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## **An Intervention Model to Create a Strong Sense of Meaning and Life Purpose in High School Students.**

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At time of publication Rosalinda Ballesteros was Vice-president for High School Education at Tecmilenio in Mexico. She is currently director for the Institute of Wellbeing and Happiness at the same institution.

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### **Abstract**

Meaning in life is an important part of psychological well-being. The following paper presents a model for creating a robust meaning-in-life system for adolescents and emerging adults, with the aim to create well-being for young people and throughout the life span. A Three Self-Strengths model is proposed for the attainment of the meaning system. The self-strengths that young people need to develop are: self-knowledge, self-determination and self-regulation. The paper includes a proposed intervention in the high school program of Tecmilenio University in Mexico.

### **Keywords**

positive psychology, meaning in life, purpose, adolescent

### **Disciplines**

Other Social and Behavioral Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

### **Comments**

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Running Head: INTERVENTION TO CREATE MEANING AND PURPOSE IN STUDENTS

An Intervention Model to Create a Strong Sense of Meaning and Life Purpose in High School Students.

Rosalinda Ballesteros Valdés

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Graduation Requirement for the  
Masters of Applied Positive Psychology Degree

Advisor: Robert Rebele

August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015

An Intervention to Create a Strong Sense of Meaning and Life Purpose  
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Abstract

Meaning in life is an important part of psychological well-being. The following paper presents a model for creating a robust meaning-in-life system for adolescents and emerging adults, with the aim to create well-being for young people and throughout the life span. A Three Self-Strengths model is proposed for the attainment of the meaning system. The self-strengths that young people need to develop are: self-knowledge, self-determination and self-regulation. The paper includes a proposed intervention in the high school program of Tecmilenio University in Mexico.

The following paper is a proposal for a series of interventions designed for adolescents and emerging adults in order to develop a sense of meaning and life purpose. These interventions are important because having a sense of meaning in life is a component of psychological well-being (Seligman, 2013). The interventions are framed in three self-strengths that this paper will argue are the foundation for having meaning and life purpose: self-knowledge, self-determination and self-regulation. Although meaning in life is part of the components of well-being throughout the life span, the search is particularly important during this developmental period because it is a crucial period in identity formation.

The interventions are intended to aid young people transiting from high school to the next step in their lives, hopefully helping formulate the decision to attend college (where to go, what to major in, etc.). The interventions are planned for a specific school context – Tecmilenio in Mexico.

Tecmilenio is a multi-campus university system with 25 locations in Mexico. Currently, the total student population of the university is 46,000 students. Each of the campuses has a high school program, with a total of 15,000 students. In Mexico, high school programs are three years long, and the students are from 15 to 18 years of age. In 2012, the university decided to establish new curriculum that includes a comprehensive well-being program for all educational levels. As part of this new model, the institution established a vision for the year 2023: to develop individuals with a life purpose and the competencies to achieve their purpose. In this context, this Capstone is an important foundation for the university's vision.

Young people often go through high school with either many unresolved questions about their futures that generate anxiety, or with no awareness of the important preparation that this period of their lives can contribute to a future sense of well-being. Psychological studies find evidence that having many sources for a sense of meaning in early adulthood will be correlated with a larger sense of well-being in later stages of life (Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005; Pohlmann, Gruss, & Joraschky, 2006). The studies indicate that, while meaning is important, actively searching for meaning can reduce the sense that one has it (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). This paper proposes a creation of a robust meaning system and the development of a life mission statement, along with other interventions, that will increase the young person's sense of self-knowledge, self-determination and self-regulation to prevent this possible reduction of the sense of well-being.

Some students realize this and many search for answers on their own; other students may go through vocational counseling. The intervention model presented here provides a new approach that both individuals and educational institutions can use. The interventions and exercises are based on the empirical findings from the field of positive psychology. Steger proposes a practical model for finding meaning based on three questions: Who am I? What is the world like? How do I fit in? (Steger, 2012); to address these questions, I propose a series of positive psychology exercises.

This proposal is based on a model that includes life purpose as the central agent for the decisions that high school students need to take in terms of their life plans. A combination of tools will guide the individual during this time and help them discover and acknowledge what gives meaning to their lives.

This paper includes a brief background section on adolescence and emerging adulthood. From there, the content is divided in two main parts: one section about meaning and life purpose and one

section about the Self-Strengths Model as a way to build meaning and life purpose. The section on meaning and life purpose presents two paradigms to understand meaning – one rooted in positive psychology and one in logotherapy. The paper will then propose a model called Three Self-Strengths, which presents a series of interventions on three key areas to develop a robust meaning system: self-knowledge, self-determination and self-regulation. The flow of the information continues with a section about implementation in a school system such as Tecmilenio. This paper also includes a section on limitations, a conclusion and an appendix with examples of the exercises as conducted by researchers and practitioners.

### **Adolescents and emerging adults: setting the foundations for sustained well-being.**

Adolescence is defined as the stage in life when the individual goes through the physical changes to develop from being a child into adulthood (Steinberg, 2014). Steinberg also argues that now the adolescent years span from 10 to 25. Although in the past the concept of adolescence did not exist, today we understand and accept that it is a distinct human development life cycle where the person has unique physical and psychological opportunities.

The period marked as adolescence is composed of biological and psychological changes. Although the period is larger now than a few years ago, most of the biological change occurs early in the period. The period from age 10 to 17 is still referred to as adolescence, and the period between the ages of 17 or 18 to 25 is called emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This stage often appears in industrialized countries where the conditions of life allow for this transitional period to be extended and be different from the responsibilities and expectations of adulthood. It is also a period of unique opportunities to establish the foundations of how to incorporate into society as an adult.

The periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood present many challenges in addition to the opportunity to set a crucial foundation for success. In the United States, one third of students who enroll in college do not graduate, one in five high school students abuse alcohol, twenty percent of high-school-age males are on medication for Attention Deficit and Hyper Activity Disorder, and about a half of the young people ages 19 to 25 have been diagnosed with a psychological problem, including an increase of depression rates (Steinberg, 2014). All of these are impediments to the development of individuals and can cause a detour towards a possibly ill-fated adulthood.

Empirical research demonstrates that there are some psychological needs that can be fostered from childhood into adolescence and emerging adulthood. Brown & Ryan (2004) found that children who feel securely attached to their parents and teachers will develop into more secure, competent, autonomous adults and adolescents; they also found that those who experience non-controlling and accepting parents during adolescence will feel more secure. Working with young people on finding life purpose can have many desired outcomes, such as pro-social behavior, moral commitment and high self-esteem (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). Furthermore, Steinberg advocates for changing our view of adolescence towards the idea that it is an age of opportunity in which the biological conditions of the brain can be used towards setting positive habits and behaviors for later on in life (Steinberg, 2014). To undergo the changes of this period alongside experiences that provide well-being will set the foundations for a good life in later stages of life (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). Adolescence is the stage in life when the individual develops a particular understanding of who he is and the individual starts to understand his identity.

A change from high-risk behavior and mental problems can be made towards well-being through interventions that promote the development of psychological well-being in adolescents. Those interventions during this age of opportunity will result in lifelong benefits towards a more sustained well-being. During the following pages, a model for developing meaning and life purpose will be presented with that aim in mind.

