

Enhancing Student/Learning Supports in Classrooms

This report focuses on redesigning classrooms to facilitate teaching, alleviate problems, and promote good learning and healthy development. Primary concerns are to prevent and respond quickly to learning, behavior, and emotional problems and reengage students who have become disengaged from learning at school. A key facet of the redesign is enabling in-classroom collaborations between the teacher and others (e.g., student and learning support staff, teacher colleagues, aides, volunteers) to

- >ensure instruction is personalized in ways that enhance intrinsic motivation and social-emotional development
- >provide learning accommodations and special assistance as necessary
- >use response to intervention in applying special assistance
- >address external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening

Properly implemented, the redesign should stem the tide of unnecessary referrals for out-of-class special assistance and special education, reduce opportunity and achievement gaps, and improve classroom and schoolwide climate.

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Enhancing Student/Learning Supports in Classrooms

Classrooms are a first line of defense in addressing factors that interfere with learning and teaching. But teachers can't and shouldn't be expected to provide this defense alone. Enhancing student/learning supports in classrooms is essential and is a key facet of improving school climate and enhancing equity of opportunity for student success at school and beyond.

In recent years, schools have focused on building better and better systems for *screening and referring* students for special assistance. Not surprisingly, the result is more and more referrals for special services. In some schools, there are so many referrals that case review committees are overwhelmed. In the wake of COVID-19, increased concern about learning, behavior, and emotional problems is likely to increase the number of referrals.

To stem the tide of unnecessary referrals, schools committed to the success of all children must be redesigned so that teachers, student support staff, and others at the school can help students as early as feasible when a problem is apparent. One focus for redesign is the classroom. In doing so, improving instruction is necessary, but it is not sufficient when it comes to teaching students who are experiencing external or internal challenges that inhibit learning. And, of course, there clearly are limits to what a teacher can do working alone in a classroom.

This report focuses on redesigning classrooms to facilitate teaching, alleviate problems, and promote good learning and healthy development. Primary concerns are to prevent and respond quickly to learning, behavior, and emotional problems and reengage students who have become disengaged from learning at school. A key facet of the redesign is enabling in-classroom collaborations between the teacher and others (e.g., student and learning support staff, teacher colleagues, aides, volunteers) who can provide supports to

- >ensure instruction is personalized in ways that enhance intrinsic motivation and social-emotional development for all students and especially those manifesting mild-moderate learning and behavior problems
- >provide learning accommodations and special assistance as necessary
- >use response to intervention in applying special assistance
- >address external barriers with a focus on prevention and early intervening

Properly implemented, the redesign should stem the tide of unnecessary referrals for out-of-class special assistance and special education, reduce opportunity and achievement gaps, and improve classroom and schoolwide climate. Referrals, of course, will still need to be made for specialized services if classroom-based supports are insufficient.

Prevailing Situation

In mapping and analyzing the prevailing state of the art with respect to how classrooms address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students, we find the following:

- (1) Teaching is organized at most schools in ways that presume classroom teachers can do the job alone.
- (2) More attention is needed to fostering stimulating and caring, as well as manageable learning environments.
- (3) Efforts to personalize instruction mainly are interpreted in terms of using technology and are not adequately differentiating instruction with respect to motivational differences.
- (4) Classrooms are not focusing enough on promoting intrinsic motivation, preventing problems, responding as soon as feasible after problems arise, and providing appropriate special assistance when students display specific problems.

(5) Teachers' professional development has not effectively prepared them with respect to understanding intrinsic motivation, and this contributes to a tendency to overrely on rewards and punishment in their teaching and classroom management practices and to approach differentiated instruction in too limited a manner.

(6) Classrooms are not designed to provide effective first responder special assistance for a student and family when needed, and this results in over-referrals for specialized services.

