



**School Practitioner
Listserv**



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

December 7, 2015

Interchange with a Principal:

- >Revealing Student Dignity, Humanity, and Capability**
 - >Principal's Comments**
 - >Center Response**
 - >Principal's Follow-up**
 - >Request to listserv participants**

Featured Set of Center Resources:

- >Engagement re-engagement, and intrinsic motivation**
- >Some Recently Updated Intro Packets**

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**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 2015 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.

Rquest from a Principal:

>In response to the following Center comments –

“As is widely acknowledged, we are losing too many teachers, principals, superintendents, and students. The costs of this are staggering. Many things need to change to reduce the numbers. Some of the ESEA reauthorization discussion is relevant to this concern. But not being discussed is the reality that in many classrooms a large proportion of the students are not motivationally ready and able to learn what the teacher has planned on a given day. *Just ask teachers*. In most urban schools and in schools in poor rural areas, teachers tell us that only about 15 percent of their students are ready and able. The implications for all personnel and students who dropout and pushout seems evident.”

Pincipal's comments: The last two sentences of your second paragraph are stunning. I'm wondering what survey produced that information regarding teachers' perceptions of their students' readiness? How many teachers were involved. How many school districts were surveyed? Were teachers surveyed across the professional experience spectrum, or were only new teachers surveyed? Did the 15% figure consider both behavior and readiness for "grade level" expectations? Please forgive my asking this of you. I understand you're busy, but "the implications" aren't clear.

There are possibilities. Underachieving students, which are the vast majority in low income communities are achieving below grade level. Fifty years of Title I, fifteen years of No Child Left Behind, a dozen years of Mayoral Control have failed to fulfill the promise of bringing those students up to and beyond grade level. We've not systemically found and used the key that would unlock this progress. All students have infinite capabilities to learn and are indeed learning. With regard to children from low income communities, we have in isolated situations enabled them to succeed, to achieve at and beyond grade level, but we have not been good at spreading the strategies that made these isolated successes possible. One thing that has long been clear to me as an urban core elementary school principal is that students aren't being effectively engaged in their own self-improvement, in the improvement and development of their peers and their community, but they are capable of being so engaged. Though we believe that all children can learn, that all children are capable of learning, we operate our classrooms and schools, generally, with students having to stand on their own, isolated from their peers rather than in a collaborative and cooperative goal driven environment in which they all participate. We operate our classrooms and schools as if we believed in "survival of the fittest." Survival of the fittest is an idea that contradicts our often stated belief in "high expectations". I have a solution to offer. It worked for me and all my students, in a sixth grade urban core classroom and with an entire student body in a K-5 urban core school. It can work for others. It costs nothing. It unlocks students capabilities to work collaboratively and cooperatively, to ground themselves in a well defined purpose that they develop. It enables them to develop a positive, success based self-concept. It enables them to focus on a positive shared purpose. It's based upon their consensus answers to the question: "What can you do to enjoy school, to learn as much as you can, to make and keep as many friends as possible, and to keep yourself safe?"

I wish to be clear and straightforward with you. The dignity, humanity, and capabilities of students from low income communities of color must be more than a theoretical construct in the minds of their teachers. That dignity, humanity, and capability must be on display in our classrooms and schools and it is our responsibility to be sure that they are on display. We might call it stagecraft and directing or coaching within an environment that facilitates each student revealing all the best within him/herself but that can't occur when we believe that they aren't "ready".

What I propose will reveal the best that each student has within them, even to doubters. We can't believe what we haven't seen. Every educator needs to see the capabilities of their students revealed. Every student needs to see their capabilities revealed. With consensus personal goals and the

permission and support of their teachers that they might work toward their consensus goals we could dramatically change school and student outcomes and shut down the "School To Prison Pipeline".

Center Response: We certainly are in tune with the concerns raised and certainly agree that “dignity, humanity, and capability must be on display in our classrooms and schools and it is our responsibility to be sure that they are on display.”