### **Background: Logotherapy**

When I was seventeen years of old, I had the unique opportunity to hear Viktor Frankl speak at a youth conference. I had no idea who he was. Steinberg (2014) mentions that memories from adolescence are more vivid than those from later in life. Be that as it may, I remember exactly what I was wearing, where I sat in the room, how he looked, and what I ate that day. I also remember his message. As a concentration camp survivor, he told stories about his fellow captives. I particularly remember a story about a woman who stayed alive because she had to get back to her children – she kept her children’s baby teeth as a reminder of her life purpose. That story has been with me from that day on, and I safeguard my children’s baby teeth just in case I might ever need to be reminded. Knowing about the holocaust from a first-account source might be one of the reasons why I am personally interested in the topic of peace and have dedicated many years of my life to its study and to help people in conflict to rebuild their lives after it.

When I first started this project, I was looking for scientific information about meaning in life. The most common reference that I was given was Viktor Frankl’s book, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1946) (Frankl, 1985). When I was seventeen, I did not know about the book, but ever since I heard Frankl, I decided that as a species we have to rise above such horror and violence.

For Frankl, humans are meaning-seeking and meaning-making creatures, which is why many people strive to understand why they are here. Although it is impressive for me to read the

book and understand how someone can find meaning in such traumatic events, as an optimist, I think that suffering cannot be the only way in which an individual can find meaning. Hopefully, vicarious experience can help us understand that if people find meaning in such difficult situations, we can find meaning in our smaller or bigger ordeals.

Frankl coined the term logotherapy, or the therapy for meaning. The basic premise of logotherapy is that we have a capacity for meaning and spirituality – even when we might be burdened with illness or conditions that we cannot control, the spirit remains. The logotherapy process removes blockages and let the spirit fulfill its tasks (Wong, 2012). Logotherapy assumes that individuals have an intrinsic motivation for meaning and that meaning can be found in all of life's circumstances, even when experiencing the most miserable conditions.

Although in current times we have done some research that shows that people can grow after traumatic events, researchers show that it does not happen to everyone (de Jong et al, 2001). In logotherapy, not everyone's spirit can make the journey from the traumatic event in the same way, but in my opinion it would seem unfair to think that those people that do not find meaning in hardship have a blocked spirit of some sort.

No one enjoys suffering (unless a pathological disposition is present), but if it is a part of a larger plan, then it seems to be an easier pill to swallow. According to Pargament, people with a high sense of religiousness are able to transfer what happens in their lives into a larger perspective that addresses a supreme being's plan for them and thus makes things easier to deal with (Pargament, 2011). That ability to connect present challenges with a larger plan or meaning (in this case a religious meaning) can even give people the strength to do unimaginable things, like overcome addiction.

Knowing about Frankl's work has given my life meaning, especially professionally. In my professional life, I believe that my being in the world is teaching about how to be better human beings. This is what drew me to the study of positive psychology.

### **Positive Psychology and the Current Study of Meaning.**

Positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005). It is a field of psychology that studies what goes well and how to help more people achieve optimal functioning. For historical reasons, psychology has often focused on the pathologies that humans can present. The positive side of the scale has had little attention until a groups of scientists wondered why some people are able to function in optimal conditions and even declare that they feel that their life is fulfilled.

The following work intends to show how a series of concepts that emerge from this field of positive psychology can be applied in exercises that could aid in the formulation of a strong sense of meaning in adolescents and emerging adults. The assumption is that being able to create a robust system of meaning early on in life, along with other important self-determination and self-regulation skills, will provide a basis for sustained well-being in later stages of their development.

One of the central topics in positive psychology is the definition of well-being, and one of the helpful frameworks to arise from the field is Seligman's PERMA (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement) model (2013). The PERMA model was developed to help individuals achieve fulfillment. Each of the elements of PERMA, Seligman

argues, is an important pathway to well-being and fulfillment. More importantly, each of the following elements can be developed through intentional action.

- Positive emotions are important since they create a sense of everyday well-being. They also help shape what Fredrickson (2009) has called upward spirals that allow individuals to enjoy more positivity in their lives.
- Engagement is the second element of PERMA that looks at how the individual can feel more involved in activities that they perform on a daily basis. One key concept is flow, or the complete immersion in an activity that one is enjoying (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008)
- Relationships, the third element, focus on the fact that social relations are an important part of well-being. The better our relational selves feel, the more we are able to function at an optimal level.
- Meaning is defined by Seligman (2013) as feeling connected to something larger than oneself. When people have a strong sense of meaning, they feel that their existence matters and that they are present in this life for a reason. In my personal view it serves as a motor to go from one stage of life to the next, and it has been correlated to longer life spans and more fulfilling lives.
- Achievement is the last element of PERMA and refers to the feeling of being able to accomplish goals and have a sense of personal worth. There are several elements of achievement that have been studied such as how people create a sense of self-determination, an element that will be very important for the interventions with young people proposed here.

Each of the elements might be difficult to fully differentiate from the others. For example, relationships might also bring positive emotions. In the following sections, I will provide a deeper discussion on the topic of meaning and will try to argue that some elements of the individual's personal relationships and their sense of achievement overlap with meaning.

### **Current views on meaning and life purpose in psychology.**

#### **What does having meaning mean?**

In this section, I will explain the construct of meaning as it has been studied over the past twenty years. It should be noted that although the elements of PERMA are studied and applied across the life span, the concept of meaning is especially relevant in adolescents and emerging adults because the process of identity formation for adulthood occurs during this time in life. As was mentioned before, meaning is an important component of well-being and it is part of the PERMA model (Seligman 2002).

Current interests in psychology include the research on what constitutes a life with meaning. How do we measure meaning and which elements of everyday life make for a meaningful life? Haidt explains that asking why we are here is like entering into a movie theater (life) when the movie has already started and leaving before it finishes. Making sense of what happens during the time you are looking at the story may be harder than it seems (Haidt, 2006). One definition for the construct of meaning within positive psychology is that life has meaning when it is understood by the person living it to matter in a larger sense, to feel significant beyond the moment, to have purpose and coherence that transcends (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006).

The human quest for meaning is a quest about what fills that larger sense, what is significant and what provides purpose and coherence for each individual. Steger (2012) indicates that

meaning is a web of connections, understandings, and interpretations that help us comprehend our experience and formulate plans directing our energies to the achievement of a desired future.

There are various definitions of meaning in the research literature. Seligman (2013) proposes that the most important thing is feeling part of something larger than oneself. Empirical studies show that spirituality is one thing that could give people this sense and feeling (King & Scollon, 1998). Another important part of the various definitions of meaning is that life feels significant beyond the moment (King et al., 2006), while other studies have shown that social relationships can help people feel that their lives matter (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). One important researcher of positive psychology, Christopher Peterson, stated that the field was about the realization that “other people matter” (Peterson, 2006). Lastly, a cognitive component of meaning in King’s definition (2006) is the sense of purpose and coherence. Some studies in this field will refer to goals as part of this important sense of purpose (Maddux, 2011).

If we look at Steger’s definition, he argues that a sense of purpose comprises motivation about life, and will materialize for individuals as finding the extended goals or a life mission. Steger argues that there are three cognitive elements to understanding the meaning of life: Who am I? What is the world like? And lastly, how do I fit in? The three questions that Steger proposes are very simple in formulation but quite complex to answer.

