

**School Practitioner Community of Practice**  
(A network for sharing & exchange)

**December 6, 2017**

**Topic: Using holiday-related school activities as natural opportunities to enhance social and emotional learning**

**Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives**

**Featured Center Resources**

**>on natural opportunities to support social and emotional learning**

- Note: Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla> for links to other resources including**
- >Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops**
  - >Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers**
  - >Training and job opportunities**
  - >Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities**

**This resource is from the  
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA**

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**Given shrinking education budgets, we have been asked to increase our outreach to make our free resources more available (e.g., for planning, professional development, etc.).**

**So please feel free to share with anyone you think might benefit (e.g., forward our resources to individuals and share on listservs and websites).**

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**For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

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*Note: In keeping with the National Initiative for Transforming Student & Learning Supports, this is being sent to and forwarded by over 100,000 school and community stakeholders concerned about (1) daily matters confronting schools, (2) promoting whole child development and positive school climate, and (3) the transformation of student and learning supports.*

## **T**opic for this week: **Using holiday-related school activities as natural opportunities to enhance social and emotional learning**

In some form or another, every school has goals that emphasize a desire to enhance students' personal and social functioning. Such goals can be seen as reflecting views that social and emotional growth has an important role to play in

- enhancing the daily smooth functioning of schools and the emergence of a safe, caring, and supportive school climate
- facilitating students' holistic development
- enabling student motivation and capability for academic learning
- optimizing life beyond schooling.

Sadly, the stated goals too often are not connected to daily practices at a school. This seems to be even more the case as increasing accountability demands mount for quick academic gains on achievement tests. Thus, at the same time that calls for attending to social and emotional learning grow louder and a variety of programs report promising research findings, the focus on such matters continues to be marginalized for the most part in schools.

Some schools, of course, do provide prominent demonstrations of curriculum-based approaches to promote social-emotional learning and incorporate character education (including programs designed to address risk factors and prevent problems). Others have programs that pair students with mentors or engage students in helping peers or encourage participation in "service learning" activity, and so forth.

We suggest that a much too neglected facet of promoting social-emotional learning involved capitalizing on *natural* opportunities (see *Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH* – (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/fall03.pdf>)).

A good example arises in the weeks between Thanksgiving and the Winter Holidays. This is a time when there are many special activities at school and a focus on concern for others. We note that schools often emphasize engaging students in giving to others. This may take the form of a service learning project. Such projects provide many social and emotional learning opportunities, although these frequently are not spelled out (e.g., see <http://www.teachhub.com/do-today-plan-mini-service-learning-project-holidays>).

In addition to enhancing academic goals, special holiday-related activities provide school staff with informal enrichment opportunities to facilitate increased student awareness of self and others, improvements in a variety of interpersonal skills, and enhanced appreciation of personal and social responsibility (e.g., increasing empathy and compassion through guided giving, learning ways to and appreciation of the value of supporting others; practicing communication skills; improving planning and problem solving skills).

*The holiday season offers an optimal time to teach young people about the value of helping others. In the classroom, activities focused on philanthropy can broaden students' understanding of the culture they live in and make students aware of the challenges people around the world face in meeting their basic human needs. In addition, encouraging youth to help others outside of school hours can help offset the materialistic frenzy often associated with the holidays. Studies show that youth who are taught to help others at a young age continue those practices through adulthood. Experts recommend involving youth as much as possible in deciding how and whom to help; they will be more invested in the outcome if they are an integral part of the process.... For example, bring holiday cheer to elders in a nursing home by having students design holiday cards or make crafts to deliver to residents. Alternatively, students could sing or put on a play....* Greta Brewster  
[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/students-help-others-altruism-holidays.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/students-help-others-altruism-holidays.shtml)

**This is a good time to mobilize discussion about how to use upcoming activities to promote social-emotional learning. And, of course, when special events are over, the opportunities for helping others and facilitating social-emotional learning continue.**

Excerpt from *Natural Connections: Children, Nature, and Social-Emotional Development* by Janet E. Thompson and Ross A. Thompson  
<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/ccic/pdf/newsart/63/natural-connections.pdf>

Two basic conclusions from research guide our discussion ...

