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Bringing Positive Psychology to the Footlights After-School Center

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Bringing Positive Psychology to the Footlights After-School Center

Abstract

This paper is the report on a service learning project conducted by four students in 2006 as part of the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania. The paper describes a proposal for applying positive psychology at Footlights – a performing arts after-school center for underprivileged teenagers in Hartford, CT. The paper describes Footlights, including daily operations, instructors and participating teenagers. It then outlines a proposed application plan for introducing and using positive psychology at the center. It concludes with an overview of the relevant empirical research that constitutes the basis for the proposed application plan. Appendices give the plan in more detail and describe a particular exercise included in the plan.

Comments

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Bringing Positive Psychology to the Footlights After-School Center:

A Service Learning Project

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Abstract

This paper is the report on a service learning project conducted by four students in 2006 as part of the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania. The paper describes a proposal for applying positive psychology at Footlights – a performing arts after-school center for underprivileged teenagers in Hartford, CT. The paper describes Footlights, including daily operations, instructors and participating teenagers. It then outlines a proposed application plan for introducing and using positive psychology at the center. It concludes with an overview of the relevant empirical research that constitutes the basis for the proposed application plan. Appendices give the plan in more detail and describe a particular exercise included in the plan.

Bringing Positive Psychology to the Footlights After-School Center:

A Service Learning Project

Four students of the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania conducted a semester-long service learning project with Footlights, a performing arts after-school program for low income teenagers in Hartford Connecticut. The project included investigating the Footlights program in particular, studying the adolescent after-school sector in general, surveying the positive psychology literature for relevant interventions, and formulating a plan in collaboration with the center director. This paper describes all of these aspects of the service learning project for the benefit of others wanting to put positive psychology to work for teenagers in general and after-school programs in particular.

About Footlights

The mission of the Footlights Center in Hartford, CT is "to inspire Hartford teens to excel and discover their talents through the arts in a safe and fun environment." The Footlights Center plays a vital role in the lives of low income and potentially high-risk adolescents by using the arts to create a positive hub. As part of a service learning course taught by Professor James Pawelski at the Master of Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania, Footlights was enrolled as an organization who might potentially achieve benefits from applied Positive Psychology.

History of Footlights

The Footlights Center was started three years ago by Michele Colletti. Her idea for the center was born out of her long term engagement with elementary schools in the region as well as a strong passion for performing arts. Ultimately she wanted to create a safe haven for these children who endure tough conditions, a place where they also could develop their performance

talents and ultimately their life coping skills.

Today, three years up and running, the center enrolls 30-40 teenagers at any given time. The center offer courses in such topics as dance, singing, writing, yoga and theatre, and all enrolled adolescents. Their operation can be thought of as 50% social services and 50% performance arts. Footlights provides a safe and stable environment for many children who go to great lengths to be initially admitted to the center and then to maintain regular attendance. Students are admitted to the program through an audition process where they may bring poetry that they have written or their sketchbooks of art and photography. Apart from its performance arts related offerings, the center also offers a homework room, individualized tutoring, Internet access for homework research and "crisis counseling" when required.

The Environment of the Center

In order to understand Footlights and what role Positive Psychology can play, it is important to understand the socioeconomic and physical environment of the center.

Hartford is a small city (population 121,000). It has a number of characteristics that suggest a challenging environment for young people:

- The average household income is well below the national average. The poverty rate is 27.5%, one of the highest of any city in the country.

- Most parents are likely to be poorly educated (only 12% of adults have college degrees).

- Many of the children are ethnic or racial minorities (38% African American, 40% Hispanic or Latino).

- The violent crime rate is 14.5 per 1000. While this is lower than the US average (20), it is significantly higher than elsewhere in Connecticut. (US Census, 2000)

It is this environment which makes Footlights over eager to create a safe environment for

Hartford teens. It is also this environment which has encouraged the teenagers at the center to develop some very special strengths, but before describing these strengths, we will take a look at the Footlights instructors.

