

CASE STUDY 21: A STRENGTHS-BASED COACHING PROGRAMME

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This case study relates to a pilot study from Mosman Preparatory School in Sydney that demonstrates how a strengths-based coaching program, integrated within the traditional school curriculum, was associated with increased levels of engagement and hope. The program was designed so it could be easily integrated within the school curriculum. All students attending Year 5 at the school were required to take part in the program as part of their Personal Development and Health Curriculum.

The coaching program consisted of eight face-to-face group-coaching sessions with the teacher-coach who was a qualified primary teacher with a Masters in Applied Science (Coaching Psychology) from Sydney University. All coaching sessions were conducted by the same coach for 45 minutes' duration on a fortnightly basis over two school terms. There were three key parts to the program.

Part 1 focused on raising the students' self-awareness, including the identification of personal strengths. To identify their signature strengths, students completed the Values in Action Strengths Inventory for Youth Survey. This survey is designed for youths aged 10 to 17 and is available online at www.authentic happiness.org. Using the survey results, the students were provided with a useful vocabulary to both identify and talk about their own character strengths. They created 'strength shields' representing how they were already using their top strengths. These shields were displayed in the classroom and referred to on a regular basis. The students were also provided with a copy of their results to share with their family.

In Part 2, the students were coached to identify personal resources and utilise these in working towards individual goals. They were taught how to identify meaningful goals, plan,

prioritise, manage time, and be persistent in their goal-striving. They applied these skills in an ongoing assignment focused on finding novel ways to use one of their signature strengths.

Part 3 was focused on the students working through a cycle of self-regulation. This involves a process of reflection and evaluation while moving forward toward individual goals. They were given the opportunity to share their assignment results with the group and reflect on what they learned. Finally, the students completed a 'letter from the future' that involved writing about themselves at their very best, focusing on how their needs and values were being met, and finding solutions to allow for all the things they would like to have happen.

OUTCOMES

To measure the results of the program, students completed a self-report questionnaire modified from Snyder's Hope Scale and the California Healthy Kids Survey. The results showed significant increases in the students' levels of engagement, hope and wellbeing as a result of their participation. Student feedback was also overwhelmingly positive.

NEXT STEPS

There is much more to positive education than a simple stand-alone course. For best outcomes, the coaching program trialed at Mosman Preparatory School would need to form part of a school-wide initiative with a strong practical focus on infusing positive psychology in to the whole curriculum. There is a need for further research and the need for expert external consultants to work collaboratively with schools to create individualised programs. Similarly, there is a need for further research in developing measurement tools to assess the overall climate of individual schools. The focus needs to be on establishing an authentic curriculum for pupils that has relevance, meaning and connectedness to their lives.