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Special Edition

Enhancing Classroom Climate for All Students

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. Findings suggest that general strategies designed to enhance school climate often are insufficient for changing the perceptions of such students. Drawing on recent literature, this article briefly outlines ways to approach improving school climate that account for the full range of students enrolled in a school.

Exploring Schoolwide and Classroom Climate

Concern for improving school climate draws on many strands of theory and research. Major examples include the extensive literatures on school effectiveness and on the impact of environmental conditions. The focus on *school effectiveness* has been mainly on improving *general* conditions for learning and teaching. Considerably less attention has been paid to *specific* conditions for enabling success at school for students who are struggling and vulnerable.

Robust associations regularly are reported between negative home and school conditions and student, staff, and school problems (e.g., problems with academic achievement, school connectedness and engagement, interpersonal relationships, staff and student morale). This has led to long-standing calls for improving environmental conditions in ways that (a) enhance nurture and care and (b) reduce exposure to and counter the impact of nonnurturing environments. These matters have become building blocks in the U.S. Department of Education's *Promise Neighborhoods* initiative and its initiative for *Safe and Supportive Schools* (e.g., see Komro, Flay, Biglan, & Promise Neighborhoods Research Consortium, 2011; Theokas & Lerner, 2006; U.S. Dept. of Educ., 2011).

School climate *emerges* from the complex transactions that characterize daily classroom and schoolwide life and reflects the influence of the underlying, institutionalized values and belief systems, norms, ideologies, rituals, traditions, and practices that constitute the school culture. The construct of *climate* is used as a marker for judging the quality of school life.

School Climate: A Multi-dimensional Construct

Researchers tend to view school climate as a multidimensional construct. For example, in early work on the topic, Moos (e.g., 1979) proposed grouping the various related concepts as follows:

- (1) Relationship (i.e., the nature and intensity of personal relationships within the environment; the extent to which people are involved in the environment and support and help each other);
- (2) Personal development (i.e., basic directions along which personal growth and self-enhancement tend to occur); and
- (3) System maintenance and change (i.e., the extent to which the environment is orderly, clear in expectations, maintains control, and is responsive to change).

Because of measurement complexity, many studies have limited their focus to the impact of a narrow set of factors on students, mainly stressing such matters as:

- (1) the nature of relationships between teachers and students;
- (2) the nature of relationships between students;
- (3) the extent to which student autonomy is allowed in the decision-making process;
- (4) the extent to which the school provides clear, consistent, and fair rules and regulations.

From a transactional perspective, some researchers emphasize the following as critical shapers of school climate: 1) interactions among students, 2) interactions between school personnel and students, 3) interactions among school personnel, and 4) interactions between the school, families, and community (e.g., Richman, Bowen, & Woolley, 2004). The transactions between students and school personnel tend to be studied the most.

Others have expanded the emphasis on relationships and personal functioning; they add quality considerations related to physical milieu and resources and practices related to instructional and student/learning supports. Examples include school size and ratio of students to staff, safety and comfort, and quality of interventions.

Cohen and Geier (2011) conclude that “virtually all researchers suggest there are four essential areas of focus: **Safety** (e.g. rules and norms; physical safety; social-emotional safety); **Relationships** (e.g. respect for diversity; school connectedness/engagement; social support – adults; social support – students; leadership); **Teaching and Learning** (e.g. social, emotional, ethical and civic learning; support for learning; professional relationships); and the **Institutional Environment** (e.g. physical surrounding).”

Hopson & Lee (2011) suggest that “Although researchers present competing ideas about the most important dimensions of school climate, most agree that climate is determined by perceptions of safety, relationships within the school, goals related to teaching and learning, and the learning environment, which encompasses school structure and feelings of connectedness to school.”