About the Instructors at the Center

The Footlights instructors are the most vital element to the center's operation. The center has thirteen part-time instructors and six on-demand tutors. The different instructors not only teach within their areas of expertise, they also take the role of positive reinforcers and role models, and they provide a sense of stability that many of these children need.

Before the instructors commence at the center they undertake what is called "Diversity Training", one of four mandatory staff meetings throughout the year, on how to work with inner city kids and the very different dynamics that exist in their community. At their staff meetings the center revisits these themes to review different difficult situations which have occurred, might occur and how to deal with them.

The instructors play a critical role in delivering the center's mission of allowing Hartford teens to excel and discover their talents. The instructors create trust and build relationships with the students to a degree that goes beyond what is required of them. Beyond their performance and artistic talents, a major strength of the instructors is their willingness to commit free time to the activities at the center. They are paid as freelance workers and all have regular jobs which they tend to outside of Footlights.

A main objective with the instructors is helping them stay faithful to their commitment to the center. The regularity of their presence is very important; if an instructor leaves (which does not happen often) the teens feel a sense of abandonment and loss that is unnecessary and more damaging when considering their complicated home lives. A second objective is training

the instructors to understand and deal with the special circumstances of these children.

About the Students at the Center

At very early ages the teenagers at the center learned how to shoulder more responsibility than many adults. Out of the 43 children enrolled at the center, only two live with parents who are still married. Most children live with extended families and migrate from house to house depending on what night of the week it is. Many have only three different sets of clothes that they wear in turn. Some venture to the center by foot in the freezing cold through highly criminal neighborhoods with a high personal risk.

With these conditions in mind it is no surprise that the major strength of these children is their resilience; their ability to cope with very harsh and unsafe conditions. They are brave and resilient far beyond what is expected in people their ages. They are also faithful to the program which greatly adds to the potential of Footlights successfully engaging and growing these at-risk teens.

The major challenge in working with developing these adolescents is to help them overcome the insecurities created by growing up in a less than ideal environment; the adolescents are used to being let down and abandoned and are very quick to interpret any staff absence as another loss, as noted above. Furthermore they are starved for any sort of positive feedback. They have little positive reinforcement at home and the parents in general take little interest in what the children actually are doing at the center, the exception being the end-of-year performance to which many parents show up.

<center>Creation of a Plan for Applying Positive Psychology</center>

The Footlights center operates on the principle that "It is all about the kids." They want to provide good feelings and positive thoughts to the kids that they do not get from anywhere

else. This also means that the implicit goal of any initiatives proposed to the center is to help provide positive emotion and positive feedback to the children. The center strives to build something positive in even the most difficult child. From their standpoint they are working with "raw" talent, young people who never had any chance to develop themselves or their talents.

The Application Plan

The overall goal of the below proposed application plan is therefore to provide guidance to the Footlights instructors on how to fine-tune their existing successful deliveries with a more defined, strengths-based mode of operations based on Positive Psychology. A second goal is to integrate and thread strengths into the students' daily arts activities throughout the year and showcase them in the end of year performance. A tertiary goal is to enable Footlights to leverage the proposed new approach in marketing to encourage increased interest from the adolescents' families and potential donors. How will these goals be met? The answer is:

- By acknowledging and capitalizing on performance talents naturally existing in the group

- By building upon the existing invaluable mentor relationships between teens and teachers

- By giving Footlights teachers and students the capability to recognize, discover, explore and channel their character strengths

- By giving all Footlights stakeholders (adolescents, teachers, board members, families and donors) a sensitivity to and shared vocabulary for recognizing and sharing strengths.

Below follows a summarized outline of the application plan proposed to Footlights. The detailed plan is in Appendix A.

Phase 1: Teacher Strengths Discovery. For Footlights, creating a strengths-based organization should begin with the staff members because of their direct and influential relationships with students. It is therefore the intent to invite the Footlights instructors on a

journey aimed at discovering their own strengths first, thereby placing them in good stead to guide their students on the same journey.

The "Teacher Strengths Discovery" will take place at the beginning of the school year with an introduction of the concept of the Values in Action (VIA) classification and assessment tool to the Footlights teachers. The instructors should also be introduced to idea of using the VIA strengths as the overarching theme for the students' end of year performance.