All this hinders and undermines efforts to increase equity of opportunity for success at school and beyond. Moreover, these conditions contribute to the type of psychological reactance among students that generates behavior and emotional problems and works against reengaging disconnected students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need to account for a wider range of individual differences, foster a caring context, and prevent and handle many more problems when they arise. Enhancing student/learning supports in classrooms is an important facet of meeting these needs(see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

Key Facets of Enhancing Learning Supports in Classrooms

- **Reframing the approach to classroom instruction to enhance teacher capability to prevent and intervene as soon after problems arise and reduce need for out-of-class referrals** (e.g. personalizing instruction; providing special assistance in the classroom; developing small group and independent learning options; facilitating social-emotional development; reducing negative interactions; minimizing over-reliance on social control; expanding the range of curricular and instructional options and choices; systematic use of response to intervention to identify effective special assistance and, if necessary, to make appropriate referrals for specialized interventions)
- **Opening the classroom door to invite in various forms of collaboration, support, and personalized professional development** (e.g., increasing co-teaching and team teaching; teachers collaborating with student/learning support staff in the classroom; using volunteers in targeted ways to enhance social and academic support; bringing in mentors; creating a learning community focused on intrinsic motivation concepts, including their application to schooling, how to minimize use of rewards and punishment, and how to reengage students who have become disengaged from classroom learning)
- **Enhancing the capability of student and learning supports staff and others to team with teachers in the classroom** (e.g., enhancing student support staff understanding of personalized instruction and how to work as colleagues in the classroom with teachers and others to enhance success for all students)
- **Providing a broad range of curricular and enrichment opportunities** (e.g., instructional content and processes that stimulate interest and personal engagement, a variety of enriching options that students have open access to and can make personal choices)
- **Contributing to a positive climate in the classroom and school-wide** (e.g., enhancing feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to others at school; reducing threats to such feelings; ensuring staff have good professional and social supports; providing for effective conflict resolution)

Redesigning Classrooms

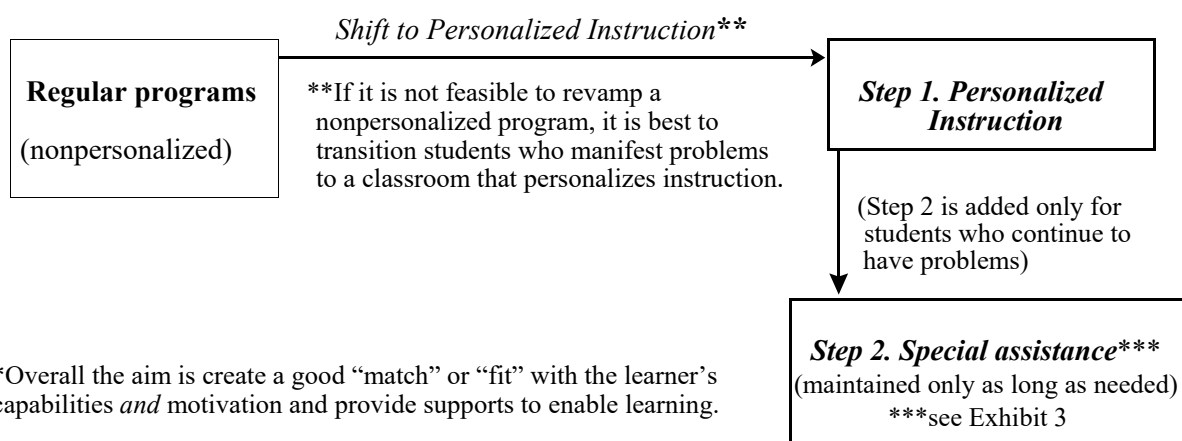
Given that the way a classroom setting is arranged and instruction is organized can help or hinder learning and teaching, considerable attention has been paid to classroom design. Research on best practices emphasizes learning environments where students and teachers feel safe, comfortable, positively stimulated, and well-supported in pursuing the learning objectives of the day.