Steger’s formulation points to the fact that self-knowledge is an important part of being able to respond to the complexities of life. In psychology, there have been a number of studies oriented towards identity formation; this seems to be a multifaceted approach. One study that is worth mentioning has to do with the orientation towards the search for identity (Marcia, 1966); in this approach, knowing who you are requires input and processing of information. You can actively search for that input and commit to what you find. This is called the high exploration-high

commitment model to identity formation, and it will be used to inform this paper's model to create meaning in life for adolescents.

Other qualities of actively searching for identity formation in the present are societal values, the sense of self-direction and freedom. In this sense, and for this paper, the question of what the world is like is more a question of how one approaches the world itself. A sense of agency or self-determination (Bandura, 1989) is very important for a flourishing approach to the world. Agency in emerging adulthood is still a concept being studied by researchers, but for the intentions of this paper, the concept would be summarized in the sense of responsibility for the course of one's life and the belief that one is in control of the decisions that we make and that we are responsible for the outcomes (Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005).

The third and last question in Steger's series is: how do I fit in? In order to answer this question, the individual would have to be aware of some sort of the answer to the first two questions. The third one would seem to come naturally if, during adolescence or emerging adulthood, one follows the high exploration-high commitment model. The difficulty of the situation arises, though, once the high-exploration portion of the equation has been discussed. What does high commitment mean?

Thus, the three self-strengths proposed in the model include the commitment to life goals and skills to achieve those goals: self-determination and self-regulation. In this case, if we return to the literature on adolescence, we can cite Steinberg (2014), for whom self-regulation is the most important skill that adolescents can be taught to assure their successful development in the future. Also, Baumeister and Tierney state that when psychologists isolate the conditions to predict positive outcomes in life, they find self-control as an important element (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011). One regulated response is being aware that you can respond in different ways. In this sense, self-determination is key to resilience training and is an important skill (Steinberg, 2014). Thus,

high commitment and the regulation of one-self to stay on task becomes an important part of the “how do I fit in?” question.

### **Current empirical research about meaning in life.**

Operationalizing and studying meaning in life and life purpose has been a challenge for scientists in the past decades. In this section, I will look further into some of the ways in which researchers have tried to measure meaning and the inferences that they are able to make from those studies. These studies have led to the discovery of several advantages of having meaning and purpose in life. Empirical findings include that having a strong sense of meaning can: be helpful in coping with difficult situations in life, promote growth, facilitate academic achievement, aid in occupational adjustment, be a protective factor for psychological and physical health, and further delay cognitive decay in later years (Shin & Steger, 2014).

Some self-reporting questionnaires have been used and have a good degree of internal and external validity. Examples of the questionnaires are: the Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky, 1993), the Purpose in Life Test or PIL (McGregor, 1998) and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire MLQ (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). These measures report whether the person observes the affirmations from the items in their personal lives. In this research, it has been found that there are correlations between the presence of meaning in life and well-being across different life stages. Other findings include that when young adults are searching for meaning rather than having meaning, later stages of life will have well-being deficits (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009).

Another important and relevant tool from positive psychology today is the assessment of character strengths. Extensive research and publication has been made about the topic (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Rashid & Anjum, 2014). Peterson and Park (2014) show that meaning is associated with using one’s top strengths of character. Some strengths have stronger correlations

with a sense of meaning than others. Specifically, the strongest correlation was between spirituality and meaning, with significant correlations also found between meaning and the strengths of perspective and social intelligence.

Other studies aimed at finding what composes a meaning system for different individuals. Pohlmann, Gruss and Joraschky (2006) have looked at the sources of people's meaning systems and found that if the person has several sources of meaning for their lives, there are higher correlations with life satisfaction. The assumption is that if one source of meaning changes, there are still other important elements that would support the sense of coherence in that person's life.

Another area in which research has focused is in finding sources of meaning in personal narratives. Some research hypotheses on the topic are based on the idea that people tell stories about themselves and about who they are. The research looks at similar situations and the different explanation that people give to the events (Sommer, Baumeister, & Stillman, 2012). They found the narratives to be a new and instructive method to define which elements give people a sense of meaning. The elements they found are: sense of purpose, feelings of efficacy, positive value and positive self-worth. When people show these elements in their narratives, they also have a sense of meaning.

Finally, in terms of research, it should be noted that scientists have been interested in testing hypotheses about meaning across a culturally and ethnically world gamut. Some studies have been made across cultural groups within the United States (Schwartz, Cote, & Arnett, 2005), as well as in other countries, like a study of Chinese adolescents and their purpose in life (Shek, 2012). In these studies, researchers find no difference in the indicators for meaning across different ethnic groups and cultures.

**From research to the shrink's office and the teachers' desk.**

From the research on meaning and life purpose, some important applications have developed. In the following paragraphs, I will explain some of the interventions and applications that have been in use for some time now in terms of therapy and in terms of education.

Wong (2010) has developed what he calls a meaning-centered positive existential psychotherapy, which focuses on helping the individual understand what gives meaning to his life. In the design of this treatment, Wong emphasized the need that individuals have to belong. So, the therapy helps the individual identify relational elements of his or her life, and if needed it helps the patient create those relationships. It also helps the individual create an optimistic view of events that happen in his life, even if they are tragic.

Other therapy applications have been centered on people finding meaning in difficult situations such as a cancer diagnosis or on group therapies to deal with tragic events (Shin & Steger, 2014). In this type of treatment, people help each other make meaning of unfortunate events. The two examples are of the interventions that psychology has developed have a common thread: helping people make the best out of high-stress situations or difficulties, usually among adult populations.

In terms of education and in particular career counseling, Duffy and Bryan (2013) state that calling should be understood as a sense of destiny and prosocial and at the same time a state of inner meaning and happiness. They find that people who see their job as a calling are more likely to find meaning in their work and more well-being in their lives. They propose that colleges and universities should address the issue of the source of the callings. They propose that vocational counseling orient toward helping students identify callings, but they also warn about the dark side of having a narrow view of the future. People that see their education as part of a calling may

develop a tunnel vision of the future and reject opportunities for growth. The intervention they propose explores the sources of callings, but also how to be open to new opportunities.

In the examples presented in the previous paragraphs, the main issue to identify seems to be what gives meaning to a person's life. It might be a calling, or it might be life circumstances. In the next section of this paper, the Three Self-Strengths model will be presented as a way to construct a robust meaning system and life purpose. The model will allow high school students to have both a clear understating of the sources of meaning and how avoid a tunnel vision, how to deal with life's challenges.

### **The Three Self-Strengths model**

Shin and Steger (2014) observed the need to create a new approach to intervention design in pursuit of meaning. Wong (2012), another major researcher and practitioner in the area of meaning, proposes a new model that is not just based on dealing with or addressing ill events (Wong, 2012). New interventions designed to promote findings of what gives people a sense of being part of something larger, having coherence in their lives or as Steger points in his model – who they are, what the world is, and how they fit into it – can help in the development of meaning.

Some of the interventions that can fit into the exploration of meaning and life purpose should be oriented to self-knowledge, such as the example of narratives or the use of character strengths. Others could be oriented towards the sense of agency and goal setting. A third set of exercises or interventions could be oriented towards the capacity to stay focused in long term goals.

In this portion of the paper, I will explain in depth each of the components of the three self-strengths that I propose. The proposal integrates a comprehensive model to help adolescents and

emerging adults understand the sources of meaning in their lives and explore what their purpose in life is, along with building the competencies to set pathways to attain their purpose. All the elements are aligned with thinking about Universidad Tecmilenio's previously stated vision: to help individuals develop a sense of purpose and to build the competencies to obtain their life goals.

