Positive Education:
Using Positive Psychology to Support
Nonprofit Leaders, Teachers, and Students of Color

Kirsten Calloway, Naomi C. Fink, Laura Garrison-Brook, and Maritza Jackson Sandoval

College of Liberal and Professional Studies, University of Pennsylvania

Author Note

This paper outlines a series of positive interventions designed for MindCatcher Education and is a Service Learning Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Applied Positive Psychology degree.
Abstract

MindCatcher Education (MC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to breaking the cycle of hopelessness in under-resourced learning spaces and fostering social-emotional growth and leadership development for students and educators of color. Our cohort from the Master’s of Applied Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania collaborated with MC to strengthen and expand their Young People Lead (YPL) program. Our cohort conducted a situation analysis and literature review and collaborated with MC to design monthly training sessions that incorporate Appreciative Inquiry, character strengths, *ikigai,* and job crafting. These interventions aim to redesign pedagogy at partnering schools, build student engagement, and reduce burnout in educators of color to strengthen YPL. The training coincides with the “Cohort Experience” training for educational leaders from August 2023 through April 2024 and includes on-campus demonstrations by site leaders for teachers and students.

*Keywords:* education, nonprofit, positive psychology, student-led learning, students of color, academic engagement, Appreciative Inquiry, character strengths, *ikigai,* job crafting
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Introduction

Based in San Francisco, CA, MindCatcher Education (MC) is a new 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (NPO) with solid core values and promising potential. The seed of MC formed in the heart and mind of CEO Nakeyshia Kendall Williams. While working for a premier learning organization, Williams noticed that school systems were failing to engage students and education organizations, especially NPOs, were failing to deliver the resources necessary to meet the needs of youths enrolled in public school (MindCatcher, 2022b), which students of color and youths from low-income homes typically attend (National Equity Atlas, 2022). Williams herself attended public school before studying at Columbia University and the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania (MindCatcher, 2022b). Aware of the power of a good education, Williams founded MC to interrupt the cycle of hopelessness in under-resourced learning spaces and support the social-emotional growth and leadership development of students and educators of color (MindCatcher, 2022c).

MC is currently led by Williams and new program director Elisabeth Young, who served as our service learning partner throughout the development of this project. MC’s primary initiatives include Collective Support (CS), Adult Social Emotional Learning Assessment (ASELA), Young People Lead (YPL), and Youth Learning Lab (YLL) (E. Young, personal communication, January 19, 2023). CS and ASELAs aim to support educators as leaders in the classroom. CS specifically helps educators unpack the challenges that impact their ability to inspire students (MindCatcher, 2022a), while ASELAs provides educators with the tools they need to improve their well-being (E. Young, personal communication, January 19, 2023). YPL and YLL are more student-centric. YPL strives to promote youth leadership and youth-led
learning by giving students a voice in the educational decision-making process (MindCatcher, 2022d). YLL creates spaces to amplify student voices and engagement in after-school programs such as the YMCA, enabling students to design their own learning experiences outside the classroom (MindCatcher, 2022e). Per our conversations with Young, MC is focused on CS and YPL as their two main programs (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

**Sector Overview**

NPOs are a tremendous force within the United States, with approximately 1.8 million NPOs currently in existence (Faulk et al., 2021). NPOs are successful when their mission objectives are realized (Sawhill & Williamson, 2001). However, this is difficult to measure (Herman & Renz, 1997) because NPO goals are often abstract or unclear (Weisbrod, 1998). Another central challenge within the world of NPOs is limited staff members. Post-pandemic inflation, competitive salaries, and employee movement have resulted in NPO workforce shortages and increased pressures upon remaining NPO employees to deliver more with less, leading to high rates of employee and volunteer burnout (National Council of Nonprofits, 2022). As an NPO serving students and educators of color and their broader communities, we believe staff and educator burnout prevention will be critical to MC’s success.

In addition to being an NPO, MC is, at its core, an education organization that serves underrepresented populations in under-resourced schools (MindCatcher, 2022c). The need for support within this sector is evident. High-poverty schools have fewer experienced instructors and more teachers with emergency or temporary qualifications than low-poverty schools (Artiles et al., 2002). In addition, students of color attend high-poverty schools more often than White students (National Equity Atlas, 2022), and public schools with predominantly minority students
receive fewer resources (Pendharkar, 2023). Thus, students of color tend to receive less adequate education and resources, both in terms of quality and quantity, compared to their White peers. Unfortunately, this opportunity gap has only been exacerbated by the pandemic, as students of color lost more academically than White students during the lockdown period between 2020-2021 (Fox, 2021).

The disparity between White students and students of color is mirrored by the disproportionate number of White teachers compared to teachers of color in US public schools (Carr, 2022). Only 20% of public school instructors identify as people of color, and only 7% identify as Black (Carr, 2022). Contributing to this imbalance is the fact that teachers and principals of color do not receive the support they need to lead and instruct properly (Barmore, 2021). Between 1998 and 2018, teachers of color were employed more quickly than their White counterparts (Carr, 2022), but they left the field at higher rates than White teachers due to burnout (The Education Trust, 2022). Before the pandemic, more Black instructors left education in the first five years of teaching than teachers of all other races (Barmore, 2021). As a result of the pandemic and “racial war weariness,” even more teachers and administrators of color are likely to leave the sector (Barmore, 2021).

However, schools need minority principals and teachers (Symonds & Hanson, 2022). Diverse teacher representation assists all students socially, emotionally, and intellectually (Heubeck, 2020), and principals of color tend to hire more diverse teachers (Symonds & Hanson, 2022). It is especially important for students of color to have same-race instructors and administrators because representation helps improve academic performance, graduation rates, and college attendance (Heubeck, 2020). In addition to benefiting students of color, having a
principal of color benefits teachers of color. Research suggests that instructors of the same race as the principal had greater job retention and satisfaction (Symonds & Hanson, 2022). Principals of color also encourage instructors of color to become administrators, leading to greater representation overall (Symonds & Hanson, 2022).

More generally, the US is experiencing a sharp rise in anxiety and depression among children and adolescents (Murthy, 2021). Research tracking mental health among college students reported that anxiety and depression levels more than doubled between 2013-2021 (Lipson et al., 2022), and in 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2021) declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. Youths of color were disproportionately impacted because of structural racism (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). These contextual factors may make Williams’s mission of fostering student engagement and supporting educators of color even more difficult to achieve.

**Strengths, Goals, and Challenges**

Our research highlights the challenges that NPOs face and the disadvantages that students and educators of color experience. With these contextual factors in mind, we approached Young to learn more about MC’s strengths, goals, and challenges. Young identified student- and leader-centricity as MC’s main strengths (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Their programs’ impact echoes these strengths. CS leaders report high feelings of *psychological safety* (MindCatcher, 2022a), the shared belief that a space such as school or work is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmonson, 1999); they feel heard and understood and leave program meetings with a clearer sense of what their challenges are and how they can take action to address them (E. Young, personal communication, January 19, 2023). MC also cultivates a
culture of listening when it comes to students, giving them a voice and meeting them where they are (E. Young, personal communication, January 19, 2023). MC leaders' and educators' curious and connection-driven approach enables them to comprehend students’ perspectives and tailor lesson plans, conflict-resolution solutions, and other ideas to best meet students’ needs (MindCatcher, 2022c).

MC is also incredibly proud of its Youth Engagement Spectrum, otherwise known as the YES Framework (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Encompassing leadership, partnership, and consulting, the YES Framework is MC’s approach to fostering trust, belonging, and accountability, with youth-led learning at its core (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Youth-led learning is based on student-led learning theory (also known as self-directed learning and student-centered learning), which is informed by constructivism, the theory that learning is not only individual to the learner but also constructed by the learner (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). In line with this theory, MC believes that those who assume responsibility for their education have the power to shape their destinies (MindCatcher, 2022c). The goal of the YES Framework is to support educators and students in transitioning from traditional teacher-led learning to a model of youth-led learning (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023) since evidence suggests that student-led learning may be more effective than teacher-led learning in K-12 school systems (Bernard et al., 2019).

Models of student-led learning are based on three assumptions: (1) students have individual learning styles, (2) students have the ability to design their learning in a meaningful way, and (3) student motivation is one of the driving forces of learning (Iverson et al., 2015). Motivation in the classroom is associated with higher self-esteem (Skinner & Belmont, 1993),
enhanced learning effectiveness (Dickinson, 1995), greater academic performance (Legault et al., 2006), and success (Weiner, 1979). In contrast, lack of motivation is associated with feelings of discontentment, frustration, helplessness, boredom, poor concentration in class, reduced productivity, higher rates of perceived stress and high school dropouts (Legault et al., 2006), lower rates of well-being, and more aggressive behavior (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). One of the central tenets of motivation is control (Weiner, 1979), which Ryan and Grolnick (1986) explain in terms of the “Origins and Pawns” theory developed by Richard deCharms in 1976; “origins” in the classroom are those who take the initiative, are actively involved, and view themselves as instrumental to their learning. In other words, “origins” are those who demonstrate high levels of student engagement, a term used to describe how interested and involved students are in their learning and how connected they feel to their classes, peers, and teachers (Alexson & Flick, 2011).