In practical terms this would mean that the teachers take on online VIA assessment (http://www.authentichappiness.com), and bring results to a first meeting to discuss. Before this they should have read the introduction to character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, ch. 1) as well as about self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Based on their strengths profile, each instructor will be asked to prepare a positive introduction of themselves which they will bring to a meeting where they will present their signature strengths-based positive introduction.

We propose a second group discussion about the teacher's role as mentors. In this context it will be important for the instructors to understand the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and how to use these as they mentor the adolescents. A second useful concept would be Vygotsky's scaffolding concept (Vygotsky, 1978): an effective form of teaching where adults learn to dial up and down the level of help that they offer in response to the adolescent's level of performance. This not only produces immediate results, but also instills the skills necessary for adolescents to problem solve independently in the future.

Phase 2 - Student Strengths Discovery. Now that the instructors are aware of their signature strengths they are equipped to begin guiding their students on their own strengths quests. All students will have the opportunity to take the VIA-Youth assessment – an online assessment tool especially developed for people aged 13-18. The objective of this phase is to

encourage the adolescents to begin thinking about how their own values are manifested in their daily lives and how they exhibit the character strengths which they already have. The mentors will help them see their existing strengths and encourage them to pursue activities that foster a balance of character strengths. Below is an example protocol of how strengths discovery could take place in the more intrapersonal, introspective types of classes offered at Footlights.

We propose that all students the VIA online at the Footlights center and then that they create a collective and publicly displayed strengths map of all students This will allow students to use their artistic talents to recognize and relate to each other. It will create a safe environment to discuss, exhibit and call out their strengths.

To complement this we propose the initiation of a creative writing class where the students can write a strengths story which again can be share with the class. Examples of this could include: write about a time when you used one or more of your strengths, write about how you've seen a family member or friend exhibit what you believe (or know) to be a strength of theirs, write about a fictional superhero who exhibits strengths of *perseverance.* In addition to the writing class the center could also consider such a thing as a special yoga class focused on building gratitude. We know that gratitude is one of the strengths with a high correlation to well-being. Yoga is a great class to encourage gratitude for themselves and for their loved ones.

Phase 3 - exploring Strengths with Students. Now that the teachers and students have spent time thinking about their own strengths, the third phase will be focused on deeper exploration by threading 'strengths' into their daily performance activities. This means encouraging them to think about their strengths and performance in tandem. With expertise in their respective fields, the teachers are best equipped to decide which strengths best relate to their daily lesson plans. Ideally a strengths discussion could be integrated into their performance class.

Example: African Drumming is infused with themes of *transcendence* (through the beats) and shares *wisdom* of ancient tribes, dancing done to drumming exhibits and elicits *zest,* etc. As part of this class the instructor would ask the students to describe and define the strengths exhibited in the performance that they are working with. By exploring the natural occurrence of strengths students will be able to explore integrating strengths into their natural orientation, seeing that strengths do not occur exclusive in a 'character classroom' setting but in their daily lives, within their already existing talents and interests (see full Action Plan in Appendix A for more details).

Phase 4 – expression: Preparing 'Strength's performance. Students have now explored the meaning of character strengths and identified their own strengths. During the fourth phase, each performance class (salsa, African drumming, Hip Hop, and so on) will be devoted to a particular strength that the teacher and students choose together. They will relate their exploration of strengths to the end of year performance, which they will present to parents, board members and supporters.

We propose to use a strengths map to build discussion around which strength students would like to focus on. Then the instructor would encourage the students to think about the actual mode of performance and work together to provide examples of choreographers, writers, dancers, singers, songs, plays and other performances that exhibit or use the strength in their piece of art. Examples could be: *Capacity to love and be loved*: Songs from Ella Fitzgerald's album 'Love and Kisses', *Humor*: Perform a scene from Bert Williams' famous Vaudeville acts

Phase 5: Performance. Keeping in mind the very central role of the end of the year performance in everything which Footlights is doing, we think that this performance is an outstanding opportunity for the Footlights students to have fun sharing what they have learned throughout the year with their parents and donors. It will be a chance to 'show off' their

performance talents and what they have learned about character strengths. It will give the center a chance to exhibit the highly integrated and strategic 'strengths' program, which bolsters Footlights as a positive hub. It is not a culmination of the year, but a step in discovering, exploring and expressing their strengths.