Classroom redesign is meant to enhance good teaching and learning. For us, this involves addressing the matters outlined in Exhibit 1. For example, we emphasize enabling teachers to personalize and blend instruction for all students, provide a greater range of accommodations and enrichment options, and add special assistance in the context of implementing “Response to Intervention (RtI).” From a motivational perspective, the emphasis is on active learning (e.g., authentic, problem-based, and discovery learning; projects, learning centers, enrichment opportunities) and reducing negative interactions and overreliance on social control disciplinary practices. Big classes are transformed into a set of smaller workgroups by using small group and independent learning options. And collaborative in-classroom instruction and special assistance are the norm. (Note the commonalities with Universal Design for Learning principles.) Properly implemented, such changes can be expected to increase the effectiveness of regular classroom instruction, prevent problems, support inclusionary policies, and reduce the need for specialized services.

Exhibit 2 illustrates a prototype framework for enabling good teaching by personalizing instruction and enhancing special assistance in the classroom. The approach is sequential and hierarchical. It reflects research indicating that “meeting students where they are” often is defined too narrowly. That is, differentiated instruction in most regular classrooms mainly focuses on individual differences in students’ developmental capabilities and doesn’t pay enough systemic attention to differences in motivation, especially intrinsic motivation. And, too little is done within classrooms to follow-up with special assistance when students manifest problems.

Exhibit 2

Prototype Framework for Enabling Good Teaching*



First Step:
*Personalize
Instruction*

In the 1960s, at UCLA we initiated a focus on a personalized approach to learning as fundamental to effective teaching and to preventing and correcting learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Since then, we have continued to develop and apply the approach.

Based on a reciprocal determinist understanding of learning and behavior, we conceive personalized *learning* as nonlinear (e.g., dynamic, transactional, spiraling). Similarly, personalized *instruction* is a dynamic, transactional, and spiraling process that strives to create a good "match" or "fit" with each learner and, by doing so, enhance equity of opportunity for success at school for students.

Defining Personalization. As essential as it is to attend to differences in capability, motivational differences often are of primary concern in creating a good fit, especially for students manifesting problems. We all know individuals who have learned much more than we anticipated because they were highly motivated; and we certainly know others who learn and perform poorly when they are not invested in the work.

So, our definition of personalization emphasizes that it is the process of accounting for individual differences in *both capability and motivation*. Furthermore, from a psychological perspective, we stress that it is a *learner's perception* that determines whether the instructional "fit" or "match" is good or bad. Given this, personalizing instruction means ensuring conditions for learning are perceived by the learner as good ways to attain goals s/he wants to reach. Thus, a basic intervention concern is that of eliciting learners' perceptions of how well what is offered matches both their interests and abilities. *This has fundamental implications for all efforts to assess students and manage behavior.*

Personalized instruction is intended to enhance learning and to prevent many learning and behavior problems. And, it provides an essential foundation for ameliorating learning, behavior, and emotional problems. Indeed, just providing a student with a personalized program may be sufficient to reverse some problems. Other problems, of course, need something more. As highlighted in Exhibit 2 and discussed below, "something more" is Step 2 *special assistance*.

What Does it Take to Personalize a Classroom? We find that, first of all, the teacher must expect and value individual differences in learners' motivation and development. As to process, the emphasis on motivation stresses offering valued options for learning and then encouraging and helping a student make decisions among the alternatives. There is a continuous focus on maintaining a youngster's perception of a good match in terms of learning activities and structure. As new information about what is and isn't a good match becomes available, plans are revised.

Transitioning to personalized classroom instruction involves developing an appropriate variety of learning options, facilitating student understanding of personalized instruction, and establishing ways for some students to work independently and in small cooperative groups while others are receiving one-to-one and small-group instruction. (see *Personalizing Learning and Addressing Barriers to Learning* online at

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/personalizeI.pdf>.)

In sum, *personalized instruction* is designed to ensure a student *perceives* instructional processes, content, and outcomes as a good match with his or her interests and capabilities.

- A first emphasis is on *motivation*. Practices focus on (re)engaging the student in classroom instruction, with special attention paid to increasing intrinsic motivation, minimizing psychological reactance, and fostering positive attitudes.
- Matching *developmental capabilities* is a parallel concern. Practices focus on accounting for current knowledge and skills.

Personalization: Don't Make it Another Buzzword

After years of being bandied about, the term personalization is coming to the policy forefront in the U.S., the United Kingdom, Canada, and beyond. With the increasing use of the term in U.S. federal policy, there is a tendency just to adopt it in place of terms such as individualized and differentiated instruction. This tendency has been bolstered by the growing emphasis on using technology in teaching, which sometimes is described as personalized instruction.

