Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program

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Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program

Abstract
This Capstone provides the rationale and preliminary curriculum for a Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program. One hundred and fifty years before the advent of positive psychology, summer camps were designed to teach children the art of flourishing (Paris, 2008). During that time, camps have organically developed techniques to foster positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment—fundamental building blocks of Martin Seligman’s (2011) PERMA model of wellbeing. As effective as camps are at promoting flourishing, however, they can become even more so by incorporating new insights and techniques from the field of positive psychology. The Camp Certification Program includes five core positive psychology concepts. Each contains a concept overview, discussion of benefits, implementation strategies, and measurement recommendations. The certification course has two goals. First, to enhance the experience for children who attend summer programs by teaching skills and habits that foster flourishing and achievement. Second, to provide a new way to view and value camp’s experiential education to help reposition it as an integral part of children’s development. By integrating positive psychology into modern camping, I hope to build demand for the camp experience and make it available to more children.

Keywords
camp, positive psychology, positive education, positive youth development, wellbeing, children, curriculum, certification, experiential education

Disciplines
Curriculum and Instruction | Early Childhood Education | Education | Educational Administration and Supervision | Educational Leadership | Educational Methods | Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration | Elementary Education | Health and Physical Education | Other Educational Administration and Supervision | Outdoor Education | Teacher Education and Professional Development

Comments
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Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program

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University of Pennsylvania

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Daniel Tomasulo

August 1, 2017
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Keywords: camp, positive psychology, positive education, positive youth development, wellbeing, children, curriculum, certification, experiential education
Dedication

This Capstone is dedicated to my mother Barbara Schainman and my late father Stephen Schainman. With more than a combined 100 years of camp experience between them, and recognition as Legends in Camping by the American Camp Association, they were more than my teachers and mentors in the camp field. They have also been my role models - for how to do good and how to live well.

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Lastly, I would like to thank all of the tremendous camp professionals who have shared their knowledge and wisdom not only with me for the purpose of this Capstone, but also with each other to create an ever-improving environment to teach children the art of flourishing.
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1. Introduction

As the Director of a large children’s summer camp for fifteen years, I believe strongly that camp is more than a place where children typically flourish. It is also an institution that teaches children how to flourish - skills to lead happier, more fulfilling lives far beyond their summer experience. Early research on camp’s impact on children supports this view. A study conducted by Philliber Research Associates surveyed over 5000 families before their camp experiences, immediately afterwards, and again six months later (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Parents reported increases in children’s social skills, leadership, independence, self-image, engagement in new activities and willingness to take on new challenges. Benefits from a camp experience were reported after as little as one week at a day or a resident camp (with more benefits accruing from longer sessions). Research on positive outcomes from camp continues (American Camp Association, n.d.A). As valuable as the camp experience appears to be for children, however, I believe that its benefits can be further enhanced by incorporating concepts, insights and tools from the new field of positive psychology.

The purpose of this Capstone is to propose a preliminary curriculum and implementation strategies for a Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program. Camp is not only a vehicle particularly well-suited to teach children to flourish, it is also an institution strongly positioned to spread positive psychology ideas. Whereas most schools have multiple stakeholders and competing curricular objectives (e.g. funding tied to Common Core curriculum), camps have potentially strong financial incentives to incorporate and promote positive psychology.
1.1 Improving Camp and Expanding Camp Using Positive Psychology

Positive psychology, discussed in detail in Section 3, focuses on helping people of all ages live more fulfilling lives. It focuses on fostering more positive emotion, stronger relationships, and deeper purpose. New research from the field may make camps significantly more effective at teaching children skills to help them flourish. This is a worthwhile goal in itself. However, I also have a second, broader objective. My hope is that, by explicitly incorporating positive psychology, summer camp can be repositioned as a vehicle for teaching children life skills that I believe are more difficult to learn in school settings. (The components of camp that make it distinctive from school and promote children’s flourishing are explored in Section 2.1). While some parents already see camp as important experiential education that fosters social and character development (in addition to teaching activity-focused skills like swimming, tennis, or arts), many still view it simply as recreation. Leaders in professional camping have worked for decades to promote camp as an educational institution, though with frustratingly mixed success (J. Ackerman, July 5, 2017). Positive psychology can provide a framework and vocabulary for showing how and why camp benefits children. Thus, the proposed certification program is intended both to 1) make the camp experience more impactful for children who already attend, and 2) ultimately make that experience available to more children by highlighting and strengthening camps’ position as a unique and important educational institution.

Getting more children to attend camp requires increasing demand for, and the supply of, summer programs. Camp is not mandated in the United States. Only about 12% of American children attend summer camp (American Camp Association, n.d.A.). To increase demand, I hope that a certification program will provide camp professionals and educators with vocabulary and
research to persuade parents that camp should be a priority for their children’s development. To increase supply, I seek to provide camp professionals, policy makers, not-for-profit organizations and others with new ways to articulate the value of camp to help them secure more funding and create more camps. Camp is expensive, and our country already puts substantial resources into children’s academic education. For parents, not-for-profit organizations and governments to spend even more on adding camp programs, there must be a strong, evidence-based rationale that camp has a substantial positive impact on children.

1.2 The Importance of Highlighting Both Flourishing and Accomplishment at Camp

At first glance, one might assume that if camp promotes children’s flourishing – making happier, healthier, more social and more resilient children – little more would need to be done to convince parents to send children to camp, or to prompt governmental and non-governmental institutions to fund camp. My experience, however, is that this is not enough. While it is hard to conceive of any parent or organization that would be against such goals, I do not believe that the objective of teaching children to flourish is compelling enough to energize a broad expansion of camping. Any successful attempt to increase demand for camp must meet other priorities of those who choose, support and fund camps. For many, fostering children’s achievement is at least as powerful a driver of parental, institutional and governmental decision-making.

In today’s competitive economy, more and more emphasis is placed upon children’s academic success and job-readiness (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Parents are more and more anxious about their children’s ability to succeed in an increasingly competitive world. A recent study shows that children’s academic and vocational success is just as important to parents as their children’s happiness (ComRes, 2016). American government and business are also concerned about children’s ability to compete in the global marketplace. In 2010, a survey of
over 400 companies was conducted by the American Management Institute (AMA), in cooperation with the Project for 21st Century Skills (P21), an organization that brings together business, education, and government. The survey found that today’s workforce is largely unprepared, lacking the skills needed in the modern workplace (AMA 2010 Critical Skills Survey, n.d.). These subpar skills include collaboration, creativity, leadership, adaptability, initiative and self-direction. P21 believes strongly that summer camp is particularly adept at fostering these skills in children. Under the leadership of Camp Director Scott Brody (personal communication, February 13, 2017), P21 has partnered with the American Camp Association (ACA) to promote camping for just this reason (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, n.d.).

Whether this goal should be on equal footing with the aim of teaching children skills to live happier, more fulfilling lives is, for the purposes of this analysis, moot. Children’s achievement currently is a high priority for parents, institutions and government. Preparing children to succeed in the modern workplace is undoubtedly important, and parents are understandably anxious about their children’s economic and career prospects. Hence, to ensure that the camp positive psychology certification program maximizes appeal to all constituencies, special attention will be paid to how its initiatives can foster children’s academic and potential vocational success, even while it nurtures their overall flourishing.

Fortunately, promoting achievement and promoting wellness are complimentary goals for camps. Even as P21 focuses on how camp promotes “non-academic” skills (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, n.d.) such as cooperation, introducing positive psychology concepts into camp curriculum may also improve academic performance. In fact, there is strong evidence that it would. In a landmark set of experiments, Alejandro Adler (2016) introduced camp-like wellness-building programs to over one million children in Bhutan, Mexico and Peru. With randomized
assignment, some schools taught skills like building positive peer relationships, increased physical activity, savoring and resilience. These initiatives took significant time away from academic courses. Nevertheless, children who received experiential education that focused on overall flourishing performed substantially better on standardized tests than control groups from the same countries. As the American camp industry seeks to find connections between camp and academic achievement, they should be inspired by the success seen internationally in countries that are creating happier and more academically accomplished children by teaching positive psychology concepts and camp-like skills.

1.3 Camps vs. Schools - Institutions to Incorporate and Spread Positive Psychology Ideas

Institutions and individuals respond to incentives. And, I believe, camps have far stronger incentives to integrate positive psychology into their programs than schools do.

Almost all schools in the United States are public (or, in the case of charter schools, supported with public funds and accountable for testing outcomes like public schools). They have multiple stakeholders (e.g. school boards, administration, teachers, teachers’ unions, parents, and local, state and federal government), goals (e.g. imparting information, developing reasoning and problem-solving skills, preparing children for standardized testing) and incentives (e.g. financial rewards for teachers and funding for schools tied to testing). As a result, the decision to teach flourishing at public schools becomes a political one - at the school, local, or state level. Even if there is political will to prioritize teaching positive psychology ideas and practices, there will always be competition from other incentivized priorities (i.e. Common Core). Public schools (and individual classroom teachers) can certainly be effective at teaching children to flourish. However, schools do not have strong financial incentives to do so.
Conversely, camps do have potentially strong financial incentives to focus on teaching flourishing. Virtually all camps are private (seeking revenue from families) or not-for-profit (seeking funding from governmental or non-governmental sources). If parents and funders can be convinced that children’s flourishing – with its positive impact on academic and non-academic achievement – should be a priority, camps are rewarded with profits or financial support if they focus on it. Without competing stakeholders and incentives, camps can prioritize positive psychology teaching to meet parents’ and funders’ demand. Camps also have the incentive to market and ‘sell’ the importance of children’s flourishing to build this demand. This combination of incentives and flexibility (fewer stakeholders and missions) makes camp a more nimble and motivated institution to highlight and teach wellness than public schools. Camps do have to balance positive psychology teaching with other benefits that they offer, but the extent that they will focus on children’s flourishing skills will rise if demand does.

1.4 Additional Beneficiaries of Camp Positive Psychology Initiatives

Children are not the only ones who stand to benefit from widespread inclusion of a positive psychology curriculum in camping. Several other groups may be impacted in ways that build their own wellbeing - while also spreading and popularizing positive psychology ideas. The first group is staff who are trained to teach positive psychology at camp. Counselors, supervisors and administrators may themselves learn important skills from the training they receive, and from the teaching ideas to children. Through what is sometimes called the “Protégé effect”, the act of teaching others is a particularly powerful tool for learning and deeply integrating ideas (Chase, Chin, Oppezzo, & Schwartz, 2009).

How large an impact might counselors’ involvement in teaching positive psychology have? An estimated fourteen million American children attend camps (American Camp
Association, n.d.A.). If, say, the national average camp staff-to-camper ratio is 1:5, and twenty percent of camps were to adopt positive psychology initiatives, then more than a quarter of a million high school and college students, teachers, and others would get a meaningful exposure to the new science of human flourishing. This number is the equivalent of 10% of all American college students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d). These staff benefits would not be confined to the United States. Programs like CCUSA (CCUSA, n.d.) bring thousands of young men and women from around the world to work in American camps. Exposure that they receive in camp jobs could help spread positive psychology awareness and teachings globally.