*First, young children acquire social and emotional competence in ways that are often different from how they acquire competence in tasks like naming letters or numbers. Social-emotional skills emerge through children's experience in close relationships and the varied activities that occur in relational experience, such as shared conversation, warm nurturance, and guided practice in learning capacities for sociability, responsibility, and self-control. Social and emotional skills also develop through the shared and solitary activities of a developmentally appropriate, enriched child care or preschool setting, including the opportunities for outdoor experiences that it provides. In such settings (as well as at home) young children develop understanding of other people's feelings and needs, are encouraged to feel empathy and caring, learn to manage their own behavior as responsible group members, and acquire a variety of other prosocial skills.*

*Second, and perhaps most importantly, play is a central context for social and emotional development in early childhood. Research shows that many kinds of play contribute to social-emotional competence in preschoolers; including pretend play, free exploration of objects in the environment, play through which children build and create (constructive play) and games with rules. Natural outdoor environments provide a context in which each kind of play is often more complex, extended, and self-determined. In natural spaces, children have a freedom to play in ways rarely possible in even the most developmentally appropriate indoor environments.*

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### **Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives**

**Which special events do you suggest as providing natural opportunities for enhancing social emotional learning and putting such learning into practice?**

And as you may know, with respect to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students, we have sent out inquiries about how school districts, state departments of education, and leadership organizations are pursuing the opportunity to transform the way schools provide student and learning supports. In that context, we also have been raising concerns about the limitations of MTSS (Multi Tiered System of Support) and have been seeking and receiving responses about that framework. We soon will be preparing a report on all this. As always we invite you to contribute your information and comments.

Send your responses to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)

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## Featured Center Resources

### >on natural opportunities to support social and emotional learning

Increasing a school’s focus on natural opportunities for personal and social growth requires advocacy, planning, and building the capacity of school staff to recognize and capitalize on the opportunities. At most schools, there are a group of folks who want to make this happen. As a starting point, they can form a small work group dedicated to moving the agenda forward. The group can (1) develop a “map” of natural opportunities for promoting social-emotional development and (2) share it throughout the school. Then, they can explore ways to engage the school in making this a regular part of school life.

For resources, see the Center’s Online Clearinghouse Quick Find on *Social and Emotional Development and Social Skills* – [http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102\\_05.htm](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2102_05.htm)

And for the Center’s discussion of *Service Learning in Schools*, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/service.pdf>

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***Did you miss the quarterly ejournal for fall 2017? It had articles on:  
EXPANDING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT UNDER ESSA***

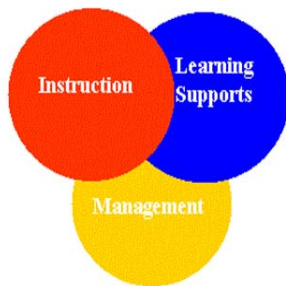
- > *Revitalizing Local Control: Transforming Student/Learning Supports and Enhancing Equity of Opportunity*
- > *Escaping Old Ideas to More Effectively Address Barriers to Learning and Teaching*
- > *Saving Starfish Is Not Enough!*

***Did you miss the monthly ENEWS?***

You can access both these resources and more from the Center’s homepage <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

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*When it comes to reducing chronic absenteeism over the long run, how you do it is a critical consideration. See*  
> *Absenteeism: Beyond Reporting and Beyond Another Special Initiative*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/newsletter/spring16.pdf>

Also see the online information about the

**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

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I hear you skipped school  
to play football.



No I didn't, and  
I have the movie  
stubs to prove it.



**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND  
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

**For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**Also send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences for sharing.**

**We post a broad range of issues and responses to the *Net Exchange*  
on our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newnetexchange.htm>  
and on *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/> )**