The Three Self-Strengths model is comprised of three realizations that are very in tune with Steger's life questions of who am I, what is the world like, and where do I fit in? Adapting that from Steger's proposal to better reach the particular target audience of adolescents, the Three Self-Strengths represent: who I am, the things that I can do, and how I stay focused on the task.

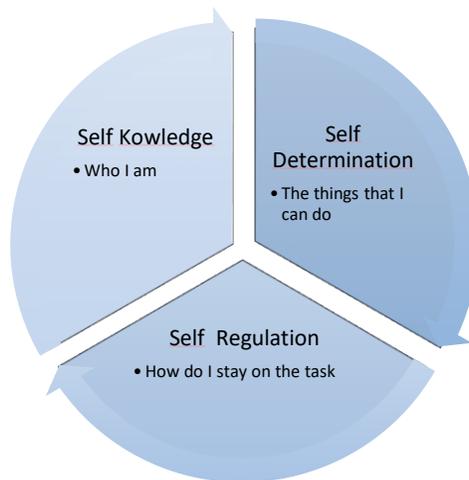


Fig 1. Three Self-Strengths Model.

In the figure above, the reader can observe a graphic representation of the Three Self-Strengths in a cycle. However, the lines between each of these realizations is not clearly defined, as some of the information that the adolescent needs for self-knowledge might also influence self-determination and self-regulation, and vice versa.

In the following sections, I will further explain some of the empirical studies and applications for each of the self-strengths: self-knowledge, self-determination and self-regulation. I

will also show examples of exercises that can be done to develop each of the three self-strengths.

The reader can look for a detailed series of exercises in Appendix A.

### **Who am I? Self-knowledge as a life skill.**

The first step towards building a strong sense of meaning and life purpose is knowing oneself, as was mentioned before in the high exploration-high commitment (Marcia, 1966) approach. This approach to finding one's sources for meaning has been used in empirical research and has shown to be an effective aid to having a robust and sustained way in which to create a meaning system (Shin & Steger, 2014). In the Three Self-Strengths model, there are three recommended activities to help high school students better understand who they are: 1. Character strengths; 2. Flow-inducing activities; and 3. Positive self-portrait.

**Character Strengths.** From positive psychology, the character strengths approach is an important way in which a person can explore and come to know themselves and thus increase their wellbeing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The taxonomy of character strengths created by Peterson and Seligman, promoted by the Values in Action Institute ([viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org)), identifies those character strengths that are valued across cultures. The first of the self-knowledge exercises that will be part of the Three Self-Strengths model includes answering the VIA questionnaire and identifying one's strengths, then finding new ways to use them in activities in which the strengths provide more satisfaction and fulfillment for the individual.

The research on character strengths suggests that more well-being and enjoyment can be attained if there is a conscious use of one's strengths (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, & Christopher, 2005). Beyond personal knowledge, according to Shin and Steger (2014), work and career life are two areas where people derive a lot meaning from. They propose that once people

know their strengths and have developed ways to increase their use, college students could frame the decision of what to major in by taking into account which type of activities will give them more personal meaning. They could write a small reflection of how their strengths could come into action with the different possible courses of studies that the person is thinking of engaging in.

To help students directly, one of the ways in which a character strengths approach can be used is in individual sessions. The benefit of individual sessions is that a person can explore the results in more detail and have a guided reflection based on the results, set a personal plan to develop more self-knowledge and fulfillment from the use of their strengths. This might be a challenge when thinking of a school setting. A more time-efficient approach could be group sessions guided by a teacher. This could lead to a reaffirmation of strengths when the teachers and other students see them reflected in a person. There are numerous examples of how to use strengths in many ways (Rashid & Anjum, 2014), and individual and group sessions could help students discover those.

A change of the school environment toward strengths could prove useful, as could a communication campaign using the language of strengths. The school staff could use badges with their strengths, for example, and people could refer to strengths in class and other non-curricular activities. The main focus of this culture change is to create self-awareness that would help young people know themselves.

**Flow-Inducing Activities.** As noted above, career exploration and work are important sources of meaning. Learning about their preferred activities, high school students can make more informed decisions about majors and careers. Although many people do not feel constrained by what they decide to major in college and what they later do in life, it can be helpful to frame the decision in terms of what gives meaning to one's life. When we do things that we like doing and we do it in way that we have mastered, we can feel more engaged – so much so that we can go into

a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Flow is a peak mental state of full immersion in an activity. It has some important characteristics, like feeling energized, having a sense of full involvement, and enjoyment.

Some interventions have been designed for school settings to increase student engagement in school. The purpose of including flow in this model, though, is not to explore flow as an element of engagement, but instead as an element of self-knowledge. One such application of the concept of flow has been linked to coaching practices, where research-practitioners have found it useful to help coachees identify flow states as a part of balancing the many aspects of their life (Wesson & Boniwell, 2007). (For more information on coaching and how it can help the design of interventions in schools, look at appendix A.) A beginner exercise for high school students would help them identify those activities that potentially help them go into flow states. By learning about their preferred activities, they can make more informed decisions about majors and careers.

**Positive Self-Portrait.** Building personal narratives can also be a way to learn more about one's self and find one's sources of meaning (Pohlmann, Gruss, & Joraschky, 2006; Sommer, Baumeister, & Stillman, 2012; Peterson C. , 2006). In this context, there are interventions that could be proposed as a positive self-portrait (Cameron, personal interview October 2014). In this intervention, the student asks important people in their life to send a small written narrative of moments when they have observed the person at their best. The student then builds a positive self-portrait with the information given by others. After the person has acquired some information about the self, the next approach will be to incorporate this knowledge to create sources of meaning.

**What is the world like? What am I able to do in the world? Self-determination as a life skill.**

Within the Three Self-Strengths model, the second self that needs to be trained is self-determination. Adapted from Steger's question about what the world is like, this model asks

instead: what am I able to do in the world? The sense that one is in control of one's actions and the outcomes of those actions is a fundamental part of interacting with the world. In the following paragraphs, I will explain what self-determination is by introducing two theories: Hope theory and goal-setting theory. The section will then propose three main areas of development for self-determination, which are: 1. Setting goals; 2. Making realistic plans to achieve them; and 3. Building resilience.

**Hope Theory.** The first topic to address is hope. In general terms, hope is defined by Snyder (2002) as the process of thinking about one's goals with a sense of agency and being able to set pathways to achieve them. To demonstrate the importance of hope, a study about academic success in college shows that college freshmen who have a higher score on a hope scale do better in college than those with lower scores in the scale (Snyder, et al, 2002). The study concludes that including interventions to create a sense of hope for emerging adults could prove as important as content-focused interventions in school. It also points that the way in which instructors present the topic to students is important.

To help students and their teachers grow a bigger sense of self-determination and develop hope, this model recommends three exercises: The first exercise is goal setting, the second is planning, and the third is resilience training. Goal setting will create the sense of being in control of one's life, while planning and resilience training will provide a feeling of being in control of the outcomes. Goal setting, planning, and resiliency are ways to provide specific skills to help the transition from adolescence into emerging adulthood and later onto different states of life while maintaining the commitment to life goals.