Despite some ongoing controversies, few argue against the goal of personalization – which is to help schools function better in addressing the diverse needs and interests students bring each day. There is also agreement that new technologies can be helpful to a degree in accomplishing the goal. And, there is agreement that improved forms of formative assessments are an important element.

In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education included the following definition in its national technology plan:

“Personalization refers to instruction that is paced to learning needs, tailored to learning preferences, and tailored to the specific interests of different learners. In an environment that is fully personalized, the learning objectives and content as well as the method and pace may all vary (so personalization encompasses differentiation and individualization).”
<http://www.ed.gov/technology/netp-2010/learning-engage-and-empower>

As part of a series of special reports on the topic, Education Week issued *Taking Stock of Personalized Learning* in 2014. That report highlighted recent definitional efforts and some ongoing issues.

http://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/personalized-learning-special-report-2014/index.html?intc=EW-PLSR_10.22-EML

Unfortunately, discussions of personalized learning often leave the impression that the process is mainly about incorporating technological innovations. For the most part, the discussions also fail to place personalized learning within the context of other conditions that must be improved in classrooms and school-wide to address factors interfering with student learning and performance.

Indiscriminate use of the term personalization turns it into yet one more buzzword, rather than a fundamental move beyond individualized instruction in the unending quest for improving how we meet learners where they are.

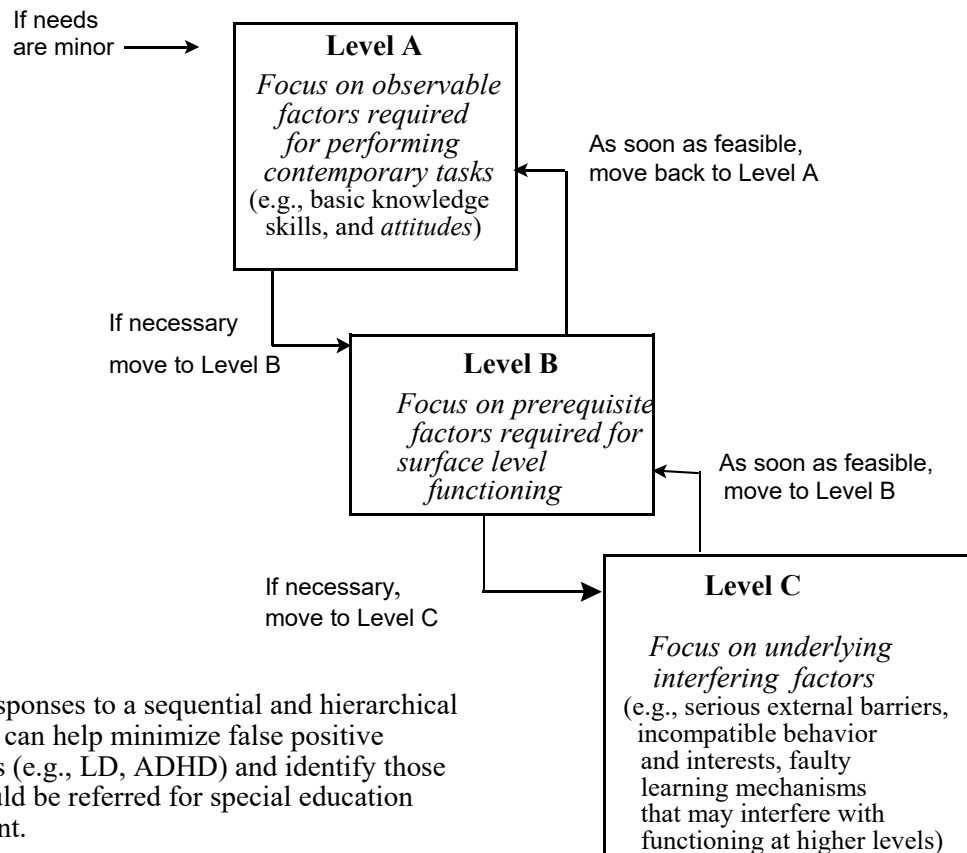
**Second Step:
Special Assistance
in the Classroom
(as needed)**

When students require more than personalized instruction, addressing the problem quickly is essential. As illustrated in Exhibit 3, this involves special intervention. Such intervention builds on the foundation laid by personalized instruction and on assessing a student's responses to personalized instruction. As appropriate and feasible, special assistance begins in the classroom; referrals for out-of-classroom assistance are made only as necessary.

