



**30 years
& counting**

**School Practitioner
Listserv**

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



August 8, 2016

Concern
 >Using current data as a measure of school climate:
 Good idea or bad?

Featured Set of Related Center Resources
 >For improving school climate

Follow-up Comments from the Field
 >Community violence and students: What's the role of schools?

**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.

Concern: “I have been receiving your Center’s mailings for a few years. One of your recent articles “ESSA: Will Adding a Nonacademic Accountability Indicator Enhance Student and Learning Supports,” caught my attention. Our state is in the process of discussing what a composite school climate measure could be, based on annual indicators that schools already collect. Is this something that you, or the Center, has been considering?”

Center Response: Just to be clear about our views on using school climate as the accountability indicator:

We clearly have no issue about wanting to see school climate enhanced. Our point is that school climate is a quality that *emerges* from making fundamental changes in key facets of school improvement. For example, school climate is unlikely to improve in schools where many students are experiencing major barriers to learning and many teachers are experiencing major barriers to teaching. So we are concerned that schools use the opportunities presented by ESSA to begin focusing on transforming student and learning supports and making sure that what is measured will focus on progress related to how schools are addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students.*

As leaders look at using current indicators that schools in a state/district already gather, there will be a strong push to mainly emphasize attendance data. The reality is that significantly reducing absenteeism in ways that produce results that don’t plateau quickly requires a complex combination of sustainable improvements in the classroom and school-wide.

Just as high stakes achievement testing isn’t an adequate measure of whole student learning and teacher effectiveness, a simple proxy measure of school climate will not enhance or strengthen a positive school climate.

The need is for interventions that directly (1) address barriers to learning and teaching and (2) re-engage disconnected students and their families. Direct interventions for addressing barriers are student and learning supports that enable schools to become more welcoming, supportive, just, and caring places. And these supports must connect with the type of personalized instruction and enrichment activities that re-engage students in classroom learning. Then, an increasingly positive school climate will emerge and be perceived as such by students, staff, families, and the surrounding community.

As we have stressed related to the *Every Student Succeeds Acts*, there is a real opportunity in the coming year to expand the accountability framework for schools. Whatever current indicators are chosen, we stress they should be selected and used for formative evaluation first and as accountability indicators second, with a major focus on improving a school’s efforts to develop an effective system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching.

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Invitation to listserv participants: What’s your take on all this?

Do you see risks in focusing on the measurement of school climate without processes in place to enhance school climate?

Any lessons learned you can share? Comments? Recommendations?

What’s happening locally?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Set of Center Resources

>For improving classroom and school climate

See our online clearinghouse Quick Find on *Classroom and School Climate* for a range of resources from our Center and from others. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/environments.htm>

Here is a sample of what you will see there:

>*Designing School Improvement to Enhance Classroom Climate for All Students*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolclimate.pdf>

This report draws on recent literature to briefly (1) discuss the construct of school climate and (2) outline ways to approach improving school climate that account for the full range of students enrolled in a school. It recognizes that everyone agrees that schools should ensure a positive school climate. Less agreement exists, however, about what this means and how to accomplish it. This is especially so when the call is for developing a safe and supportive environment that also is nurturing and caring and that provides all students with an equal opportunity to succeed. Equity concerns are heightened when schools are viewed using the lens of how they interface with students who are struggling academically, acting out, and experiencing conflictual relationships with school staff and peers.

>*About School and Classroom Climate*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schoolclassroomclimate.pdf>

For more extensive resources, see the continuing education modules and guides listed. Or send a request to Ltaylor@ucla.edu for a preview look at the in press new book entitled: *Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Developing a Unified, Comprehensive, and Equitable System*.

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Follow up Comments from the Field

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

The 7/25/16 Special Edition of the School Practitioner Community of Practice explored the question about the role schools can play in addressing community violence.
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner\(7-25-16\).pdf](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/mhpractitioner/practitioner(7-25-16).pdf)

Here are two commentaries shared in response:

(1) “For schools to promote *peace* and address such controversial issues in certain states (such as Texas), I would personally be concerned about whether the teachers believe in peace as opposed to protest. If they believe in protest while they are asked to speak about peace, what would they do? I have such concern because I cannot say that I know the full story of what is actually going on in different states and that they may face exigent circumstances that change teachers' opinions. I think before anything is said to students, the teachers are also part of the concern, because they are also ordinary people who may believe violence is the only way to raise attention or action from the government. I guess my first point is that whatever should be done about the students/their families, the teachers/schools should be taught about it beforehand.

I absolutely agree that schools can be a part of the effort to address the students' families and communities, because they have the unique advantage of being the educators in the communities, and possess the powerful advantage of not having any political interests/bias when addressing people (unlike when mayors, senators, presidents alike). So I would definitely encourage schools to spread words on *peace*.