Williams believes youth-led learning is the best way to foster student engagement (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Engagement has been shown to increase self-awareness, leadership, and motivation (Dias, n.d.). At the same time, disengagement predicts poorer graduation rates, drug misuse, delinquency, and arrest, according to longitudinal data from the Rochester Youth Development Study, a study that included 911 7th- and 8th-grade students, 68% of which were African American (Henry et al., 2011). Given the possibility of academic disengagement, increasing engagement is crucial. Yet school systems have not been designed to engage students or give them a voice. (MindCatcher, 2022b). MC is actively working to rectify this problem through YPL by transforming how instructors teach and students participate in the classroom; YPL uses the YES Framework to promote youth leadership and
youth-led learning by giving students a voice in the educational decision-making process (MindCatcher, 2022d). MLK Middle School in San Francisco, CA, has been the pioneer school for the YPL program. While still a work in progress, the YPL program at MLK is leading the charge in developing learning spaces that promote student voice and youth-led learning (MindCatcher, 2022d). Thus far, student-led learning has been adopted in elective courses; the goal is to implement this learning style in all classes (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023). Young believes that of MC’s programs, YPL will be most fitting for the application of positive psychology (E. Young, personal communication, January 27, 2023).

For student-led learning to be successful, students need to be motivated and engaged. If they are not, student-led learning can be challenging and chaotic (Iversen et al., 2015). Educators will also need to demonstrate intellectual humility and let go of the control they are accustomed to having in the classroom, which requires a considerable shift away from traditional student-teacher roles (Iversen et al., 2015). Some educators -- including those at MC (E. Young, personal communication, January 27, 2023) -- may find this difficult to accept (O’Neill & McMahon, 2005). MC would like student-led learning to be embraced and is working hard to change the mindsets of educational leaders, teachers, and students (E. Young, personal communication, January 19, 2023). However, MC lacks internal support and organizational stability. MC’s primary staff consists of two people, and as a new organization, programs are still in development, which makes it hard to gain buy-in (E. Young, personal communication, February 13, 2023); a nascent organization’s “figuring things out” period is often a time when it is difficult to get organized and coordinate day-to-day activities (Pakroo, 2017). Moreover, MC’s challenges are deeply rooted in external factors such as America’s history of systemic racism, as
laid out in our sector overview. As a result, MC faces enormous obstacles in supporting educators and students of color with their social-emotional growth and leadership development. We explored these challenges and potential positive psychology solutions in our literature review.

**Literature Review**

Building on our situation analysis, our literature review is divided into two parts: (1) challenges and (2) opportunities. In part one, we delve deeper into the threats and obstacles that educators and students of color face, including implicit bias, stereotype threat, and the burden placed on educators of color to assume so many responsibilities, from role models to disciplinarians. In part two, we explore positive psychology interventions (PPIs) that may serve as opportunities for MC. When choosing PPIs, our constituents were top of mind. MC exists to serve educational leaders, teachers, parents, and, of course, students. However, as we got to know MindCatcher with its primary staff of two, we felt the need to recognize MC staff as another constituent. Our goal then became to serve MC in a way that would support their staff, serve their constituents, and uphold their values, which are represented by the YES Framework.

What does success look like to MC? Success is when educators are excited about engaging students in the learning process, and students are eager to be engaged. Success is when student-led learning is embraced, and leaders of color have the resources they need to confront the challenges they face. Success depends on shifting perspectives (E. Young, personal communication, March 7, 2023). The four areas of positive psychology we selected -- Appreciative Inquiry, character strengths, *ikigai*, and job crafting -- are aimed at doing just that.
Part I: Challenges

Threats to Students of Color

As social beings, the messages we send each other through words and actions matter. Implicit biases are when our unconscious attitudes or stereotypes affect how we perceive the world, actions, and decisions (Staats, 2016). Because of the unconscious nature of implicit bias, even educators desiring to be fair to students can act in ways that result in inequitable results for different groups (Staats, 2016). Implicit bias can be seen across the educational spectrum. For example, a research study found that Black students were referred to gifted programs 66% less than White students, and Latinx students were referred 47% less (Grissom & Redding, 2015). Another study showed that Black students in an accelerated math track in 8th grade were less likely than White or Asian peers to be advanced into an accelerated track in 9th grade, findings which are not fully explained by previous academic performance (Irizarry, 2021).

Other influences on students’ self-perception include social identity threat and stereotype threat. Social identity threat is a process that occurs when a person’s sense of identity is challenged through their belonging to a group with a negative reputation (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat is a subset of social identity threat that specifically refers to the risk of being judged due to being part of a negatively stereotyped group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These threats can lead to increased worry and stress and decreased working memory, resulting in negative impacts on academic performance (Hanselman et al., 2014). For example, it has been documented that Black students have underperformed in standardized tests such as the SAT. However, this was not based on intellectual capacity; instead, it was due to anxiety tied to race-related cues they have received over time, such as repeated messages of being academically inferior (Steele & Aronson, 2000). This powerful social dynamic may cause students of color to
disidentify with academic achievement, lessening their interest, engagement, and motivation in school (Steele, 1992).

Attending poorly resourced and understaffed schools, a common trend for students of color (Pendharkar, 2023), can also lead to student disenfranchisement, as demonstrated by the achievement gap between Black students and their White counterparts. For example, in the U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress, a research initiative that includes a sample population of roughly 15,000 students across the United States, 64.2% of all Black students in 12th grade performed below the basic achievement level in math compared to 39.1% overall, and 41.9% of Black students tested below basic levels for reading compared to 23.7% overall (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Black students also take fewer Advanced Placement (AP) classes and have lower graduation rates than their White peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). These factors, coupled with implicit bias and social identity threat, fuel student disenfranchisement.

**The Invisible Tax on Educators of Color**

Black instructors face burnout due to their perceived connection to students of color (Terada, 2021). Indeed, Black educators often feel pressured to connect with all Black students, regardless of their students’ backgrounds or cultures (Will, 2016). As a result, they rarely taught honors or AP classes. They felt administrators believed they could only teach lower-performing subjects. They also had to work twice as hard as their White colleagues and control their behavior to appear more professional. However, the report’s narratives have been virtually absent from teacher diversity conversations (Will, 2016). According to Ashley Griffin, the co-author of the report and the interim director of K-12 research at the Education Trust, schools need to
analyze their retention rates and create focus groups to hear from Black educators about their experiences (Will, 2016).

In addition, Black teachers are constantly being inundated with addressing discipline, which is a microaggression (Terada, 2021). This onus is placed on Black male teachers because they are seen as role models and father figures for Black adolescents, especially Black males, who may not have adult male figures in their homes and surroundings (Brockenbrough, 2014). Relying on Black male teachers as patriarchal disciplinarians for Black students in urban schools, universities and policymakers have recruited more Black males into teaching, hoping that doing so will help mitigate systemic injustices on urban adolescents of color (Brockenbrough, 2014). Single-sex educational initiatives have also prioritized partnering Black male teachers with Black male students for the same reasons (Brockenbrough, 2014). However, Black male instructors have indicated that discipline-related conflicts complicate their relationships with Black students (Brockenbrough, 2014). Black women educators also face the same burden of being perceived as disciplinarians and authoritarians. Despite their own experiences of oppression and marginalization, Black women educators are often expected to enforce zero-tolerance policies on Black students, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and disregarding their potential to support and empower their students (TeachThought Staff, 2022).

Colleagues’ overreliance on Black educators’ disciplinary talents shows disdain for their workload and neglect to appreciate their other teaching strengths (Brockenbrough, 2014). It is also challenging for these educators to manage additional responsibilities and the high expectations of colleagues, administrators, parents, and students (Will, 2016). Former U.S. Education Secretary John King called the way Black educators discipline students of color the
“Invisible Tax on Teachers of Color” (TeachThought Staff, 2022). The Invisible Tax assumes they can better communicate with African American boys with behavior concerns. White educators utilize Black educators as disciplinarians, punishing students and not liberating them from “tough” love narratives. This strategy disregards findings from studies showing the positive impact of Black educators on student achievement (TeachThought Staff, 2022). We believe Black educators should be allowed to support students of color rather than enforce zero-tolerance policies simply because of this familiarity.

Black educators can disrupt oppressive practices that govern Black students’ conduct. Sadly, only 13.4% of education administrators were Black in 2015 (TeachThought Staff, 2022). Black educators should lead discipline decisions. Otherwise, Black educators who disapprove of the policy of “zero tolerance” discipline for Black students may decide to abandon the teaching profession altogether.