Exhibit 3

Special Assistance Sequence and Hierarchy

Step 2 is introduced as necessary using best practices for special assistance (remediation, rehabilitation, treatment). These are applied differentially for minor and severe problems.



In keeping with the principle of using the least intervention necessary (e.g., doing what is needed in ways that are least intrusive, restrictive, disruptive), step 2 stresses different *levels* of *special* intervention and the following hierarchical approach to their application:

- for students with minor problems, Level A teaching maintains a direct focus on readily observable problems that are interfering with classroom learning and performance

- for students who continue to have problems, it often is necessary to move Level B to teach prerequisites (e.g., readiness attitudes, knowledge, and skills) that haven't been learned; then move back to Level A once prerequisites are acquired
- when interventions at Levels A and B don't ameliorate the problem, the focus shifts to assessing underlying factors that may be interfering with learning and performance; if correction is not possible, the emphasis is on amelioration of symptoms, teaching compensatory strategies, and ensuring necessary accommodations for learning at Levels A and B.

Students with severe and chronic problems require attention at all three levels.

More on the sequential and hierarchical approach is presented in *Addressing barriers to learning: In the classroom and schoolwide*.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html .

Motivation:
 A Primary
 Concern
 Throughout
 Both Steps

Motivation is a constant concern for any intervention. Good practice strives to (a) ensure motivational readiness, (b) enhance motivation during learning, (c) increase intrinsic motivation as an outcome, and (d) minimize conditions that decrease engagement in the process.

With respect to both personalization and special assistance, an understanding of intrinsic motivation clarifies that it is essential to avoid practices that limit options and decision making and that make students feel controlled and coerced. Restricting the focus mainly to “remediating” problems cuts students off from experiences that enhance good feelings about learning at school. Overemphasis on controlling behavior produces psychological reactance. Overreliance on extrinsic motivation risks undermining efforts to enhance intrinsic motivation and can produce avoidance reactions. All this can reduce opportunities for positive learning and for development of positive attitudes. Over time, such practices result in too many students disengaging from classroom learning.

In contrast, practices that capitalize on intrinsic motivation enable and support learning. Such practices offer a broad range of content, significant enrichment opportunities, and procedural options, including a personalized structure to support and guide learning. The focus on intrinsic motivation also stresses the importance of developing nonthreatening ways to provide ongoing information about learning and performance.

Enrichment Opportunities and Student Engagement. Enrichment activities increase the possibilities for creating a good motivational match and for facilitating learning, development, and remediation. Enrichment embellishes the classroom and school environment and increases the likelihood that students will discover new interests, information, and skills through exploration, inquiry, discovery, and recreation. The activities can play a role in preventing, minimizing, and overcoming school and individual problems. In some cases, the experiences lead to lifelong interests or careers.

Because enrichment often is viewed as nice, but optional, it is not surprising when such activities are overlooked in discussing school engagement. And, because youngsters who manifest learning, behavior, and emotional problems are seen as needing all the time available in order to deal with their problems and “catch up,” they often experience fewer enrichment opportunities.

Well-designed and structured enrichment activities are basic to encouraging proactive behavior and engagement. As an integral part of daily classroom time, we see it as a mistake to use them as a behavior modification strategy (i.e., offered as rewards and withdrawn as punishment).

Because they are seen as extra-curricular and often offered afterschool, the impact of enrichment experiences is not separated out in assessing academic progress. It is a reasonable assumption, however, that such experiences make a significant contribution to a student's sense of value and joy and feelings of competence, self-determination, and affiliation with significant others. And they can help reengage a student in classroom instruction.

