

Sometimes Basketball is More Than Basketball: Psychoanalysis Scores a Slam Dunk!

Basketball and psychoanalysis working together in school?

by Mark D. Smaller, Ph.D.

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If someone had told me that at some point in my career my love for playing basketball would be integrated with my love for psychoanalysis, and applying psychoanalytic ideas to social problems I would not have believed it. A psychoanalyst playing ball in an alternative high school on the west edge of Chicago?

Well, our Analytic Service to Adolescents Program (ASAP) provided an opportunity last week at our Annual Morton Alternative School (MAS) Basketball Tournament and Student- Faculty Game. Katie Romey, our ASAP social work Loyola graduate intern, when not seeing students in group and individual psychotherapy, has been running an after-school basketball program. A former Division 1 college basketball player and one time high school star, Katie learned quickly that basketball is, well, more than basketball at MAS. She teaches basketball skills, but also social and emotional skills used to battle students' depression, anxiety, and the pull of gang involvement. She recently shared the story of one student not wanting to leave basketball and lying to "his boys" on his cell phone saying that he was, "on his way," while continuing to play in Katie's group.

Having accepted the challenge by Katie, ASAP Co-Director Dave Myles, and Principal Rudy Hernandez, to participate in the tournament, I rescheduled patients, put on my MAS t-shirt and warm-ups, and drove out to Morton in the afternoon. The tournament was progressing-the winning student team would face off against the faculty. If I could have converted the joy and energy in that gym to electricity, Chicago could have lit up through the entire holiday season.

Whether playing in a game, or sitting around the gym watching, laughing, or cheering, "my kids," as I refer to them, were completely in the moment and having fun. The violence on the street (some students recently lost a friend in a neighborhood shooting), the difficulties at home, and past trauma, were left at the door. Never has so much noise been so soothing to my ears and heart.

We see students individual psychoanalytic therapy and in groups. Our recent in-service workshop for teachers helped to utilize the psychoanalytic "forward edge" approach we use in the therapy- focusing on strengths, acknowledging limitations and trauma, while facilitating normal adolescent ambitions and longings-in school, in relationships, in the classroom, and for the future.

And, it's working. We our qualitative and quantitative data over the last 4 years has shown reduced levels of depression and anxiety, while facilitating graduations. We change the course of students' lives.

Right-basketball has become more than basketball at our school. I can't think of a better way to apply psychoanalytic ideas in the school and out in the world.

And, that 59 year old psychoanalyst playing ball? He scored the winning shot and felt 16 again.

All in all, a holiday gift that was, well, priceless for all of us at Morton Alternative