A camp certification program in positive psychology could also help students and camp in additional ways. Camps, under the direction of the ACA or other organizations, could create for-credit high school or college summer courses that would combine an online learning component (to be developed) with reflective writing about working with children and teaching them positive psychology concepts. Such courses would result in stronger demand for camp jobs by students, better trained and more effective staff, lower educational costs (as staff get paid while taking courses – which might even be sponsored by camps to attract top staff), and an even broader exposure to ideas about how children and adults can flourish.

The second group to benefit from introducing positive psychology to camp is teachers and coaches, many of whom work in camp programs during the summer. Camp positive psychology initiatives are an efficient and economical opportunity to spread important ideas and techniques into classrooms, ballfields and other child-development settings. It is expensive and logistically challenging for schools to take educators away from their classrooms to learn positive psychology techniques, even if doing so is a high priority for the school or district. From my own experience with over 120 teachers on staff each summer, I have seen how effective
Camp can be in introducing teachers to positive psychology concepts which they in turn implement in their own classrooms. I have heard many stories from my staff of their energizing positive psychology focus working its way into their colleagues’ classrooms, and even inspiring school administrators.

The third group to benefit from camp positive psychology programs is parents. Camp Directors have a strong marketing incentive to educate parents on ways that they are teaching children to become happier, more resilient, more social, and stronger achievers. This marketing and information-sharing can provide parents with a strong exposure to positive psychology. Parents can also learn how they too can apply its lessons at home. Positive psychology certainly does not hold all the answers to effective parenting; it is an evolving science. However, many techniques and interventions have been tested and replicated, making them strongly evidence-based tools for helping children.

Traditionally, encouraging parenting education is delicate and difficult. Many will question its efficacy or balk if they feel threatened by the possibility that their learning about parenting techniques will challenge their own efforts. However, camp may offer a gentle way to share useful information. If families see that their children are benefiting from positive psychology-inspired practices at camp, they may become curious, choose to learn about the field, and try new techniques. Further, this exposure to positive psychology may facilitate its adoption in schools. If parents learn about positive psychology benefits through camp experiences, they may in turn advocate introducing similar focus and strategies into their children’s classrooms.

In summary, even the modest adoption of a positive psychology focus by camps could have an enormous impact. If just ten percent of camps adopted positive psychology into their programs, nearly 1.5 million children could learn new skills to make them happier, more resilient
and more successful (American Camp Association, n.d.A.). If parents of these 1.5 million children see noticeable positive changes in their children, they are more likely to share their experiences with friends, increasing demand for camping. As demand and recognition of benefits grow, government and other institutions may put resources towards camping. And, additionally, hundreds of thousands of young staff and teachers associated with American summer camping – and millions of parents - could learn the fundamentals and promise of positive psychology.

Before exploring the details of what a camp certification program might look like, let us explore summer camp and the field of positive psychology in more depth.

2. American Summer Camp

Summer camps may well be the first modern organizations specifically designed to foster flourishing. In the 1860s, camps were created explicitly to provide children growing up in “corrupt” urban settings with an opportunity to experience positive community living, recreation, and nature (Paris, 2008). Taking place during school vacations, camps were intentionally non-academic. They employed what is today called “Experiential learning”, an orientation where learning develops by doing (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2001). Other defining elements of camps from their earliest days included spending time away from family, learning from positive adult and young-adult role models, participating in high-engagement activities that emphasize physical and social skill-building, and being challenged in ways that teach the value and rewards of effort (Thurber, 2009). Before the twentieth century, camps were exclusively residential (sleepaway), lasted several weeks to entire summers, and took place throughout upstate New York and New England (Paris, 2008). They employed ritual (often based upon idealized perceptions of Native American culture) and group-focused games or projects in order to form tight-bonded communities. Then – as now – many adults who attended summer camp as
children recount it as one of their most enjoyable and formative life experiences (Thurber, 2009). In interviews, adults often credit camp for building their independence, identity, values and social skills (Hulleman et al., 2017). One broad study, thousands of children at a variety of camps were asked to rate their overall summer experience. The mean rating was 8.79 out of 10 (Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007). This is not to say that every child has a positive experience at camp, or that all camps deliver upon the promise of fun, friendship and inclusion. Not every child will have a transformative experience. Nevertheless, the very structure and purpose of camp is to deliver positive experiences and develop physical, creative, character-building and life skills experientially (Paris, 2008). This focus, along with the characteristics described in Section 2.1, make camp an institution uniquely positioned to show and teach what it means to flourish.

Today, over 14,000 American camps serve more than fourteen million children (American Camp Association, n.d.A.). Typically, children attend camp between the ages of three and fifteen, though some camps cater to even younger and older campers. Camps now come in a wide variety of forms. There are day camps where children return home each afternoon, resident camps where they live away from home, and travel camps where they explore nearby attractions or faraway destinations. Some camps last a week or less, while others require children to attend for entire summers. There are camps that focus on building specific high-level athletic, creative, hobby, scientific, or academic skills like basketball, ceramics, chess, or robotics (specialty camps), while others expose children to a variety of activities (traditional camps). Certain camps have targeted missions (e.g. religious or environmental camps) or work with specific populations (e.g. low-income, special needs, or grief camps). There are private, not-for-profit, school-based, and municipal camps.
[Note: There are also a wide variety of non-academic, experiential learning programs that lie outside of most definitions of camp. These include afterschool programs, sports leagues, and weekend recreational programs. I exclude these from this analysis because they do not carry key camp features such as young counselor role-models or extended time away from family, discussed in Section 2.1.]

From my years of experience and those of other Directors, parents view camp in different ways and send their children to camp for many reasons (J. Ackerman, personal communication, July 5, 2017; J. Buck, personal communication, May 2, 2017). Many parents see camp as simply recreation or an enhanced type of childcare. Others value camp as a key contributor to their children’s social, emotional and character development. The mission of the American Camp Association (ACA) is, “To enrich the lives of youth and adults” (American Camp Association, n.d.C). Regardless of whether they have a defined mission, or explicitly incorporate positive psychology, camps of almost any form, scope, length or purpose can benefit children in numerous ways (Thurber et al., 2007). However, I believe that camps of any type or purpose can be enhanced by employing positive psychology ideas and research.

I am not alone in seeing positive psychology as an important part of the future of camping. VOCE (Veterans of the Camping Experience), an organization of ACA Directors with at least fifteen years of experience, recently met at the nation’s largest camp conference and agreed that incorporating positive psychology to enhance camp may be the most important initiative currently available to ensure both the relevance of summer camp and its financial success in the coming decades (ACA TriState Camp Conference, personal communication, March, 2016). They agree with my belief that explicitly tying positive psychology initiatives to
camping has the potential to build widespread recognition of camp as an important educational institution that contributes to children’s flourishing and achievement.

2.1 Components of Modern Summer Camp and How They Benefit Children

Before exploring positive psychology and how it may be used to enhance camps, it is important to define the core elements of today’s American summer camp. As noted in Section 1, while positive psychology insights may further improve camp, I and others believe that core features of camp already effectively promote children’s flourishing (Thurber et al., 2007). Understanding these components of camp deepens an understanding of what camp is and the mechanisms through which it delivers benefits. With this knowledge, camps can better explain not only that they positively impact children, but also how they do so. Research supporting these components can, before enhancing camp with positive psychology initiatives, make a strong case that camp should be a higher priority for children’s development.

The aggregate impact of camp on children is difficult to study because of expense, logistics, creating control groups, and many confounds that can affect results. However, defining the fundamental elements of camp can form a framework for collecting and examining existing research on how these components individually benefit children. Combining evidence that supports the impact of each component would make a powerful case that the overall camp experience produces important outcomes. This case can then be strongly augmented by including evidence from new positive psychology initiatives.

There is an additional reason for defining camp’s core features. Many of these elements can also be leveraged when implementing a positive psychology program at camp, as discussed in Section 4.5.
The list of core camp features below is one which I have created in conjunction with several prominent camp directors, members of the ACA, and camp researchers (J. Ackerman, personal communication, February 27, 2017; S. Baskin, personal communication, May 10, 2017; A. Pritikin, personal communication, February 17, 2017; S. Lambert, personal communication, February 16, 2017; M. Thompson, personal communication, May 23, 2017; C. Thurber, personal communication, May 29, 2017). Despite its attempt to define camp, this list cannot be considered global or definitive. That said, the group that I polled produced near consensus on the following items as core features of modern summer camp. Nearly all camps contain these features, and most programs strive to incorporate these elements if resources are available (C. Thurber, personal communication, May 29, 2017).

**Fundamental components of camp that can foster children’s growth and wellness, include:**

A. Experiences away from parents

B. Positive role models (counselors) from outside the family

C. Highly social, collaborative peer group living (resident camp) or other group experiences (day camp)

D. Positive peer social norms

E. High-engagement activities

F. Non-academic, experiential learning

G. Play, and/or teaching through playful experiences

H. Focus on producing positive emotions

I. Physical activity

J. Exposure to nature (when possible)
K. Limited access to electronics, particularly cell phones and social media (camps do vary in allowing cell phones and other devices, based on both mission and parental expectations)

L. Values and character development goals that include being a good group and community member, respect for self and others, kindness and friendship, environmental stewardship, hard work and the importance of effort and perseverance, learning through safe risk-taking, and others.

As noted above, research exists on how many of these components produce or can produce benefits for children. As an example, children who do not have structured days during the summer (as they would at camp) are far more susceptible to inactivity and obesity (Carrel, Clark, Peterson, Eickhoff, & Allen, 2007). As a second example, play is a mechanism for building High Quality Connections (HQC) - strong dyadic connections marked by increased trust, self-efficacy, collaboration, social awareness, and positive identity-formation (Stone, 1989; Dutton, 2003; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011). Such research largely falls outside the scope of the initiative to build a positive psychology curriculum for camps. Nevertheless, it is part of the full articulation of camp’s value. From this starting place, the case for the value of camp can be strengthened by adding evidence of positive psychology’s impact on flourishing and achievement. Also, the current popularity of positive psychology and freshness of its insights can be leveraged by camps to attract parents and media attention in order to promote the full range of camp benefits.

I strongly recommend that the American Camp Association and others aggregate such research on camping’s components to create a full picture of camp’s importance, and synthesize and disseminate the findings to camps. I also recommend that further study be done on camp outcomes independent of the introduction of positive psychology. Specifically, I recommend
studies on a) how each of the defining elements of camp promote children’s flourishing, b) the factors that make each of these components more or less effective, and under what circumstances, and c) how, in combination, these features can compound benefits for children. Studies on the effectiveness and mechanisms of these camp components should supplement ongoing research into the overall benefits of the camp experience, as well as the impact of positive psychology initiatives.

