

## **School Practitioner Community of Practice**

(A network for sharing & exchange)

*April 10, 2019*

### **Topics for discussion**

#### **>Guiding & Supporting Volunteers at Schools**

### **Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern**

**Note:** Go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla> for links to other Center resources including

- >Upcoming initiatives, conferences & workshops
- >Calls for grant proposals, presentations, and papers
- >Training and job opportunities
- >Upcoming webcasts & other professional development opportunities

This resource is from the  
Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports, UCLA

**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](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**

**For previous postings of community of practice discussions, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/practitioner.htm>**

### **Topic for Discussion –**

#### **>Guiding & Supporting Volunteers at Schools**

#### **From a Volunteer tutor discouraged by challenges in helping in classrooms**

*I tutor/mentor at a high school as part of a college work study program. We sit in with the freshmen during their classes and help out, mostly in math. Even though the school has a college-bound focus, a lot of the students seem unmotivated and do not care about their education. I understand that it is a rough neighborhood and that other circumstances may affect them, but it concerns me that even the teachers have been overwhelmed and giving up. The challenge has been getting the students to understand and realize that they are actually capable of doing well in school and in their futures. Discipline has also been another issue and a number of the students have not been behaving very well. I feel like another challenge is that it is hard for freshmen to have a college-bound attitude so early in high school. I know they think they would like to go to college, but many from the school who attend college don't stay or graduate. I want to know more about how we can motivate and provide better resources to these students and teachers regarding engagement.*

## Center Response

Volunteers can be especially helpful in establish a supportive relationship with students who are having trouble adjusting to school. However, volunteer preparation and ongoing guidance and support by the teacher and student/learning support staff are essential.

With this in mind, volunteers and school staff will find some useful resource links on the Center's Quick Finds. See:

>*Volunteers in Schools* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/volunteers.html>

>*Tutoring* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/tutoring.html>

>*Motivation, engagement, and re-engagement* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>

## Comments from the Field

- (1) "... [Volunteers should] think about these skills and assignments from the perspective of the students. If they didn't find value in the original work (the reason for them needing a tutor), how will they find value in studying it again with someone helping them? And if there is no value in the work, why should they care about even being here? (resulting poor behavior choices)

Re-engagement is the goal - not the skills/work (that's secondary). The work needs to be relevant to the student(s). Students need a sense of control over their situation and learning choices. What's the point of the assignment? How does it relate to what I need/want right now - and not four years later? Why should I care? College is too far away from the reality of today, especially if these are students from disadvantaged neighborhoods. I'm guessing that they don't know anyone *like them* who has been to college, so why should they be focused on higher ed? It doesn't make sense and delayed gratification is not part of their experience.

There are different ways to learn the same set of skills. Can assignments be adapted to interest students in technology or sports, for example? I'm not up on freshman math curriculum, but could the same skills be taught to track a sports team's progress over the course of a season and then estimate/problem solve changes that need to occur to do better the next year?(There are a lot of variables to be considered in that type of problem.) Or could the math concepts be applied to social media usage and how to increase or decrease usage of a specific app or online behavior? ... Could students apply their math to engineering problems in the neighborhood related to traffic, social issues, needs of younger siblings at their school, anything that is within their experience. Also, giving students accurate feedback and encouraging them to work together on problems can sometimes motivate young people. They begin to learn from one another, realize that the math skills have relevance and start to take responsibility for their own learning.

I'm sure this tutor/mentor has little control over the assignments given to these freshmen, but perhaps she could work with the instructor to present these concepts in different ways. I'm guessing that the teacher may appreciate the help.... Not only will they learn the concepts but they will learn the importance of collaborative problem solving - a much more important skill in today's workplace.

If this dedicated young person can figure out how to approach the problem differently to re-engage these students, I'm sure their behavior will improve. I wish her the best because this is one of the hardest and most rewarding experiences she will have in her career. The students will eventually show her the right path to take, but it could take several tries."

- (2) "...When I was assigned to tutor a disengaged fourth grade boy in math, we first talked about what he wanted to learn. He thought math had no place in his life. He didn't see the point. He was very interested in his dog, though, so we agreed to work together to build a dog house. Of course, there was tons of math in that project. About halfway through, he was sawing a board and casually mentioned, 'I know what you are trying to do.' But, he kept on and pretty soon started trying to figure out how the classroom math might someday be useful to him.