Conclusions on Application Plan

We have created the above proposed plan with the purpose of infuse and integrate the principles of positive psychology into all the activities of the center. This is why we propose to start out with training the instructors in positive psychology and strength-based thinking. By starting here it is our hope that this would help the center develop a strengths-based vocabulary and an improved applied perspective on strengths. We believe it is the instructors that after this initiation will come up with ideas on how to frame and fine-tune their current activities to align with positive psychology, something which in turn will help the instructors discover and point out particular strengths of students. By enabling the center to move towards an even more clearly defined strengths-based philosophy and mode of operating, we speculate that this movement can provide Footlights with the necessary insights to leverage their activities and the strengths of the children even further.

Theory Behind the Plan

We will now account for the underlying positive psychology research which is the basis and inspiration for our application plan. We will do this by posing and briefly answering some the same question our team asked when we started working with Footlights.

What helps adolescents become increasingly resilient and competent?

Like researchers, teachers can learn by observing children who flourish in the midst of adversity. Understanding the factors that occur in their lives can teach better ways to reduce risk,

promote competence, and make positive shifts in the course of development for other children (Morrison, 2006). Some behaviors of resilient people can be taught, including an optimistic explanatory style (Seligman, 1990; Peterson & Steen, 2005), accentuating hope (Lopez et al., 2004) challenging self-defeating beliefs, calming and focusing, and putting things in perspective (Reivich & Shatté, 2002), these are all aspects which we would like to develop through the instructor's mentoring relationships at Footlights.

Masten & Coatsworth (1998) describe children as living systems, embedded within many other systems, such as families and schools. As they grow up, the contexts in which they must function change, and the challenges they must negotiate to demonstrate competence differ. The same child can be judged competent in one context and incompetent in another. Therefore selecting ways to improve a child's competence should take into account not only ways to change the child's capabilities, such as tutoring, but also ways to find a better fit between the child and context, such as changing schools or teachers.

Peer acceptance and popularity have been associated with better achievement and other positive attributes (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Intervention programs need to recognize the complex roles that peers play in development. Encouraging children to develop friendships with rule-abiding and socially competent children can be good interventions, but grouping less socially competent children together can be counterproductive. We believe that being aware of each others strengths, the teens at Footlights will be able to build better friendships, both within and outside the center.

Children generally have better social competence with peers and better conduct overall when they have parents who are warm but structured with consistent rules and high expectations for behavior, often described as authoritative in style (Maccoby, 1980; Grusec & Lytton, 1988).

Authoritative parenting has also been associated with academic success from early childhood through adolescence across sex and socioeconomic status (Baumrind, 1978; Dornbusch & Ritter, 1990; Steinberg & Silk, 2002).   Adults who adopt similar warm but firm styles when working with adolescents may have a similar influence, thus helping produce more socially competent children. A child can perform at a more advanced level with structure and support provided by a proficient adult, such as the performers that work with adolescents at Footlights. This process, the scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978), has been integrated as a part of our application plan since we believe it can help many children function at the growing edge of their capabilities.

What do character strengths contribute to youth development?

Why have we started to focus the Footlights application plan on identifying and documenting strengths? Because character strengths play an important role not only as a buffer to psychological stress, but also as an enabler of thriving in adolescence (Park, 2004).

The Values-in-Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-IS for youth) for youth as we propose to use in the action plan is a comprehensive self-report assessment of twenty-four character strengths. An emerging field of study based on the VIA-IS is beginning to show how awareness and development of character strengths, such as commitment to learning, social competence and sense of purpose, is associated with positive outcomes such as school success, leadership and valuing diversity (Scales et al, 2000).