2.2 American Camping Versus International Camping

While this project focuses on American summer camp, the camp experience is now global. Camps of wide range of missions and forms have taken hold around the world. This expansion has taken place with the support of information-sharing through organizations like the International Camping Fellowship (ICF), the Asia Oceania Camping Fellowship (AOCF) and Australian Camps Association (International Camping Fellowship, n.d.), as well as the American Camp Association. Exciting programs include camps that promote friendship and mutual understanding amongst warring nations (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.), experiments that bring children and staff together who do not speak the same languages to develop deep understanding of human interaction, and programs attached to schools to teach the value of perseverance and struggle. Outward Bound, for example, has taught adolescents and adults wilderness skills and how to overcome adversity since its creation in Great Britain in 1934 (Outward Bound International, n.d.). Notably, Geelong Grammar School, a private school in Australia that has enthusiastically embraced Positive Psychology in its mission and education, includes a year-long program of highly-challenging outdoor group living in its Timbertop Program (McDonough, DeCoste, Flynn, & Biette, 2014.). The reason that this paper focuses on American camping is first, because that is my area of expertise, second because camping is a
larger part of American culture than it is abroad, third because camps and the camp industry is
more developed in the US because it has evolved for a century and a half, and fourth because
American camping remains the primary model for international camps (J. Ackerman, personal
communication, July 5, 2017).

In summary, summer camp is more than recreation, and more than play. Summer camp
teaches *through the use of* recreation and play (C. Thurber, personal communication, May 29,
2017). With this in mind, let us turn our attention to positive psychology - its goals and methods
- and how insights from the field can enhance modern camping.

3. Positive Psychology

Throughout most of its history, the field of psychology’s primary focus has been to
relieve suffering. And, over the past century, the psychology has made enormous strides towards
understanding the causes of a wide range of ailments and ways to treat them. However, the field
of psychology once had broader aims. Prior to World War II, psychology had three goals: to
relieve suffering, to make people’s lives more fulfilling, and to promote achievement (Seligman
& Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Over the past seventy years, psychology’s emphasis on using
scientific methods to study and promote human flourishing and achievement has been eclipsed
by its pursuit of healing. In his inaugural address to the American Psychological Association,
then new APA president Martin Seligman proposed that the field once again broaden its focus
(Seligman, 1999). Without turning away from the goal of mitigating and preventing mental
illness, he proposed that as much time and as many resources be spent on understanding and
promoting what makes life worth living. In other words, positive psychology recognizes that
promoting happiness is a different endeavor from avoiding unhappiness (Seligman, 2012).
Positive psychology, however, does not simply examine what makes people “happy” – a vague term that is not consistent between cultures or over time (McMahon, 2008). Nor does it confine itself to the hedonic study of pleasure. Positive psychology promotes and studies “the good life” as a “science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). However, the field recognizes the complexity of what constitutes “the good life”. It does so by acknowledging the full range of human experiences – positive and negative – and taking a multifaceted approach to human flourishing (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Sheldon & King, 2001). However, whereas traditional psychology seeks to promote a good life by meliorating weaknesses, positive psychology approaches the task by building and capitalizing on strengths (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2014).

Several models for what elements make up the good life have been proposed (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Diener, 2000; Prilleltensky et al., 2015). One such model, created by Martin Seligman (2012), identifies five independent factors that contribute to wellbeing. I have selected this model, called PERMA (Positive emotion, Engagement, positive Relationships, Meaning and Achievement), because its components are easily understandable and tie directly into the experience and mission of most camps. Positive emotion, through a focus on fun and play, is a primary goal of virtually all camps – as well as a tool for imparting values and skills (J. Ackerman, personal communication, July 5, 2017). Camps also produce high engagement, where children find “flow” by losing themselves in the enjoyment of a physical, creative, nature, or other activities. Building positive relationships – through explicit camp values or the experience of spending time in peer groups with positive social norms and modelling from counselors (C. Thurber, personal communication, May 29, 2017), is also a defining feature of a camps. And, by
building athletic, creative, personal and interpersonal skills via experiential learning (Kolb et al., 2001), campers develop meaning and experience achievement.

3.1 Positive Psychology Interventions – Putting Theory into Practice at Camp

Creating models for understanding human wellness and flourishing is, however, only half of the mission of positive psychology. The other half is to develop and test methods that foster wellness and increase flourishing. Positive psychology seeks to identify approaches – on an individual, group, or organizational level – to actively promote flourishing (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). These are called Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs). Typically, when one thinks of the term “intervention”, one imagines a person or group intervening when they believe that someone is experiencing difficulty or is in danger. PPIs function differently. They are practices and strategies designed to benefit individuals or groups in ways that create or build upon strengths. While this strength-based approach can also be helpful to clinical populations, including those with depression or anxiety, they are primarily designed to promote flourishing for non-clinical populations. Because many find the term “intervention” confusing or disconcerting, I prefer to think of PPIs as activities that one might find in a self-help or managerial effectiveness book, but with scientific evidential backing.

An example of a PPI is a “Gratitude visit” (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). In this initiative, which can be done by adults and older children, a participant writes a letter to someone who has had a significant positive role in his or her life. The letter expresses thanks for how this person – e.g. a mentor, parent, teacher or friend – impacted the writer. The writer then visits or calls the subject of the letter and reads it aloud. While this is not the type of PPI that I would typically recommend for a camp because of logistical challenges (though it can certainly be done), it does illustrate the difference between a positive psychology
intervention and a traditional intervention. It also demonstrates the potential lasting benefits from even a brief PPI. In one study of 89 children and adolescents in 3rd, 8th and 12th grades, a single gratitude letter and visit measurably increased participants’ self-reported life satisfaction four weeks after a single visit (Mallen Ozimkowski, 2007).

PPIs are not merely temporary mood-boosters. Meta-analyses of PPIs have demonstrated significant and lasting positive changes from an assortment of different initiatives (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). No PPI is effective for everyone or in every environment. This “Person-fit” challenge affects how and how many different PPIs should be used in a camp setting. A pragmatic strategy is to employ a variety of concurrent interventions. This has the dual benefit of maximizing chances that at least some interventions will have a substantial positive impact, and create the potential for additional benefit from compounding positive effects. In other words, forming a virtuous cycle or “upwards spiral.” For example, one intervention may target producing more positive emotion, and another may increase savoring – defined as the enhancement and extension of positive emotions through deliberate attention (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). An increase in positive emotion from the first initiative can provide more opportunity for savoring, which in turn produces more positive emotion. Employing several PPIs simultaneously at camp does have a drawback, however. Doing so makes measurement of the efficacy of any one initiative more difficult. Using multiple PPIs may make it impossible to tease out which camp intervention is the cause of any given change.

3.2 Measuring the Effectiveness of Positive Psychology Interventions at Camp

This measurement question is significant, because it is important to know which camp PPIs are working, which should be discontinued, and which should be altered. Positive psychology is an evidence-based field. It is not enough to claim that camp PPIs are having a
positive impact on children. Far more powerful – and genuine – is to provide genuine evidence that children are benefiting from employing PPIs, even in combination where it may be unclear which PPIs are leading to which outcomes. Because measurement is so critical to demonstrating efficacy, the camp certification course, covered in Section 4, not only explores evidence that PPIs are effective in other contexts. It also provides, wherever reasonable in a camp setting, suggestions on how to measure specific PPI’s effectiveness when used at camp.

Camp PPI measurements are intended to provide more than anecdotal evidence that the programs are having a positive impact. They are not meant, however, to provide “gold standard” scientific testing - randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind experiments. Such measurement is unrealistic at camp. The measurements provided in Section 4.4 are designed to, very generally, show that the positive psychology certification activities proposed are producing globally positive effects. However, the suggested measurements may also provide a basis for teasing out which positive outcomes can be reasonably attributed to which PPIs. Imperfect as these separations may be – for example, methods used to teach savoring may be impacted by strategies that teach mindfulness – they offer a starting place to make educated guesses about which initiatives are having an impact. Camps should use evidence that PPIs deployed in combination benefit children to promote camp, positive psychology and positive education. Meanwhile, they should use individual measures of PPI effectiveness in camps to fine-tune and improve initiatives with the best information available. Camps can then alter or discontinue individual initiatives based on their own information, and information shared from other camps trying PPIs.

A further recommendation is that the camp industry, and the American Camp Association specifically, pilot PPIs individually at different of camps. These experiments could use
randomized subject assignment and control groups, within or between camps. Such studies could measure outcomes and infer causation for each PPI. These experiments would certainly include many confounds (differences in camper group makeup and interactions between campers, different staff members, lengths of time at camp, quality of programs and programs for different ages, impact of choice activities, etc.). Such experiments would nonetheless provide evidence of efficacy and effect sizes for different PPIs. However, conducting experiments on each PPI would be very resource-intensive and logistically complex. Therefore, I recommend beginning by employing the less exacting measures suggested in section 4 to gather broad evidence that combinations of positive interventions are producing positive results. If such evidence is strong, more elaborate (and expensive) measures can be pursued in the future.

3.3 Positive Psychology Interventions, Children, Education, and Camp

Understanding the nature of PPIs, one might reasonably ask whether they are effective for children and, if so, whether they can be effectively implemented in the relatively short timeframe of summer camp.

Many PPIs that have proven successful for adults have not yet been tested on children. When working with children, interventions typically require modification, and such modification also introduces potential confounds. Also, PPIs successful with one population are not necessarily successful with others (Bolier et al., 2013). Further, measuring short- and long-term outcomes of interventions is particularly difficult with children. Testing outcomes during pre-adolescence (typically before age 13) is challenging because this stage is characterized by rapid developmental change (Sengstock & Hwalek, 1990). Then there is the potential that meaningful changes made in children’s behavior, mental habits or values when younger can be significantly
altered during the significant brain “rewiring” (myelination and synaptic pruning) that takes place during adolescence (Giedd et al., 1999).

Despite these challenges and limitations, various studies conducted in the fields of Positive Education (PE) and Positive Youth Development (PYD) – two fields that apply positive psychology principles to education and children - provide evidence that many interventions done with children and adolescents do create meaningful and lasting change (Seligman et al., 2009; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004). Several PPIs have even been shown to make children profoundly less susceptible to depression and anxiety, as well as reducing behavioral problems and other impediments to learning and wellness (Brunwasser & Gillham, 2009). While longitudinal research is still needed to better assess the long-term impact of PPIs after the brain’s rewiring during adolescence, it should be noted that all initiatives to teach children positive behaviors and values run a similar risk. Childhood and adolescence are times of rapid change with sometimes volatile developmental process, but that should not curtail efforts to raise happy, healthy, capable children.

