



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



**A Weekly Community of Practice Network
for Sharing and Interchange**

July 25, 2016

Special Edition:

**Community violence and students:
What's the role of schools?**

Concerns

- >Enhancing understanding of what's causing the violence
- >Providing support for emotional reactions to violence
- >Planning ways to minimize violence at school and in the community

Comments from the Field

Featured Set of Related Center Resources

**Please forward this to a few colleagues you think might be interested.
The more who join, the more we are likely to receive to share.**

**For those who have been forwarded this and want to be part of
the weekly exchange, send an email to Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

**For previous recent postings of this community of practice, 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 community of practice network has expanded in number of participants and topics discussed. The thematic emphasis is on (1) daily concerns confronting those working in and with schools, (2) the transformation of student and learning supports, and (3) promoting whole child development and positive school climate.

Community violence and students: What's the role of schools?

Concerns:

- >Enhancing understanding of what's causing the violence
- >Providing support for emotional reactions to violence
- >Planning ways to minimize violence at school and in a community

In recent months, the news has been inundated with increasingly frequent reports and pictures of acts of violence (terrorist attacks, mass shootings, violence by and to police) and with the reactions of victims and concerned citizens. In the U.S., community protests against and for police officers have been widespread. As the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry stresses:

"Children often see or hear the news many times a day through television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. Seeing and hearing about local and world events, such as natural disasters, catastrophic events, and crime reports, may cause children to experience stress, anxiety, and fears....The possible negative effects of news can be lessened by parents, teachers, or other adults by watching the news with the child and talking about what has been seen or heard.... . This allows parents to lessen the potential negative effects of the news and to discuss their own ideas and values. [In this way,] ...parents can help them feel safe and help them to better understand the world around them." Excerpt from "News and Children"

http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Facts_for_Families/FFF-Guide/Children-And-The-News-067.aspx

All this is made especially salient for schools by the shooting of Philando Castile who was a school employee and therefore someone personally known to the students and staff at the school. The letter that the school quickly sent to the staff and families regarding Mr. Castile's death is worth noting:

...We have lost a beloved member of our J.J. Hill school community. As you've probably learned through media reports, our nutrition services supervisor, Philando Castile, died Wednesday night after he was shot by an officer from the Saint Anthony Police Department.

Mr. Castile had been an employee with Saint Paul Public Schools since 2002 and is a Central Senior High graduate. He welcomed students to the lunchroom with enthusiasm and fist bumps. Teachers and staff loved working with him and he frequently greeted former colleagues with a smile and a hug. This is a tragic loss for our school, our staff and his family. Our hearts go out to all who knew him and we will definitely miss his presence this fall.

We will do everything we can to support Philando's family during this difficult time. The J.J. Hill Montessori PTO has scheduled a community vigil outside in the garden area ...

You may wish to talk with your child about this sad news. When someone dies, children may react in many different ways. Please pay attention to their concerns and be alert to any changes such as:

Physical – any changes in sleep patterns or eating habits;

Emotional – any changes such as unusual fears, anger, worry, or especially distant behaviors toward parents;

Social – loss of interest in usual activities.

If staff or students need additional social/emotional support, please call

<http://jjhill.spps.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=42&ModuleInstanceID=64133&ViewID=047E6BE3-6D87-4130-8424-D8E4E9ED6C2A&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=42705&PageID=77>

And in response to the recent events, NYC's superintendent, Carmen Fariña, issued an open letter to educators and families about their "moral obligation" to answer difficult questions about race, guns, and violence. See her letter for resources she calls on teachers to use (letter reproduced at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/07/18/superintendent-we-have-a-moral-obligation-to-talk-to-kids-about-race-violence-and-guns/>).

In the aftermath of recent events, many youth-oriented organizations have stepped forward with suggestions about how to talk with children/teens about the events and how to anticipate and provide support for emotional reactions. *Talking with youngsters is important.*

But schools also have other roles to play. For example, schools need to increase their capacity for helping students, staff, families, and community stakeholders understand the many factors underlying violent events around the world, locally, and in the home. These include factors such as

- >political stakes (e.g., national and international power struggles and related military, para-military, and terrorist activity)
- >economic inequities (e.g., poverty, unemployment, job competition, moves to a global economy)
- >religious doctrines (e.g., genocides, honor killings, political power)
- >racial and ethnic biases and tensions (e.g., intergroup hostility, gang violence, contested police shootings and related protests)
- >gender discrimination and biases (e.g., related to sexual orientation)
- >immigrant discrimination and biases (e.g., related to political, economic, religious, racial, and ethnic factors)
- >mental illness (e.g., psychopathology)

As the above indicates, the school's role in enhancing understanding of the causes of violent events has major curricula implications across many subject areas.