Park (2004) identified key factors in the development of character strengths as biological, parental, positive role models, close relationships with family and friends and finally positive institutions. Several of these factors come to play in after-school environments, and the role of the staff within such an institution is also critical (Higgins, Power and Kohlberg, 1994).

Seligman (2002) suggests that using signature strengths in work, love and play may provide young people a route to a fulfilled life. Some strengths such as zest, hope, love, social intelligence, self-regulation, wisdom and perseverance show a robust correlation with life satisfaction. Teamwork and prudence seem to contribute more to life satisfaction for adolescents and children than for adults (Park 2004).

Merely naming a strength in another person can amplify it (Peterson & Seligman, 2001). We assert that youth programs such as Footlights should mirror back positive traits to adolescents so that they perceive character strengths that they already possess. Mirroring contributes to growth in self-efficacy and growth in social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral competencies (Catalano et al, 2004). Our assertion raises several questions. First, do adolescents understand character strengths and find them desirable? Second, how do adolescents learn about character strengths in themselves and others? Finally, what approaches can teachers use to observe, reflect, and nurture character strengths?

Do adolescents understand character strengths and find them desirable?

Steen et al (2003) explored the VIA character strengths with a series of focus groups conducted in high school classes with 459 students from 9th to 12th grade. The students participated readily and openly, demonstrating not only the capability to understand the VIA character strengths, but also that they consider them worthwhile.   The strengths particularly valued among the students included leadership, wisdom, social intelligence, love of learning, spirituality, and the capacity to love and be loved. Although the students were mostly middle class, they were not exclusively so. Steen observed that inclination to participate did not appear to be a function of gender or ethnicity or the typical level of involvement in classes. Sometimes students rarely vocal in class were particularly active in focus groups. The understanding of

strengths was quite sophisticated: students recognized various strengths as interdependent, and

many students considered how an individual's signature strengths function as a coherent package.

How do adolescents learn about character strengths?

Steen et al (2003) identified a number of ways that students themselves believe they

develop character.   They set a premium on learning from life experience. They profess an

evident hunger for contemporary role models, an observation consistent with what is known

about gaining self-efficacy through role models (Bandura, 1994).   They learn from peer pressure,

which can be a strong positive influence. Students learning from group discussion that their

peers value certain character traits sometimes reconsider traits previously rejected or disparaged.

Steen et al. (2003) suggest having adolescents respond to narratives with the main

character exemplifying a particular trait, particularly when the narratives arise from students'

own examples, thus using behavioral terms that are appropriate to their experience (Desetta &

Wolin, 2000).   Students liked sharing opinions rather than being indoctrinated, as well as the

positive focus markedly different from all the warnings they receive. They found it reassuring

that they can exercise personal control that will make a difference in who and what they are.

How do teachers learn the character strengths of students?

Most work on detecting character strengths in young people is focused on questionnaires

such as the VIA-IS for youth. However, teachers of young people do not always have the luxury

of consulting questionnaire results. They need techniques for recognizing strengths "in the wild"

as young people express them.

Fortunately, signature strengths are not a mystery either to those who possess them or

others in their vicinity, as long as the setting allows them to be evident (Peterson & Seligman,

2001). Teacher nominations correlate reasonably well with the character strengths that students

manifest in everyday behavior (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, 638; Park & Peterson, 2005). After-school programs, particularly those associated with the performing arts, provide very broad settings for expression of strengths.

How do performance arts contribute to well-being?

The next question we posed concerned creativity - the quintessential source of flow. Csikszentmihalyi argues that the most important lesson we can learn from creative people and the creative process is that of finding purpose and enjoyment in our existence (1997, 20). One of the greatest misconceptions about creativity is that it occurs silently inside the creator's mind, but rarely does a creator create without cultural relevance and inspiration. The beauty of performance as creative expression is that it is an interactive process which others can watch unfold. As described below, in some theaters all people (audience and actors) are involved in the creative process.

