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

September 6, 2017

Topic: *Re-engaging disconnected students*

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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

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.

Re-engaging disconnected students

We frequently receive requests such as this one: "I am a 7th grade science teacher. I want to ensure I'm approaching every situation in a way that is psychologically beneficial for the students and their learning. While relationship building is of the upmost importance to me and has made class management easier, there are things that I'm at a standstill about with particular students .... For the majority, the techniques I have learned about reengaging unengaged learners have worked, but there are about 15 percent of my students who do not respond well to any sort of intervention. Additionally, they continue to distract the whole class from the lesson, and I'm a strong believer in keeping all children in the classroom rather than referring those who might be misbehaving. I've tried to assess what was causing the misbehavior as well, but some constantly lash out because they want to be referred and sent home from school due to the extreme lack of desire to be there and lack of motivation. Any type of intervention has been a constant refusal, even private conversations about what goals they want to reach and how they can reach those in my class. How do I engage unengaged learners and increase intrinsic motivation for those who the interventions do not work? Am I at a place where I must start with extrinsic motivation to build momentum? Or will this decrease my chances of building any intrinsic motivation? I'm determined to ensure all of my children succeed because they are all extremely intelligent, but I want to make sure I'm taking the best steps to get there given the circumstances. Any advice would be greatly, greatly appreciated!"

Center Comments: There is no easy solution to the problem of disconnected students. And we know that sending advice from afar is easy to do but not easy to implement. Given these realities, we hope the following comments are of some help:

With respect to re-engaging students, we find extrinsic motivators usually do little more than reduce misbehavior *temporarily*. A commitment to keeping students in class is a good one. However, it tends not to work out unless the teacher brings other folks into the classroom to help with the process of re-engaging the students at school *and in classroom learning*. No teacher should accept the expectation that re-engaging these students is a teacher's responsibility *alone*.

Invaluable resources for modeling and mentoring are those teachers who have been successful in re-engaging students and any staff who provide student supports (psychologist, counselor, social worker, Title I resource staff, assistant principal, etc.). Such colleagues need to be invited into the classroom to team in developing changes that will lead to re-engaging students. Volunteers also can be invaluable both in working with disengaged students and helping with other students so that a teacher has more time to work on re-engagement.

And it is essential to engage someone from the student's family to enhance understanding about the student and to collaborate in problem solving about how to re-engage the student. In involving the family, care must be taken to invite them into the process in ways that does not criticize and blame them for the student's misbehavior. 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.

Sometimes disengaged students respond to being offered special roles and connections at school (e.g., roles that give them special status and positive recognition). This type of intervention is based on the intrinsic motivation principles that stress the value of promoting feelings of competence and positive connection (both with teachers and other students).

For links to more details, see *Featured Center Resources*

We sent the request to a number of colleagues with experience working in schools; below is a sample of responses we received.

Comments from Colleagues in the Field

(1) "This is a very interesting question that I personally struggled with and saw the teachers at our Middle School struggle with as well. I understand it can be difficult to maintain the attention of some students nonetheless prevent some large distraction to take place within the classroom. Here are some of my insights that hopefully are helpful. ...I find it best to gain rapport with the students and really try to understand the root of the problem as to why a student is acting the way they are acting. I understand that sometimes it is difficult to provide that one-to-one attention because there are so many students, but taking some time to build a safe space for at least a couple of minutes to check in with these students a couple of times a week goes a long way. Personally, I was able to gain the trust of students this way and the surprising thing was that they ended up behaving and paying more attention with me.... This improvement in behavior and engagement in their studies happened because we listened to what they have to say and got to know them as individuals before we set them up for the role of student. Also, when it comes to reengaging students in learning, I think it is important to acknowledge the various ways that there are to learn. For example, one of the teachers I worked with based their classroom structure on solely lecture and individual work. The students for the most part were uninterested since they fell into a routine that they would call 'boring.' Thus, to make class more engaging it would help to change up the way that information is presented to students, whether it is showing small clips to get a point across and appeal to the visual learners, having lectures for auditory learners, and group work from time to time to get students learning from each other and not just the teacher. I feel like this type of learning engages most of the students because it includes a variety of learning styles and gives students time to decompress through different learning activities. By keeping students occupied, there leaves less leeway for students to act up. However, there might be that one student who may still not be engaged or keeps on disrupting the class, then that is when you might want to pull the student aside and feel free to ask them how you can best help them learn. Sometimes as educators we might not be seeing the best way to help a student, so I find student feedback crucial to helping them enjoy the learning experience in a way that accommodates to their needs."

