Building Our Superpowers! Strengths Research to Practice

ADVANCING SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE
CLAUDETTE FETTE
PATTI DERR
Objectives:

1. Participants will compare strength-based models.

2. Participants will identify their own strengths and practice strength-based strategies.

3. Participants will analyze common pitfalls in attempts to practice from a strengths perspective and develop solutions.
Who are we anyway?
The value of authentic experience
Mental HEALTH is:

Positive affective or emotional state (feeling happy)

Positive psychological and social function (self esteem/control, relationships)

Productive activities (doing things that are important to you)

Resilience (bouncing back)

(Bazyk and Arbesman, 2013)
What is Strength-Based?

"Raising children is vastly more than fixing what is wrong with them. It is about identifying and nurturing their strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these strengths."

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p6)
What is Strength-Based?

• Basis of strength-based service delivery is “premise that even the most troubled youth have unique talents, skills, and other resources that can be marshaled in the service of recovery and development” (page 287-8).

• Cox (2006)

• Even the most troubled systems have strengths.
Strengths that support elementary to middle school transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal traits</th>
<th>Contextual Supports</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Temperament</td>
<td>◦ Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cognition</td>
<td>◦ Peer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Optimism</td>
<td>◦ Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interests</td>
<td>◦ Caring adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creativity</td>
<td>◦ Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Attention to tasks</td>
<td>◦ Community participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive identity</td>
<td>◦ School environment (current)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health</td>
<td>◦ School/academic foundation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>◦ Cultural factors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>◦ Material possessions</td>
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<td>◦ Respect from others</td>
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Fette (2011)
Strengths in Wraparound

**Strengths based.** The wraparound process and the wraparound plan identify, build on, and enhance the capabilities, knowledge, skills, and assets of the child and family, their community, and other team members.

Identify
  - Capacities
  - Interests
  - Resources

Recognize

Intervene

Create

Enabling Niches
Strengths Promotion in Schools
Strengths in Schools

The identification of strengths is mandated in student’s individualized education plans (IEP) within special education.

Can be difficult to ground IEPs in child strengths within a system for which deficits are the key to access.
Applying Public Health Approach to Mental Health

PBIS ➔ Integrated Systems Framework

Tier 1

Tier 2

Tier 3

http://www.apbs.org/new_apbs/SWDesc.aspx
Tier 1 Universal Mental Health Promotion & Prevention

"Promotion efforts focus on competence enhancement and positive mental health in the whole population within the context of their everyday lives"

(Bazyk and Arbesman, 2013, p 21)
Tier 1 supports

- Social skills programming; Social and emotional learning curriculum [https://casel.org/](https://casel.org/)
- Positive behavioral interventions and supports [https://www.pbis.org/](https://www.pbis.org/)
- Building opportunities for structured leisure activities [https://everymomentcounts.org/](https://everymomentcounts.org/)
Tier 1 for Families?
Mental Health First Aid
Trauma Informed Care
Anti-stigma Efforts
Family Resource Centers
Family to Family education
Tier 2

Targets at risk youth who may not be diagnosed but may have behavioral changes; or youth with diagnoses but asymptomatic; at risk youth

• Recognition of trauma: historical, intergenerational, systems based ...

• Prevention (grading down demands/stressors) + promotion of competences to minimize early symptoms (Downing, 2011)

• Often small group interventions ... support groups, activity groups, skill development groups
Tier 2 supports

RtI in school settings

Instructional Support Personnel

- to modify tasks, environment to facilitate success
- to identify strengths
- to build and facilitate supportive activities

EBP

- social skills for antisocial behavior, ADHD, ID
- Play, leisure, recreational programming for ID, anxiety

(Bazyk and Arbesman, 2013)
Tier 2 for Families?
Families with their own histories or who are at risk of difficulty based on the challenges they are facing.

• Recognition of trauma
• Prevention
• Family to Family supports

Need a welcoming environment, opportunities to connect to others with their experiences ... to find “our own”
Tier 3

- Systems of care/wraparound
- Youth empowerment/create opportunities
- Identification of strengths and promotion of wellbeing
- Intensive play, leisure & recreation programs
- Accommodations to enable participation

(Bazyk and Arbesman, 2013)
Strengths in Positive Psychology
Clifton Strengths Explorer

Measures 10 “talent” themes for youth (34 for adults):

1. Achieving
2. Caring
3. Competing
4. Confidence
5. Dependability
6. Discoverer
7. Future thinker
8. Organizer
9. Presence
10. Relating

https://www.strengths-explorer.com/home.aspx
Character Strengths: Values in Action Project

1. **Wisdom and knowledge** (creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective)
2. **Courage** (honesty, bravery, persistence, zest)
3. **Humanity** (kindness, love, social intelligence)
4. **Justice** (fairness, leadership, teamwork)
5. **Temperance** (forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation)
6. **Transcendence** (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, religiousness)

[https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths-via](https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths-via)
Compare

Cox
- Capacities
- Interests
- Resources

Domains:
- Social
- Academic
- Athletic
- Artistic /Creative
- Mechanical
- Spiritual /Cultural

Clifton
- Achieving
- Caring
- Competing
- Confidence
- Dependability
- Discoverer
- Future thinker
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- Relating

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Multiple Intelligences

**Naturalist** (nature smart)

**Musical** (sound smart)

**Logical-mathematical** (number/reasoning smart)

**Existential** (deep thought/meaning of life smart)

**Interpersonal** (people smart)

**Bodily-kinesthetic** (body smart)

**Linguistic** (word smart)

**Intra-personal** (self smart)

**Spatial** (picture smart)
What is your Superpower?
Strategies!
Build Identity!

• Teach strengths, embed into curriculum
• Model naming and deliberately using your strengths
• Identify strength heros
• Name strengths in action “strengths spotting”
• Give strength based homework assignments
• Encourage use of strengths in new ways every day!
Strengths as Solutions!

• When there are challenges, look for how students can apply their strengths to build solutions

• Create interdependent teams that rely on strengths

• Practice reframing what you see as negative traits or behaviors from a strengths lens
Start with Yourself!
Self Care

Mindfulness

- Notice the ordinary; 5, 4, 3, 2, 1
- Notice/watch thoughts, feelings
- Meditation, yoga, tai-chi

Precautions - trauma

- Pay attention to responses, incorporate movement
- Use different anchors, focus outside the body
- Give choices, (Invite rather than command)
- Hit the brakes and respect boundaries

Treleaven, 2018
Self Care

Gratitude

Kindness

https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-videos/19-kindness-can-be-the-norm

Happiness Challenge Workbook:
http://www.actionforhappiness.org/media/15876/the%20happiness%20challenge%20workbook%20updated.pdf
Goals

Give us back a sense of control
Help keep us moving

Goal Attainment Scaling
Pitfalls

Should individual people be carrying the largest part of the responsibility? Where does the environment need to step up?

- Do all children have opportunities to feel competent/successful?
- Do we know trauma and respond appropriately?
- Do I blame myself when I fail?
- Do I blame when my students fail?

Unger, 2018
Parting thoughts

• Reframing negatives; being persistent
• Habits and Routines; being persistent
• Exhaustion; being persistent
• Humor
• Exploring interests & building passions ...
• What are your challenges?
  .... How can you use your strengths there?
Questions?

get cape.  
wear cape.  
fly.
References & Resources


References & Resources

Franz, J., & Miles, P. Paperboat Consulting


National Wraparound Initiative http://www.nwi.pdx.edu/

References & Resources