Performance arts can be very complex and enjoyable activities, not only resulting in flow experiences, but also providing other benefits to young people. Newman and Goldberg (1996) argue that *performance* is the key tool for social development and personal understanding and growth. Their model, *learn – develop – philosophize – perform – joy,* includes several dimensions. Behavior is imposed on people by societal institutions while *performance* is creative and allows young people to express and define their own uniqueness.-Performance returns people to an organic form of learning and fosters *zones of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1987), which are learning environments that focus on the shared process of growth rather than the product of gathered information.

The Castillo Theatre, an Off-Broadway theater in New York City, is an example of this model in action (Friedman, 2000). Castillo goes beyond the normal practice of directive

narratives and creates conversations between audience and performers. The goal is not for the audience to leave feeling amazed at the talented actors and beautiful set, but instead to feel that they too can act and create.   Conversational theater can serve as a vital social and political tool.

According to Newman's model, Footlights is on very sound footing with its philosophy of supporting adolescent development through performance arts.

How do performance arts build adolescent initiative?

Performance fits the criteria outlined by Larson for a specific structured activity that builds adolescent initiative: development of intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and concerted engagement in a temporal arc from start to a challenging goal (Brandtstadter, 1998; Ryan, 1993).   As a result of performance as an initiative-enhancing, voluntary, structured activity, participants progressively learn to transfer this motivation into other parts of their lives. This helps them create order, meaning, and direction. Various short-term longitudinal studies support Larson's theory, including the Girl Scout cookie campaign (Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Topping, & Lacasa, 2002) and service activities as ways to build civic engagement (Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates, 1999).

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APPENDIX A: FOOTLIGHTS APPLICATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Footlights is "to inspire Hartford teens to excel and discover their talents through the arts in a safe and fun environment." The Footlights Center plays a vital role in the lives of low income and potentially high-risk adolescents by using the arts to create a positive hub. This action plan uses Positive Psychology to bolster the objectives of the center by harnessing the positive that already exist within it.

GOAL:
The overall goal of the application plan is to provide guidance to Footlights teachers on how to fine-tune their existing success with a more defined, strengths-based mode of operations based on Positive Psychology. A secondary goal is to integrate and thread strengths into the students' daily arts activities throughout the year and showcase them in the end of year performance. A tertiary goal is to enable Footlights to leverage the proposed new approach in marketing to encourage increased interest from the adolescents' families and potential donors.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES:
The underlying principles that have guided the development of this Action Plan include: • Footlights has limited resources and time, hence an application plan must be both pragmatic and feasible in the context. • The *students* and *teachers* are the two vital elements of the center. It is our belief that an appropriate plan should include and involve both of these categories. • The only effective action plan is one that will be easily integrated into the existing activities.

HOW WILL THE APPLICATION PLAN ACHIEVE THESE GOALS?
• By acknowledging and capitalizing on performance talents that naturally pervade the group. • By building upon the existing invaluable mentor relationships between teens and teachers. • By giving Footlights teachers and students the capability to recognize, discover, explore and channel their character strengths. • By giving all Footlights stakeholders (adolescents, teachers, board members, families and donors) a sensitivity to and shared vocabulary for recognizing and sharing strengths.

RESOURCES NEEDED:
For Teachers • Computer access: VIA Assessment tool on www.authentichappiness.com • Articles referenced in the literature review, especially ones on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and scaffolding (Lipscomb, L., Swanson, J., West, A., 2004), character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), creation and use of the VIA-Youth (Park & Peterson, 2005), and teen response to character strengths (Steen, Kachorek & Peterson, 2003; Park, 2004).

- *"Strengths Coordinator":* This new position will be created to support the teachers through their strengths discovery and classroom integration. The person hired for this role will meet with each teacher weekly to check in and guide the teachers in developing additional ideas to foster the strengths environment. This person will be available one day a week for three hours.

For Students
- Computer access: VIA –Youth Assessment tool on www.authentichappiness.com

PHASE 1: TEACHER STRENGTHS DISCOVERY
TIMEFRAME: APPROXIMATELY 2 MONTHS (SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER)

For Footlights, creating a strengths-based organization begins with staff members because of their direct and influential relationships with students. It is therefore our intent to invite the Footlights instructors on a journey aimed at discovering their own strengths, placing them in good stead to guide their students on the same journey.