Part II: Opportunities
Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an asset-based approach that highlights the positive aspects of a program to help create desired program outcomes (Rogers & Fraser, 2003). AI fosters excitement and creativity by emphasizing strengths rather than weaknesses (Cooperrider Center, 2023). AI is based on social constructionism, the theory that people and organizations create their realities through their interpretations of and conversations about the world (Krattenmaker, 2002). AI builds on a program’s strengths and potential. AI consists of a 5-D model, including five stages. The first stage is Define, which involves identifying examples of success. The Discovery stage then involves eliciting positive stories based on the identified examples. The next stage is Dream, where all the stakeholders create shared images for the future. The Design
stage has stakeholders sketch out their ideal vision. The final stage, Delivery, is the implementation phase (Priest et al., 2013). The 5-D model of AI can be used to make organizational changes and transform relationships (Cram, 2010), which is precisely what MC is looking to do with YPL. AI has been successful in educational settings (Priest et al., 2013; Waters & White, 2015), making AI a strong candidate for application. That being said, we could not identify a study that specifically used AI to incorporate student-led learning in the classroom, and very few studies use AI in K-12 education with students of color. It also appears that most AI studies were led by researchers who appeared well-versed in AI, while this would not be the case for MC.

**Character Strengths**

*Character strengths* are positive personality traits that reflect our identity, are appreciated across cultures, and produce positive outcomes (Niemiec, 2018). One of the first large-scale projects in positive psychology, the *Values In Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths and Virtues*, creates a common language of strengths that can lead to greater self-awareness, appreciation, and perspective (Niemiec, 2018). Identifying and exercising one’s character strengths has been shown to increase work productivity, improve coping with stress, enhance positive classroom behaviors, contribute to positive health outcomes, and foster engagement (Niemiec, 2019). Character strengths such as Creativity, Leadership, Curiosity, Zest, Love of Learning, Self-Regulation, and Perseverance are particularly tied to engagement, while Curiosity, Gratitude, Perspective, Spirituality, Social Intelligence, and Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence are closely correlated with meaning (Seligman, 2011; Wagner et al., 2019).
Unfortunately, most people are unaware of their character strengths (Niemiec, 2018). The VIA Survey and strengths-based exercises may help MC leaders, educators, and students recognize and apply their strengths, supporting AI’s asset-based strategy and directly fostering engagement. While researchers conducting the *VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues* looked across time and cultures to identify the 24 character strengths that now comprise the classification (Pawelski, 2022), we did not find research dedicated explicitly to exploring strengths in people of color or under-resourced settings.

**Ikigai**

As Viktor Frankl (1959) wisely postulated, people with a “why” can bear almost any “how.” MC highlights the value of “why” by emphasizing *ikigai*, having a purpose in life and a reason to live (Wilkes et al., 2022). Purpose improves student well-being by increasing academic engagement, perseverance, civic engagement, and happiness (Damon, 2008). As Bill Damon, a world-renowned thought leader on adolescent purpose, put it, “Purpose endows a person with joy in good times and perseverance in sad times, and this stays true throughout life” (2008, p.31).

All young people, especially students of color who have witnessed a succession of well-publicized social justice inequalities, require the protective aspects of purpose (Damon, 2008; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), yet studies indicate that only 20% of students have something meaningful to devote themselves to and a clear understanding of how their actions correspond to their purpose (Damon, 2008). There are many opportunities for students to connect to the spark that leads to *ikigai*, such as volunteer opportunities, hobbies, and ways they would like to see the world become a better place (Damon, 2008). Schools also provide a critical opportunity where teachers can model what it means to live a purposeful life. However, teachers
rarely share their personal “why” with students, failing to help them connect what they learn to more purposeful goals (Damon, 2008). This vacuum often means that students do not feel that what they learn has relevance to their future lives. For these reasons, an emphasis on *ikigai* and interventions related to purpose may be especially helpful for MC.

**Job Crafting**

*Job crafting* (JC) is a process through which individuals actively adjust their job design to create positive outcomes such as greater engagement, job satisfaction, resilience, and thriving (Berg et al., 2007). From an educational perspective, JC refers to what educators and students can do to redesign their roles to foster engagement, increase satisfaction and motivation, and enhance the meaning and purpose of school and work. It describes how employees take advantage of possibilities to customize their roles by purposefully altering their tasks and interactions with others (Berg et al., 2007), thereby positively impacting individual and organizational performance by assuming more or fewer tasks, broadening or narrowing the scope of tasks, changing work relationships, and cognitively altering how people perceive work.

JC is a three-stage process that includes motivation, identifying crafting possibilities, and the ability to transform one’s perceptions of the meaning of one’s work (Berg et al., 2007). *Task crafting* alters the number, nature, and types of jobs; *relational crafting* alters the number, type, and intensity of relationships, as well as alters patterns of interaction; and *cognitive crafting* alters how one perceives tasks, roles, and the meaning of their work (Myers, 2020). These strategies are frequently associated with positive and meaningful experiences but can also have unexpected consequences. JC is a technique that helps people cope with adversity and develop resilience (Berg et al., 2007), allowing them to improve their working lives while making
meaningful contributions to the organization. It is a versatile set of building blocks that can be restructured, formatted, and reframed to create a unique job that introduces employees to various resources (Berg et al., 2007).

JC unlocks creative insights, allowing for evolution over time. It involves redesigning one’s role to better align with their values and strengths (Berg et al., 2013), making it a powerful tool for learning and teaching with various redefining and reimagining purposes. The benefits of JC include making work more engaging and fulfilling, identifying opportunities to craft roles in beneficial ways, cultivating meaningfulness and effectiveness, and creating positive outcomes for the individual and their organizations or educational settings. We suggest that JC can empower people to think about the meaning and purpose of school or work in new ways and see the elements of their roles to alter them to make them more fulfilling and engaging (Myers, 2020).

**Limitations**

Although the findings included in this literature review are well-established, it is important to note that they are also limited. Many studies rely on self-report measures and are not longitudinal. Additionally, while we aimed to include culturally relevant research to fit with MC’s primary constituents, some of the studies referenced above included mainly White participants, suggesting that the results may not be representative across various cultures and ethnicities. The field of positive psychology is aware that most scientific studies concentrate on western/White, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic (WEIRD) populations, and much of the research we used to inform our interventions is no different. Another significant concern with some of the included studies is that they do not account for biosocial factors such as students’
genetics, relationships outside of school, or home life context, which may impact students’ educational experiences. Despite these limitations, the implications of the current research are significant as they suggest that many educational structures and environments in existence today are in need of reformation. We will use the insights gleaned from this research to help MC create meaningful change in their organization and the education of their constituents.

**Application Plan**

Our situation analysis revealed the challenges MindCatcher Education (MC) is encountering in its endeavor to break the cycle of hopelessness in under-resourced learning spaces (MindCatcher, 2022c). As a new startup nonprofit with only two staff members, MC has done a stellar job of developing programs to address the needs and promote the strengths of educational site leaders, teachers, and students of color. However, MC’s challenges are deeply rooted in America’s history of systemic racism, as described in our literature review. As a result, MC faces enormous obstacles in supporting educators and students of color with their social-emotional growth and leadership development. MC is also influencing pedagogy by moving away from the traditional teacher-led learning approach to a student-led learning model through the Young People Lead program (YPL) (MindCatcher, 2022d). Despite this heavy lift, we are optimistic that positive psychology -- specifically Appreciative Inquiry, character strengths, *ikigai*, and job crafting -- can support MC’s mission and assist Young and her team in solidifying MC’s offerings and communicating the program offerings to potential stakeholders.

Our cohort, Team Violet, in collaboration with MC’s program director, decided to focus on positive psychology interventions that support the mission of MC’s new “Cohort Experience: Site Leader Coaching and Collaboration” training model, which is still in the planning stages.
The main objective of the Cohort Experience is to build and expand the Young People Lead (YPL) program (E. Young, personal communication, March 8, 2023). The first of the interventions we will highlight is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). As mentioned, *Appreciative Inquiry* is an approach to organizational change that focuses on strengths and potential (Krattenmaker, 2001). We hope AI can support the YPL program's mission of working with under-resourced schools to reimagine the student experience by shifting pedagogy from teacher-led learning to student-led learning (E. Young, personal communication, 1/19/23). Meanwhile, *ikigai* and job crafting will address student disenfranchisement since student engagement is foundational for student-led learning success. Another primary goal of these interventions is to remediate educator and administrative burnout, as faculty members will need to be energized to make these changes. Finally, we aim to include positive psychology interventions that can highlight participant strengths to encourage engagement and excitement.

Envisioned timing is for MC staff to learn and practice the interventions over the summer of 2023 and then embed these interventions in the administrative and leader “Cohort Experience” training from August 2023 through April 2024. After each monthly training session, site leaders will connect with their teachers in on-campus, in-person sessions to train teachers in the interventions. Teachers will then embed these lessons into classroom activities and role-model these activities to students. Students will then be encouraged to teach these concepts to other students. “I can’t be it unless I see it” is often used in mentoring models (Mentor National Conference, personal communication, January 25, 2020). Our dominant way of learning how to act is by watching the behavior modeled by others. This information then guides our actions (Bandura, 1977). The power of role modeling inspires our strategy. Imagine what would happen
if students receive positive psychology intervention (PPI) guidance from teachers but do not witness teachers themselves using these practices; the overall effectiveness of the PPI would be undermined. Team Violet hopes this modeling lens will both inspire and empower MC staff, educational leaders, and teachers to make time and space for this work since they care so deeply about those they serve.