... I'm guessing your volunteer time might be pretty much structured for you, but you get the idea. If the work-study school will allow, I think your strongest option might be to try to link the math to something already on the student's list of high-interest activities, if only temporarily. Get to know the student, then try to find some meaningful work that ignites the student's passion and also somehow involves math. Work together on the project. See from personal experience how math helps everybody to be successful at reaching the goal. Then celebrate!..."

- (3) "Unfortunately, there is no simple answer to this question. For a volunteer tutor/mentor to have an impact, or even a small influence, on students who seem 'unmotivated and don't care about their education' a relationship has to be developed. That takes time. Usually more than a semester that a work-study program provides. When I first became a volunteer tutor I spent much of my time looking for ideas that I could bring to my weekly tutoring. The Internet now makes this search for ideas more possible. I'd try to encourage this student to take her concerns back to the college and try to get them to set up a study program that looks at tutor/mentor programs around the country, how they are designed, how they use the non-school hours, as well as the school day, etc. with the goal of proposing a new program design for the schools that they are working with that might reach these students earlier, even in elementary school, and stay connected to them longer, all the way through high school and into college. At a minimum, is there a weekly feedback group at the college, of other student tutor/mentors, where they can share questions and feedback with each other? If not, maybe that can be encouraged."
- (4) "Kudos to the heart of this student. She's wanting to address issues that are deep and wide. On a one-to-one level, I always believe in the power of relationships. ... Listening more than talking, listening with lots of interest and empathy, being honest, finding likable traits and skills, and exploring the students' vision of what they want in their future are important relationship builders. Sometimes we put too much energy into trying to fix someone; our ideas might be better received if we tell them things like, 'Your life is different from mine, so I can't really know how you see things. I know how hard you work at your goals. I'm interested in what you see after high school.' One of the most potent change agents is to find how a student can be of service to others. I've seen this turn students around when nothing else could. Beyond the potential for individual relationships, the tutor's student needs to partner in very respectful ways with the teacher. An after school debriefing type of conversation allows for expressing concerns .... Changing trajectories in schools where the kids come from backgrounds that make school difficult is not impossible, but really works best with a school wide effort...."

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**Share with us your comments  
about the above topic or other related matters!!**  
**Send your responses to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu)**  
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### **Links to a few other relevant resources & other topics of concern**

*Improving how schools address barriers to learning & teaching: Escaping old ideas and moving beyond current trends* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/reportapr2019.pdf>

*About school shootings* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/schshoot.pdf>

*Students experiencing stress* <https://www.apa.org/ed/schools/primer/stress-health-primer.pdf>

*Supporting safe and healthy schools for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students: A national survey of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists*  
<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Publications/SupportingSafeHealthySchools.pdf>

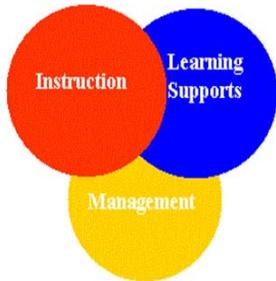
*Separate and Still Unequal: Race in America's Schools*  
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr19/vol76/num07/toc.aspx>

*In-Class Presentations: A Potential Barrier to Success at School?*  
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/pubspeak.pdf>

*Success Plans: Promising Tools for Customizing Student Supports and Opportunities*  
<https://edredesign.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/HarvERLEExSummaryDigitalf.pdf>

About a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports, see:  
***Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*** —  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

On embedding student/learning supports into school improvement, see  
***Improving School Improvement***  
[http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving\\_school\\_improvement.html](http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)  
*Both are available at this time as free resources.*

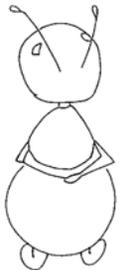


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For information about the  
**National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports**  
go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/newinitiative.html>

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

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When I volunteered, you told me:  
*When the going gets tough, the tough get going.*



Well, it's starting to get tough, so I'm going.



**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**  
**For new sign-ups – email [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto: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/>)**