The Teacher Strengths Discovery will take place at the beginning of the school year. A MAPP consultant will introduce the concept of the Values in Action classification and assessment tool to the Footlights teachers. The consultant will also introduce the VIA strengths as the overarching theme for the students' end of year performance.

STEP 1: ASSIGNMENT
- Teachers take VIA online, bring results to first meeting to discuss.
- Read introduction to character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, ch. 1)
- Prepare positive introduction or life theme description based on strengths profile
- Read about self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994).

STEP 2: DISCUSS VIA RESULTS
Teacher's present their Signature Strengths-based Positive Introduction / Life theme Introduction. (See Appendix A for additional exercises)

STEP 3: DISCUSS TEACHERS' ROLES AS MENTORS
- Explain four sources of self-efficacy and how to use as they mentor these adolescents.
- Explain Vygotsky's scaffolding concept: an effective form of teaching where adults learn to dial up and down the level of help that they offer in response to the adolescent's level of performance. This not only produces immediate results, but also instills the skills necessary for adolescents to problem solve independently in the future.

STEP 4: USING STRENGTHS IN MENTORING
Strengths Card Sorting: Write 5 top strengths on index cards, break into pairs to discuss how their strengths currently and can potentially interact to make them effective mentors and help students build efficacy. Encourage them to consider how they mentor and capitalize on

important moments with their students now, how can they use the knowledge of their own strengths to be a better mentor? May be helpful to suggest creating formation with the cards to show how the strengths look together. For example: Do some show up in the forefront and others act more silently, potentially hiding the others when the mentor? Do they look like a pyramid, building on one another? Encourage them to use their performance and artistic capabilities to deepen insight about strengths and how to use them with their students.

PHASE 2 - STUDENT STRENGTHS DISCOVERY
TIMEFRAME: APPROXIMATELY 2 MONTHS, JANUARY - FEBRUARY

Now that the teachers are aware of their signature strengths they are equipped to begin guiding their students on their own strengths quests. All students will have the opportunity to take the VIA-Youth assessment. The objective of this phase is to encourage the adolescents to begin thinking about how their own values are manifested in their daily lives and how they exhibit the character strengths which they already have. The mentors will help them see their existing strengths and encourage them to pursue activities that foster a balance of character strengths. Below is an example protocol of how Strengths Discovery could take place in the more intrapersonal, introspective types of classes offered at Footlights.

STEP 1: STUDENTS TAKE VIA ONLINE @ FOOTLIGHTS CENTER
Allow students to take VIA- Youth in Resource Room One-on-One Strengths Discovery (with Michele and/or mentor)

STEP 2: ART CLASS - CREATE A STRENGTHS MAP OF ALL STUDENTS
This will allow students to use their artistic talents to recognize and relate to each other. It will create a safe environment to discuss, exhibit and call out their strengths.

STEP 3: CREATIVE WRITING CLASS – WRITE A STRENGTHS STORY
Assign students a strengths story to write and share with the class. Examples: • Write about a time when you used one or more of your strengths • Write about how you've seen a family member or friend exhibit what you believe (or know) to be a strength of theirs. • Write about a fictional superhero who exhibits strengths of *perseverance.*

STEP 4: YOGA CLASS – BUILD GRATITUDE
We know that gratitude is one of the strengths with a high correlation to well-being. Yoga is a great class to encourage gratitude for themselves and for their loved ones. Example: Dedicate each practice to something/one that you feel grateful for/to.

PHASE 3 - EXPLORING STRENGTHS WITH STUDENTS

TIMEFRAME: APPROXIMATELY 2 MONTHS (NOVEMBER – DECEMBER)

Now that the teachers and students have spent time thinking about their own strengths, this phase will be focused on deeper exploration by threading 'strengths' into their daily performance activities. Encouraging them to think about their strengths and performance in tandem. With expertise in their fields, the teachers are best equipped to decide which strengths best relate to their daily lesson plans. Outlined below is a protocol that the teachers can use to guide them in bringing a strengths discussion into their performance class.