Theory and Research-based Assumptions

Based on the existing literature and given the realities of current resources (e.g., personnel, dollars, space, facilities, etc.), we stress the following assumptions in pursuing work designed to ensure school improvement and school climate efforts address all and not just some students:

- School climate emerges from the ongoing transactions among key stakeholders and between them and the school environment.
- Stakeholder perceptions are the critical criterion for evaluating school climate.
- Stakeholders need to develop a sense of personal responsibility for the school's mission, appreciation of individual differences, commitment to independent and cooperative functioning and problem solving, and a desire to generate a psychological sense of community.
- Besides improved learning, policies and practices must stress improved strategies for enabling equity of opportunity for all students to succeed at school.
- A unified and comprehensive system of stakeholder supports is essential to minimizing barriers to learning and teaching and keeping students engaged.
- The wider the range of options that can be offered and the more the stakeholders are made aware of the options and have a choice about which to pursue, the greater the likelihood that they will perceive the school climate as positive.
- For struggling students (and their parents), the school climate is unlikely to be perceived as good as long as the student is not engaged effectively with the school. Thus, interventions must be designed to enhance the student's (and other key stakeholders') intrinsic valuing of what the school can contribute to her or his well-being.
- School personnel (e.g., teachers, administrators, school and student support staff) are unlikely to perceive the climate positively unless they feel they have a sense of job satisfaction.
- Support for school improvement capacity building, especially enhancing personnel competence, should be the first priority.

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A Few Specifics Related to Improving Schools in Ways that Promote a Positive School and Classroom Climate

Analyses of practice and research suggest that a proactive approach to developing positive school and classroom climates requires careful attention to (1) enhancing the quality of life at school and especially in the classroom for students and staff, (2) pursuing a curriculum that promotes not only academic, but also social and emotional learning, (3) enabling teachers and other staff to be effective with a wide range of students, and (4) fostering intrinsic motivation for learning and teaching.

With respect to all this, the literature advocates

- a welcoming, caring, and hopeful atmosphere
- social support mechanisms for students and staff
- an array of options for pursuing goals
- meaningful participation by students and staff in decision making
- transforming the classroom infrastructure from a big classroom into a set of smaller units organized to maximize intrinsic motivation for learning and not based on ability or problem-oriented grouping
- providing instruction and responding to problems in a personalized way
- use of a variety of strategies for preventing and addressing problems as soon as they arise
- a healthy and attractive physical environment that is conducive to learning and teaching.

For more discussion of practices, see Blum (2005), Brophy (2004), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009a,b), Center for Mental Health in Schools (2011a), Lehr and Christenson (2002), National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2004), Tableman (2004), Weiss, Cunningham, Lewis, and Clark (2005).

Terminology

Some schools feel friendly, inviting, and supportive, others feel exclusionary, unwelcoming, and even unsafe.

The feelings and attitudes elicited by a school's environment are referred to as school climate.

Alexandra Loukas

What happens at schools is best understood in transactional terms. Thus, a school's impact is a function of the fit between what the staff and other stakeholders bring to the situation and the situational factors that must be addressed. For example, a school's stakeholders bring a set of assimilated knowledge, skills, and attitudes, a current state of being (demographic status; immediate physiological, cognitive, and emotional states), and available institutional resources. The situation presents a host of demands and stressors which differ in terms of contextual factors such as locale, level of schooling, and student readiness. There are considerable variations among schools and in classrooms with respect to the number of students who show up motivationally ready and able to cope with what happens. There also are wide resource disparities among schools due to school budgets and differences in family income and support for school learning. At any given juncture, the situational demands and stressors may or may not be a good fit with what the school and home can mobilize effectively.

Schoolwide and classroom *climate* are terms used to capture the overall quality of what emerges from the complex transactions. The terms capture the temporal, and somewhat fluid, perceived qualities of the immediate setting and reflect the influence of underlying, institutionalized values and belief systems, norms, ideologies, rituals, traditions, and practices that constitute the school *culture*. And, of course, the climate and culture at a school also are shaped by the surrounding political, social, cultural, and economic contexts (e.g., home, neighborhood, city, state, country).

From a psychological perspective, it is the perception of actors rather than of observers that is key to understanding the positive and negative influences of school and classroom climate on stakeholders (e.g., students, staff, parents, and other involved parties). And, perceptions of climate probably are heavily influenced by relationships with peers and colleagues. Given all this, it is not surprising when contrasting perceptions are reported about the climate in a particular school and classroom.