**Setting Valued Goals.** To align with and build life purpose, commitment to goals should come from intrinsic motivation. The sense of understanding what is important for the self creates extended goals, or a personal life mission. A sense of coherence accompanies some definitions of

meaning (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Shin & Steger, 2014), and when goals represent the self in a deeper sense (including one's values), they are called self-concordant goals. Sheldon and Kasser developed an intervention that explores self-concordant goals (2002). In this intervention, they propose that people can brainstorm a series of goals and then answer a questionnaire about them in order to find which ones will be concordant with their values and beliefs. As they progress in the intervention, they are asked to keep those goals that are more attuned to them and write a life purpose statement based on them. An exercise on what is valuable to the young person can be done by asking students to think about those things that are important to them. They can then use this knowledge to evaluate the goals they set and choose those that are most coherent with their life purpose.

In the previous section, I explained how self-knowledge is an important input for meaning and life purpose. Better understanding oneself is valuable on its own, but it also helps with an exercise like this. Being able to do the concordant goal exercise with a robust knowledge of who you are, for example, should result in a better life purpose statement and selection of goals that are likely to bring meaning (See appendix A for the specific exercises).

**Creating a Plan.** Once meaningful goals have been established, the next step from hope theory is setting pathways to attain those goals. In Seligman's research (2006), he explains that he found that some individuals are naturally optimistic in their interpretation of life events, while others have a pessimistic explanatory style of life. The good news is that optimism can be learned, and one way to be more optimistic about the future is the sense of efficacy or agency that comes from goal-setting.

A particular technique that Grant-Halvorson explains in her work and that can be of important use with young people is mental contrasting. This technique was researched and created by Gabrielle Oettingen (2014). When using mental contrasting, individuals first positively

visualize their desired future (e.g., solving an ongoing interpersonal conflict) and then mentally elaborate the current reality that stands in the way of realizing the envisioned future (e.g., shyness). One of the reasons why people often don't keep their commitment to their goals is that they are not equipped to deal with setbacks, so this technique helps by providing routes when such obstacles appear.

Imagining the future and then imagining real-life obstacles reveals that in order to realize the wished-for future, one has to act based on the current reality (e.g., to solve the interpersonal conflict, one needs to overcome the present shyness). In other words, to pursue meaningful goals, one needs to believe that he or she can act in the world in ways that will be effective. As a consequence, expectations of overcoming the anticipated obstacles determine one's behavior: high expectations lead to increased effort and more success, and low expectations lead to decreased effort and less success (Grant-Halvorson, 2011). The latter helps people disengage from unrealistic wishes and free up resources for other goals. This has also been called realistic optimism (Schneider, 2001).

Although there are more details in Appendix A, I will outline here mental contrasting for the reader to observe the type of interventions that are proposed.

WOOP (Oettingen, 2014) is an acronym for four steps to combine mental contrasting with an additional activity called implementation intentions. Mental contrasting contributes the "WOO" part (wish, outcome, and obstacle) in WOOP, whereas implementation intentions contribute the "P" part (plan).

The WOOP strategy contains four steps:

1. **Wish:** The first step is to name an important but feasible wish or goal that one would like to fulfill.

2. Outcome: The second step is to identify and imagine the positive future outcome of fulfilling this wish or goal.
3. Obstacle: The third step is to identify and imagine the most critical personal obstacle that stands in the way of fulfillment of this wish or goal.
4. Plan: The fourth step is to specify a plan to affect desired behaviors. It takes the form of "if [a particular situation that represents a good opportunity] arises... then I will [engage in behavior that promotes my goal]."

For the design of the self-determination portion of the high school program described in this paper, once that the young person has established a life purpose and has an idea of their extended goals, student counselors can use mental contrasting and implementation intentions to help students set paths that will lead to those goals in a more effective way.

**Building Resilience.** The final step in this model towards feeling in control is for a person to know how to act when those obstacles arise. Reivich and Shatté (2002) state that resilience, or the ability to bounce back from setbacks, is an important skill for life, as it can give a sense of being able to control the outcomes of the events around us in many ways. Building on Seligman's work showing that optimistic people are resilient, positive psychologists developed training in such resilience skills (Gillham, et al, 2007).

It is important to remember that most of the interventions that were made to increase meaning in the past (from the 1950's to 1980's) had to do with making sense of traumatic events or illness in one's life (Sommer, Baumeister, & Stillman, 2012; Shin & Steger, 2014; Wong, 2010). Yet I believe there is a difference between finding meaning through hardship and having meaning and being able to deal with hardship. Although it is possible to derive meaning from traumatic events that throw life off course, it is also important to assure that the person will be able to continue in their life mission in spite the obstacles.

There are a few resilience interventions that have shown excellent results over time (Gillham, et al, 2007) and that provide the skills necessary to be able to deal with life's hurdles. A complete model of building self-determination in adolescents and young adults should include resilience training. This training could occur *vis-à-vis* with the exploration for identity and the commitment for goals (in different contexts, it might also be helpful).

To help build resilience, Reivich and Shatté propose an exercise to aid the person in regulating emotional responses to triggering or activating events (2002), such as a setback in the pursuit of a meaningful goal. Among other ways in which to build self-determination in dealing with those kinds of situations, the ABC model and identifying thinking traps can be important skills for young people. The ABC model teaches people to identify immediate thoughts that influence the emotions and reactions they have in response to setbacks, while thinking traps identify common patterns in thinking that can be counter-productive (See appendix A for more information).

Another source of resilience when pursuing meaningful goals is to have strong relationships. In a technique called Active Constructing Responding (ACR), as presented by Shelly Gable (Gable & Gosnell, 2011), young people learn that responding with interest and making the other person feel important is a crucial relationship builder. Importantly, this research shows that relationships, like meaning, is strengthened not just after setbacks, but in good times as well.

### **From Self-determination to Self-Regulation**

Meaningful goal setting, planning (through mental contrasting and implementation intentions), and building resilience can give young people self-determination, or the feeling of being in control. But it should also be mentioned that a robust meaning-making system requires a

good deal of actual self-control. Accordingly, self-regulation will be explained in the next section, as the connection between what the world feels like and where does one fit in.

**How do I fit in? The last self-strength is self-regulation.**

According to Steinberg, self-regulation is the most important skill that as educators we can wield in order to help young people (Steinberg, 2014). In the brief section about adolescence, a few of the challenges that young people face today are mentioned, including losing control of alcohol consumption, using drugs, having unprotected sex, and not finishing school. The challenges also include the exponential growth of depression rates in young adults. According to Baumeister and Tierney, young people today have probably been raised in an environment that has favored self-esteem over self-regulation (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011). As a result, youth today may lack the psychological resources to stay on task. Self-regulation helps adolescents and emerging adults to restrain or use their willpower to pursue their meaningful goals, to deal with the difficulties of life and to be open to change when necessary.

In this sense, one of most immediate threats to a continued sense of meaning and life purpose is the lack of self-control. There could be real threats to the feeling of purpose if young people know what they want in life but are not able to stay on the pathway to achieve it. Thus, the Three Self-Strengths model cannot be complete if the individual is not able to stay on task for the extended goals. In the model, once the individual knows who he is and acknowledges what he wants to and is able to accomplish, the last self-strength that is needed for sustained well-being is self-regulation. Willpower, as self-regulation is also known, can help children stay on task doing homework when there are great opportunities for fun outside of the home, or an adolescent solving

math problems when the social networks are tempting her, or even a graduate student to keep writing a paper, such as this one, when her friends are out to dinner.