(2) "…. I have no doubt this person has done everything possible to reach this group of students. The only suggestion I have is to enlist help from others in the school. Ideally, there should be a group of 'local experts' in the building who could offer additional help and support to this teacher as well as the students that continue to be disengaged. This group of experts could include a counselor, behavior specialist such as a special education teacher, an administrator, social worker, and/or other teachers who interact with a given student. Sometimes the size and make up of the group can change depending upon a student's needs and history. For example, someone in the school who has worked with the student's family or an older sibling or a teacher who had this student in the past could be included.

   Having a group of people discussing one student can often lend perspectives, information and ideas that a single teacher could never have. In addition, people who know a student could help to develop and implement interventions that extend beyond the science classroom and provide additional supports throughout the day. This group should reconvene regularly to check on progress, goals and make adjustments as needed — and keep their focus on this student until they find interventions that work.

   Some students have very complex needs that require a *system* of supports. Besides having complex needs, these students have learned that their behavior helps them achieve their goal — to be removed from the classroom or be sent home. It is very difficult for a teacher to single-handedly address these complex needs and help students develop alternative behaviors. A small group of staff, on the other hand, could develop a plan that includes other

people in the building, other people in the student's lives such as parents/guardians or even the student him/herself. ...

As a group begins to work together to help a student, they learn together about re-engaging them. This learning automatically transfers to others students informally since staff talk about and share their successes with other staff. More and more students begin to benefit without having to go through a formal process. If other teachers (who have the students before they come to science class) find new ways to engage students or reduce misbehaviors, individual students may have a better experience in science and throughout their school day.

The other important change that begins to occur is that a system of supports begins to evolve as staff learn what is needed and what is most successful for their student population. Again, the supports that are put in place for a few students can also benefit others before their behavior reaches a critical stage...."

(3) "The teacher wonders about a lack of motivation, but it could be that about 15% of the students simply do not want to be in the class. Since the request arose from a science class, let's test some hypotheses! ...

Hypothesis: The student simply wants a different class. Is a schedule change possible? If there isn't a class open, could the student do useful work of some kind around the school. Perhaps in the library, cafeteria, as a PE assistant in the gym? It's tough to feel unmotivated (and perhaps disconnected) when you are working hard on a task that everybody appreciates.

Hypothesis: *Lack of motivation*: Early in my coursework, I heard that motivation = one's confidence that one can do well on the task – times the value one places on knowing how to perform the task. So, if people fear they can never succeed, or if they simply see no point, motivation is likely to be zero. We can use this formula during relationship building discussions in an attempt to find the roadblocks to stronger motivation. Perhaps the student has failed in similar tasks before and doesn't want to go down that road again. Or, maybe, the student doesn't see the value of going through an instructional process simply because it's the next thing in the textbook and they doubt they will ever use that information. If you get a glimmer of what is behind the motivation failure, then maybe you can figure a modification that is acceptable to the student....

Hypothesis: We don't yet have enough info to figure this out. So many things are happening in a classroom It is extremely difficult for the teacher to keep track of absolutely everything. If you have a school psychologist available to you who knows how to do a detailed "functional assessment of behavior", that might uncover behavioral "triggers". Eliminating or modifying the triggers might just help keep behavior within reasonable limits. ... Finally, it has been my experience that the 15% that struggle to do well can often do much better with careful planning. However, their lives are often complicated and after a few weeks you may need to revise your plan."

Hope some of this is helpful. Let us know what you work out and if you think we can be helpful as you continue to development professionally.