Analyses of research suggest significant relationships between classroom climate and positive outcomes in academic behavioral, and emotional domains. Such associations have been used to highlight the importance of school climate in general. Specific associations explored include student connectedness, engagement, self-efficacy, cooperative learning, achievement, attendance, safety, self and peer behavior, relationships and collaboration with peers and staff, health, social and emotional development, graduation rates, teacher retention, school improvement, overall quality of school life, and more.

What Researchers' Report

Positive school environment and school connectedness are reported widely as associated with positive academic performance and less risky adolescent behaviors; not surprisingly, all this is associated with positive interpersonal relationships between students and school staff. Strong achievement levels also are reported for classrooms perceived as having greater cohesion and goal-direction and less disorganization and conflict. Conversely, findings suggest that experiencing school climate as negative can have long-range adverse effects (e.g., students dropping out, teacher burnout, mental health problems). Implications for practice emphasize strategies that enhance perceptions of safety, school connectedness, feelings of self-determination, positive interpersonal relationships between students and school staff, a psychological sense of community among stakeholders, and more.

As Wang and Holcombe (2010) report,

We found that teachers can best promote students' positive identification with school and stimulate their willingness to participate in their tasks by offering positive and improvement-based praise and emphasizing effort while avoiding pressuring students for correct answers or high grades.... Conversely, results from our study demonstrate that the presence of competitive learning environment decreases school participation, undermines the development of a sense of school belonging, and diminishes the value students place on school.... Students who are competent but either alienated from school or less intrinsically motivated may need more autonomy support in the form of more interesting and relevant activities and decision-making opportunities in order to become engaged with learning. On the other hand, students who are passive or anxious about exercising autonomy or attempting novel tasks may need more structured scaffolding of tasks, more guidance, and more explicit instruction in effective strategies before they fully engage with classroom learning.... We found that students who reported being encouraged to interact and discuss ideas with each other in class reported higher levels of school identification and use of self-regulatory strategies. Moreover, students are more likely to participate in school and bond with school when teachers create a caring and socially supportive environment....

It is important to note that some research suggests that the impact of classroom climate may be greater on students from low-income homes and groups that often are discriminated against. At the same time, some findings suggest that broad-band strategies for improving school climate may be insufficient for engaging and re-engaging struggling students, especially those from low-income homes and groups that often are discriminated against. As Jennings and Greenberg (2009) stress:

Emotionally challenging events that teachers typically face often involve interactions with students who are not emotionally well regulated, including those caught in anger, anxiety, and sadness. These students, at highest risk of developing behavioral disorders and emotion regulation difficulties, are the very students in greatest need of a supportive relationship with their teacher.

In addition to enhanced social and learning supports, a range of specific school and classroom climate strategies probably are needed to reach students who struggle academically, act out, and experience conflictual relationships with school staff and peers.

For more on the research, see the Center report: *Designing School Improvement to Enhance Classroom Climate for All Students* -- <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/climate.pdf>

**Ways to Approach
Improving School
and Classroom
Climate for
Struggling Students**

It is extremely costly and time-intensive to transform schools where the prevailing environment creates a lackluster or, worse yet, a hostile climate. And as indicated above, there is little agreement about how best to proceed to improve the climate.

Those who focus mainly on the construct of school climate tend to place a high priority on assessing school climate. Given the realities of severe budget cuts, however, overemphasis on expending significant resources on assessment is premature. After all, most stakeholders already are painfully aware when their school's climate is unsatisfactory. And, given the experiences with achievement testing, hopefully policy makers have learned that overinvesting sparse resources in measurement means leaving too little for capacity building.

With respect to making things better, we suggest that the first and foremost necessities for improving schools involve enhancing resources as much as feasible at every school and increasing supports for *capacity building* and especially strengthening personnel competence.

**Keeping the
Focus on
Enhancing School
Improvement**

Probably everyone has an image of an ideal school climate. Chances are the image is rather utopian. As such, the image is an aspiration and can only be approximated by broadly focusing on improving many facets of the education system.

We all want schools to be good. Based in part on school effectiveness research, there is growing consensus about what constitutes good schools and classrooms. Exhibits 1 and 2 offer a series of syntheses that encapsulate prevailing thinking. Such thinking and all school improvement policy and practice, of course, are influenced by politics, economics, social philosophy, and a host of legal and pragmatic factors. Fundamentally, school climate is dependent on and emerges from how school improvement is defined, planned, and implemented.