Self-regulation is also considered a character strength (Pererson & Seligman, 2004) that provides the individual with the ability to regulate emotional responses, to be in control of one's actions, and to have discipline and control one's appetites. It has been mentioned before that self-control is one of the most important skills that psychology has found to have positive outcomes in people that are successful and have a sense of well-being (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011).

The main issue for the model proposed here is whether the young person can increase self-control in some way. Baumeister's lab has shown that it exists and that it can be depleted, but can self-regulation be increased? Research shows that when people exercise self-control, they can create habits or routines that later will require little effort (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011). Self-control also permeates into other aspects of an individual's life; this means that when the person increases self-control in one type of activities self-regulation over all benefits. Baumeister's proposal is to strengthen self-control by changing small things first, and later addressing bigger self-control tasks.

In the case of the proposed intervention, the need to stay on task required to achieve extended long term goals requires self-control. Say, for example, that a young person finds that they want to participate in a very competitive academic program in order to have the necessary skills for the life purpose that they have stated. Immediate self-control might come in handy now as they try to gain admittance to the program, then also play a significant role during their college years and later on. Self-control is required to master resiliency, to establish a savings fund, to stay healthy and so on.

One exercise design as proposed by Steinberg (2014) could be to teach self-control via mindfulness training. To be congruent and coherent with interventions that have been researched and have shown positive correlations with well-being, the proposed approach for this model will be Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice (MBSP), a program that integrates and builds character strengths and mindfulness. The first research findings show that it is beneficial in boosting well-being, signature strengths, engagement, purpose, and positive relationships (Niemic, 2014).

Self-regulation is increased in this practice because mindfulness will help to create mental strategies to stay on the task and know how to deal with obstacles in being present and fully concentrated. This mindfulness practice weaves in the mindful use of strengths by focusing attention on the experience of using character strengths and at the same time discovering that the individual is using strengths in a conscious way. The student will be attentive to how they are using the strengths and will be able to concentrate better. Based on self-regulation research, this training could result in self-regulation benefits in other areas of the student's lives. The program is an eight-week intervention (more details of the intervention are specified in the appendix A). The important thing for the three self-strengths model is that it boosts self-regulation.

Similarly to resilience training, mindfulness is not an intervention that has been considered as a part of meaning and life purpose interventions. But if as educators we are to be able to create a positive adulthood for the current generations of young people by teaching the self-control to pursue their life purpose, then it might be one of the most important things that we can offer them.

### **How to construct an intervention in a high school program.**

During the past decade, elementary, middle and high schools have introduced some of the different concepts of positive psychology. Some have even introduced them within a school-wide approach. Two very successful examples in Australia are Geelong Grammar School and St. Peter's

College (Waters, 2014), schools that have applied many interventions and have evidence of their success by measuring student's PERMA levels and other indicators of wellbeing. The proposed Three Self-Strengths model has the intention of making the creation of meaning and life purpose as one of the development objectives for a high school program. The model can be summarized in a series of interventions or exercises to create meaning and life purpose.

The following table shows an example of how the interventions could be conducted in a typical high school program, and the exercise descriptions are compiled in Appendix A of this paper. In the case of Tecmilenio, the program is a three-year curriculum, so the interventions would be conducted as follows:

	<b>Freshman</b>	<b>Junior</b>	<b>Senior</b>
<b>Self-Knowledge</b>	Character Strengths Flow inducing activities	Positive Self Portrait	
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>	Resilience training	Concordant goals and life mission	WOOP
<b>Self-Regulation</b>		Mindfulness training	

To recap, each of the self-strengths can be developed and increased by:

- Self-knowledge is produced by: a) Knowing and using one's character strengths; b) Being aware of the activities that can induce flow states in oneself; and c) Creating a positive self-portrait with the input of others.
- Self-determination is attained by: a) Setting concordant goals and a life mission statement; b) Applying the WOOP process to plan for the pursuit of goals; and c) resilience training to support goal achievement
- Self-regulation is strengthened by mindfulness training – specifically, mindfulness-based strengths practice.

Applying all of the exercises requires planning and design, which should take place with the intention to create the desired outcomes. As has been mentioned, there are many benefits from knowing yourself, your motivations, and what you want to accomplish – and having the skills to do so. Some of those benefits include better academic results, but that is not the main purpose of the proposed model.

High school takes place in Mexico during three years of education, when adolescents are between 15 and 18 years of age. These are important years to work with the Three Self-Strengths in order to generate more well-being during adolescence and emerging adulthood, but also later in life.

The general operationalization or implementation of the interventions would be to work in tracks focused on each of the Self-Strengths during the three years of high school. During the first year, students should work on: knowing their strengths, resiliency training and beginner mindfulness exercises. During the second year, they could approach more complex exercises like the sources of flow and continue with mindfulness practices. The positive self-portrait and setting of a life mission, as well as the WOOP intervention, should be left last, for the third year of high school. In this way, the interventions can help build a robust system of meaning for young people and help them transition into their college years successfully.

As for measurements, there are at least two types of measurements that can be done. First would be to measure meaning and purpose themselves, which could be done in a pre-intervention, mid-intervention and post-intervention stage. Currently Tecmilenio is using the items related to purpose in life from the Scale of Psychological Well-being (Akin, 2008). Also, a general measure of the PERMA scale (2013) can be used during similar times. These measures would help school

administrators to understand the impact of the Three Self-Strengths model and could inform changes to the program's design.

Recently, the University of Victoria in New Zealand conducted a study of the role that life purpose has in secondary education. In this intervention, the University made a pre-intervention test with the MLQ model, then they gave the students an academic course on the sources of meaning in life. The intervention consisted of tutoring sessions about what they would like to do professionally later in life. They then measured post-intervention using the same questionnaire. (Riedel, 2015). In their findings, students began low on the scale and then ended higher in MLQ questionnaire.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the proposed model will be divided into three areas: High school students, research on meaning, and application of the model into a real high school context.

For the first set of limitations, it is important to remember that the main aim of this paper is to help high school students include the element of meaning and life purpose as they decide where to go to college and what to study. It is a reality that applies to a limited group of adolescents that have access to high school education worldwide, and in particular to Tecmilenio students. As a practitioner of positive psychology, I realize that it is possible to find meaning and purpose without going to college. However, the main interest of the paper is to address a perceived need of this specific population.

Also, in this particular model, the high-exploration and high-commitment model to personal identity assumes that all the students will be able to achieve the level of motivation. It is

possible that some of the students will not be motivated to explore who they are or to commit to their findings; maybe they won't care at all.

In terms of the second set of limitations, research on meaning and life purpose has so far focused on the study of people that report that they have meaning in their lives or that they can identify the sources of meaning. Some of the limitations are based on the results of practical applications of the concepts that have been researched in such a way that they are mainly therapy-based interventions. This paper takes a new approach that is sustained in the ideas of important researchers on meaning like Paul T.P. Wong and Michael Steger, but not yet tested directly.

Lastly, in terms of the high school context, it should be mentioned that the Capstone paper was written with the intention of serving as a guide for a particular school, the Universidad Tecmilenio in Mexico. This means that because I have focused on the academic curricula and configuration of a particular school, I might be biased on my views and thus the proposed track of application might not work for every school program or calendar. Adaptations to other schools would need to be made. It also should be mentioned that the success of the program is highly dependent of the mentors, tutors or teachers that will implement it – teachers will need to be trained in the concepts and practice them themselves to be able to work with students.