To be clear about the term ready and able, our focus is on ways to keep students “*motivationally ready and able.*” What is widely seen in schools is that pre-schoolers and kindergarten students display a wonderful motivation to learn. They have so many questions and are so curious. Naturally, they bring a variety of individual differences in what interests them and what abilities they already have developed. By the end of 2nd grade in many schools, we see the first surge of referrals for learning, behavior, and emotional problems. And the referral problem increases as students move on to ensuing grades. Consider all the students in middle school and high schools who have become disconnected from classroom instruction. These students are the ones teachers experience as not motivationally ready and able to gain much from the curriculum being taught.

As we indicated: “In most urban schools and in schools in poor rural areas, teachers tell us that only about 15 percent of their students are ready and able.” This has been the consistent indication when we have asked teachers in the audience as we presented across the country over the last 30 years. We ask: “How many students show up in your classrooms motivationally ready and able to learn what you have planned to teach them that day?” In some large poverty-ridden schools, teachers have said the number was as low as 10 percent.

Does it have to be that way? Of course not.

Does it mean that the teachers we work with don’t believe in the students’ capabilities and potential or that they are not learning anything? Of course not.

What we raise is only a recognition of the major systemic problems that need to be addressed by society and, as a critical component of the society, by public education.

We are always please to hear from folks like you who indicate that they are working on ways to counter the problems of public education. This is an especially critical time for doing so.

We were struck by your statement that: “We operate our classrooms and schools, generally, with students having to stand on their own, isolated from their peers rather than in a collaborative and cooperative goal driven environment in which they all participate. We operate our classrooms and schools as if we believed in ‘survival of the fittest.’ Survival of the fittest is an idea that contradicts our often stated belief in ‘high expectations’.” This not only is true for students, it is true for teachers and student support staff, and for those in the home who are responsible for the youngster’s caretaking.

Addressing all this systematically and on a large-scale is the intent of our National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports.

Thanks again for your comments. We would be particularly interested in how your school is working systemically to transform how it uses student and learning supports to enhance equity of opportunity by addressing the barriers to learning and teaching that are commonplace in schools in poverty neighborhoods.

Pincipal’s Follow-up: Thank you for sharing how you collected data on teacher perceptions of their students’ motivational readiness. What teachers have told you is their

reality and a preoccupation which they may not typically speak about openly. Teachers, staff and parents at my school revealed this to be their reality when, as their newly assigned Principal, I asked them in a my first meeting with staff and parents, "What can I do to assist you?" After a very long pause, silence was broken by a teacher who I would later discover was one of the best teachers I had ever worked with. She said, "We are having a lot of difficulty with our students' behaviors and attitudes. They give up too easily. They don't follow the rules. Maybe you can help us with that." After suggestions that I meet with students in the auditorium, that teachers send misbehavers to me for detention during recess and lunch, typical punishment methods, staff and parents in this low income community of color agreed to try student developed and adopted consensus goals as a replacement for rules. In the nine years that followed, there was no call to bring the rules back. Student suspensions from class and from school were virtually eliminated. Students were rarely punished. Peer relations were so good, bullying in school and in the community disappeared. Achievement improved. These changes were readily evident, even to visitors who wondered if we were putting something in our kids food. The Coordinator of school field trips at the Zoo was so impressed by our students' behavior, politeness, and attentiveness she offered free busses to see if all of our students were like that.

You said that you'd be particularly interested in "how your school is working in a systematic way to transform how it uses student and learning supports to enhance equity of opportunity by addressing the barriers to learning and teaching that are commonplace in schools in poverty neighborhoods." I wish you could see how adding consensus student body personal goals to the mix of staff and parent implemented student and learning support strategies makes a difference in the lives of students on and off campus.