Acknowledging some research gaps with child-focused PPIs, it is clear that many done with children in elementary school, like those used in the Penn Optimism Program, have shown sustained benefits years after the interventions (Seligman, 2007). And, in regards to the short timeframe of camp, in should be noted that many successful interventions conducted with children can be completed in days, weeks, or, sometimes, hours (Seligman et al., 2009). In fact, some PYD programs have already been conducted and tested in camp settings (Lerner, 2005). In summary, much research has yet to be done on the adaptability and long-term effect of PPIs in children, and there will always be questions about how applicable any given intervention is to a given child in any environment. Nevertheless, early research supports successfully employing a
strengths-based approach to teaching children skills to flourish. With these caveats, along with a deeper understanding of camp and positive psychology, let us turn focus to the framework, strategies and specifics of a positive psychology certification program for camps.

4. Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program - Improving Camp as Vehicle for Fostering Children’s Wellbeing

In the sections below will present

1. The framework for the positive psychology certification course, including the five positive psychology concepts chosen

2. What makes this initiative different from other efforts to bring positive psychology into camping

3. Criteria for selecting the positive psychology concepts


5. Strategies for Successful Implementation
4.1 Framework for Certification Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 Positive Psychology Concepts Included in Initial Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Growth Mindset</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The extent to which people believe that their intelligence and capability are largely malleable and learnable, versus genetic and talent-based (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, &amp; Dweck, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resilience</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ability to bounce back from adversity, navigate daily challenges, and seek new challenges based on confidence that one can handle disappointments or setbacks (Reivich &amp; Shatte, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Savoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The practice of deliberately focusing awareness to enhance, extend, and draw forth positive emotions or sensations (Bryant &amp; Veroff, 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expanded Physical Activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incorporating more physical activity, and different types because physical activity is even more important to wellbeing than previously understood, contributing to positive emotion, self-efficacy, and enhanced learning (Sattelmaier &amp; Ratey, 2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindfulness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purposeful exertion of control over attention; slowing down and attending to the present moment non-judgmentally (Davidson et al., 2012).</td>
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*Each concept will include 4 parts*

- **I. Overview**
  - The concept and research supporting it
- **II. Benefits**
  - For children and others
- **III. Implementation**
  - Program integration and staff training
- **IV. Measurement**
  - Proposed measurements

4.2 What Makes this Camp Positive Psychology Course Different

Making camp into a more effective vehicle for benefiting children is not a new concept. Nor is the idea of bringing positive psychology concepts into camping. Camp consultants including Chris Thurber (personal communication, May 29, 1017) and Michael Brandwein (personal communication, March 8, 2017), and American Camp Association leaders like Steve...
Baskin (personal communication, May 10, 2017), Andy Pritikin (personal communication, February 17, 2017) and Scott Brody (personal communication, February 13, 2017), have championed incorporating positive psychology in camping for several years. Recent keynote speakers at major ACA conferences have included notable positive psychology researchers Angela Duckworth, Shawn Achor, and Scott Barry Kauffman (Andy Pritikin, personal communication, February 17, 2017). However, this proposed course and certification addresses five gaps in camps’ efforts to integrate positive psychology by providing:

1) **Step-by-step instructions to implement positive psychology at camps.** The goal of this course is to provide specific and concrete strategies, activities and measurements that empower camp professionals unfamiliar with positive psychology to quickly understand key ideas, how to integrate them into existing programs, how to train staff and build enthusiasm for the mission of teaching positive psychology, and how to measure outcomes. The ideas provided are meant as an initial foundation for an actual course – one that will be refined and expanded over time.

2) **Positive psychology vocabulary and understanding of key concepts and their benefits.** The certification course offers Directors and other professionals the opportunity to quickly learn core (and current) ideas with a depth that will enable them to speak knowledgably to parents, funders, and others.

3) **Marketing materials that highlight camp positive psychology goals and initiatives.** Positive psychology certification can be highlighted in camp’s marketing materials and on its website. This should prompt parents to ask about positive psychology: what it is, how it benefits children, and how camps put its ideas into practice. While, from my experience, few parents ask about American Camp Association Accreditation, I do
believe that many more would inquire about an advertised camp positive psychology certification. Families can easily guess the nature of ACA Accreditation, so rarely ask. However, fewer would intuitively understand the nature of a positive psychology certification, potentially prompting them to seek more information.

4) **A package of ideas to share with other camps.** Graduates of a camp certification program can further and more effectively promote the inclusion of positive psychology in other camps for the benefit of children and the industry overall. Directors meet regularly not only at large regional conferences, but also in smaller collaborative groups such as Long Island Camps and Private Schools (LICAPS), where ideas are shared (Long Island Camps and Private Schools, n.d.).

5) **A forum for exchanging ideas and best practices.** Program alumni can create online or other forums for sharing their experiences in implementing positive psychology initiatives. They can learn from one another’s successes and failures. This information can then inform and improve the certification course, and potentially provide ‘implementation mentors’ to help new attendees.

This vision for positive psychology in camping is consistent with the mission of the ACA – that camp to be a tool to develop and impart life skills, values and character (American Camp Association, n.d.C). The purpose of this course is to prompt Camp Directors to think through not only what positive psychology is, but also how to weave its ideas throughout their programs.

Michael Brandewein (2003) uses the term “Intentional Camp” to describe this type of deliberate, strategic effort to improve camp as a child development environment. It is in this tradition that I propose a Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program (SCPPPC).
4.3 Criteria for Selecting Which Positive Psychology Concepts to Include in the Summer Camp Professionals’ Positive Psychology Certification Program

The concepts to be taught in the SCPPPC - Growth Mindset, Savoring, Resilience, Expanded Physical Activity and Mindfulness - were chosen for several reasons:

1) **They represent foundational Positive Psychology / Positive Youth Development ideas**, including those advocated by the IPEN – the International Positive Education Network (Emily Larson, personal communication, March 13, 2017).

2) **The concepts chosen have strong empirical evidence supporting their teachability and positive impact.**

3) **These Positive Psychology Interventions can be woven into existing camp activities with minimal impact to those programs.** Camps are time-limited. A camp can be as short as one week, and, with activity-packed programs, there is often little time to teach wellness skills. Children and parents may be resistant to the idea of taking time away from the primary activities for which they selected the camp. Therefore, wellness-promoting activities should to be built into daily routines.

4) **These initiatives can be implemented by young, relatively inexperienced staff without long and sophisticated training.** Most camp staff are in college or high school, and do not have strong educational or psychology backgrounds. Therefore, interventions must be implementable by people with minimal understanding of the concepts. This limitation, along with lack of training time, is the reason that several
important positive psychology and PYD subjects, like Character Strengths and Learned Optimism\(^1\), have been excluded from the course.

5) **Interventions that emphasize benefits that most camps already do well are excluded from the course.** These include activities designed to build strong engagement, positive emotion and positive relationships – all categories at which camps already excel.

6) **Ideas that overlap with other skills already taught at camp, but are taught in new ways and based upon new research, are included.** Although physical activity is a staple of camp programs, new research highlights the importance of increasing the amount and changing the ways that camps emphasize exercise and movement.

### 4.4 SCPPPC Curriculum: Concepts, Benefits, Implementation & Measurement

**Concept 1: Growth Mindset**

**Overview**

Mindset is the extent to which people believe that their intelligence and capability are largely genetic and talent-based, versus malleable and learnable (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). The former belief is called a “fixed mindset” (which I sometimes refer to as a “talent mindset”) and the latter a “growth mindset”. Those with a fixed mindset tend to view successes and failures through the prism of talent (“I did well on the test because I am smart”), or

\(^1\)Values In Action (VIA) Character Strengths, developed by Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004) are a series of 24 traits that are nearly universally valued throughout history and across cultures. PPIs involving character strengths have been shown to be powerfully beneficial (Niemiec, 2013), but usually involve children taking surveys (to which parents might object if they view them as psychological tests) and require skilled staff to implement them effectively. Similarly, Learned Optimism, a process where children and adults learn to see positive events as lasting, pervasive, and typically the result of one’s actions (and negative events as temporary, unusual occurrences, and caused by events outside of themselves), is also valuable (Seligman, 1990).
“I did not do well because I am dumb!”). People with a growth mindset put more emphasis on effort (“I did well on the test because I studied hard”, or “I did not do well because I did not study enough.”) These perspectives tend to bring about different reactions to setbacks. Those with a fixed mindset tend to respond by giving up or demonstrating helplessness, whereas those with a growth mindset tend to respond by seeking mastery and try new strategies (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995).

Most of us have a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets (Dweck, 2015). Those with a stronger growth mindset focus more on improving, whereas those with a fixed mindset tend to want to prove their talent (Dweck, 2016). It is theorized that people with a talent mindset tend to give up more quickly on challenging tasks because of the belief that if talent is strong enough, one should not require significant struggle and effort to succeed (Blackwell et al., 2007). Struggling feels like a challenge to their self-concept of being talented and capable, and hence they give up rather than risk feeling less adequate. Put another way, people are more willing to put in full effort into tasks and risk failure if they take pride in being someone who works hard. Conversely, they may give up or avoid a task if they tend to take pride in being someone who is talented.

Critically, a Growth Mindset can be taught (Mueller & Dweck, 1998). And while simply instructing children (and adults) that intelligence and talent are changeable over time is enough to affect mindset, a more powerful way is to regularly employ language that reinforces the value of effort (Dweck, 2007; Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Cimpian, Arce, Markman, & Dweck, 2007). I have used the following example effectively in a camp setting to articulate to parents and staff the impact that language can have on mindset. In an experiment by Mueller and Dweck (1998), fifth graders were given a moderately difficult set of problems to solve. Afterwards, a researcher
congratulated the children by praising either their effort or their intelligence. The students were then given the option to select harder or easier problems for their next task, with instructions that they would learn more by doing the harder problems. Those who had been praised for their intelligence strongly tended to choose an easier challenge, whereas those praised for their effort chose more difficult problems. Thus, by changing just a few words, a complete stranger affected a children’s self-concept and the value they placed on effort. If such effects can be brought about by one interaction with a stranger, imagine what repeated effort-based praise could accomplish when given repeatedly by a beloved role-model – a child’s camp counselor?

Benefits

Individuals with a growth mindset show greater persistence and demonstrate more resilience when faced with social challenges (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Children with a growth mindset tend to seek out challenges, whereas children with talent mindsets seek easier tasks that prove how intelligent and capable they are (Dweck, 1999). Greater effort and persistence on tasks directly leads to stronger achievement amongst children, including academic, musical and athletic achievement (Liew, Xiang, Johnson, & Kwok, 2011). Those with stronger growth mindsets demonstrate more persistence. Simply believing that intelligence is malleable has a substantial impact upon academic performance (Mangels, Butterfield, Lamb, Good, & Dweck, 2006).