**Appreciative Inquiry**

Over the last 30 years, AI has evolved (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 2017), including successful use in educational institutions with students from diverse backgrounds. This leads us to believe that AI may be an appropriate application for MC. We hope that AI can assist MC in building and expanding its YPL program so that schools can enhance students’ voices and increase students’ sense of autonomy. MC has been partnering with MLK Middle School to change the teaching pedagogy to student-led learning (MindCatcher, 2022d). While the work with MLK is still evolving, it contains the seeds of success through improved student engagement and a more empowered student voice (E. Young, personal communication, January 23, 2023). By looking at the strengths of student-led learning at MLK, AI can help MC’s new educational partners envision what student-led learning might look like for them.

With the implementation and growth of MC’s Young People Lead (YPL) program at the center of the new “Cohort Experience” training model, educational site leaders such as principals and curriculum deans are being asked to redesign schools for the teachers and the students. MC states that our public schools are rooted in traditional education, where teachers are the experts and students are passive learners; this teaching style can cause student disengagement (E. Young, personal communication, January 19, 2023). YPL aims to equip teachers and young people with
the tools to reinvent school together, shifting teacher-led learning to student-led learning (MindCatcher, 2022d). AI is an organizational change approach that includes all stakeholders' voices believing that there is wisdom at all levels of one’s institution, moving away from the top-down model of change and the belief that only those at the top know best (Krattenmaker, 2001). By embracing the strengths and wisdom of all stakeholders, including the teachers and the students, change can flow with less resistance (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). The AI model of identifying what works well by listening to teacher and student stories can help MC develop its new vision.

The AI intervention comprises a series of slide decks, including a general overview of the AI process and individual decks for each of the five stages of the 5-D cycle. The deck starts with an introduction to the AI stage, followed by an AI-inspired activity aligned to MC’s needs. Many organizations that adopt the AI approach hire an AI consultant. Recognizing that MC is a young nonprofit which might make this unrealistic, we created a training slide deck to guide participants through each stage of the 5-D AI cycle (Zoll et al., 2021). The first slide deck will focus on the first stage of the 5-D model, Define, where participants will collectively envision the desired change. The suggested activity is organizational strengths-spotting. In the second stage, Discover, participants will be coached to conduct six to eight appreciative interviews with school stakeholders, from students to teachers to parents, to identify what works well to connect with community strengths (Ryan et al., 1999). The third phase is Dream, where the participants create a vision board or statement to capture their desired change. The last two slide decks will include the stages of Design, which will focus on an affirmation activity, and Destiny, which will focus on an accomplishment activity (Zoll et al., 2021).
Character Strengths

We chose to focus on character strengths in part because recognizing and appreciating strengths aligns neatly with Appreciative Inquiry and, more importantly because character strengths are culturally relevant and exercises related to character strengths require few resources to implement. In conducting the *VIA Classification of Strengths and Virtues* project, Christopher Peterson, Martin Seligman, and their colleagues looked across time and cultures to identify the 24 character strengths that now comprise the classification (Pawelski, 2022); this cross-cultural consideration is critical because MC primarily serves underrepresented groups and people of color (MindCatcher, 2022c). The accessibility of these exercises is also helpful since MC has limited staff members and works with under-resourced schools; these exercises do not require any specific resources other than a laptop or phone to take the VIA Survey, which is available for free on the VIA Institute website. MC strives to enhance students’ and educators’ engagement and sense of purpose (MindCatcher, 2022c). These exercises can help MC achieve this mission and may help alleviate some of the stress and burnout that MC staff and educators experience.

Discussing, developing, and practicing character strengths with MC staff, educators, and students will enable each individual and the organization as a whole to experience these benefits. Two exercises that may be particularly valuable for MC include (1) using your signature strengths in new ways (Schutte & Malouff, 2018) and (2) strengths-spotting (Niemiec, 2018). The first exercise involves using one’s top character strengths in new and innovative ways (Schutte & Malouff, 2018). For example, someone high in Gratitude might work on being mindful of something they typically take for granted or write down three things they are grateful for each day for a week. Meanwhile, the second exercise involves recognizing character
strengths in others. The SEA Model -- seeing (S), explaining (E), and appreciating (A) -- can be used to practice strength-spotting effectively (Niemiec, 2018). This activity aligns well with the discovery stage of AI. Both exercises can enhance the well-being of MC staff and educators. In addition, they can be taught to MC students to improve their well-being and interpersonal relationships. Participants should take the appropriate VIA Survey (the VIA Adult Survey or VIA Youth Survey) before implementing either of these exercises to help them identify their top character strengths and become familiar with all 24 character strengths.

**Ikigai**

Studies have found that as people move into midlife, their well-being is increasingly influenced by generativity, which is when we contribute to the world to benefit future generations (Erikson, 1968). Through the *ikigai* intervention, teachers and leaders will be coached to share their stories about what inspired them to become educators and why they find their role meaningful. This activity feeds generativity, meaning that the adults are likely to feel more purposeful (Bronk, 2014). The filling of this psychosocial developmental need can result in an upward spiral that will help protect adult participants from burnout.

The teacher-facing presentation touches upon the importance of role modeling and highlights research showing that many educators find their jobs meaningful (PayScale, n.d.). In this way, teachers are well-positioned to inspire children to explore purpose (Wilkes et al., 2022). Increased purpose is strongly tied to resilience and identity development (Damon, 2008), which means it has significant protective factors, especially for adolescents (Bronk, 2014). The three student-facing presentations communicate three central messages. First, everyone has unique skills and character strengths to contribute to the world; second, how they can explore what they
love to do; and third, guidance on how and where to find their purpose in life. Students will be reassured that connecting with *ikigai* takes time, so if they finish the lessons and have yet to discover their purpose, that is okay. These interventions require roughly an hour to train teachers through a workshop, two hours of class time broken down into three separate lessons given by slide decks, and a few printed worksheets, making it highly accessible for any school.

**Job Crafting**

Job crafting (JC) is a technique that enhances resilience and encourages individuals to explore new perspectives on their school or work (Berg et al., 2007). In addition, it empowers individuals to modify their tasks, relationships, and perceptions to align with their values and strengths. JC helps people see the elements of their roles [jobs] to alter them to make them more fulfilling and engaging (Myers, 2020).

The Job Crafting Exercise (JCE) is one tool that can assist people in identifying opportunities to customize their roles to their values, strengths, and passions. In addition, it encourages participants to consider their work an adaptable set of building blocks rather than a rigid list of responsibilities (Berg et al., 2013), which has the potential to align well with student-led learning growth opportunities. The following suggested applications are the most prevalent ways MC staff, educators, and students can use the Job Crafting Exercise (JCE):

- **Self-Development:** Individuals can do the JCE independently.
- **Group Workshops:** The Two-Hour Workshop Outline offers guidance on how to conduct JCE workshops.
- **Classroom Instruction:** Educators can teach students about job crafting theory.
- **One-on-One Coaching:** MC can help participants navigate the JCE.
We believe JC can work in educational settings and answer questions such as how to transform classrooms/schools/workplaces into hubs of human flourishing, how to cultivate the deepest sense of meaning and purpose at school/work, and how to enlist the support of others to ensure the most powerful and sustainable job crafting experiments. The official Job Crafting Exercise comprises a workbook that requires each participant to purchase it individually. However, to mitigate expenses for MC, we have created an adapted version of the exercise in the form of a mini-experiment.

**Summary**

As realistic optimists, we have authentically assessed MindCatcher Education (MC) and analyzed the challenges MC is confronting in its efforts to disrupt the hopelessness narrative in under-resourced learning environments (MindCatcher, 2022c). As a result, we took a context-conscious, culturally sensitive approach to curate our chosen interventions. We hope that Appreciative Inquiry, strengths-based practices, *ikigai*, and job crafting can support MC’s mission and offer workarounds to successfully navigate systemic barriers and obstacles that impede academic achievement among students of color and lead to stress and burnout among staff and educators of color.
References


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Fox, M. (2021, February 23). *The coronavirus pandemic, nearly a year long, is hitting students of color the worst*. CNBC.


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https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/School_poverty/?geo=0100000000000000


https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-018-9695-z


https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-022-00764-7


Appendix

Application Materials Roadmap

Please note: Our SLP partner, Elisabeth, provided us with a tentative professional development cohort experience schedule for MC Leaders. Based on this tentative schedule, we have mapped out when we believe it makes most sense for each PPI to be taught. In particular, the materials related to Appreciative Inquiry have been split across sessions and interwoven with other PPIs so that each session builds off of one another in a way that feels integrative and holistic, rather than repetitive or clunky.

We hope that MC Leaders will be able to teach MC Teachers and that MC Teachers will be able to teach MC Students in a similarly structured manner. However, these schedules have not yet been formed. As such, we have only created a clear schedule for MC Leaders. That being said, the slide decks used for MC Leaders can be used again for MC Teachers; these decks are clearly labeled as follows: “Leader Facing - TOPIC.”