Schoolwide Enrichment Activities. Among enrichment offerings at schools are activities related to the arts, science, computers, athletics, student government, school newspapers and may include participation in clubs, exhibitions, performances, service learning programs, and competitions. Such activities often are more attractive and intriguing than those offered in the regular classroom curriculum. In part, this is because they are not required, and individuals can seek out those that match their interests and abilities.

Offered before school, they can bring students to school early and thus reduce tardies. Offered at lunch, they can reduce the incidence of harassment and other negative interactions. After school, they provide alternatives to antisocial interactions in the community.

Where Does Response to Intervention Fit as a Learning Support?

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a prominently advocated strategy in efforts to address learning problems as soon as they arise. The process involves analyses of authentic responses made to instruction and other interventions designed to address problems. Such analyses consider (a) motivational as well as developmental considerations and (b) whether the problem requires a deeper look. It explores such concerns as:

Does the problem stem from the student not having acquired readiness skills? Does it arise from "critical student dispositions" that have produced avoidance motivation to curricula content and instructional processes? What accommodations and interventions are needed to ameliorate the student's problems? And, when problems persist, what other external and internal factors must be considered?

Using response to intervention to clarify such matters fits well with the classroom approach that first *personalizes* instruction and then assesses learning and behavior problems using a hierarchical set of interventions.

Implementing response to intervention effectively is best accomplished through collaborative actions. For more, see *Response to Intervention*

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/rtii.pdf>).

Opening the Classroom Door to Enhance Student/Learning Supports

As former teacher Claudia Graziano related in an *Edutopia* article:

New teachers, however naive and idealistic, often know before they enter the profession that the salaries are paltry, the class sizes large, and the supplies scant. What they don't know is how little support . . . they can expect once the door is closed and the textbooks are opened.

The point seems evident: Teachers need a system of supports in the classroom and schoolwide to help when students are not responding effectively to instruction. This means classrooms and schools need to have a more open-door policy, albeit one that keeps schools safe.

Opening the classroom door can enhance student support, staff development, and outcomes. The crux of the matter is to ensure in-class collaborations. Collaboration and teaming are key to facilitating personalized instruction and special assistance, creating a stimulating and manageable learning environment, and generally addressing barriers to learning and teaching. To further enhance engagement and learning, opening the doors provides opportunities to broaden the range of enrichment activities by inviting in community colleagues and volunteers who have special knowledge, skills, and talents.

Collaboration also provides an avenue to improving personalized on-the-job professional development for teachers and student support staff. These professionals have much to teach each other. For example, student support staff (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, social workers, nurses) have specialized expertise. Their training prepares them to provide targeted direct assistance and support to students and their families. Currently, they tend to offer what they know through consultation with colleagues which is viewed by them as a form of collaboration. However, effective collaboration with teachers involves much more than consultation and making recommendations. It encompasses learning from teachers about classroom teaching and then working with teachers in their classrooms to improve how classroom design and practices can more effectively address learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

Personnel preparation programs for student/learning supports staff generally do not prepare them to work in classrooms, and teacher preparation programs do not teach how to collaborate with and learn from such staff in the classroom. So, for such collaboration to become the norm, preparation programs must expand to encompass an emphasis on teaming and mutual learning in the classroom.

In sum, opening the doors to enhance in-classroom collaboration expands what can be done to enable classroom instruction and learning and enhance equity of opportunity. Such teaming can help incorporate practices that engage and accommodate students who are not doing well and those with special needs.

A Note About the Role of Technology

When schools closed because of the COVID-10 pandemic, technology became indispensable. And this led some advocates of enhancing equity of opportunity to suggest transforming public education on a technological foundation.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jeanneallen/2020/03/13/how-technological-innovation-in-education-is-taking-on-covid-19/#22ea6a2a7bc7>

The problem with *overemphasizing* technology as a solution to educational inequities is that it *overrelies* on the belief that directly delivering instruction is sufficient. That is, the approach woefully ignores the need to address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students (and families).