### **Conclusion**

Meaning and life purpose are important elements of psychological wellbeing throughout life – having a sense of meaning increases overall wellbeing. Therefore, developing both a robust meaning system and a sense of purpose are elements that a high school program can provide to young people as part of their preparation for life.

Young people transitioning to adulthood have specific challenges that have big impacts on their wellbeing and that could potentially affect their future. That is why this Capstone paper presented a series of interventions on the topic of meaning and life purpose called the Three Self-Strengths model, focusing on the development of self-knowledge, self-efficacy, and self-regulation. The model is based on the field of positive psychology and uses different elements to create a comprehensive three-year application that helps young people know who they are, know what they are capable of, and know how to stay on task. The model is also based on the notion that young people that will participate will be willing to explore the sources of who they are, what the world is like and how they fit in, and that they will compromise to the results that they find.

The Self-Strengths build on each other and grow stronger as the young person starts working on them. The interventions have been done separately in different contexts with empirical results. The commitment that this paper makes is to orient each of the exercises towards creating more meaning and purpose in the young person's life. It is an application with a purpose.

In the future, research of the overall application could prove important to analyze the results of the intervention. Also, other interventions can explore changing the order or adding new exercises. It is my hope that more educators will be interested in developing a sense of meaning and purpose in young people that will help them increase their psychological wellbeing for life.

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## Appendix A

### Exercises for the Three Self-Strengths model

#### Introduction

In the body of the paper I presented a proposal to implement the Three Self-Strengths model in a high school program. The following table is a summary of the exercises and how they should be implemented in the Tecmilenio three-year program:

	Freshman	Junior	Senior
Self Knowledge	Character Strengths Flow inducing activities	Positive Self Portrait	
Self Efficacy	Resilience training	Concordant goals and life mission	WOOP
Self Regulation		Mindfulness training	

In the following pages, examples of the exercises will be presented for the reader to have the general description and instruction of the interventions for each of the self-strengths: self-knowledge, self-efficacy and self-regulation. During the interventions, I propose to use a tool from life coaching as an aid for the teachers to implement.

Life coaches are trained professionals that accompany individuals in their search for answers. There are many different techniques and areas that people can have coaching on. One of them is life coaching. In this brief appendix, I will explore a possible tool for constructing a robust meaning system using a coaching tool called the Wheel of Life, as well as the co-active coaching approach, for balancing different aspects of life.

Life coaching is a collaborative process that fosters self-directed learning and personal growth. The person being coached (*coachee*) is accompanied by a coach, who facilitates the process (Kimsey-House & Kimsey-House, 2011). There are very few applications of coaching for young populations, but over the last years some researchers and practitioners have explored those routes (Green, Grant, & Rynsaardt, 2007). The results are promising, since intervention with young people often helps them to set goals and also helps them to reflect on the future and their plans.

Balancing the Wheel of Life (Figure 2) is one of the exercises that several coaching techniques use. The wheel addresses different aspects of an individual's life, and the exercises often ask the person to evaluate their current state in each of these in order to later set plans for enhancing those elements of the wheel that might need attention.

In coaching, it is the *coachee* who decides which elements might need to be addressed and which are best left as they are. In the case of the proposed interventions, it has to be mentioned that the purpose of the wheel is to illustrate the many sources of meaning that one might encounter. Some studies have found that when people have a robust meaning system, their sense of meaning is stronger and can be sustained through life, even when some of the sources of meaning fail (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009).

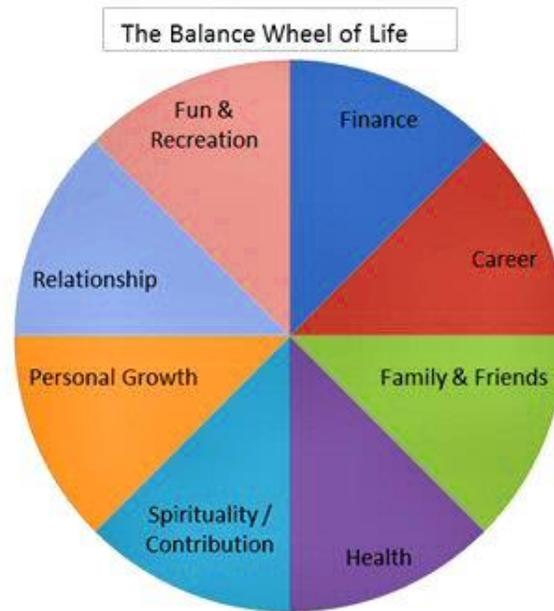


Figure 2: The Wheel of Life, taken from: Kimsey-House and Kimsey-House 2011

The figure contains a series of categories in which the individual can explore both how those elements contribute to the meaning system and life purpose or need to be dealt with to make sure that their goals are attained.

In this sense, the Wheel of Life in coaching is an image that the *coachee* comes back to and balances in recurrent occasions. It also serves as a visual aid to give obstacles a certain weight in the present moment. When, for example, a person might face illness, the wheel helps the person understand that other aspects of their life are still in balance or it helps plan the impact of illness in the other aspects and thus helps them plan accordingly.

## Interventions and Exercises

### Self-knowledge exercises

#### 1.- Character Strengths

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	The student will know his or her character strengths. This is the basis for the self-knowledge exercises.
<b>Required materials:</b>	VIA questionnaire, computer.
<b>Required time:</b>	2 hours to present the questionnaire and at least a full semester to identify the use of strengths.
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	First semester of the Freshman year of high school
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	This intervention is based on the VIA classification of Strengths (viacharacter.org). According to this classification, there are 24 Character Strengths, divided into six virtue categories: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence.
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	All teachers in the school are knowledgeable about the 24 VIA Character Strengths

#### Exercise Design:

- a) The teacher should explain what the character strengths are and show the classification to students.
- b) Students answer the VIA questionnaire and obtain their top strengths.
- c) They have a conversation with a classmate about the results and whether they see the strengths fitting how they are.
- d) Teachers and students help each other identify character strengths as they witness them throughout the whole semester.
- e) During the last month of the semester, students are asked to find new ways to focus on their strengths.
- f) Students share their insights the last week of the semester.

#### 2.- Learning more about flow states.

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	The student will know and practice activities that can make him or her more engaged and induce flow states. The intervention works by helping students identify their preferred activities and knowing how to find the ideal challenge level.
<b>Required materials:</b>	Journal for goals, plan and reflection
<b>Required time:</b>	This exercise takes place during one full semester and students are accompanied by one teacher or counselor as they go through the setting the goals, and the reflections that follow in the steps. The goal setting part of the exercise takes one hour.
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	Second semester of the Freshman year
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	Wesson and Boniwell (2007)
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	All teachers in the school are trained in the concept of flow, and have worked with setting goals. Knowing the wheel of life is of aid to the teachers since they can use it to ask.

### Exercise design:

- a) Students are asked by the teacher to set academic and nonacademic goals for the second semester of the freshman year.
- b) Once the goal is set students are asked to reflect on the skills that they need to accomplish their goals, reflect on the challenge level that the goal presents and set a plan to acquire the skills.
- c) During that same session they are asked to think about those challenges and reframe the activity by finding how their strengths come into play.
- d) The next part of the session, students are asked to write down the results that they expect and how they will impact their future if they achieve those goals.
- e) They are asked to keep a record of the goals and the steps made towards attaining it. Teachers take the journal home with them once a week to read through it and comment.
- f) Teachers celebrate small wins and advancement in the student's goals and give small rewards once a month.