What else?

Comments from the Field:

The following comments from the field include perspectives on broadening the role of schools related to enhancing understanding of violence, providing support for emotional reactions to violence, and minimizing violence at schools and in a community.

Colleagues responded to the following request from our Center:

What role do you think schools have in addressing current concerns about racial tensions, shootings, police/community trust, protests, gun laws, building community wide empathy/resilience?

Clearly there are no easy answers, and the risk of focusing on this is that it may cause more anxiety in students as they explore their own and their families attitudes and beliefs. Furthermore, for some this is not a pressing issue, while for others, it is.

Some schools will address reactions and worries about safety; some will discuss issues. Some will continue to encourage understanding of the perspectives/experiences of others and demonstrate social justice in the classroom and school-wide.

As schools work with students to better understand how to advance a just and peaceful society, can they also work with the families and communities to promote change?

Finally, do you know of any resources that are designed for schools to raise these matters as part of the curriculum?

A sample of responses:

- (1) "... the [CA] state department of education has a number of resources that are related to safe school environments that touch on the topics you mention. [See] resources at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/bullyingprev.asp> [and see] the Teaching Tolerance program at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/se/bullyres.asp>. ...
- (2) "I recommend the resources from the Southern Poverty Law Center <http://www.tolerance.org/racism-and-police-violence>. They have a great 'framework' for teaching tolerance/anti-bias concepts at any grade level at: <http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Anti%20bias%20framework%20pamphlet.pdf>. They also reference a website called "Perspectives for a Diverse America" <http://teachperspectives.org> which helps teachers build literacy-based learning plans based on this framework. ... I think the framework and strategies for building lesson plans could help teachers tailor the information to their own students' needs. I have yet to find anything helpful that specifically relates to families and communities. That said, the learning plan strategies on that website include 'inquiry and action steps' where families and communities can be engaged."
- (3) "I feel that educators should address it directly with students (esp in communities that are clearly effected). It's definitely the elephant in the room, better for youth to know they have a safe place/person to talk with then to feel like the obvious is being avoided. In my mind, it's the same principle for suicide prevention, talk about it directly and honestly. 'Have you thought of killing yourself?' Talking about suicide does not make people think about it more or 'plant seeds'. My opinion is that would be the same with these types of situations, kids are keenly aware of what's going on around them, talking about it directly seems to be a better approach.
If nothing else, in communities where this isn't pressing, I believe the issue of unity and acceptance, etc. regardless of the circumstances is always beneficial. If schools so chose they could offer 'town hall meetings' or design some community service projects that build a sense of unity and community ..."
- (4) "Each school should be prepared to allow time to talk about these things in classrooms and if not, with a counselor or MH professional. My concern is that schools will say 'that's not our job' and the dismissal of these things tends to compound tension rather than dissipate the tension. I am a fan of CISD (Critical Incident Stress Debriefing) often used with soldiers, emergency or police workers ... as it is focused, brief and a positive way to dissipate the tension and anxiety that comes from this. I also think that the suicide literature could assist here. ... In a simple way of saying this, we need to offer solutions that connect us, rather than disconnect us. Providing venues to talk for those who need to, is critical. Also training for teachers to not fear addressing difficult topics is also needed.
For elementary schools I recommend Roots of empathy, Mind Up, Second Step and/or Positive Actions if implemented by Teachers. For secondary schools I recommend building youth voice, community voice, parent voice and a school team who can come together to address these issues. If that cannot happen, I support teachers and their strong ability to use this as content for discussion and action if possible to promote an environment on campus that creates a 'safe place' in the midst of turmoil.... Overall I recommend professionals going to NASP and using info to help students cope [and] schools [to] create safe places....
I am working toward a cultural response by working with distinguished teachers who can assist in building these topics into their curriculum. I recommend Ceeds of Peace <https://youtu.be/1WkhqWunScI>. ... I like this because it starts with us and how we can make a difference. I also recommend Azim Khamisa and <http://tkf.org/>. His personal story alone is amazing ... his message is forgiveness.... It is also time for schools to begin to focus on restorative practices from P-12."