We’ve also created Student Facing decks that are tailored toward a younger audience and classroom setting; these decks are clearly labeled as follows: “Student Facing - TOPIC.” See Lesson Overview on page 54 for outline of how lessons integrate.

Finally, should MC leaders wish to see an overview of Appreciative Inquiry prior to diving into the five stages of Appreciative Inquiry, the following slide deck was also created.

Appreciative Inquiry Full Slide Deck

Roadmap for Cohort Experience (Leader Facing Decks):

Session 1 - August: Appreciative Inquiry Introduction and Stage 1: Define
Session 2: September: **Appreciative Inquiry Stage 2: Discovery**

Session 3 - October: **Character Strengths**

Session 4 - December: **Student Motivation using Ikigai and Character Strengths**

Session 5 - January: **Appreciative Inquiry Stage 3: Dream**

Session 6 - February: **Job Crafting**

Session 7 - March: **Appreciative Inquiry Stage 4: Design**

Session 8 - April: **Appreciative Inquiry Stage 5: Destiny**

**Student Lessons Overview: (Homeroom & Site Visits)** [Student Facing Class Overview with Learning Outcomes](#)

**Student Handouts: **[Student Handouts Folder](#)

**Student Facing Decks:**

[Student Facing Character Strengths Part 1](#)

[Student Facing Character Strengths Part 2](#)

[Student Facing - Purpose Intro plus what You’re Good At](#)

[Student Facing - What You Love to Do](#)

[Student Facing - What The World Needs](#)

**Proof of Permission for curated items for Appreciative Inquiry**

[Permission from AI Commons and Cooperrider Center](#)
Evaluations

To track the effectiveness of the suggested interventions, Team Violet recommends that students take an online self-report measure pre- and post-program. We suggest using scales focusing on purpose, student leadership, and student motivation since these are the central categories where MC desires positive outcomes. We have broken down evaluations into two groups: middle and high school. Scales have been abridged by age to suit reading and attention levels.

**HIGH SCHOOL EVALUATION: PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM**

* A total of 42 self-report items covering motivation, purpose, and leadership

**ACADEMIC MOTIVATION:** Items pulled from [Academic Motivation Scale](Vallerand et al., 1992), abridged from 28 items down to 16.

Likert scale using the language: “Not true at all, A little true, Kind of true, Very true, Exactly true,” with scores running from 1 to 5 forward scored and 5 to 1 reverse scored.

*Instructions:*

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to school.

*Why do you go to school?*

1. Because I need at least a high-school degree in order to find a high-paying job later on.
2. Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.
3. Because I think that a high-school education will help me better prepare for the career I have chosen.
4. Because I really like going to school.
5. Honestly, I don’t know; I really feel that I am wasting my time in school.
6. To prove to myself that I am capable of completing my high-school degree.
7. In order to obtain a more prestigious job later on.
8. Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.
9. I once had good reasons for going to school; however, now I wonder whether I should continue.
10. Because of the fact that when I succeed in school I feel important.
11. Because I want to have “the good life” later on.
12. I can’t see why I go to school and frankly, I couldn’t care less.
13. For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities.
14. To show myself that I am an intelligent person.
15. Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.
16. Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.

**PURPOSE:** Items pulled from [Claremont Purpose Scale](https://example.com) (Bronk et al., 2018), a scale crafted to measure purpose among adolescents.

All items are scored on a Likert scale with some questions being reverse-scored. Scale is broken down into sections addressing meaningfulness, goal orientation and beyond-the-self dimension.

*Meaningfulness:*

1. How clear is your sense of purpose in your life?

   Not at all clear, A little bit clear, Somewhat clear, Quite clear, Extremely clear
2. How well do you understand what gives your life meaning?
   Do not understand at all, Understand a little bit, Understand somewhat, Understand quite a bit, Understand extremely well

3. How confident are you that you have discovered a satisfying purpose for your life?
   Not at all confident, Slightly confident, Somewhat confident, Quite confident, Extremely confident

4. How clearly do you understand what it is that makes your life feel worthwhile?
   Not at all clearly, A little bit clearly, Somewhat clearly, Quite clearly, Extremely clearly

Goal orientation:

5. How hard are you working to make your long-term aims a reality?
   Not at all hard, Slightly hard, Somewhat hard, Quite hard, Extremely hard

6. How much effort are you putting into making your goals a reality?
   Almost no effort, A little bit of effort, Some effort, Quite a bit of effort, A tremendous amount of effort

7. How engaged are you in carrying out the plans that you set for yourself?
   Not at all engaged, Slightly engaged, Somewhat engaged, Quite engaged, Extremely engaged

8. What portion of your daily activities move you closer to your long-term aims?
   None of my daily activities, A few of my daily activities, Some of my daily activities, Most of my daily activities, All of my daily activities

Beyond-the-self dimension:
9. How often do you hope to leave the world better than you found it?
   Almost never, Once in a while, Sometimes, Frequently, Almost all the time

10. How often do you find yourself hoping that you will make a meaningful contribution to the broader world?
   Almost never, Once in a while, Sometimes, Frequently, Almost all the time

11. How important is it for you to make the world a better place in some way?
   Not at all important, Slightly important, Somewhat important, Quite important, Extremely important

12. How often do you hope that the work that you do positively influences others?
   Almost never, Once in a while, Sometimes, Frequently, Almost all the time

**LEADERSHIP:** Pulled from Leader Self-Efficacy Items (Rehm & Selznick, 2019) that were customized for middle school students from the original scales (Kane & Baltes, 1998; Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009). Likert scale using the language: “Not true at all, A little true, Kind of true, Very true, Exactly true” with scores running from 1 to 5 forward scored and 5 to 1 reverse scored.

1. I believe I have the ability to be a leader
2. I see myself as a leader
3. I am aware of my own strengths (things that I’m good at) and what areas I need to develop
4. I know how I can help make my world a better place
5. I do not know how to be a leader
6. I can help others work hard on a task
7. I can help others feel good about what we are doing
8. I value working with other people in groups
9. I work well with others and share leadership in order to solve problems effectively
10. I can take charge when necessary
11. I can communicate effectively with others
12. I think making friends and developing relationships with others can help us all to succeed
13. I look at challenges in different ways in order to find the best solution
14. I believe that leadership can be taught

MIDDLE SCHOOL EVALUATION - PRE- AND POST-PROGRAM

A total of 17 self-report items covering leadership, purpose and motivation

ACADEMIC MOTIVATION: Items pulled from Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992), abridged from 28 items down to 5.

Likert scale using the language: “Not true at all, A little true, Kind of true, Very true, Exactly true” with scores running from 1 to 5 and negative items reverse scored from 5 to 1.

Instructions:
Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to one of the reasons why you go to school.

Why do you go to school?
1. Because I really like going to school.
2. Because I want to have “the good life” later on.
3. To show myself that I am an intelligent person.
4. I don’t know; I can’t understand what I am doing in school.

5. Because eventually it will enable me to enter the job market in a field that I like.

**PURPOSE:** Items pulled from [Claremont Purpose Scale](Bronk et al., 2018), a scale crafted to measure purpose among adolescents. Originally 12 items, it has been abridged to 3 items. All items are scored on a Likert scale. Scale is broken down into sections addressing meaningfulness, goal orientation and beyond-the-self dimension.

1. How well do you understand what gives your life meaning?
   - Do not understand at all, Understand a little bit, Understand somewhat, Understand quite a bit, Understand extremely well

2. How much effort are you putting into making your goals a reality?
   - Almost no effort, A little bit of effort, Some effort, Quite a bit of effort, A tremendous amount of effort

3. How important is it for you to make the world a better place in some way?
   - Not at all important, Slightly important, Somewhat important, Quite important, Extremely important

**LEADERSHIP:** Pulled from [Leader Self-Efficacy Items](Rehm & Selznick, 2019) that were customized from the original scales (Kane & Baltes, 1998; Bobbio & Manganelli, 2009) for middle school students. Original scale referenced above was 18 items, the abridged version here is 9 items long. Items are forward and reverse scored on a Likert scale with item 5 being an attention check. Likert scale uses the language: “Not true at all, A little true, Kind of true, Very true, Exactly true”

1. I believe I have the ability to be a leader
2. I see myself as a leader

3. I am aware of my own strengths (things that I’m good at) and what areas I need to develop

4. I know how I can help make my world a better place

5. I do not know how to be a leader

6. I can help others work hard on a task

7. I can help others feel good about what we are doing

8. I can take charge when necessary

9. I believe that leadership can be taught
References


Link to MindCatcher Education Printable Guidebook

MindCatcher Handouts

MindCatcher Slide Decks
Contents

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MindCatcher Education (MC) is a new 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the social-emotional growth and leadership development of students and educators of color through four innovative programs. Two programs focus on building social-emotional growth and leadership among educational leaders and teachers of color. The other two focus on developing and nurturing leadership skills among students of color.

As part of our service learning project, the Master’s of Applied Positive Psychology cohort at the University of Pennsylvania partnered with MC this spring to explore how positive psychology can strengthen and expand its programs. We focused on how the new cohort experience training model with educational leaders could build and expand the Young People Lead (YPL) program. YPL empowers youth by giving them a voice in the educational decision-making process.