STEP 1: EXPLORE AND INTEGRATE STRENGTHS INTO DAY'S LESSON
Select character strengths that may be exhibited in the day's performance activity. Example: African Drumming is infused with themes of *transcendence* (through the beats) and shares *wisdom* of ancient tribes, dancing done to drumming exhibits and elicits *zest,* etc.

STEP 2: DEFINE & DESCRIBE THE STRENGTH(S)
Ask the students to describe and define the strengths exhibited in the performance that they are working with. By exploring the natural occurrence of strengths students will be able to explore integrating strengths into their natural orientation, seeing that strengths do not occur exclusive in a 'character classroom' setting but in their daily lives, within their already existing talents and interests.

STEP 3: SELF IDENTIFICATION AND PEER RECOGNITION OF STRENGTHS
At this age, peer recognition and approval is vital. Building momentum around the discussion, there is great opportunity to share their strengths and recognize peers for exhibiting the specific strengths being discussed. This can be done throughout the lesson.

PHASE 4 – EXPRESSION: PREPARING 'STRENGTHS PERFORMANCE'   TIMEFRAME: (APPROXIMATELY 3-4 MONTHS, MARCH - JUNE)

Students have now explored the meaning of character strengths and identified their own strengths. During this phase, each performance class (salsa, African drumming, Hip Hop, and so on) will be devoted to a particular strength that the teacher and students choose together. They will relate their exploration of strengths to the end of year performance, which they will present to parents, board members and supporters.

STEP 1: CHOOSE STRENGTH TO FOCUS ON IN EACH CLASS
Use a Strengths map to build discussion around which strength students would like to focus on. Encourage students to think about the actual mode of performance and work together to provide examples of choreographers, writers, dancers, singers, songs, plays and other performances that exhibit or use the strength in their piece of art.

STEP 2: BUILD PERFORMANCE AROUND CHOSEN STRENGTH
Examples:

- *Capacity to love and be loved:* Songs from Ella Fitzgerald's album 'Love and Kisses'
- *Humor:* Perform a scene from Bert Williams' famous Vaudeville acts

PHASE 5: PERFORMANCE
TIMEFRAME: END OF SCHOOL YEAR

This is an opportunity for the Footlights students to have fun sharing what they have learned throughout the year with their parents and donors. It will be a chance to 'show off' their performance talents and what they have learned about character strengths. It will give the center a chance to exhibit the highly integrated and strategic 'strengths' program, which bolsters Footlights as a positive hub. It is not a culmination of the year, but a step in discovering, exploring and expressing their strengths.

To build additional support and funding from families and donors, this program should also be leveraged through their marketing and publicity materials.

PHASE 6: – ASSESS LEARNING AND PLAN FOR UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR
TIMEFRAME: SUMMER

This is a chance to reflect and assess the learning from the program to build on the successes and consider any potential adjustments. Taking this information into consideration Footlights can began planning for next year.

STRENGTHS ICEBREAKER EXCERCISES
Courtesy Margaret Greenberg

Logistics: Post each of the 24 VIA strengths on a flipchart & hang around room.   Conduct 4 activities, each followed by a group discussion.

Activity #1
Instructions: Ask people to get up and go to the flipchart for their #1 strengths & discuss the following questions with the others that congregate there (approx. 5 minutes):
- What is this strength all about?
- What's really valuable about this strength?
- How have you used this strength in the last 24 hours?
- Develop a slogan for how your strength plays out at work. Post on the flipchart.

Quick debrief:
- What do you notice about where people are?
- What did you learn in your strengths group?

Activity #2
Instructions: Now, ½ of you stay where you are and the other ½ of you go to a strength that you ARE NOT & "interview" the people who have this strength:
- Same questions

Quick debrief:
- Same questions

Activity #3
Instructions: Now, everyone go to their 5th strength & discuss the same questions.

Quick debrief:
- Same questions

Activity #4
Instructions: Now, the ½ of you that didn't move in the 2nd round, go to a strength you ARE NOT & "interview" the people who have this strength?
- Same questions;

Author Note