Implementation

Improving and changing children’s mindsets happens largely through education (explaining that they can improve based on hard work, rather than “talent”) and reinforcing language (praising effort rather than outcome). However, teaching children this idea can be
difficult, and simply explaining to staff what language they should use and avoid is unlikely to be effective and build habits. Therefore, a five-pronged approach is recommended.

1) Teach the overall idea during staff orientation. While they are unlikely to retain the information, this explains the idea, benefits for children, and priority at camp – it will be part of their day-to-day role. Orientation plants the seed for understanding that is referenced throughout the summer. Create a catchy, simple guideline, like “Focus on effort over outcome”, and provide vivid examples.

2) Put reminders throughout camp. Use the same phrase and, if possible, an icon or other visual reminder such as a cartoon of a determined child. Reminders are there both for children and for staff.

3) Train sports coaches and other activity leaders (theater directors, arts staff) to have two critical missions in addition to providing instruction in their activity. They are also using growth mindset language with campers, and, whenever possible, directing other counselors to employ growth mindset phrases. In other words, use leaders throughout camp to train-the-trainers, to coach other counselors how what to say to coach their campers.

4) Have staff evaluate campers’ growth mindsets using bi-weekly camper progress forms. Forms ask staff to assess the degree to which they believe campers value talent versus effort. Such forms may be useful for targeting which campers may need additional help developing a growth mindset. The more significant value, however, is the reminder and reinforcement of the goal and their role of “Mindset coach”.

5) Encourage staff to praise specific efforts rather than general effort. General praise can be interpreted as praise for a trait like capability, rather than a positive behavior
(Cimpian et al., 2007). Similarly, praising the whole person (“You are a good girl”) can encourage helplessness in the face of challenges, whereas focusing on process (“You came up with an effective way to do that”) encourages mastery-seeking (Kamins & Dweck, 1999).

**Measurement**

Measurement of growth mindset can be done by creating opportunities for campers to demonstrate persistence and the willingness to take on greater challenges. Persistence can be measured by timing how long campers stay on task. At the beginning of a camp season, and again at the end, groups can be given the task of creating a very large mural using ‘butchers paper’ – long inexpensive rolls of brown paper. Because this is a task without a specific end point, the time that the group spends on task can be measured. This is not a perfect measure of perseverance. Potential confounds include group dynamics, changing interest in such a project or improvement of skills, and anticipation of a following activity. Nevertheless, the larger number of groups tested, and the greater variety of tasks measured, the stronger the evidence of the effectiveness of a mindset development program.

Similarly, mindset can be measured by presenting campers with the choice to pursue easier or harder challenges. Presumably, with a stronger growth mindset, campers are more likely to select more difficult projects, particularly if campers feel that their efforts will be judged by peers or staff (Dweck, 2016). At the beginning of the summer, ask individual campers if they would prefer an easier or more difficult art project, athletic challenge or song. Then do the same at the end of the summer, and compare the percentage that choose the more difficult challenge. If the proportion of fixed to growth mindset changes, one would anticipate a higher percentage of campers to select the more difficult challenges.
Concept 2: Resilience

Overview

Resilience is multifaceted and has many definitions. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, to navigate through daily challenges, and to seek new challenges based on the confidence that we can handle disappointments or setbacks (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Resilience helps us rebound when things don’t go our way, persist to overcome obstacles, and inoculate us from excessive fear and stress so we can strive for ambitious goals. While one often associates resilience with recovering from significant trauma, resilience in overcoming lesser obstacles is part of our daily experience, and adaptability to setbacks, challenges and even significant adversity tends to be the norm for children (Condly, 2006). Resilience can best be thought of as a tendency or pattern of thoughts and behaviors. Resilience is not simply something that someone has or does not have. It can vary significantly from one situation to the next. However, when strengthened in one arena of life it tends to carry over to other areas. And, critically, while resilience can be a relatively stable trait, it can also be successfully developed in both children and adults (Seligman et al., 2009). However, just as there is no single agreed-upon operational definition of resilience, there is no single one single factor that creates resilience (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Resilience can be developed through the experience of overcoming challenges, by learning cognitive tools that help decouple thoughts from emotions (recognizing that it is not an external event that causes the emotion, but our thoughts about the meaning of that event), and by developing a growth mindset where setbacks are viewed as learning challenges rather than defeats (Yeager & Dweck, 2012) [see Concept 1 in the previous section]. Resilience is enhanced by stronger relationships (and the social skills that facilitate them), more positive emotions
(Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and building self-efficacy - the belief in one’s ability to succeed in tasks and challenges (Bandura, 1977). Resilience is also bolstered by developing an optimistic explanatory style, in which good events are seen as lasting, caused by one’s own actions, and a regular occurrence, while negative events tend to be seen as short-lived, the result of external causes, and infrequent (Gillham, Shatté, Reivich, & Seligman, 2001). This is not an exhaustive list of resilience-building elements (Karen Reivich, personal communication, February 12, 2017). The wide range of ways in which resilience can be fostered, prompts the International Positive Education Network (IPEN) to view resilience it as an umbrella goal under which other concepts and initiatives for building wellness fall (E. Larson, personal communication, March 13, 2017). With so many ways to build children’s resilience, camps have to determine which ones best fit with their mission, vision and culture – as well as which ones are most likely to be adopted (or, at least, not rejected) by campers, parents and staff.

Benefits

Stronger resilience leads to lower rates of depression and anxiety (Gillham et al., 2007; Neil & Christensen, 2009), improved academic performance and stronger peer relationships (Cicchetti, Rappaport, Sandier, & Weissberg, 2000). Resilience leads towards more successful goal-attainment and greater achievement in sports and other extracurricular activities (Rouse, 2001). Children with more resilience have greater self-control, more consistent mood, and fewer behavioral problems (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). For these reasons, teaching and building resilience in school has been a growing trend over the past several years (Tough, 2016).

Implementation

Teaching resilience at camp provides particular challenges. Camp is rarely mandatory. Whether for-profit or non-profit, camp programs are chosen by parents (and very often by
children). While some parents may like the idea of children learning to become resilient through facing difficult challenges or disappointments, many will balk at having their child experience the associated discomfort (Jed Buck, personal communication, May 28, 2017). To make a resilience-building program appeal to all, rather than just families who have selected camps that focus on developing it, great care must be taken in how resilience is taught and fostered at camp. Ideally, a camp would be able to replicate classroom cognitive-behavioral approaches like those employed by the Penn Optimism Program (Shatte, Reivich, Gillham, & Seligman, 2014), but such formal instruction may be rejected by families because it can be seen as a psychological intervention or taking time away from core camp activities. My recommended strategy, then, is: a) focus on developing positive attitudes towards the idea of resilience – bouncing back when things do not go our way, and then b) providing modest symbolic challenges that children can feel good about conquering.

My suggested goal for camps is to have children understand what resilience is, take pride in being resilient, identify times when resilience is called for, and have many concrete examples of having exhibited resilience. Rather than teaching specific coping skills, measures like these can teach children to integrate resilience as a key personal value, recognize situations to employ a resilient attitude, and have a resilient identity transferable to other areas outside of camp.

Develop How Children Value Resilience and Their Identity as Being Resilient

To develop camper’s pride in being resilient, camps can harness the power of positive role models (counselors), positive peer social norms and ritual. Morning meetings and brief times before various regular activities can be leveraged to prime campers to think about resilience, and to adopt a resilient attitude and identity.
Use the following steps;

1) Advocate resilience through group – and individual – building slogans and statements. (“We are the Cayuga Rangers, and Cayuga Rangers are resilient!”)

2) Call and response. Staff call out questions, and campers reinforce social norms and commit to identity or action – see Section 2.1. Example: Call: “Who are we?!” Response: “Cayuga Rangers!” Call: “And what are Cayuga Rangers?” Response: “Resilient!”

3) Take a moment to ask campers what it means to be resilient. Ask who can give an example at camp of a time when a camper was resilient.

4) Ask campers to come up with times at camp – opportunities – where they can show their resilience. “Who can come up with something disappointing at camp that other might upset other groups, but that Cayuga Rangers bounce back from?!”

5) Provide a concrete example daily of a situation where campers could show resilience. Provide staff with one or two age-specific examples in the camp morning bulletin. Examples can include: being called out in softball on a bad call, having swim cancelled, or having to end an activity earlier than we would like to.

6) Establish rituals that remind and reinforce the group identity that “We are resilient”. Have a calendar in the group headquarters and put a sticker of a muscled arm on it each morning when campers have identified ways that they have been resilient, or when staff have pointed out examples. Ensure that staff verbally acknowledge (and hence reward) situations where campers did not complain when disappointed to reinforce this behavior.
7) Have a ritualized special high-five that campers give one another when they have been resilient. This employs positive peer social norms in a ritualistic way in the morning, and provides campers with a concrete, symbolic way to support and reward one another throughout the day when they display resilience.

The techniques above can also be used just prior to any activity that staff anticipate may be frustrating to campers.

Getting support from staff to carry out this type of resilience advocacy should be easy. The more campers embrace resilience, the better their behavior is likely to be, especially when things go wrong. Staff should be eager to reduce camper complaints (and, as a result, parent complaints). Train the staff during orientation with a brief demonstration of a morning meeting, with general counselors playing the part of campers. Then follow up with regular scripts, one every few days throughout the summer, giving staff the language that they can use and providing them with many examples of resilience.

Provide groups with camp-orchestrated challenges to teach and provide opportunities to demonstrate – and take pride in – resilience

A. Manufacturing Challenges at Camp

A typical camp program includes many small planned and unplanned challenges for individual campers and groups – from day-to-day social dynamics to ropes course climbing walls. In addition, throughout the summer, camps can manufacture minor disappointments, setbacks or challenges as a means of teaching and reinforcing resilience. These orchestrated situations should be modified to the age of campers and anticipated tolerance of parents to avoid negativity and maintain family support. Examples can include having to wait for ten minutes before a swim, rescheduling a favorite activity, or “running out” of an anticipated dessert and substituting a less
desirable one. Staff should be prepped prior to these events to that they know to use this as an opportunity to challenge campers to be resilient (“Do Cayuga Rangers get down when we don’t get our favorite dessert?!”) and reward them verbally and with “The Cayuga Rangers high-five” if campers respond positively or bounce back quickly.

**B. Prompting Resilience Reinforcement at Home**

To further reinforce the value of resilience, and identity of resilience, have notes that are sent home with campers (day camp) or emailed to parents (resident camp) suggesting that parents ask campers about how resilient they were during the challenge. This is an opportunity to get parents to support the mission of building campers’ resilience, and a training tool for parents to find ways that they can identify and praise their children at home for bouncing back or not becoming discouraged.

**Measurement**

While there are formal measurement survey tools for measuring resilience in children and adolescents (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Naglieri, LeBuffe, & Ross, 2013), such measurement is impractical at camp. Parents may be confused and put off by such surveys, and they take time away from other activities. More pragmatic measurement at camp would include end-of-summer parental surveys, or staff assessment of camper resilience at intervals. Staff assessment should become easier as attention is brought daily to examples of resilient behavior.