After considering MC’s successful implementation of YPL at one of its partnering middle schools and their YES framework, mission, and values, we identified four positive psychology interventions to support MC in achieving its goals. These interventions are listed here:

1. Appreciative Inquiry - A perspective-taking intervention that includes an overview of its purpose and application to aid in the building and expansion of the YPL program.
2. Character Strengths - Leader- and student-facing exercises that can support the Appreciative Inquiry process, build student engagement, and reduce educator burnout.
3. Ikigai - Lessons on finding purpose that help educators and students identify and share purpose and meaning in their lives, increasing student engagement and reducing educator burnout.
4. Job Crafting - A mini-experiment that supports students and educators in reimagining their roles when applying student-led learning, increasing student engagement and leadership, and reducing educator burnout.

This booklet contains the training materials for MC’s new cohort experience training model from August 2023 to April 2024, designed to support the growth and expansion of YPL while building student engagement and reducing educator burnout.

We are honored to have worked with the program director, Elisabeth Young, of MC, and it is Team Violet’s greatest hope that these interventions will support MC in achieving its vision.

Sincerely,

Team Violet
Lesson Plans
LESSON OVERVIEW:
Helping students connect to their strengths, purpose, and what is working well in their lives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Lesson Name</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Corresponding Handouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Student Facing Character Strengths – Lesson 1</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>Intro to strengths and students discover their top strengths</td>
<td>Printout for Bulletin Board Character Strengths Handout for Students – My Top Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>Student Facing Character Strengths – Lesson 2</td>
<td>30 min</td>
<td>Strength spotting and using strengths in a new way</td>
<td>Character Strengths Handout for Students – I SEA You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third</td>
<td>Student Facing – Purpose Intro Plus What You’re Good At</td>
<td>35 min</td>
<td>Why purpose is important, dealing with negative self talk, and what we are good at</td>
<td>Character Strengths Handout for Students – I SEA You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Student Facing – What You Love to Do</td>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>What is flow, when have we flourished in the past, how we want to be remembered</td>
<td>What You Love to Do – Positive Past Handout; What You Love to Do – Fantastic Future; What You Love to Do – Brainstorming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>Student Facing – What the World Needs</td>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>The many paths to purpose, noble vs heroic purpose, how the pieces fit together, purpose brainstorming</td>
<td>What the World Needs – Brainstorming; What the World Needs – Putting the Pieces Together; What the World Needs – Purpose Brainstorming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following classes take roughly three hours to complete and consist of the following:
## OUTLINE FOR COHORT EXPERIENCE:

Cohort/Champion of the Work + Design Team
Meetings During Site Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>The month of</th>
<th>Leader Facing Deck</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Introduction and Stage 1: Define</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Stage 2: Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Character Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>December</td>
<td>Student Motivation Using Ikigai and Character Strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Stage 3: Dream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>February</td>
<td>Job Crafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Stage 4: Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Stage 5: Destiny</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 1
Objective: To support MC in their design of strengthening and expanding their YPL program at partnering school sites and to help facilitate the changing roles involved in youth-led learning using the AI 5-D model.

AI & Building & Expanding YPL
Appreciative Inquiry is an asset-based approach to organizational change. It includes the voices of all stakeholders to highlight existing strengths, advantages, and opportunities to create the ideal vision. Below are links to support MC in walking through each stage with one AI-inspired activity.

Stage 1: Define - What is it that you are creating?
Stage 2: Discovery - What strengths exist in support of what you are creating?
Stage 3: Dream - What is the ideal version of what you are creating?
Stage 4: Design - What actions, and changes need to happen to create the ideal version?
Stage 5: Delivery - How are the actions and changes going and what needs adjustment?

Ready to get started?
AI Overview
AI Stage 1: Define
AI Stage 2: Discover
AI Stage 3: Dream
AI Stage 4: Design
AI Stage 5: Destiny

Stage 1 = Clarifying
Stage 2 = Appreciating
Stage 3 = Envisioning
Stage 4 = Co-Constructing
Stage 5 = Innovating
Lesson 2
Objective: To improve well-being, productivity, classroom behavior, stress management, relationships, and engagement for MC staff, educators, and students.

Character Strengths, Recognizing & Appreciating
Character strengths (CS) align with the discovery phase of AI. More importantly, CS exercises are culturally relevant and require few resources to implement. Our recommended exercises are: 1) using signature strengths in new ways and 2) strengths-spotting.

What are your signature strengths?
Use your signature strengths in new ways
The SEA Model - Spot Explain Appreciate

Ready to get started?
Leader-Facing CS Full Lesson
Student-Facing CS Part I
Student-Facing CS Part II

Each character strength falls under one of six virtues, which are universal across cultures: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, or Transcendence.
Lesson 3
**Objective:** To support educators and students in identifying and sharing their purpose in life due to all the positive benefits of living with purpose.

**Ikigai & Building Resilience, Engagement, & Reducing Burnout**
Ikigai is the Japanese concept of finding one’s purpose in life based on individual strengths and skills. Having a sense of purpose contributes to resilience and motivation, which can support student engagement and leadership while reducing burnout in educators. We have created four purpose-finding lessons, one for educators and three for students.

**Ready to get started?**
Leader-facing: Knowing Your Why
Student-facing: Purpose Intro
Student-facing: What You Love to do
Student-facing: What the World Needs

**Handouts**
Ikigai Lessons on Finding Purpose
Ikigai: Role Modeling, Meaningful Work, Modeling Meaning, Your Purpose
Ikigai Questions for educators & students

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**Ikigai**

Role Modeling
Meaningful Work
Modeling Meaning
Your Purpose

---

**Ikigai Questions for educators & students**

1. What is your purpose in life?
2. How does your purpose guide your actions and decisions?
3. What are the benefits of living with purpose?
4. How can you share your purpose with others?

---

**Ikigai Handouts**

Ikigai: Role Modeling, Meaningful Work, Modeling Meaning, Your Purpose
Ikigai Questions for educators & students

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**Ikigai Lessons on Finding Purpose**

Ikigai: Role Modeling, Meaningful Work, Modeling Meaning, Your Purpose
Ikigai Questions for educators & students

---

**Ikigai Questions for educators & students**

1. What is your purpose in life?
2. How does your purpose guide your actions and decisions?
3. What are the benefits of living with purpose?
4. How can you share your purpose with others?
Lesson 4
Objective: To help staff members, faculty, educators, and students redesign their roles in ways that align with their values, strengths, and passions, leading to greater engagement, fulfillment, and positive outcomes for both the individual and their organization or educational setting.

Job Crafting (JC), A Powerful Tool for Learning & Teaching: A flexible set of building blocks to reorganize, reframe, and restructure work. JC can empower people to think about the meaning and purpose of school or work in new ways, helping them see the elements of their roles to alter them and make them more fulfilling and engaging. JC unlocks creative insights, allowing for evolution over time.

Task Crafting - Alters the number, nature, and types of jobs or activities involved in, expanding or reducing the scope of tasks

Relational Crafting - Alters the number, type, and intensity of relationships, as well as alters patterns of interaction

Cognitive Crafting - Alters how one perceives tasks, roles, and meaning of her work

Ready to get started?

Leader-Facing JC Guide
JC Mini-Experiment Printout

Benefits of Job Crafting:
- Can make work engaging & fulfilling
- Helps identify opportunities to craft roles in beneficial ways
- Helps cultivate meaningfulness and effectiveness
- Creates positive outcomes for the individual & their organizations or educational settings
References

Appreciative inquiry commons. The Appreciative Inquiry Commons. (201, March 26). https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu


References


Appendix
Please Note:

Our SLP partner, Elisabeth, gave us a tentative professional development cohort experience schedule for MC Leaders. Based on this tentative schedule, we have mapped out when we believe it makes the most sense for each PPI to be taught. In particular, the materials related to Appreciative Inquiry have been split across sessions and interwoven with other PPIs so that each session builds off of one another in a way that feels integrative and holistic rather than repetitive or clunky. We hope that MC Leaders will be able to teach MC Teachers and that MC Teachers will be able to teach MC Students in a similarly structured manner. However, these schedules have not yet been formed. As such, we have only created a clear schedule for MC Leaders. The slide decks used for MC Leaders can be used again for MC Teachers; these decks are labeled as follows: “Leader Facing - TOPIC.”

We have also created Student Facing decks tailored toward a younger audience and classroom setting; these decks are labeled as follows: “Student Facing - TOPIC.” Also, the “Student Facing Class Overview with Learning Outcomes” document outlines how lessons integrate.