- (5) “I think what we have learned over the years is we have to be transparent and open about all these issues. ... many people for years avoided talking about suicide thinking it would increase anxiety or encouraging more students to engage in suicide attempts. In fact what the current research indicates is ... the opposite occurs....

I think it makes for a mature and interesting discussion in ... classes where they have to read and article about racial tensions or a shooting and than have a open or thoughtful discussion or even a debate. I think of Kohlberg and moral reasoning ... formal reasoning may be necessary for individuals to reach the highest level of moral reasoning. So having students discuss may actually have the advantage of allowing students to hear other points of view and than actually move to a higher level/stage of moral reasoning. ... My point is we have to get people to talk about it and be solution focused. Maybe even get them to challenge their own racial beliefs. In many cases it's not the students belief but in fact their parents attitudes or beliefs. ...”

- (6) “I am aware of several excellent programs that address the issues you mention. One of the best is the Anti-Defamation League’s A World of Difference program and No Place for Hate project. They have a wonderful selection of age-appropriate curricula that can be delivered in a variety of settings. Even better, whenever there is a national or world event that touches on racism, terrorism, tragedy, hatred, oppression, violence, etc., they prepare and disseminate lesson plans to help educators discuss and process the event with students. I personally believe we must always address these issues in a trauma-informed manner that is sensitive to the needs of the students and pertinent to their situation. I think if we don’t address them, students may never have the opportunity to better understand and process their feelings, beliefs, etc., which can lead to undesirable behaviors. I think we all agree schools play a huge role in helping students learn how to think critically so they can be effective future leaders and citizens, which directly impacts our ability to move toward a more peaceful and just society.”

- (7) “I think kids want/need a space to talk about these issues. The hard part is comfort level with the staff leading the discussions. Often times, unfortunately, that leaves it to assembly like sessions rather than small group discussions. I would love to have a social media format to discuss the issues with students. Although risky according to some of my colleagues, it is the way kids are communicating.

First, Teaching Tolerance is one of the best resources that I use. They have ideas for all ages. Second, Welcoming Schools is a wonderful program for GLBT issues. Third, the Fourth R and curriculum like it teach healthy relationships. This is a more subtle way to introduce curriculum that would allow for the discussions we want to have. Fourth, agree with No Place For Hate. Each school creates their own events to qualify as a No Place For Hate school. Curriculum is provided, but the school liaison has choice about what events they will do at the school. Most often the focus in schools are a bit apprehensive to tackle issues unless there is a helping professional on campus to facilitate.”

- (8) “I think we need more school-based social workers and other school-based mental health professionals. Most of the children who are most at risk spend more hours than not in school. Again, many of these same students attend summer school. If administrators complain we cannot cram more into the instructional day, then they need to figure out how to fund and implement extended day programs to meet these students' needs. As evidenced within the past week, there will continue to be more copycat "executions" and tragic traumas as our world turns. Until and unless school officials begin to partner with social service agencies that could provide in-school support systems, I believe the limited primary prevention and interventions will be nothing more than throwing a rock in the water. You know the rest of the story.”

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Invitation to listserv participants: *What's your take on all this?* What do you think the role of school can be in addressing the wide range of violence in the community? Any lessons learned you can share? Comments? Recommendations? What's happening locally? Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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On the internet

Here are two comments from the internet:

>“There are plenty of resources available for educators and parents to help them engage young people in conversations about race, racism and police violence.... But this post is about a mindset in too many schools where the adults don't want to engage students in discussions about such sensitive issues — even though many educators believe it is as important as anything else kids learn in school.