Ultimately, given our society's commitment to equity, fairness, and justice, school improvement means doing the best at every school for *all* students. For school staff, equity, fairness, and justice start with designing instruction in ways that account for a wide range of individual differences and circumstances. But, the work can't stop there if we are to assure all students an equal opportunity to succeed at school. Teachers and student support staff must be prepared to design all facets of classrooms and what goes on schoolwide with a view to accommodating and assisting all students and especially those who are not motivationally ready and able to profit from the many instructional improvements being made.

**Students' feelings
of being part of the
school community
and cared for by the
members of that
community create
the conditions for
healthy development
and avoidance of
risk behavior.**

Blum, McNeely,
& Rinehart

Exhibit 1

A Synthesis of Principles/Guidelines Underlying Good Schools and Teaching*

The following is a synthesis of widely advocated guidelines that provide a sense of the rationale for school efforts to address barriers to development and learning and promote healthy development. It is organized around concerns for (1) stakeholders, (2) the teaching process, and (3) school and classroom climate.

- (1) With respect to *stakeholders*, good schools and good teaching
- employ a critical mass of high quality leadership and line staff who believe in what they are doing, value the search for understanding, see errors as valuable sources of learning, and pursue continuing education and self-renewal,
 - involve all staff and a wide range of other competent, energetic, committed and responsible stakeholders in planning, implementation, evaluation, and ongoing renewal,
 - identify staff who are not performing well and provide personalized capacity building opportunities, support, or other corrective remedies.
- (2) With respect to the *teaching process*, good schools and good teaching use the strengths and vital resources of all stakeholders to
- ensure the same high quality for all students,
 - formulate and effectively communicate goals, standards, and quality indicators for cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development,
 - facilitate continuous cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development and learning using procedures that promote active learning in-and out-of-school,
 - ensure use of comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches (e.g., approaches that are extensive and intensive enough to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and develop in healthy ways),
- make learning accessible to all students (including those at greatest risk and hardest-to-reach) through development of a full continuum of learning supports (i.e., an enabling component),
 - tailor processes so they are a good fit in terms of both motivation and capability and are no more intrusive and disruptive than is necessary for meeting needs and accounting for distinctive needs, resources, and other forms of diversity,
 - deal with students holistically and developmentally, as individuals and as part of a family, neighborhood, and community,
 - tailor appropriate measures for improving practices and for purposes of accountability.
- (3) With respect to school and classroom *climate*, good schools and good teaching
- delineate the rights and obligations of all stakeholders,
 - are guided by a commitment to social justice (equity) and to creating a sense of community,
 - ensure staff, students, family members, and all other stakeholders have the time, training, skills, and institutional and collegial support necessary to create an accepting and safe environment and build relationships of mutual trust, respect, equality, and appropriate risk-taking.
- And, in general, good schools and good teaching are experienced by all stakeholders as user friendly, flexibly implemented, and responsive.

*Synthesized from many sources including the vast research literature on good schools and good teaching; these sources overlap, but are not as restricted in their focus as the literature on effective schools and classrooms – see next Exhibit.

Exhibit 2

**A Synthesis of Characteristics of Effective Schools and Classrooms
that Account for *All Learners****

Effective Schools

- Commitment to shared vision of equality
 - >High expectations for student learning
 - >Emphasis on academic work that is meaningful to the student
- Daily implementation of effective processes
 - >Strong administrative leadership
 - >Alignment of resources to reach goals
 - >Professional development tied to goals
 - >Discipline and school order
 - >A sense of teamwork in the school
 - >Teacher participation in decision making
 - >Effective parental outreach and involvement
- Monitoring student progress through measured indicators of achievement
 - >Setting local standards
 - >Use of national standards
 - >Use of data for continuous improvement of school climate and curricula
- Optimizing school size through limited enrollment, creation of small schools within big schools (e.g., academies, magnet programs), and other ways of grouping students and staff
- Strong involvement with the community and with surrounding family of schools
 - >Students, families, and community are developed into a learning community
 - >Programs address transitions between grades, school, school-to-career, and higher education

*Synthesized from many sources including the vast research literature on effective schools and classrooms.