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nvitation to Listserv Participants to Share Perspectives

What advice or suggestions do you have about re-engaging disconnected students?
How do you think student/learning support staff should help?

Send your responses to Ltaylor@ucla.edu

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Featured Center Resources for

>Working with students who are not engaged in classroom learning

(1) We stress opening classroom doors and inviting in others to enhance ways to work with disengaged students (e.g., personalizing instruction, forming small groups, providing special assistance in the classroom). With respect to inviting others in, consider

> (a) *teaming with other teachers* who have been successful in re-engaging students for support/ mentoring/coaching and also *bringing in volunteers* to provide extra and even older students (e.g., from the school or local college who might see it as a service learning opportunity).

> (b) *teaming with student/learning support staff* (counselors, social workers, school psychologists) not just to consult about individual students, but to find ways for such staff to participate in the classroom to help implement "response to intervention" practices and to evolve strategies for engaging and re-engaging all disconnected students. To these ends, a support staff member might, for example, work in the classroom for a time with a small group of designated students. (The group might be termed a "speed learning" group or some other term that conveys a positive image.)

(2) Sometimes a useful strategy is to invite disengaged students to take on a special role (e.g., helper/tutor/peer buddy with students who are new to the school). This is the type of thing volunteers can help implement and monitor.

(3) And don't forget about enlisting the involvement of the family in problem solving.

Here are some relevant Center resources:

> *>Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* –
>   Access from link on the Center's homepage - http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/

> *>Personalizing Learning* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf – includes –

>> >>Personalizing Structure for Learning
>> >>Conferencing as a Key Strategy
>> >>Assessment to Plan; Feedback to Nurture
>> >>Moving a Classroom Toward Personalized Learning
>> >>Turning Big Classes into Smaller Units
>> >>Volunteers as an Invaluable Resource

> *>Matching Students and Instruction: the Dilemma of Grouping Students* –
>   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/grouping.pdf

> *>Minimizing Referrals out of the Classroom* –
>   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/referralspn.pdf

> *>About School Engagement and Re-engagement* –
>   http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/reengagestudents.pdf

For other resources that may be helpful, see the links in our Center Quick Find on

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

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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/

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## RECISSION OF DEFERRED ACTION FOR CHILDHOOD ARRIVALS (DACA)

The recission of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program will affect more than 800,000 young adults who are in school or working, and striving to make a living in this country. In the coming months, schools will have to help students cope with the additional stress and educators will be involved with shaping Congressional policy-making.

http://action.nilc.org/page/s/urge-congress-to-pass-the-dream-act?source=em170905-dream-act

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Hurricane/Storm/Flooding Aftermath Resources.

The following provide starting places for schools to access resources:

>The U.S. Department of Education has activated its emergency response contact center in response to the devastating impacts of Hurricane Harvey. The Department's K-12 and Higher Education stakeholders who are seeking informational resources as well as those seeking relief from Department-based administrative requirements should contact the Department toll free at 1-844-348-4082 or by email at HarveyRelief@ed.gov.

>From our Center:

>>*Responding to a Crisis* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/crisisresp.htm
>>*Crisis Quick Find* – http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p2107_01.htm

>From education agencies:

>>*Disaster Recovery Policy and Systems Guidance* (Louisiana Dept. of Education)
http://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/louisiana-believes/lde-disaster-recovery-guidance.pdf?sfvrsn=8
>>*Dealing with Disasters: Frequently Asked Questions* (Texas Education Agency)
http://tea.texas.gov/About_TEA/Other_Services/Weather_and_Disaster/Dealing_with_Disasters__Frequently_Asked_Questions/
>>*Lessons Learned from School Crises and Emergencies* (U.S. Dept. of Education)
https://rems.ed.gov/docs/LL_Vol2Issue5.pdf

>From the American Psychological Association
>>*Mental Health Resources for Hurricanes/Floods*
http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/index.aspx
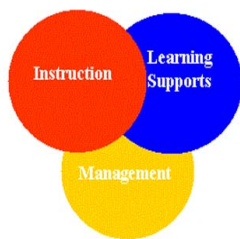
Information is online about the
National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html

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/)