Finally, the following slide deck was also created should MC leaders wish to see an overview of Appreciative Inquiry prior to diving into the five stages of Appreciative Inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry Full Slide Deck

Cohort Experience (Leader Facing Decks): Cohort/Champion of the Work + Design Team Meetings During Site Visits

- **Session 1** - August: Appreciative Inquiry Introduction and Stage 1: Define
- **Session 2** - September: Appreciative Inquiry Stage 2: Discovery
- **Session 3** - October: Character Strengths
- **Session 4** - December: Student Motivation Ikigai & Character Strengths
- **Session 5** - January: Appreciative Inquiry Stage 3: Dream
- **Session 6** - February: Job Crafting
- **Session 7** - March: Appreciative Inquiry Stage 4: Design
- **Session 8** - April: Appreciative Inquiry Stage 5: Destiny

**Student Lessons Overview:** (Homeroon & Site Visits)

**Student Handouts:**

**Student Handouts Folder**

- Student Facing Deck:
  - Student Facing - Character Strengths Part 1
  - Student Facing - Character Strengths Part 2
  - Student Facing - Purpose Intro plus What You’re Good At
  - Student Facing - What You Love to Do
  - Student Facing - What The World Needs

Proof of Permission for curated items for Appreciative Inquiry
Handouts
Helping address a world need could lead you to a powerful purpose. When you look out into the world, what are some ways that you think it could be a better place? Think about things like health, the environment, social justice, equity, caring for others, boosting happiness or maybe other ideas that come to mind. Take a few minutes to think about this. Write about your ideas below.
WHAT YOU LOVE TO DO

Look at your Fantastic Future and Positive Past sheets. What do you notice about them? Is there a common thread that you can see? What would you say you love to do? Write about this below.

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

Draw out your ideas here if you would like.
POSITIVE PAST EXERCISE

Think about a time in your past when you were really thriving and/or experienced a sense of flow.

Who were you with? What were you doing? How did you feel? What did you love about this time?

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Envision yourself on your hundredth birthday. Imagine that everything in your life has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded in accomplishing your goals. Think about what you accomplished and what you did in your life. Who are you within this moment? What will you be remembered for? How did you touch the lives of others?

List out what made you most excited about this amazing life that you have lived.

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YOUR FANTASTIC FUTURE
MORE FANTASTIC FUTURE HERE!

Draw your fantastic future below, if you want.
Look at the “Putting the Pieces Together” sheet and start to throw out ideas for what your purpose might be. If you are stuck, it can be helpful to have a teacher, counselor, friend, or family member look at your list with you. Once you are done, look over the list and circle the ones you are most excited about.
Look at the “Putting the Pieces Together” sheet and start to throw out ideas for what your purpose might be. If you are stuck, it can be helpful to have a teacher, counselor, friend or family member look at your list with you. Once you are done, look over the list and circle the ones you are most excited about.

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Find your purpose!
Putting the Pieces Together

What is important to me/What I love to do: (Think Positive Past & Fantastic Future)

What I am good at: (Think Top Strengths & Positive Past)

What the World Needs: (Think Be the Change)

Fill in the circles below, one with each area - What I love to do, What I am good at, What the World Needs
MY TOP STRENGTHS

Student name:

Strength 1:

Strength 2:

Strength 3:

Strength 4:

Strength 5:
MY TOP STRENGTHS

Student name:

Strength 1:

Strength 2:

Strength 3:

Strength 4:

Strength 5:
## MY TOP STRENGTHS

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<td>Strength 5</td>
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### Discovering Your Strengths
I "SEA" YOU
a strengths spotting activity

Student Name:

Strength You Saw:

Explain What Happened:

Appreciate it:
I "SEA" YO
a strengths spotting activity

Student Name:

Strength You Saw:

Explain What Happened:

Appreciate it:
Acknowledgements
We are MindCatcher Education
Hello, We're Team Violet!

Kirsten Calloway
Laura Garrison-Brook
Maritza Jackson Sandoval
Naomi Fink
Abi Tschetter
Elisabeth Young
Towards a brighter tomorrow

- Shifting Perspectives
- Designing the Future of Education
Beginning of Team Violet's presentation.
(School bell rings)

Hello class, and welcome. We know you're all excited to be here, as we have a special guest joining us today, but if you would all please now take your seats so we may begin.
Maritza: Hello Mappsters and guests. My name is Maritza Jackson Sandoval, and I have the distinction of introducing our outstanding service learning partner MindCatcher Education.

(Maritza: You can change the following to anything else if you want to)

First, we'd like to introduce ourselves. We are Team Violet. And, of course, we would not be here today without the help from...(click)
Hello, We're Team Violet!

Our lovely MAPP 714 coach, Abi Tschetter, and our service learning partner liaison, Elisabeth Young, with whom we are so very grateful to have collaborated this semester.
Who is MindCatcher Education?

They are a new non-profit led by Elisabeth Young, program director, Nakeyshia Kendall Williams, founder and CEO, and several consultants. Their mission is to break the cycle of hopelessness in under-resourced learning spaces such as public schools and after-school programs, which they accomplish through various programs that support the social-emotional growth and leadership development of educators and students of color (MindCatcher, 2022).

Narrative of Nakeyshia:

The seed of MindCatcher Education was planted in CEO Nakeyshia Kendall Williams' heart and intellect while working for one of the leading learning organizations and witnessing firsthand how our school systems are not built to engage our children. She also saw that education corporations and organizations were not providing products and services to fulfill the requirements of our public school students. Who are the students in our public schools? They are mostly low-income young people of color.

As a product of public schools, Columbia University, and the Wharton School of Business, Nakeyshia understands the value of a good education. She believes that our youngsters deserve a better education, a good education.

She couldn’t sit on the sidelines and do nothing; she had to take action. So she started MindCatcher Education with the intention of creating procedures that would uplift educators and
adolescents of color. Still, she understood the foundation was in supporting educators of color.
Whom does MindCatcher serve?

Educational Leaders of Color include school principals, superintendents, after-school site leaders, and others from under-resourced educational communities.

MindCatcher Programs:

MCE offers four programs to meet their aim of breaking the cycle of hopelessness in under-resourced learning spaces: Collective Support (CS), Adult Social Emotional Learning Assessment (ASELA), Youth Learning Lab (YLL), and Young People Lead (YPL).

Collective Support is an affinity-based cohort experience geared to the requirements of the school and after-school site leaders of color regarding leadership and wellness. ASEA is an assessment instrument they developed to assist educators in their roles as classroom leaders.

Youth Learning Lab is a program that establishes spaces in after-school programs like the YMCA to enhance student voice and agency, allowing children to construct their own learning experiences outside of the classroom.

Young People Lead is a program that encourages youth leadership and youth-led learning by allowing students to participate in educational decision-making.

MindCatcher's Strengths:

We consolidated and structured the ideas we obtained from multiple meetings with the program
director, Elisabeth Young, regarding MCE and how positive psychology might be able to complement their efforts into a SWOT analysis framework (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats).

They are primarily concerned with students and leaders. They meet their partners where they are and listen to what they have to say. Their Collective Support program is doing an excellent job of assisting leaders of color in their work of establishing generative learning environments for youngsters. Participants in Collective Support express a sense of psychological safety. They feel heard and understood, leaving program meetings with a better understanding of their problems and how to solve them. If you want to see testimonies, there is a brief film on the mind catcher website.

MLK Middle School's Young People Lead program exemplifies the power of student-led learning and young leadership. While the program is still in its early stages, it is a success story in that students are taking control of their learning and are more engaged than ever before.

If you are curious to see MindCatcher in action, we welcome you to scan the QR code in the top right-hand corner of this slide.

I will now turn it over to Kirsten who will discuss our literature analysis.
Thank you, Maritza!

In our literature review we examined implicit bias, student disenfranchisement, the risk of educator and MindCatcher staff burnout, and the burden placed on educators of color to assume so many responsibilities, from role model to disciplinarian. We also explored the challenges of implementing student-led learning at MindCatcher’s partner schools. However, the challenges we’re going to highlight today are those around educators of color, particularly Black educators.

Black instructors face burnout due to their perceived connection to students of color. According to a report by the Education Trust, Black educators often felt pressured to connect with all Black students, regardless of their students’ backgrounds or cultures. As a result, they rarely taught honors or AP classes. They felt administrators believed they could only teach lower-performing subjects. They also had to work twice as hard as their White colleagues and control their behavior to appear more professional. However, the report’s narratives have been virtually absent from the teacher diversity conversation. According to Griffin of the Education Trust, schools need to analyze their retention rates and create focus groups to hear from Black educators about their experiences.

In addition, Black teachers are constantly being inundated with addressing discipline, which is a microaggression. This encumbrance is placed on Black male teachers because they are seen as role models and father figures for Black adolescents, especially Black males, who may not have adult male figures in their homes and surroundings. Relying on Black male teachers as patriarchal disciplinarians for Black students in urban schools, universities and policymakers have recruited more Black males into teaching, hoping that doing so will help mitigate systemic injustices on urban adolescents of color. Single-sex educational initiatives have also prioritized partnering
Black male teachers with Black male students for the same reasons. However, Black male instructors have indicated that discipline-related conflicts complicate their relationships with Black students. Additionally, colleagues’ overreliance on Black educators’ disciplinary talents shows disdain for their workload and neglect to appreciate their other teaching strengths. It is also challenging for these educators to manage additional responsibilities and the high expectations of colleagues, administrators, parents, and students.