Effective Classrooms

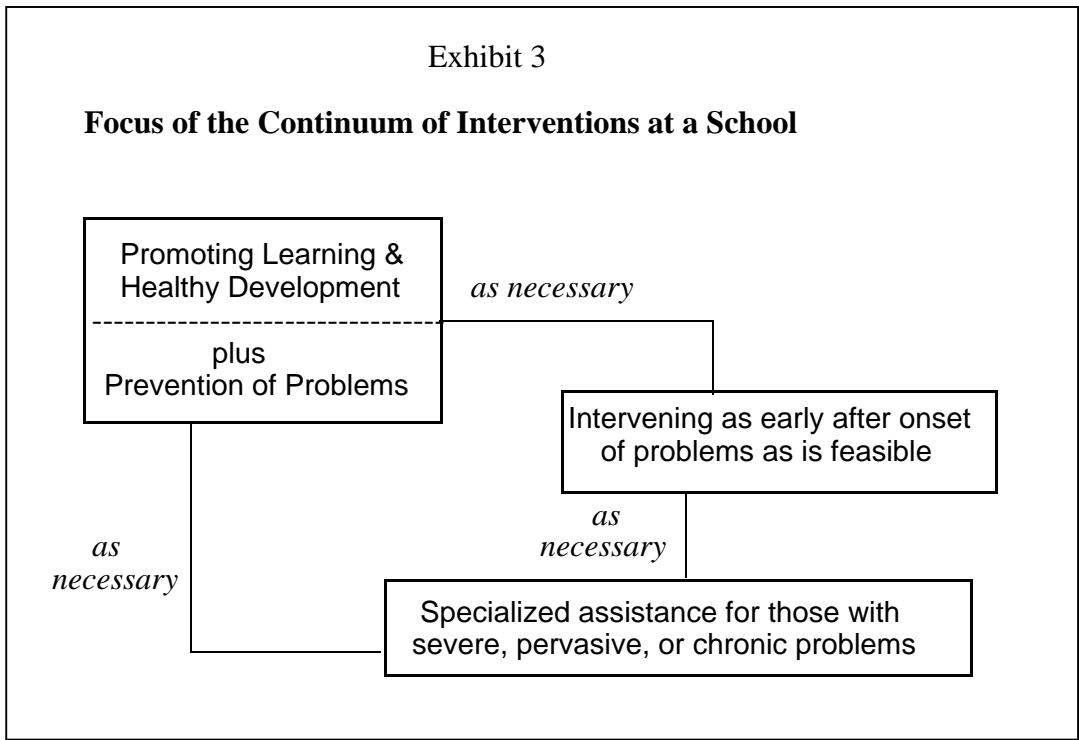
- Positive classroom social climate that
 - >personalizes contacts and supports in ways that build trust over time and meets learners where they are
 - >offers accommodation so all students have an equal opportunity to learn
 - >adjusts class size and groupings to optimize learning
 - >engages students through dialogue and decision making and seizing “teachable moments”
 - >incorporates parents in multiple ways
 - >addresses social-emotional development
- Designing and implementing quality instructional experiences that
 - >involve students in decision making
 - >contextualize and make learning authentic, including use of real life situations and mentors
 - >are appropriately cognitively complex and challenging
 - >enhance language/literacy
 - >foster joint student products
 - >extend the time students engage in learning through designing motivated practice
 - >ensure students learn how to learn and are prepared for lifelong learning
 - >ensure use of prereferral intervention strategies
 - >use a mix of methods and advanced technology to enhance learning
- Instruction is modified to meet students’ needs based on ongoing assessments using
 - >measures of multiple dimensions of impact
 - >authentic assessment tools
 - >students' input based on their self-evaluations
- Teachers collaborate and are supported with
 - >personalized inservice, consultation, mentoring, grade level teaming
 - >special resources who are available to come into the classroom to ensure students with special needs are accommodated appropriately

Framing the Work

A school that pursues equity of opportunity for all students strives to develop a full continuum of interventions. Such a continuum extends from (1) promoting assets and preventing problems, through (2) responding to problems as early as feasible after they appear, and extending on to (3) narrowly focused treatments and specialized help for severe/chronic problems (see Exhibit 3).