The first day of school is the very best day to begin developing consensus student personal goals. This is when students and staff are most optimistic and most curious about how successful they might be during the ensuing school year. To develop the goals, students answer the following question and submit their class' favorite five answers to a committee of parents, teachers and students who form a ballot of their answers for a student body vote:

"What can you do to enjoy school, to learn as much as you can, to make and keep as many friends as possible, and to keep yourself safe?" What students would suggest, and what they would vote for, can be predicted. The five goals chosen by my sixth grade classroom and by the student body were essentially the same because kids know what they need to do to succeed in school, to make and keep friends and to keep themselves safe. What I "discovered" through the use of the consensus student goals strategy is that students are eager to do the right thing and to see their peers do it as well and that pledging to work on their consensus goals created a systemic opportunity to make that happen. There's a difference between rules and goals. Goals are not about a presumption that we must be perfect. Goals infer a process, an ongoing effort. We strive for goals. Goals are about making a conscious personal commitment to one's self, not about obedience to the authority. Our goals belong to us. They come from our concept of self. Making progress toward achieving our goals builds our self confidence. Consensus personal goals enable students to discover that they can make and fulfill commitments to themselves and their peers.

Consensus goals enable them to understand that they aren't in competition with each other to fulfill these commitments. They learn by experience that they can help each other, as a community of common interest, to fulfill those commitments. In doing so they achieve a peaceful and productive school and neighborhood experience. This is an empowering process. All children need the sense of personal empowerment in building their community of common interest, in building successful peer relationships, and in their ability to successfully pursue skill development and academic achievement. Where that isn't happening, students are underachieving. Implementing a consensus student personal goals strategy is uncomplicated. No additional staffing or curriculum is needed. No budget is needed aside from what a school spends to recognize students for doing a good job. When all forms of recognition are tied to students' efforts to fulfill their consensus goals, our support and respect for our students and their goals is clearly demonstrated.

In this consensus goals process, our students are partners in self control, self affirmation, in collaboration and cooperation and in the celebration of everyone's progress. People who live in low income communities are not generally characterized as empowered in confronting obstacles and barriers to learning and to personal safety, yet we don't hear any discussion and we have no systems encouraging self-help and peer support as a strategy to enable students to circumvent obstacles and barriers to their learning and safety. That being said, I'm not promoting a "lift yourself up by your own bootstraps" solution, or suggesting that society, government and NGA's don't have a responsibility to support and improve services to low income communities and for children from those communities. I'm suggesting that we add a coherent and systemic opportunity for students to effectively help themselves in ways that only they can."

R **request to listserv participants:** What would you add to this interchange? What other successful experiences would you like to share with the over 40,000 people who receive this weekly exchange of ideas? Please further the exchange by sending comments, concerns, and questions to Ltaylor@ucla.edu .

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F **eatured set of center resources:**

>Resources on engagement, re-engagement, and intrinsic motivation

For more resources on engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning, see the Center's Quick Find on *Engagement* -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

Link from there to a wide range of resources, including the following Center developed aids:

Continuing Education Modules

- >Engaging and Re-engaging Students and Families: Four Units for Continuing Education
- >Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning

Guides for Practice

- >Examples of the Focus on Intrinsic Motivation in the Six Learning Supports Arenas
- >Engaging and Re-engaging Students in Learning at School
- >Engaging and Re-engaging Families When a Student is Not Doing Well

>Some Recently Updated Intro Packets

- >*Resource mapping and management to address barriers to learning: An intervention for systemic change* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/resourcemapping/resourcemappingandmanagement.pdf>
- >*Transitions: Turning risks into opportunities for student support* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/transitions/transitions.pdf>
- >*Parent and Home Involvement in Schools* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/parenthome/parent1.pdf>
- >*Least intervention needed: Toward appropriate inclusion of students with special needs* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/leastint/leastint.pdf>
- >*Understanding and minimizing staff burnout* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/burnout/burn1.pdf>

- > *Affect and Mood related to school aged youth* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/affect/affect.pdf>
- > *Attention problems: Intervention and Resources* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/attention/attention.pdf>
- > *Anxiety, Fears, Phobias, and Related Problems: Intervention and Resources for School Aged Youth* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/anxiety/anxiety.pdf>
- > *Conduct and Behavior Problems in School Aged Youth* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/conduct/conduct.pdf>
- > *Dropout Prevention* –
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/dropoutprev/dropout.pdf>

*For information about the *2015 National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports*, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

***Equity of opportunity is fundamental to enabling civil rights;
transforming student and learning supports is fundamental to
enabling equity of opportunity and promoting whole child development***

***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/>)**