As for resources, I cannot, on the top of my head, think of anything directly related to such education. However, from my experience as a student, I do appreciate my education on History and the way History teaches me about the future. It might be helpful to look at periods where biases/wars cost lives (such as WWII), and periods where appreciation and humble attitudes lead to flourishing (China after 1900's when the country realized Western culture was not monstrous but industrialized).

On a personal note, what has convinced me of peace is always economic development, because I have been studying Economics throughout my college career -- I have learned historically (governments of the US during Prohibition, of Nigeria, Indonesia, Peru, etc.) and proved mathematically that there is no social justice before healthy economic development, and there is no economic development to be spoken of before peace. This would be somewhat complicated for younger students to pay enough attention to completely understand, but it may be something worth considering.”

(2) “First, what you want to do is being done in varied forms across the country. In terms of curriculum, Popular Education models are geared for this (as an example, consider *Project South*, <http://projectsouth.org/education-and-research/toolkits/>).

I also draw your attention to Hawah Kasat from One Common Unity <http://www.onecommonunity.org/staff/hawah/>. Although I haven't yet seen it, I've heard good reviews about his documentary *Fly By Light*. (This documentary could be a useful teaching tool in schools).

Second, it seems for schools that are not set up for new programs or constructivist pedagogical interventions, the simple strategy of hosting an all-school assembly with a diverse panel of speakers is a plausible first step. A more long term solution might be workshops on global citizenship (a less politically charged topic) that helps students learn to appreciate the same issue from multiple perspectives. But as your tone conveys, there are no easy answers before us. Therefore, I would like to dedicate the remainder of my email to my thoughts about that.....

Theory suggests that we've got to teach our kids how to speak their truths, which means we have to give them the space to be reflective and honest. But when topics like police violence are so politically charged, when schools are jam-packed with standardized tests, and when teachers aren't trained to oversee such difficult conversations, it's difficult to plot a path forward.

When I learned of the shooting of the Dallas police officers, and my heart dropped like so many others across the country, I was reminded of how sociopolitical development is an important developmental milestone for all youth, and particularly those who may be more likely to experience oppression and, eventually, withdraw from civil society. As we have seen with the unconscionable targeting of police officers (first in TX and now in LA), Blacks struggling with the historical and contemporary realities of state-sanctioned violence against other Black Americans in the post-Trayvon Martin age NEED the sociopolitical development that schools can foster. It's not just a missed opportunity; it's a national concern. Not just for minority students either, but for all students.

Yet, as important as it is that we move forward, we also have to be careful to understand that students will receive this information in different ways. For instance, in some cases watching the videos of Alton Sterling is kind of dehumanizing, while for others it's traumatizing to watch. Consider, for instance, what it's like for Americans to see videos of Afghans killed abroad; most Americans likely receive the images in a way that is different from how the majority of Afghans receive them. In fact, the more we see it, the more likely we are to become desensitized to it. So when facilitating conversations in schools, we have to be aware of this. We also have to be aware that many students who feel personally connected to this issue could leave the conversation feeling more victimized and isolated than ever before.

One way to deal with this would be to create “affinity groups,” which could be facilitated by trained, well-intention folks like you who have some mental health background, or, perhaps, teachers. But I'd like us to step back further and consider that many teachers are ill-equipped

to lead these conversations and even their presence could lessen the positive impact of such programs. Culturally relevant teaching and critical, transformative teaching is not so much about simple habits and actions within a class, as it is an entire ideology that informs the identity of the teacher and therefore the identity of the class.

For this reason, I believe an important step would be teacher training. At times like this, it is important that teachers have an opportunity to go on retreat and discuss these issues. This is particularly important for the same reason it's important to have these stimulating class environments for the students. Specifically, the way to help teachers understand their privilege is to be in conversation, honest and open conversation about the lives and experiences of their colleagues. This gives them the experience of what it means to be a part of such meaningful conversations, but it also gives teachers the opportunity to confront their own biases and assumptions in a safe and diverse environment. I prefer the retreat idea because it allows teachers to learn of the personal experiences of colleagues and make connections that are not possible in a simple diversity workshop format.

So, given these concerns, my first suggestion is to 1) train the teachers (in a meaningful way), 2) have a school-wide discussion but use affinity groups to allow for deeper and safer exploration of these issues, and 3) consider working with established programs in the community that are already tackling these issues.

Finally, I think we also have to accept that students who are experiencing this in a personal way and who don't have an opportunity to discuss these issues in schools are going to find that the material they are learning is irrelevant. Social movement is happening and for many students, it is a large psychological burden. If schools refuse to address that altogether, that's not just received as a lack of interest; instead, students in this situation experience a feeling of invisibility that's reinforced by the silence of people who don't understand their "trauma." Relatedly, teachers and administrators also must understand that they are agents of identity formation. Educators who understand this are intentional in how they interact with students; those who are not aware also impact student identity, albeit unwittingly. In the latter case, this impact is often negative.

I applaud you on exploring these issues and really making efforts to find the best path forward for students."

*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/>)