All the programs represented by the continuum are integrally related. Therefore, it seems likely that the impact of each can be exponentially increased through organizing them into subsystems and then integrating them as appropriate (Adelman & Taylor, 2006 a,b).

Focusing only on a continuum of intervention, however, is insufficient. It is necessary to organize programs and services into a circumscribed set of arenas reflecting the content purpose of the activity. Thus, pioneering efforts across the country not only are striving to develop a full continuum of programs and services, they are framing the content by clustering the work into a circumscribed set of arenas of intervention (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011b).



With respect to organizing content, in our work with schools we stress six clusters:

Good direct instruction is essential but insufficient to enhancing school climate

- Direct strategies to (a) facilitate instruction and (b) enable learning in the classroom (e.g., personalizing and improving instruction in general and specifically for students who have become disengaged from learning at school, with specialized assistance as necessary for those with mild-moderate learning and behavior problems; includes a focus on prevention, early intervening, and use of strategies such as response to intervention)
- Supports for transitions (e.g., assisting students and families as they negotiate school and grade changes and many other transitions)
- Increasing home and school connections
- Responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises
- Increasing community involvement and support (outreach to develop greater community involvement and support, including enhanced use of volunteers)
- Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed.

When school personnel demonstrate respect for students and seek their input in developing rules and policies, students experience fewer risk behaviors, such as substance use and violence.

Hopson & Lee

As illustrated in Exhibit 4, the result of combining the continuum and the six arena example is a unifying, comprehensive, and cohesive framework that captures many of the multifaceted concerns schools, families, and neighborhoods must address each day (e.g., see Adelman & Taylor, 2006a,b; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2008).

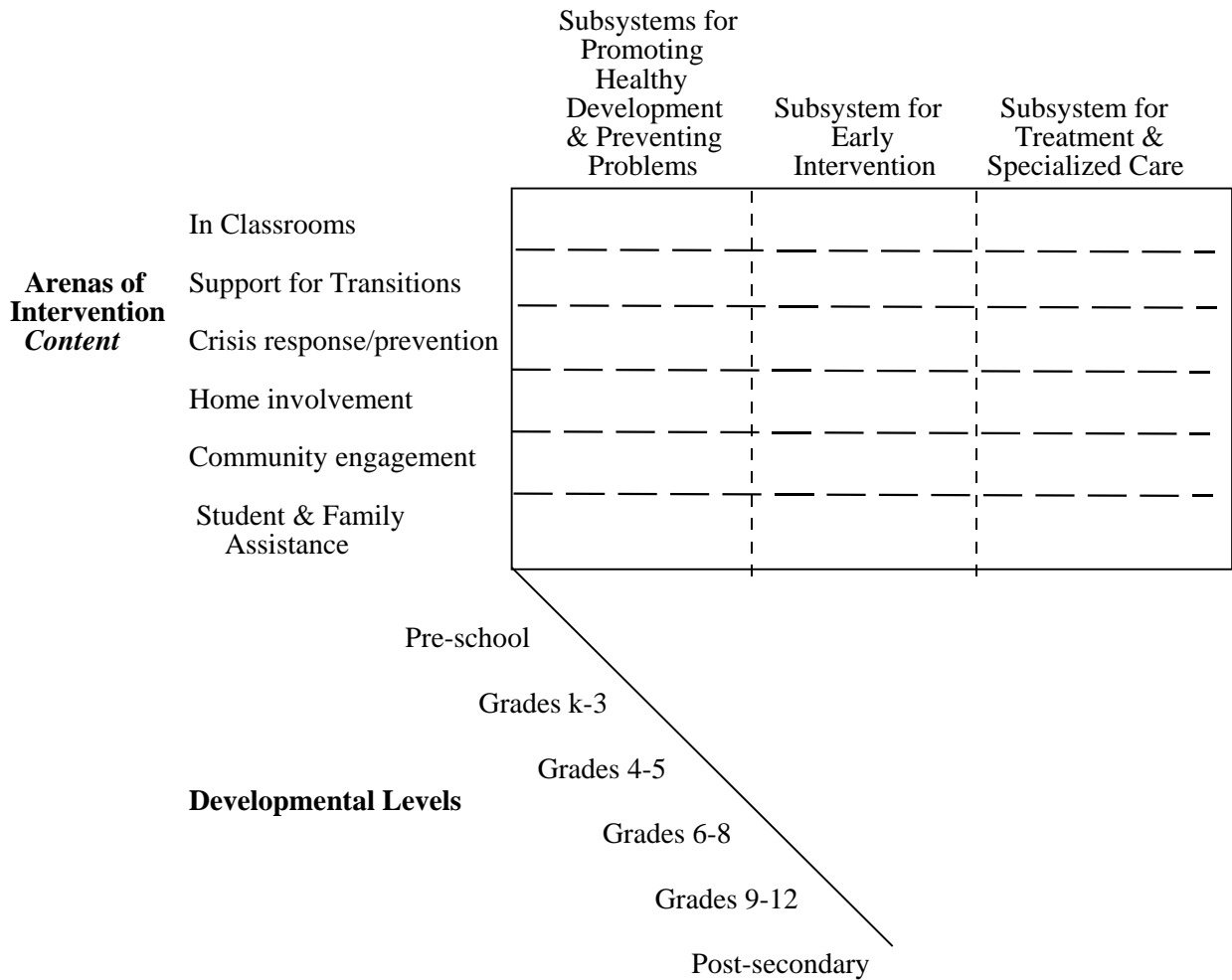
This framework can be used to weave together school, home, and community resources in ways that enhance effectiveness, achieve economies of scale, and provide a base for leveraging additional financial support. (For a quick outline of the focus in each of the six arenas, go to <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/6arenas.pdf>)