**Concept 3: Savoring**

**Overview**

Savoring is the practice of deliberately focusing awareness to enhance, extend, and draw forth positive emotions or sensations (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Savoring regulates (induces, extends or dampens) positive emotion through directed attention, and is a skill which can be
taught (Smith, Harrison, Kurtz, & Bryant, 2014). Positive emotions can be elicited or elongated by appreciating present emotions or sensations, reflecting on past positive events, or anticipating future ones (Kurtz, 2008). Savoring can not only be an experience. It can also be a strategy. By savoring, one can lengthen (or shorten) an emotional experience, bask, anticipate, or reminisce (Bryant & Veroff, 2007). Teaching and practicing savoring strategies, like naming three good things that happen each day for one week, has been shown to produce increased positive emotion months afterwards (Seligman et al., 2005). In other words, a relatively short training in how to savor can provide lasting benefits.

It should be noted that few if any studies have tested savoring interventions for children. On the one hand, it could be argued that children are natural savors, excited by the novelty of many new situations. On the other hand, it is reasonable to believe teaching children strategies to savor can lead to habits of mind that can be applied in a greater range of situations or build foundational strategies for later in life. Like adults, children can apply attention to positive events and thoughts, and such directed attention is believed to be the mechanism behind savoring (Smith et al., 2014).

Benefits

Put simply, people who savor more experience more positive emotion (Smith et al., 2014). Such positive emotions elicited by savoring can lead to stronger relationships and increased resilience (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007), better health (Bryant & Veroff, 2007), and improved self-esteem (Wood, Heimpel, & Michela, 2003). It should be noted that the causal relationship between savoring and self-esteem can be complex. While savoring appears to build self-esteem, those with a high sense of self-worth also tend to savor positive experiences more than those who have low self-esteem (Wood et al., 2003). There is evidence that the greater
positive emotion produced by savoring ultimately leads to greater life satisfaction (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), and greater savoring has been correlated with better health amongst older adults (Smith & Bryant, 2016).

**Implementation**

Becoming better at savoring requires understanding, learning and practicing new strategies until they become habits (Quoidbach, Berry, Hansenne, & Mikolajczak, 2010). Again, to overcome time and training limitations at camp, variations of tested interventions can be embedded within programs and rituals.

1) For arts programs, instructors can ask campers to imagine recent work in which they take pride before embarking on a new project - a variation of Keeny’s (2009) “Basking in achievement” exercise.

2) Throughout the day, attention can be brought to savoring the moment in any activity by having music play randomly in short bursts. When it plays, campers stop what they are doing, look around, appreciate what they are doing, then dance to celebrate (I am calling this, “Stop, drop, smile & rock”).

3) Rituals that induce pre-savoring, relishing or post-savoring can include morning and afternoon group or bunk meetings. Every morning can include moments of pre-savoring, where children close their eyes and imagine specific activities or events to which they are looking forward.

4) Instructions can be given to take “Mental photographs” of good moments (Smith et al., 2014) that will be shared with the group or parents at day’s end, to practice enjoying moments and reflecting upon them.
5) Instead of the “Three good things” exercise (Seligman et al., 2005), where students write down or say three things that went well that day, camps can create an end-of-day ritual can include a group circle in which one large and one tiny positive experience during the day is shared.

By making practices such as these part of regular programming and daily routines, camps can implement savoring-teaching practices without lengthy explanations to staff (or campers or parents). Explanations can even be provided afterwards to help groups understand details about a positive intervention that has already been enjoyed.

**Measurement**

Formal measurement of savoring, such as the Savoring Beliefs Inventory (Bryant, 2003) survey are impractical at camp; filling it out takes too much time, it may be misconstrued by parents as a psychological evaluation, and it is designed for adults. Measuring children’s overall affect change over a period of time using scales such as the Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Children (PANAS-C) is also unhelpful, because there are many confounds that ought to raise children’s positive affect during the course of a camp summer (Laurent et al., 1999). Therefore, any measurement of increased savoring must be indirect or come from surveys from parents and/or staff.

My recommendation is, at four times during an eight-week season (or shorter intervals for shorter seasons), children in small groups be asked to name:

1) As many good things that happened during the past week as they can remember,

2) As many bad things that they can recall happened, and

3) As many future events that they are looking forward to in or out of camp.
If children are becoming more adept at savoring, one would anticipate that they would name a greater number of positive events overall, and include a larger number of “small moment” events, like the taste of biting into a cheeseburger or the feel of grass under their toes. Responses can be coded as “large events” or “small events”, and ratios can be compared. One would also predict that the number of “bad things” that happened would remain neutral or decrease. It is important to note that these findings could also be the result of increased mindfulness if the camp is teaching mindfulness strategies, improved optimism, or simply a byproduct of accumulated positivity from a good overall summer experience. Anticipation of future events may have to be discounted towards the end of camp, because many programs incorporate special events like carnivals at the end of their seasons, and American families often choose August for vacations. Theoretically, half of each age group at camp could be taught savoring techniques and half not, but that might cause parental upset.

For these reasons, savoring may be the most challenging camp PPI to measure. Nonetheless, measures of improved affect and increased awareness of ‘good things’, whether because of savoring or other mechanisms, are positive. Over time, new ideas on how to measure increased savoring may emerge. In the short term, limited measures like the one proposed, and surveys of staff and parents (particularly if surveys of parents are done a month or more after camp) may lightly indicate that savoring activities are contributing to children’s flourishing.

**Concept 4: Expanded Physical Activity**

**Overview**

It may initially seem odd to include physical activity in a camp positive psychology certification program because physical activity – sports, swimming, hiking, and the like – have traditionally been core features of camp programs, and are incorporated in most camps today.
(Paris, 2009; Hickerson & Henderson, 2010). The reason that physical activity is highlighted as part of this program, however, is that new evidence suggests that being active is even more important to wellbeing than previously understood. By some accounts, today’s American children are by far the least active and most cardiovascularly unhealthy in our history (Ogden et al., 2006). Twenty-three percent of children ages nine through thirteen engage in no meaningful daily physical activity (Duke, Huhman, & Heitzler, 2003). While sports, dance and other activities outside of camp provide many children with the interest and habit of exercising year-round, for others camp could become a primary motivator, as well as a way for all children to develop habits to include more physical activity – and different types of physical activity - into their daily lives. It is therefore proposed that camps find new ways to advocate for, emphasize and incorporate even more exercise in their programs, and to change the focus to include stronger exertion.

Benefits

It is well-known that physical activity and exercise improve physical health, reduce obesity (Mo-suwan, Pongprapai, Junjana, & Puetpaiboon, 1998), and positively regulate mood (Larun, Nordheim, Ekeland, Hagen, & Heian, 2006) in children. In addition, a growing body of evidence suggests that physical activity also boosts academic performance, enhances learning and memory (Dwyer, Blizzard, & Dean, 1996), and reduces and guards against stress, depression and anxiety (Morgan, 1994; Calfas & Taylor, 1994), and builds self-regulation, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Buck, Hillman, & Castelli, 2008). Physical activity protects neurons and fosters the growth of new neurons, called neurogenesis, by releasing chemicals such as BDNF (brain-derived neurotrophic factor), what neuroscientist John Ratey describes as, “Miracle-Gro for the
Highly aerobic physical activity is particularly effective at producing an assortment of neural growth factors (Hillman, Erickson, & Kramer, 2008).

Physical activity not only acts both as a buffer against negative outcomes like depression, anxiety and behavioral problems (Larun et al., 2006), but also builds children’s global sense of self-efficacy and perceived competence (Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000). In other words, as children work hard physically, they develop a belief system that they are capable and have more control over their lives (Biddle & Asare, 2011). Increased physical activity correlates with increased feelings of self-worth (Fox, 2000). Increases in self-efficacy and feelings of self-worth correlate with stronger relationships, better self-control and improved mood (Babic et al., 2014).

An aspect of exercise that may surprise many is the impact that it can have on cognition, learning and brain health. There has been increasing attention in the media about the cardiovascular dangers of being sedentary and prolonged sitting (Owen, Healy, Matthews, & Dunstan, 2010). What is less-discussed is the potential for physical activity, especially strenuous physical activity, to promote achievement. Studies vary in how much academic improvement is derived from increasing physical activity in schools, from modest (Sallis et al., 1999; Dishman 2000) to moderate gains in standardized tests (Shephard, 1997). However, each of these studies showed some academic gains while reducing academic class time by as much as 14% (Hillman et al., 2008). There is also evidence that has spurred interest in further research. A large cross-sectional study performed by the California Department of Education showed significant correlation between physical fitness and academic performance (Grissom, 2005). Research continues on the connection between exercise and brain health, and targets more causational evidence as well as questions of “dosage” - how much and what type of physical exercise is optimal, and for what ages and targeted benefits (Sattelmair & Ratey, 2009).
Increasing physical activity is not a silver bullet for all problems, nor should one expect that it will substantially improve self-control, self-efficacy or grades for all children. Effect sizes—how strong an impact physical activity has—on emotional, cognitive and academic improvements typically range from small to moderate (Hillman et al., 2008; Sallis et al., 1999; Shephard, 1997). Nevertheless, there are few ways to spend one’s time and energy that have the wide range of positive physical, psychological, and competence-building effects that exercise does (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). Hence increasing physical activity at camp, and emphasizing its importance to children beyond camp, should be a key priority.

**Implementation:**

Since camps almost universally have physical activity as part of their programs, the certification course has three goals. First is to show children new ways to incorporate physical activity into their normal routines. Second is to put a stronger focus on activities that involve stronger exertion to reap stronger cognitive benefits from exercise. And third is to make these ‘stick’ by developing an identity that “I am someone who likes to be physical” and, ideally, “I am someone who challenges him- or herself with difficult physical activity.”

**Suggestion 1:** Remove chairs during activities that do not require them. Arts programs, music programs, woodshop and hobby programs can be readily taught while children stand at tables rather than sitting. Staff can explain to children that standing keeps blood flowing to our brains, making us more creative. After the first several sessions without chairs, have chairs available the next time campers come to the activity, and have staff lead an elaborate gesture of collectively pushing the chairs away because, “We are sharper and more creative without them!”

**Suggestion 2:** Creative Energy Breaks. During passive activities like arts programs, every ten or fifteen minutes have a “Creative Energy Break”. Ask campers if they like being
creative? If so, then we are at our most creative after having moved! Make the breaks enjoyable by having mini-dance parties, a quick race around the tables or a rapid-movement game of Simon Says.

**Suggestion 3:** Place new focus on aerobic warmups for relatively low-energy games. For example, when teaching baseball, explain to campers that if we are going to do our best, we need to warm up. And that means really getting ourselves warm!

