Research studies show that expressing gratitude is one way of building relationships and boosting your own happiness. We're going to watch a video of one of those studies to show how the act of expressing gratitude can be powerful for your own well-being.

Video Session: An Experiment in Gratitude (7 mins)

[Link to YouTube](#)

Individual Activity

Advisor: hand out note cards and pens to students. Allow students to spread out and write.

- Now you have the chance to share your thoughts with the person of your choice.
- Take the last few minutes to write a note expressing your gratitude. It doesn't have to be long, but it should be heartfelt and concrete.
 - If it's not possible to share with the person they originally chose, have students choose someone else.

Logistics to address:

- *How will the letter get delivered?*
 - *Have students hand-deliver it to a friend or family member.*
 - *If it's a teacher or someone internal, an option for an advisor to pass it along.*


Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Journal: At the beginning of the week, we asked you to answer the following questions. Take a few minutes now to answer them again. Be honest and remember that these questions are totally private.

On a scale of Very True/Somewhat True/Somewhat False/Very False, rank the following:

- I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a long list.
- I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
- Thinking about the things I have (that others might not) gives me joy.

3.1– Friday Lesson

 <p>Possi(bilities) Lessons</p>	Topic:	Gratitude
	Possi Year:	1
	Lesson #:	3.1– Friday Focus– Relationships <i>Fun Activity</i>
Objectives:	Explore concept of gratitude to build personal well-being Identify opportunities for cultivating gratitude Develop strategies for practicing gratitude and expressing it to others Explore the research showing how gratitude can build relationships TODAY: Friday: Students identify a fun activity to do together.	
	HOS Links:	
Materials:	TBD depending on selected activity. Students will need their journals.	
	(include links to worksheets / activities)	

Lesson Launch (5-7 mins):

The lesson launch is a rapid method of laying

Journal: Look at the results of your mini-quiz from Monday and yesterday. Compare your answers to all questions. What are some of the generalized trends you see over the course of the week? I.e: did you generally become more aware of positive things? Less aware? No change? Any answer is OK.

What could explain your personal trends?

Lesson Activity (15 mins):

Introduction and tie to gratitude:

- Research shows that collaboration towards a shared goal is a fun way to build gratitude towards each other.

Since Friday is the Group Activity Day, here are a few ideas of fun relationship-building activities:

- Dance circle: one person goes in the center at a time and shows off a move. Everyone else claps and supports them.
- Appreciation Circle: Each person takes turns holding the talking piece. While they are holding the talking piece, 3-4 people shout out/highlight nice things about that person. Make sure to leave enough time for everyone to go.
- Writing Circle: In a notebook, each person writes the first sentence of a story. Then, everyone passes their notebooks to the right. The next person writes a sentence building on the previous one. Keep going like this until the stories are complete. Take turns reading their story out loud.

Lesson Close (5-7 mins):

Exit Ticket: What did you learn this week about gratitude? Using the framework below, fill it:

When we began this study of gratitude, you had some initial ideas of what it was all about. However, we've spent a week exploring the concept and different applications, so use this moment to reflect on how your thinking has changed. Use the prompts below:

I used to think ... (insert a few sentences)

But now I think ... (insert a few sentences)

After a few minutes, go around the room and have each person share what they wrote.