(A teacher's experience) “Two years ago, I began teaching eighth-grade English in a school year that spanned the high-profile killings of Michael Brown, Walter Scott, Tamir Rice and John Crawford. In the fall of that school year, we were reading “To Kill a Mockingbird.” After my initial shock from the tragedies wore off, I waited for the school leaders to reach out to staff. I expected them to help us sort through how to have hard conversations with students. I was the only black teacher in the middle school, which meant the kids with questions came to me first. A week or so later, leadership told us teachers to steer away from ‘politically charged’ conversations. These conversations were not ‘age-appropriate’ for middle-school students.... By the time Freddie Gray died in police custody in Baltimore in April 2015, the continued silence of my school's leaders sealed my decision to leave the school. The fact that leadership advised us to say nothing to children let me know teaching was the right thing (teaching), but I was in the wrong place... It's never too late to change our mindsets about what children need to hear us say to them... A school cannot ignore reality for the sake of political correctness. Teachers need guidance on how to communicate world events to the students who deal with these issues when the final bell rings. School leadership, no matter the ethnic makeup, must be fearless in how it navigates racial and social climates. Many schools are continuing to under-serve these students by choosing to ignore the societal issues that singularly affect minorities. We have to be brave enough to tackle the uncomfortable problems with the children who will one day grow up to change the world...”

From: *What kids need to hear about race and violence but many schools won't touch*
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/07/12/what-kids-need-to-hear-about-race-and-violence-but-many-schools-wont-touch/>

>“In the wake racially charged violence, our dismay and distress have reached a fever pitch. These tragic shootings, of black men by police and policemen by a sniper, add fuel to a burning conversation in this country, and I think it's important for all of us to take part. The conversation is about the relationship between police and black communities, about violence, racism and divisiveness. ... my job is to speak for children, who too often get short shrift because it is “inconvenient” to put their interests first. And here is the truth: the outbursts and the arguments, the anxiety and enmity, the killings and memorials are out there in full view of our kids, black or white, documented or undocumented, immigrants or native born.

Our children need help. They need the adults in their lives to step up and comfort them and also to be honest with them. And though the conversation is different from community to community, parents need to talk to their children about the way things are and the way we think they should be....

Many people have published helpful guidelines for talking to children about these very American issues of race, racism, equality and responsibility. I offer just a few:

- Acknowledge injustice in our society. Children know when adults are hiding things from them, and it makes them feel unsafe.
- Talk about the power of positive action. It helps children to know that adults are working together to make our communities and our country more fair.
- Communicate hope to children. Feeling powerless or passive in the face of bad things makes them more painful.
- Focus on togetherness and our common welfare. We need to stress that if some Americans are vulnerable, none of us should be comfortable.
- Affirm the value of peaceful dissent. Passionate differences of opinion are the lifeblood of this country, but disagreements are never an excuse for violence.
- E pluribus unum. When the conversation turns ugly, our children should know that uniting rather than dividing is the course that gets results.

The best gift we can give our children, and the best way to make them feel safe, is to let them hear and see our efforts to work towards change....In moments when hope eludes us, let us remember the power of constructive action and of investing in our children, all our children, not just yours or mine. If we help our children, if we nurture and protect their childhoods, if we spare them from our prejudices and misunderstandings, they have a chance to be better than we are....”

From Child Mind Institute – <http://childmind.org/blog/talking-kids-race-violence-america/>

Featured Set of Center Resources

>Addressing/reducing school/community violence

To access a wide range of resources on the matters discussed above, see the following Center Online Clearinghouse Quick Finds:

- >Conflict resolution – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_02.htm
- >Cultural competence – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/culturecomp.htm>
- >Gangs – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3009_01.htm
- >Preventing hate crime – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/hategroups.htm>
- >Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transexual issues – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p3017_02.htm
- >Effects of mass media on behavior – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/media.htm>
- >Post traumatic stress – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/ptsd.htm>
- >Psychological first aid – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/psychfirstaid.html>
- >Racism and schools – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/racism.htm>
- >Threat assessment – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/threatassessment.html>
- >Tolerance – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/tolerance.html>
- >Violence prevention – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2108_03.htm

Note from the National Association of School Psychologists’ website:

“... In the coming weeks, NASP will be developing resources to help families and schools engage in conversations about prejudice, privilege, and power and how we can work together to counter hate and violence and bring positive change and unity to our country.”
<http://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/media-room/press-releases/nasp-statement-regarding-recent-acts-of-violence>

*For information about the

National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports,

see

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

And note that our new book detailing the prototypes and related resources is now in press.

For a preview, contact Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

***THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE BECOMES!***

Send resources ideas, requests, comments, and experiences to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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 to *Facebook* (access from the Center's home page <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>)