**Suggestion 4:** Energy lines! Counselors often have difficulty getting campers to line up and move to their next activity in a manageable way. Therefore, staff can turn getting from one place to another into a playful, high-physicality exercise by turning moving in queues into a game. Campers first line up, then jog together (ideally singing a camp chant or song with cadence, like a fun march). Periodically, the counselor calls out a command to freeze, do a pushup, do three jumping jacks, have a thumb wrestle (to maintain the silly game element), flap their “wings” to try and fly, or have a zany five second dance party. While implementing this is in some ways requires more energy from staff, they are likely to adopt the practice because gamifying moving to activities removes most of the challenge of coaxing children to form lines and not run ahead.

**Suggestion 5:** As a Monday ritual (or other appropriate time), spend a few minutes asking campers as a group who did high-exertion exercise at home/over the weekend (at day camp) or during free time (at resident camp). Ask who found a creative way to make an already physical activity more aerobic? Did anyone ride a stationary bike or do sit-ups while watching TV? Doing this exercise as a group conveys that there is a social norm that this is what peers do, and as children take pride in their choice to be physical during leisure time, they may internalize the value of exercise, as well as associate it with other enjoyable activities.
**Suggestion 5:** Purchase and use portable heart-rate monitors for use in certain activities, and reward children who keep a high elevated heartrate with praise and recognition. This is a variation of a practice done at in the Naperville, IL School District (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). The activities can range from dance, to sports warm-ups, to “Superhero training” (calisthenics). This brings focus to the importance of elevated heart rates, creates positive associations and reinforcement for high-exertion, and is an opportunity for less athletic children to “compete” with more athletic children. Many children avoid physical activities because of negative social comparisons (Ekeland, Hagen, & Heian, 2006), and anecdotal evidence from Naperville schools suggests that children who have traditionally avoided physical activity can become enthusiastic participants after experiencing success (which eluded them in other physical activities) using elevated heart-rate activities (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008).

**Measurement**

To understand if a camp’s expanded physical activity program is having an impact, it needs to measure both attitudes and behaviors. Are children choosing to stand rather than sit without being prompted? Are they automatically doing sprints before a baseball game out of habit? Set up chairs at activities that did not have them before, and watch to see if campers choose to sit in them or not.

Parent surveys may also help determine whether the increased physical activity at camp has extended to areas outside of camp. Rather than inquire about afterschool activities that campers choose during the schoolyear (because children often find new interests as they are exposed to camp activities like martial arts or dance), structure questions around changes that parents see in leisure-time choices. If camp efforts to change attitudes towards physical activity are successful, parents should see children standing doing homework or other activities, or
finding other ways to be physical during regular activities that they did not engage in prior to camp. Note: If parents are informed about efforts to increase physical activity at camp and reinforce these at home, it may become less clear whether habits are truly formed at camp. From my perspective, this is still a camp success. If a practice initiated at camp causes parents to reinforce in ways that support an initiative, the likelihood of long-term habit formation may increase, and the result is still a more physically active and healthy child.

**Concept 5: Mindfulness**

**Overview**

Mindfulness is a broad term describing a range of practices that purposefully exert control over one’s attention (Davidson et al., 2012). Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994), one of the first western scientists to study mindfulness, describes it as, “Paying attention, in a particular way: on purpose, in the moment, and nonjudgmentally” (p. 4). Often confused with meditation (which can be a mindful practice), mindfulness is an attempt to focus on the current moment in a soft, accepting way – and can be done with eyes open or closed, sitting, walking, practicing yoga, eating, or engaging in any number of activities (Davidson et al., 2012). Mindfulness is a way of slowing down and attending to the present moment, whether that moment is following one’s breath (a meditative practice) or focusing on the details of an experience (and active mindfulness practice). As discussed below, mindfulness strategies used by adults must be adjusted in ways that make them easier and more enjoyable for children to practice.

**Benefits**

Mindfulness has been shown to promote children’s self-control and self-regulation (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007), and reduce children’s negative emotional reactivity and emotional volatility following challenging events (Creswell, Way, Eisenberger, & Lieberman,
Mindfulness can also increase frequency of positive emotion (Brown, Ryan, Creswell, & Niemiec, 2008), while reducing judgmental self-talk and the likelihood of clinical anxiety and depression (Burke, 2010). It can help children and adults focus on tasks for longer periods of time while avoiding distraction (Leary & Tate, 2007). The practice of deliberate attentional focus can be so powerful that it can literally rewire the brain, increasing grey matter density in brain regions associated with self-control, social awareness, and areas related to specific task-performance (Hölzel et al., 2011). Meta-studies on mindfulness strongly suggest that its practice can improve cognitive abilities – and, by extension, academic performance – with increased memory, attention, and time-on-task as potential mediators (Chiesa, Calati, & Serretti, 2011).

**Implementation**

The benefits of mindfulness come through repetition (Napoli, Krech, & Holley, 2005). Therefore, a camp implementation should focus on convincing children that practicing mindfulness will help them (in activities or areas that they care about), how to practice mindfulness, and cues for when they ought to do so. Further, if mindfulness activities are fun and/or comforting, the practices may become self-reinforcing. It is unrealistic to expect children to sit quietly meditate for long periods of time, but while mindfulness methods and strategies employed by adults must be modified for children, they can nevertheless have similar benefits (Roeser & Peck, 2009).

One challenge of teaching mindfulness at camp is that staff may be unfamiliar with mindfulness, may be uncomfortable not only teaching basic techniques but also uncomfortable practicing them with the campers. This is important because staff are role models, and if they are not joining the children in practicing (or, worse, talking while children are to be practicing),
camper are unlikely to engage in exercises. To get buy-in from staff, I recommend not only highlighting how mindfulness can help campers, but also how campers’ practice makes their own jobs easier. A short time proactively teaching and practicing mindfulness with their campers can lead to better behavior, fewer negative emotional outbursts, and calmer, more cooperative children. The next step is to support staff with simple instructions and helpful tools, like ones discussed in “Strategies” below.

**Convincing children that they should adopt mindfulness techniques**

Children want to play, and camp tends to be a high-energy, high-stimulation environment, where campers are eager to (sometimes literally) dive into the next activity. Therefore, campers need to feel that a mindfulness activity is fun, will benefit them in a way that is already meaningful to them, and/or be consistent with their individual or group identity. From my experience, the first two strategies are easily achievable, but the third is more challenging.

**Strategy 1: Turn mindfulness training into a game.** Have campers walk around a room or outside area, and ask them to slow down, notice their breath, and see how many tiny new things they can notice (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). Are there new sounds? Can they notice things about the room that they had never seen before? Can they see different shades of color in the blades of grass? Having children move while practicing mindfulness may make it easier for them to focus for longer periods of time. Afterwards, have campers share things that they noticed in small groups.

**Strategy 2: Tie the idea of mindfulness into achieving campers’ other goals.** Does a camper want to be a star athlete? An accomplished performer? A better chess player, painter or miniature golfer? They can do what more and more of the professionals do – practice mindfulness before practicing or performing (in a game or show). World-class experts in many
fields, including sports and artistic performance, regularly practice mindfulness (Ungerleider, 2005), and campers can too!

**Strategy 3: Leverage the desire to be resilient to teach mindfulness.** If efforts to get the group to champion resiliency are successful, campers may adopt tools to help them reach their resiliency goals. One example is called, “The breathing hand” exercise (J. Grumple, personal communication, February 11, 2016). In this exercise, children use one finger to trace each finger from the other, outstretched hand. With each, slow, in-breath, one traces up one finger, and then down the other side with the out-breath, until the entire hand has been traced. Because this exercise feels good – it is soothing, and tickles slightly – children are more likely to both view it as a game and do the activity voluntarily. It can also be incorporated into group’s resiliency goal (“We are Cayuga Scouts, and Cayuga Scouts are resilient!”) as a strategy for group members to regain control and equilibrium when negative, challenging, or anxiety-producing events occur (like getting out in baseball or preparing to climb a rock wall). Counselors can remind campers to use the breathing hand exercise to calm themselves and, ultimately, campers may learn to turn to the breathing hand without adult prompting when they become anxious, upset or distressed.

**Strategy 4: Begin each day with a short, guided visualization at morning meetings.**

Have staff play a prerecorded brief visualization each morning. Explain that this practice will help make the group members more resilient and better performers in their favorite activities. Begin with short visualizations, perhaps 30 seconds. As camper’s familiarity, acceptance and skill at listening attentively increase, extend to longer visualizations as a daily ritual. To further the effectiveness, include an additional ritual with the visualization. Make the visualization the last part of the morning meeting, and challenge the group to maintain their new focus with an
absolutely silent walk to their first camp activity. This walk will increase focus by being mindful, noticing every sound, sight and feeling they experience along the way.

**Measurement**

There are two general areas to explore when measuring whether a mindfulness intervention is effective at camp. The first question revolves around how well children are adopting the idea that mindfulness is important, how independently they choose to practice mindfulness. The second relates to the benefits that children receive from practicing mindfulness — how their ability to focus and self-regulate has improved, if behavior has improved, and perhaps whether anxiety has been reduced.

*Measuring whether children have adopted mindfulness as a strategy and habit.*

**Suggestion 1:** At four points during the season (every week for a four-week session), have a staff member keep their eyes open during a group three-minute meditation. Record how long before children begin to lose interest or focus, or whether they – as a group – are able to stay focused longer. Group dynamics may interfere – it only takes one child to stir any group out of a focus activity. If this is the case, modify using smaller groups and remove groups that are distracted by one or more campers from the measurement. This is not meant to be a perfect controlled experiment – it is designed to identify whether there is general evidence that children are able to stay focused longer.

**Suggestion 2:** Have staff note whether, when children become upset, they respond positively to the suggestion of using “The breathing hand” exercise, or other techniques taught during the summer.

**Suggestion 3:** Before playing a competitive game, tell the children that they have four minutes to prepare. See if some or most chose to prepare by using mindfulness practices.
Measuring the impact of mindfulness practice on focus, self-regulation, behavior and anxiety.

Measuring the impact of mindfulness teaching on children’s overall focus, self-regulation, reactivity, behavior and anxiety is more difficult in a camp setting. Theoretically, one might randomly assign groups to either learn mindfulness or not, then measure the differences in behavior and time-on-task or behavioral changes between groups later in the summer. However, it may be difficult to perform such an experiment, particularly if a camp must explain to parents why it is teaching some children and not others. Simple measures of changes in time-on-task or behaviors throughout the summer may simply be the result of acclimation to camp or group routines, increased skills or interests, or any number of factors that may change over the course of a summer.