Note: As a guidance resource for intervention capacity building, the basic matrix illustrated in Exhibit 4 is formatted as a tool for mapping and analyzing resources to fill gaps, enhance cost-effectiveness, and plan priorities for system development. See <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

Exhibit 4

A Unifying Intervention Framework to Aid Schools, Families, and Neighborhoods in Providing a Comprehensive and Cohesive System of Supports

Integrated Intervention *Subsystems*



Some Special Concerns

Improving schools requires a critical mass of stakeholders who feel like valued members contributing to the collective identity, destiny, and vision and who are committed to being and working together in supportive ways. Some straightforward considerations for capacity building include enhancing a school’s culture of *caring and nurturance* and *collaboration and collegiality*.

Caring and nurturance begin with welcoming and providing social support. An ongoing welcoming and supportive culture sets the stage

for collaboration and collegiality. And as Hargreaves and others have noted, collaboration and collegiality are fundamental to morale and work satisfaction and to the whole enterprise of transforming schools to meet the needs of individuals and society. *Collaborative cultures* foster collaborative working relationships which are spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable. Note, however, collegiality cannot be mandated. When it is *mandated*, the result often is *contrived collegiality* which tends to breed inflexibility and inefficiency. Contrived collegiality is administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable (Hargreaves, 1994).

Given the importance of home involvement in schooling, attention also must be paid to creating a caring atmosphere for family members. Increased home involvement is more likely if families feel welcome and have access to social support at school. Thus, teachers and other school staff need to establish a program that effectively welcomes and connects families with school staff and other families to generate ongoing social support and greater participation in home involvement efforts.

The aim in all this is to promote feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness

Also, just as with students and their families, school staff need to feel truly welcome and socially supported. Rather than leaving this to chance, a caring school develops and institutionalizes a program to welcome and connect new staff with those with whom they will be working. And it does so in ways that effectively weaves newcomers into the organization.

Another specific focus is on barriers that can get in the way of stakeholders working together. Problems related to working relationships are a given. To minimize such problems, it is important for participants to understand barriers to working relationships and for sites to establish effective problem solving mechanisms to eliminate or at least minimize such barriers.