### 3.- Creating a positive self-portrait with the input of others.

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	The student will learn about how other people in their life see them and when they are at their best.
<b>Required materials:</b>	Paper to write the essay
<b>Required time:</b>	This exercise takes place as homework, and the students will need to send e-mails and then compose an essay. It should take about three hours.
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	First semester of the Senior year
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	This intervention is based on Cameron's work (personal communication, October 2014)
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Knowing the wheel of life is of aid to the teachers since they can use it to ask students who would be important people in each of the aspect of the wheel for them.

#### Exercise design:

Students are assigned to ask 3 friends, 3 family members and 3 teachers about themselves, they have to ask 9 people to write a story about when those people have observed them to be at their best. The stories that people write about the students should be one page long. As the second part of the homework:

- a) Students read their 9 stories.
- b) Students then compose a self-narrative about the times when they are at their best pointing to the character strengths that others observe in them.
- c) Students reflect on the role that those times when they are at their best play in their life and include a last paragraph as part of their homework.

### Self-efficacy exercises

#### 1.-Resilience training

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	To develop flexible, accurate thinking that will help students analyze events in their life and explain them in the best possible way.
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<b>Required materials:</b>	A notebook to work with the formats for the ABC model
<b>Required time:</b>	One session a week for at least 8 weeks
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	Any semester of the Freshman year
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	Reivich and Shatté (2002)
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Teachers should be trained in the ABC model, thinking traps and icebergs. They should have the complete 8 week training themselves.

Exercise design:

- a) Students will be asked to practice identifying beliefs for at least 5 days using the following table, and then come back and discuss them in small groups.

<b>Activating Event:</b>	
<b>B: (heat-of-the-moment thoughts)</b>	<b>C: (emotions and reactions)</b>
→	
→	
→	
<b>Helping or Harming?</b>	

- b) One facilitator (an adult that might be a teacher, counselor, advisor) is present and guiding the session. Students are later left to use their new knowledge for 3 to 4 weeks.
- c) After students have used the format and are acquainted with it they will be shown that sometimes there are patterns that we follow called thinking traps. Students will be asked to identify possible patterns in their behavior.
- d) Students will be asked to work on thinking traps for 3 to 4 weeks.
- e) The third part of the training is to identify those moments when important values that they hold have may come into conflict or generate those Activating Events, again using the same exercise model as before.

**2.- Active Constructing Responding.**

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	To learn how to respond in positive ways to events that happen in life.
<b>Required materials:</b>	Video about ACR
<b>Required time:</b>	Two one hour sessions and the homework time.
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	Any semester of the Freshman year.
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	Gable and Gosnell (2011), video on ACR from: Gordon Lamb (available <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRORihbXMnA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRORihbXMnA</a> )
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Teachers should be trained on ACR and use the wheel of life also as a source of information.

### Exercise design:

- a) For this training, students are shown a video that exemplifies the model and then will be asked to pick a person to practice it within the classroom.
- b) Then students will be asked to pick an area of the wheel of life, pick a person that impacts that area, and practice ACR with that person for one week.
- c) After the week, students will come back to class and have a group sharing session about how it went.
- d) Students will be asked to incorporate ACR into other areas of their life.

### 3.- Setting concordant goals and a life mission statement.

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	The students create a life mission statement.
<b>Required materials:</b>	Paper to write the narratives and statement
<b>Required time:</b>	About 3 hours divided in two 90 minute sessions
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	First semester of the Junior year
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	This intervention is taken from Shin and Stinger (2014)
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Knowing the wheel of life is of aid to the teachers since they can use it to ask students who would be important people in each of the aspect of the wheel for them. Know Shin and Stinger model of self-concordant goals.

### Exercise design:

- a) Students are asked to look at the wheel of life and think about your daily activities that have to do with each of the areas in the wheel.
- b) Students can be asked to write a couple of fantasy narratives of their possible futures.
- c) Teachers show the student's the model of self-concordant goals; at this point students have enough self-knowledge to know what their interests are and how to pursue them, and to ask themselves which interests are intrinsically motivated.
- d) Students are asked to evaluate their goals in the context of what gives them meaning and use elements of the wheel of life or other input as desired.
- e) Students choose which goals are more important and intrinsically motivated, which ones they want to pursue for a period of time, then use this information to formulate a statement of purpose in life.
- f) Students are asked to set smaller goals that will lead to bigger ones and frame the decisions of what will happen after high school.

#### 4.- Applying the WOOP process to the goals.

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	Students will learn how to apply create pathways for goal attainment and deal with adversity.
<b>Required materials:</b>	Life purpose statement from the self-concordant exercise
<b>Required time:</b>	About 3 hours divided in two 90 minute sessions
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	Senior year
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	Adaptation from Gabrielle Oettingen exercise (2014)
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Knowing about goal attainment and preferably having read Hedi-Grant Halvorson "Succeed: how you can reach your goals"

#### Exercise design:

1. The student will be asked to look at the goals and life purpose statement that he or she made in the self-concordant goal exercise.

2. The student will be asked to think about the possible positive outcomes of the fulfillment of the goals that he or she set in the exercise.
3. The student will be asked to identify possible obstacles for the attainment of the goals.
4. For each of the obstacles the student will be asked to set possible pathways to deal with the imagined obstacles.
5. Students will be shown how to do a flow diagram of the results of the WOOP exercise.
6. Later students will be asked to reflect on how they can use this knowledge in addition to the other learning from resilience to deal with possible setbacks in the future.

**Self-control or regulation is strengthened by mindfulness training.**

**1.- Basic awareness exercises on mindfulness**

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	Students will be taught the basic techniques to be open to the context and engage in the present moment
<b>Required materials:</b>	None
<b>Required time:</b>	About one hour a week during 4 weeks
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	Senior year
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	Mindfulness based strength practice Niemic
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Knowledge about the VIA character strengths and mindfulness based strengths practice.

Exercise design:

- a) Students will be asked to do a mindfulness practice once a week during one hour.
- b) Students will be asked to practice the exercise during that full week.
- c) In the first part of the next session, students will be asked to reflect on the experience of the past week.

- d) The next part of the session students will practice a new basic mindfulness awareness exercise.

## 2.- Strong mindfulness

<b>Purpose of the exercise</b>	Improving mindfulness by weaving in character strengths
<b>Required materials:</b>	VIA Institute course on mindfulness
<b>Required time:</b>	About one hour a week for 4 weeks
<b>Suggested timeframe:</b>	Senior year, after the first intervention
<b>Source of the exercise:</b>	Mindfulness based strength practice Niemic (2014)
<b>Previous knowledge required for the instructor/ tutor:</b>	Teachers should be trained on the course provided by the VIA Character Institute.

Exercise design:

- a) Students will be asked to do a mindfulness that weaves character strengths and mindfulness, they will engage on the practice once a week during one hour.
- b) Students will be asked to practice the exercise during that full week.
- c) In the first part of the next session, students will be asked to reflect on the experience of the past week.
- d) The next part of the session students will practice a new basic mindfulness awareness exercise.