Nevertheless, a camp could ask staff to compare children’s behaviors and focus on instructions and tasks prior to and after mindfulness activities. Similarly, if the camp shares such exercises with parents and encourages them to experiment with these practices at home, surveys may provide feedback on changes that families see. My overall suggestion on evaluating the efficacy of teaching mindfulness techniques at camp is to defer to the many studies being done at schools around the country. In future iterations of the camp positive psychology certification course, mindfulness-teaching techniques will be re-evaluated and selected based on specific research done in schools on general and specific populations, and reviewed in meta-studies such as those done by Greenberg and Harris (2012) and Remple (2012). While this does not specifically address the effectiveness of teaching mindfulness in a camp setting, what is known about mindfulness training is that a) there is strong evidence that it provides powerful and broad
benefits for children and adults, and b) those benefits accumulate with more time spent on mindfulness practices in any number of contexts (Napoli et al., 2005).

4.5 Strategies for Implementation and Adoption of Positive Psychology Concepts at Camp

The goal of this program is to teach children new values, self-concepts, physical habits and habits of thinking. The following are five strategies for integrating and promoting positive psychology concepts in camp environments. Many of these strategies employ aspects of camp’s core defining features of camps (see Section 2.1). These strategies are designed to provide effective instruction despite the constraints of camp: short sessions, competing priorities for time and resources, young staff, limited staff training time or opportunities, and difficulty of getting camper, parent and/or staff buy-in.

Strategy 1: Weave initiatives into existing camp programs

Camp, unlike school, does not typically have time set aside for lectures. Parents send their children to have fun, and to learn in the process of having fun. Weaving initiatives into existing activities helps ensure that children, parents and staff do not feel that positive psychology instruction is distracting from the fun of camp.

Embedding initiatives:

1) Does not take significant time away from core camp activities, so is unlikely to create objections from campers or parents.

2) Leverages enjoyment and positive mood derived from the camp activities for which campers and parents have presumably selected the camp. If initiatives are enjoyable and consistent with other elements of camp, one would also anticipate few objections from campers or parents. In addition, people experiencing positive emotion have broader attention, scope of cognition, flexibility of thinking, ability to recognize
connections, and improved memory (Fredrickson, 1998). In other words, if a camp program succeeds in producing positive emotions, children are more likely to learn and retain new concepts and habits.

3) Avoids misinterpreted and concern by parents that camp is conducting “psychological interventions”.

4) Ensures that learning is experiential. Learning by doing has been shown to be a particularly efficient and effective means of teaching, and one that helps children internalize concepts (Kolb et al., 2001).

5) Make training and staff buy-in easier because familiar activities form the basis of instruction.

Strategy 2: Tie positive concepts to camper identity

Camp is, by definition, a short experience – typically one to eight weeks. Integrating new habits and behaviors into children’s sense of self – their identity – makes it more likely that they will continue camp initiatives into the school year and beyond. People are more enthusiastically motivated to pursue goals and activities that are integrated into their identity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This integration can take the form of valuing certain ideas (e.g. exercise is important), or identifying with those ideas (e.g. “I am someone who exercises”). There is no consistent timeframe for how long it takes an individual to build a physical habit or habit of mind, and even established habits can fade over time if they are not consistently practiced (Duhigg, 2013). To make what is learned at camp ‘stick’ beyond the summer, it must either be a fully-formed habit
by the end of a camp session, be intrinsically motivating by itself (i.e. fun), or be integrated into a new sense of self.²

Tying positive psychology concepts to identity may also help campers carry their newfound camp skills and confidence into other areas of their lives. Self-concept and personality are not static. We view ourselves differently and behave differently in different social and situational contexts (Stets & Burke, 2000). For example, we may feel socially confident at camp, but not view ourselves as confident at school. Research suggests that by intentionally reflecting on how a camp identity can carry forward into school, children can better maintain gains in confidence and sociability beyond the summer (Hulleman et al., 2017). Camps can help children project a new sense of self developed at camp forward to school and other contexts. They can do this by prompting campers to think of concrete examples of how they will use new skills and perspectives throughout the year.

² Dan McAdams (2001) argues that there are two malleable levels of personality that lay above the stable “big five” personality model (a commonly accepted framework in psychology that categorizes aspects of personality). The first level above the big five is “characteristic adaptation.” Characteristic adaptation includes peoples’ goals, values, beliefs and coping mechanisms. This level represents life’s compass and toolkit – what we care about, what we strive for, and how we handle failure (and thus our perseverance). The level above characteristic adaptation is our overall “life story”. Our life story creates a coherent narrative that combines and makes sense out of our personality traits and our values, beliefs, goals and coping mechanisms. Camps are in an ideal position to convey and reinforce such “third level” life stories to promote ideas like resiliency and increased physical activity. Camp can help children integrate these and other concepts as part of their own stories about “Who they are” and “What people like themselves do”. For example, a camp may help a child think of him or herself as, “I am someone resilient who bounces back if things go poorly”. Then, if the child loses an important game, he or she is more likely to see this as a temporary setback and shake off the loss, and less likely to engage in negative self-talk or wallow in self-pity.
Strategy 3: Leverage existing camp tools to promote new ideas

As noted in Section 2.1, camps have defining features common to almost all programs. Many of these can be used to promote new positive psychology ideas, values and behaviors. These camp tools include:

1) Positive role modelling and mentoring from young adults from outside the family (counselors)
2) Positive peer social norms (positive peer pressure) and focus on group and team-building
3) Play, and teaching through playful experience
4) Ritual
5) “Hive” experiences where individuals put greater emphasis on group identity and goals than individual ones (Haidt, 2012)

Camp counselors play the roles of ‘big sibling’, mentor, and leader. This makes them powerful models, able to shape behavior. Children and adolescents tend to pattern themselves after mentors with whom they have established positive relationships (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). They do not merely emulate role models, they also assign meaning to role models’ actions (Kelemen, 1999), and look to their behavior to identify social norms (Schmidt, Butler, Heinz, & Tomasello, 2016). This means that children not only follow the lead of role models like counselors, they embrace the reasons and perceived purpose of what role models advocate and do. If camp staff can establish positive values, priorities, and behaviors within a group, children as young as three will tend to reinforce these behaviors with one another, providing correction when others deviate from norms (Rakoczy, Brosche, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2009).
The power of counselors to teach through directing group behavior is strengthened by play and ritual. Games, rituals and symbolism can impact the values and identity of both groups and individuals. Group play builds trust and bonding, promotes adoption of new social norms, builds trust and encourages participatory learning (Stephens et al., 2011; Stone, 1989; Depping, Mandryk, Johnson, Bowey, & Thomson, 2016). Call-and-response (where a counselor calls a question out to the group, such as “Are we excited about swim?!?” and the group responds, “Yes”) and similar techniques harness the power of “commitment and consistency” - people tend to behave in ways (and adopt perspectives) that they voluntarily verbally commit to (Cialdini, 1987). Call-and-response reinforces “answers” that counselors prompt (strengthened by the social norm of their friends yell the same answer).

In addition, Haidt (2012) theorizes that under certain conditions individuals sublimate their identity and goals to that of larger groups in a “hive-like” manner. The result is an experience where individuals strongly adopt values of a group, as happens with sports teams and fans. Such conditions include having a trusted leader (counselor), feeling that there is a noble mission (camp values), shared goals or fate (provided by counselors), behaving in synchronous ways (like singing, chanting, dancing or clapping, regular practices at camp meetings) and symbols of similarity (camp group name, camp traditions, special handshakes, etc.)

**Strategy 4: Show campers how positive psychology concepts meet their existing goals, or tie the concepts to identities that children seek.**

Rather than present positive psychology as a route towards overall wellness or future happiness – vague concepts – tie them to children’s existing and immediate goals. For example, children like to do well, improve and succeed in activities, particularly their favorite ones. If a child who enjoys art or baseball learns that warming up with strong physical exertion leads to
creativity or better performance on the field, he or she will be more likely to do a quick sprint before a project or game. If a child believes that a role model – a professional athlete, performer or even fictional character like a superhero - meditates briefly before going into action, he or she is more likely to adopt the practice to be more like that role model.

**Strategy 5: First inspire staff by first sharing the mission of positive psychology and its potential to impact children. Second, help them further internalize the mission by providing details on how they will teach children. Then third, seek voluntary commitment from staff while they are inspired.**

The following recommendation is rooted in my own experience energizing a staff of 500 behind the goal of teaching children positive psychology tools. I have seen lackluster support from staff when they are given activities and goals that they are not excited about or have not internalized as their own.

An effective way to begin is to show staff an inspiring goal that both excites and makes positive psychology goals feel realistic and accomplishable. (I recommend positive psychology videos like Shawn Achor’s (2011) or Carol Dweck’s (2014) TED Talks). This is followed by a discussion of the positive psychology goals for campers, and a brief overview of how they will be achieved, with an explanation that more information will come when staff need instructions. Consistent with Hope Theory (Snyder, et al., 1991), this provides staff with the goal (teaching children critical life skills), the pathway (an outline of what will be taught and how staff will teach) and agency (instilling belief in their ability to teach positive psychology using a combination of examples and assurances that additional instruction will be given). This is also a technique to help staff internalize the mission of helping children learn to flourish. The more
staff embrace this mission, the more likely they are to be intrinsically motivated to carry it out (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

The Summer Camp Professionals Positive Psychology Certification Course preliminary curriculum and implementation strategies are designed to be the foundation of an actual course which I hope to create in the next year. As with all initial iterations of a course or curriculum, I anticipate that this will evolve through trial-and-error, implementation and measurement feedback from camp directors, and advances in positive psychology. Ideally, creative camp professionals will help devise ways to include other positive psychology concepts including VIA Strength-based PPIs and Learned Optimism, and develop new activities and strategies to successfully integrate the five concepts included here.

I anticipate that the camp community will work to bring together research and evidence about existing camp components and practices – and new positive psychology initiatives – to create a consistent, compelling account of why camp helps children flourish year-round, long-term. Initiatives at the American Camp Association are already underway (American Camp Association, n.d.B). I also predict that such research will create an ever-stronger case that building wellness through traditional camp activities and positive psychology-informed practices will also foster positive academic outcomes. The next step will be initiatives, by the American Camp Association or other organizations, to promote ways that positive psychology initiatives at camp (as well as other camp outcome research) create happier, more capable, flourishing children. This information can be used to advocate for making camp more available to more children, through greater parental demand for summer programs, grants and not-for-profit camps,
government funding and expanded municipal camps. As positive psychology makes camping more impactful for children, my hope is that it also makes camp more available for them.

I believe that camp is equipped to teach children values and skills that school cannot – through play and non-academic experiential learning, positive role modelling by young adults, and a variety of other factors discussed. Ideally, schools will also incorporate positive psychology concepts into their curriculum and culture. Through the International Positive Education Network (IPEN) and other initiatives, this is already happening around the globe (International Positive Education Network, n.d.). However, camps – being independent and outside of bureaucratic and political apparatus – have much more flexibility to experiment with innovative programs. And, if these camp positive psychology programs produce measurable and significant results, the summer camp experience may become a stronger and more frequent compliment to academic education in the United States and beyond.
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