Former U.S. Education Secretary John King called the way Black educators discipline students of color the “Invisible Tax on Teachers of Color”. The invisible tax assumes they can better communicate with African American boys with behavior concerns. White educators utilize Black educators as disciplinarians, punishing students and not liberating them from “tough” love narratives. This strategy disregards findings from studies showing the positive impact of having Black educators on student achievement. Black educators should be allowed to support students of color rather than enforce zero-tolerance policies simply because of this familiarity. Evidence of an African-American female educator at a charter school in New York City with a mostly Black and Latino student body spotlights how Black women are also not immune from being regarded as disciplinarians and authoritarians in today’s educational context.

Black educators can disrupt oppressive practices that govern African-American conduct. Sadly, only 13.4% of education administrators were Black or African American in 2015. Black educators should lead discipline decisions. Otherwise, Black educators who disapprove of the policy of “zero tolerance” discipline for Black students may decide to abandon the teaching profession altogether.

What does success look like to MC? Teachers succeed when they are excited about reaching students who were previously disengaged from the learning environment. Success is when student-teacher-based project designs go through iterations and are genuinely supported. Finally, success is when safe spaces are provided to educators and leaders of color to address these challenges. Leaders of color require time, community, wellness, and mindset as fuel to mastermind their way to better serve young people.

Using positive psychology, Team Violet was eager to help. As realistic optimists, we authentically assessed MindCatcher Education (MC) and analyzed the challenges MC is confronting in its efforts to disrupt the hopelessness narrative in under-resourced learning environments. As a result, we took a context-conscious, culturally sensitive approach to curate our chosen interventions. I will now turn it over to Laura who will now walk us through the Application and Evaluation Process.
Introduce (development/process of applications)

Thanks, Kirsten. In this part of the presentation we will talk about how Team Violet determined whom the interventions will serve and how they will be served, the power of modeling, the interventions, and suggested evaluations. *click*
Constituents

As we were getting to know MindCatcher with its staff of two people, we were impressed by their generosity of heart. With a staff of two, their programs worked to support ** educational leaders, ** teachers, ** parents, and ** students. MindCatcher is a new nonprofit focused on this heavy lift, so as a team, we also felt the need to recognize MindCatcher staff as another constituent.
YES Framework

MindCatcher wants to be a change agent for the young people they serve, where students are transformed into academically engaged leaders. The YES framework, which stands for Youth Engagement Spectrum, is central to their model where ikigai or life purpose is foundational. When focusing on what our interventions would be, we zeroed in **leadership, **academic engagement, and **ikigai as where we could help MindCatcher with its efforts.
Waterfall effect

Team Violet recognizes that this is more of a marathon than a sprint. As mentioned, the risk of burnout and disengagement is real for everyone involved. In light of this, we decided on a **waterfall effect** where we encourage **MindCatcher staff** to first internalize the concept and teach it to **educational leaders**. These leaders then train **teachers** in the concepts. Teachers pass along the interventions to students and then students are encouraged to teach this to fellow classmates. **
Applications outline

With the intended learning outcomes of increased leadership, academic engagement, and ikigai in mind, the interventions that Team Violet has chosen are appreciative inquiry, character strengths, purpose exploration, and job crafting.
Role Models

One of the most powerful ways that we learn as human beings is through observing the actions of others (Bandura, 1986). This role modeling has a dual benefit. First, our hope is that these skills and strengths will help protect MC staff, leaders, and teachers from burnout. Second, students are more likely to embrace these strategies if they see the adults in their lives modeling them.
### Cohort/Leadership Training

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<td>August</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Introduction and Stage 1: Define</td>
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<td>Appreciative Inquiry Stage 2: Discovery</td>
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### Roadmap

MindCatcher will be invited to experience the interventions for themselves before embedding them into their leadership training. Session suggestions are listed here. **
1. AI (Maritza) ~1 min

We plan to use the 5Ds of Appreciative Inquiry for our first intervention. While many organizations who use AI hire AI consultants, we did not want to recommend such an intervention due to the cost. Therefore, we created lessons for each of the five stages of AI and offered one positive psychology intervention per stage to assist MC in moving through the stages on their own.
2. Character Strengths (Naomi) ~1 min

Our second intervention focused on character strengths, which are positive personality traits that reflect our identity, produce positive outcomes, and contribute to the collective good (Niemiec, 2018).

We focused on character strengths in part because recognizing and appreciating strengths aligns neatly with the discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry. But, more importantly, because character strengths are culturally relevant, and exercises related to character strengths require few resources to implement. These factors are important because MC primarily serves underrepresented groups in under-resourced schools.

The two specific exercises we recommended were using your signature strengths in new ways (Schutte & Malouff, 2018) and strengths-spotting (Niemiec, 2018). These exercises can be used by MC staff, educators, and students and have been shown to increase well-being, improve work productivity, enhance positive classroom behaviors, help with stress management, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and increase overall engagement (Niemiec, 2019), which is one of MC’s primary missions.

Worksheets like ** can be used to teach and practice each exercise. *click*
3. Ikigai (Laura) ~1 min

As mentioned earlier, ikigai - the reason we get up in the morning or our purpose in life - is central to MindCatchers YES framework. For that reason, the third intervention is focused on purpose. Purpose has been shown to boost academic engagement and resilience. Purposeful students are also likely to be less stressed. With educators we talk about how they can be natural role models for purpose. People in education generally find their jobs to be very meaningful.

The adult-facing intervention encourages leaders and teachers to model meaning for their students.

The student intervention is broken down into three lessons which focus on what we are good at, what we love to do, and what the world needs. These lessons are supported by student worksheets.
4. Job Crafting (Kirsten)

Job crafting is a visual framework that can be helpful to staff members, faculty, educators, students, and others. It serves a variety of redefining and reimagining purposes, making it a powerful tool for learning and teaching.

From an educational perspective, Job Crafting is what educators and students can do to redesign their roles in ways that foster engagement in the classroom, increase satisfaction and motivation, and enhance the meaning and purpose of school and work in new ways.

We suggest that Job Crafting relates to MindCatcher, and aligns with the YES Framework. It helps people see the elements of their roles to alter them to make them more fulfilling and engaging (Myers, 2020). Job Crafting unlocks creative insights, allowing for evolution over time.

There are Three Forms of Job Crafting that create a flexible set of building blocks to reorganize, reframe, and restructure our work.

Task Crafting
Alters the number, nature, and types of jobs or activities involved in, expanding or reducing the scope of tasks

Relational Crafting
Alters the number, type, and intensity of relationships, as well as alters patterns of interaction
Cognitive Crafting  
Alters how one perceives tasks, roles, and meaning of her work (Myers, 2020)

We believe Job Crafting can answer (appreciatively): How can we best transform our classrooms/schools/workplaces into hubs of human flourishing? How can we cultivate the greatest sense of meaning and purpose at school/work? How can we enlist the support of others to ensure the most powerful and sustainable job-crafting experiments?

Team Violet is aware that the formal Job Crafting Exercise involves a workbook that must be purchased by each individual who participates in the exercise. In light of that fact, Team Violet is offering MindCatcher an adapted version in the form of a mini-experiment.
To measure the impact of these PPIs at MindCatcher, we suggested administering the following three assessments pre- and post-interventions: The Academic Motivation Scale, the Claremont Purpose Scale, and the Leader Self-Efficacy Items scale. We chose these scales because they are tried and true measures that focus on what MindCatcher would like to see improved: purpose, student leadership, and student motivation. We also abridged these scales down to 3-9 items per test for middle schoolers and 12-16 items per test for high schoolers to keep them brief for MC students. *click*
To wrap up, we invite you to join us in a quick exercise. On the next slide, I'm going to show you a picture and I want you to count how many shapes you see. You will only about 10 seconds to do this. Ready? Go!
*Count to 10 and then flip to next slide* *click*
Wrap-Up

Exercise

Now I know I asked you to count the shapes, but answer this question: What images did you see on the puzzle? Count those up and put in the chat how many you remembered. Was it maybe 7 or 8? 5-6? 3-4? 1-2? None?
This exercise demonstrates the power of perspective -- we see what we focus on. The images were right there on the screen -- as they are again now -- but many of us didn’t actually take them in the first time because we were focused on something else.
And that’s exactly the point. As Maritza mentioned at the very beginning of our presentation and as Laura outlined with the YES Framework, MindCatcher is all about shifting educators’ and students' perspectives toward a model of what could be: a model of youth-led learning, a model of purpose, a model of hope. **

Keeping up with day-to-day demands that life brings -- and as a new nonprofit, MC has a lot! -- it can sometimes be hard to see and balance the dreams and the details. When we focus too much on one, we can lose sight of the other. In this exercise, many of us missed the images because we were focused on the shapes. Our hope is that our work with MindCatcher can help them balance priorities and see not only the challenges that lie ahead, but also the strengths and opportunities. **

And the PPIs we selected are aimed at doing just that. Appreciative Inquiry, character strengths, Ikigai, and job crafting are all intended to help people see the good that’s in front of them and build the good that could be.

By shifting our perspectives from deficit-based to strengths-based, to positive-psychology based, we hope we can help MindCatcher empower their staff members, educators, and young people to *click*
make their mark on the world.
Thank you
References


References


References