The aim in all this is to promote feelings of competence, self-determination, and connectedness (e.g. Deci, 2009; Deci & Flaste, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1985; National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2009). Such feelings and attitudes are engendered by ensuring there are mechanisms and strategies that effectively provide support, promote self-efficacy, and foster positive relationships. The degree to which a school can create the desired atmosphere seems highly related to its capacity to prevent and ameliorate learning, behavior, and emotional problems. And, an obvious connection exists between all this and sustaining morale and minimizing burnout.

A Note About Creating a Caring Context for Learning

By this point, it should be evident that creating a caring context for learning requires considerable commitment on the part of all concerned. Teaching can be done in any context. Whenever a surrounding environment tries to promote learning, the process can be called teaching. Teaching occurs at school, at home, and in the community at large. It may be formalized or informally transmitted. Teaching in no way guarantees that learning will take place. Teaching in an uncaring way probably does guarantee problems will arise.

From a psychological perspective, learning and teaching are experienced most positively when the learner cares about learning and the teacher cares about teaching. *Moreover, the whole process benefits greatly when all the participants care about each other.* Thus, good schools and good teachers work diligently to create an atmosphere that encourages mutual support, caring, and a sense of community. Such an atmosphere can play a key role in preventing learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems and promoting social and emotional learning and well-being.

Caring has moral, social, and personal facets. And when all facets of caring are present and balanced, they can nurture individuals and facilitate the process of learning. At the same time, caring in all its dimensions should be a major focus of what is taught and learned. This means a focus throughout on fostering positive socio-emotional and physical development.

Caring begins when students (and their families) first arrive at a school. Classrooms and schools can do their job better if students feel they are truly welcome and have a range of social supports. A key facet of welcoming encompasses effectively connecting new students with peers and adults who can provide social support and advocacy.

On an ongoing basis, caring and a positive school climate are best maintained through use of personalized instruction, regular student conferences, activity fostering social and emotional development, and opportunities for students to attain positive status. Efforts to create a caring classroom climate benefit from programs for cooperative learning, peer tutoring, mentoring, advocacy, peer counseling and mediation, human relations, and conflict resolution. Special attention is needed to promote practices that enhance motivation to learn and perform, while avoiding practices that decrease motivation and/or produce avoidance motivation and that focuses on mobilizing unmotivated students (and particularly those who have become actively disengaged from classroom instruction). Clearly, a myriad of strategies can contribute to students feeling positively connected to the classroom and school.

A special problem that arises in caring communities are rescue dynamics. Such dynamics arise when caring and helping go astray, when those helping become frustrated and angry because those being helped don't respond in desired ways or seem not to be trying. It is important to minimize such dynamics by establishing procedures that build on motivational readiness and personalized interventions.

Concluding Comments

Considerable research stresses the impact of school climate. Given the correlational nature of school and classroom climate research, however, cause and effect interpretations remain speculative. Big questions remain to be answered (e.g., Are there specific environment or climate features that impact student outcomes? How much of the effect is due to reducing stressors? What are the specific implications for policy and practice?).

Ultimately, all stakeholders have a significant role to play in ensuring schools change in ways that enhance school climate and account for the full range of students and other key stakeholders at a school. It seems unlikely, however, that all this can be attained in the absence of a fundamental shift in school improvement policy and practice.

Current policy and plans for turning around, transforming, and continuously improving schools are too limited because they focus mainly on improving instruction and how schools manage resources. This state of affairs deemphasizes the necessity for directly addressing barriers to learning and teaching and re-engaging disconnected students as a primary facet of improving schools, enhancing school climate, and ensuring all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school.

As our research stresses, the essential shift needed in school improvement policy and practice is a move from the prevailing two- to a three- component functional framework. The third component provides a unifying concept and umbrella for developing a comprehensive system to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students (see Adelman & Taylor, 2006a; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2011c).

Clearly, enhancing school and classroom climate is a demanding process. At the same time, it is clear that leaving things as they are is not an option. A shift in school improvement policy and practices is essential in meeting society's commitment to public education, public health, and civil rights.

How was school today?



*Well, if it's true we learn from our mistakes,
I had a great day!*

Note: This article is an excerpt from the Center report entitled: *Designing School Improvement to Enhance Classroom Climate for All Students* <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/climate.pdf>

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