

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

August 23, 2017

Topic: *Providing alternative learning opportunities for students having problems adjusting to school this year*

Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

Featured Center Resources for

>Supporting all students as they begin the new school year

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).

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to 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.

Providing alternative learning opportunities for students having problems adjusting to school this year

A common request we receive is about what to do when a student reacts negatively to prevailing curriculum and instructional methods (e.g., greatly dislikes what is being taught; doesn't like being grouped with others, especially others who also aren't doing well in class). This situation arises quite frequently as students begin a new school year and is an engagement and re-engagement problem at anytime.

Here are some steps we take when such instances arise:

- (1) *Instructional Changes*. From a psychological perspective, our first concern is to make some teaching changes that the student will perceive as positively different. The first step toward accomplishing this involves exploring with the student what s/he dislikes and what would be a better match in terms of the student's interests and capabilities. For example, we try to clarify
 - >the student's assets and strengths (e.g. positive attributes, outside interests, hobbies, what the youngster likes at school and in class)
 - >what the youngster doesn't like at school
 - >the reasons for "dislikes" (e.g., Are assignments seen as too hard? as uninteresting? Is the youngster embarrassed because others will think s/he does not have the ability to do assignments? Is the youngster picked on? rejected? alienated?)
 - >other possible causal factors
 - >what the youngster and those in the home think can be done to make things better (including extra support from a volunteer, a peer, friend, etc.)
 - >some new things the youngster would be willing to try to make the situation better.

At this stage, it is helpful to engage someone from the student's family in the process of clarifying the problem and then collaborating in re-engaging the student. (In involving the family, care must be taken to invite them into the process without criticizing and blaming them for the student's behavior. They may need to learn some different ways to interact with the student and school, and this is more likely to happen if they feel the school is not calling them in to chastise them.)

- (2) *Personalizing learning opportunities*. Based on the information gathered, the next step involves developing personalized learning opportunities. Such opportunities are defined as meeting a learner where s/he currently is – both in terms of motivation and capabilities. We strive to offer alternatives that the student will perceive as a good fit.
- (3) *Providing special learning supports as necessary*. If personalization proves insufficient, it usually means the student needs some special assistance and accommodations. In providing such supports, the first emphasis is on doing so in the classroom. (Referral to an alternative program is a last recourse.) Effectively pursuing intensive learning supports in the classroom requires inviting others in to collaborate in developing learning alternatives and supports. (Reach out and invite in other teachers, student support staff, Title I resource staff, assistant principal, volunteers, etc.) Remember that teachers should not and cannot be expected to do it all alone. (See *Teachers Can't Do it Alone!* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/alone.pdf> .)

For a more detailed discussion of all this see:

- >*Personalizing Learning and Addressing Barriers* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf>
- >*Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* – Access from the Center's homepage – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
- >*Classroom Based Learning Supports Survey* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/classroomsurvey.pdf>
- >*Enhancing Classroom Teachers' Capacity to Successfully Engage All Students in Learning-* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/enhanceteachers.pdf>

For links to more resources, go to the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Finds on:

>Classroom based learning supports – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>

>Motivation, Engagement, and Re-engagement – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

About Measuring Engagement

In this era of science-based practices and accountability for outcomes, formally measuring engagement is a concern. Our brief resource *About School Engagement and Re-engagement* (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/reengagelistserv.pdf>) includes a summary of the review by Fredricks, Blumenfeld &, Paris entitled: *School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence*.

Here is an excerpt:

Engagement is defined in three ways in the research literature:

- Behavioral engagement draws on the idea of participation; it includes involvement in academic and social or extracurricular activities and is considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes and preventing dropping out.
- Emotional engagement encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work.
- Cognitive engagement draws on the idea of investment; it incorporates thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

>*Antecedents of Engagement*. Antecedents can be organized into:

- School level factors: voluntary choice, clear and consistent goals, small size, student participation in school policy and management, opportunities for staff and students to be involved in cooperative endeavors, and academic work that allows for the development of products
- Classroom Context: Teacher support, peers, classroom structure, autonomy support, task characteristics
- Individual Needs: Need for relatedness, need for autonomy, need for competence

>*Measurement of Engagement*

- Behavioral Engagement: conduct, work involvement, participation, persistence, (e.g., completing homework, complying with school rules, absent/tardy, off-task)
- Emotional Engagement: self-report related to feelings of frustration, boredom, interest, anger, satisfaction; student-teacher relations; work orientation
- Cognitive Engagement: investment in learning, flexible problems solving, independent work styles, coping with perceived failure, preference for challenge and independent mastery, commitment to understanding the work

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Invitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

What alternatives do you recommend in working with students who are not doing well as the school year gets underway?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Center Resources for use in

>Supporting all students as they begin the new school year

For all students, the transitions of every new school year present challenges. New teachers, new classes, the move to a new grade level, moving into and from middle school all present opportunities for schools to welcome and provide appropriate support. See the Center's Quick Find for some resources designed to help in making transitions more successful:

>Transition Programs – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2101_01.htm

See in particular the links to the following Center developed transition resources:

>Support for Transitions – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/book/ch5trans.pdf>

>Self-study Survey on Transitions –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/transitionsurvey.pdf>

>Transitions: Turning Risks into Opportunities for Learning Supports –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf>

If you missed the quarterly ejournal for summer 2017 or the monthly ENEWS, you can access them and more from the Center's homepage <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>



Information is online about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

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

For new sign-ups – email 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/>)