Advanced technology *does offer tools* for improving almost every facet of efforts to address barriers to learning and promote healthy development. Technology is expanding, exponentially; the possibilities seem endless. Building on technology as tools for aiding all students, classrooms especially need to be more versatile in working effectively with students who are not quite as ready as others in terms of their motivational readiness and current capabilities.

Clearly, even before COVID-19, a brave new world has emerged. There is much for all of us to learn about advanced technological applications. We all need to grasp the big picture and develop a plan and an agenda for integrating such applications into the daily efforts to enhance the development, learning and general well-being of all students.

For a general overview of the use of technology in teaching and learning, see <https://www.ed.gov/oii-news/use-technology-teaching-and-learning>

For examples of using interactive technology to assist in addressing barriers to learning, see <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/technol.pdf>

Potential Impact of Classroom Redesign on School Climate

In practice, school and classroom climates range from hostile or toxic to caring and supportive and can fluctuate daily and over the school year. The impact on students and staff can be beneficial or another barrier to learning and teaching.

Well-designed classrooms should stem the tide of unnecessary referrals for out-of-class special assistance and special education and reduce the opportunity and achievement gaps. Such outcomes are essential to making fundamental improvements in classroom and schoolwide climate.

Research generally notes that school and classroom climate are significantly related to matters such as student engagement, behavior, self-efficacy, achievement, and social and emotional development, principal leadership style, stages of educational reform, teacher burnout, and overall quality of school life. For example, studies report strong associations between achievement levels and classrooms that are perceived as having greater cohesion and goal-direction and less disorganization and conflict. Research also suggests the impact of classroom and school climate may be greater on students from low-income homes and groups that are discriminated against.

Each individual at a school has a personal view of the climate in a classroom and schoolwide. That view reflects the degree to which the setting is seen as enhancing or threatening the individual's feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to significant others in the setting and is further influenced by what others in the setting communicate about the climate.

A Couple of Notes About Classroom and School Climate

- Given the correlational nature of school climate research, cause and effect interpretations remain speculative. The broader body of organizational research does indicate the profound role accountability pressures play in shaping organizational climate. Thus, it is likely that increasing demands for higher achievement test scores and control of student behavior contribute to a school climate that is reactive, over-controlling, and over-reliant on external reinforcement to motivate positive functioning. Regardless of the current status of research, understanding the nature of classroom and school climate is a basic element in improving schools, and learning supports are a basic component in enhancing creating and maintaining a positive climate.
- Classroom and school climate sometimes are referred to as the learning environment or the supportive learning environment, as well as by terms such as atmosphere, ambience, ecology, milieu, conditions for learning. It generally is acknowledged that the climate is a temporal, and somewhat fluid, perceived quality which emerges from the complex transaction of many factors and reflects the influence of the underlying, institutionalized values and belief systems, norms, ideologies, rituals, and traditions that constitute the school culture. And, of course, the climate and culture at a school are affected by the surrounding political, social, cultural, and economic contexts (e.g., home, neighborhood, city, state, country).

Concluding Comments

Enhancing learning supports in classrooms is essential to accounting effectively for a wider range of individual differences by (1) personalizing instruction and (2) providing special assistance *in situ*. Classroom-based learning supports not only overlap regular instructional efforts and enrichment opportunities, they add value to prevailing efforts to improve instruction and ameliorate learning, behavior, and emotional problems. In addition to enabling student academic performance, such collaborative efforts are an important facet of bringing a broad and informed focus on mental health concerns into the classroom.

Properly designed and implemented, classroom-based learning supports can prevent problems, facilitate intervening as soon as problems are noted, enhance intrinsic motivation for learning, and reengage disconnected students. They also can reduce the number of unnecessary referrals for specialized services. Accomplishing such objectives can facilitate student and staff well-being and foster the emergence of a positive climate for learning in a classroom.

Moving forward requires systemic changes that make it feasible for teachers and student/learning support staff, and others, to work together in the classroom. Such changes include (a) opening the classroom door to enhance collaboration and personalized professional development related to learning supports and (b) enhancing the capabilities of student and learning supports staff and teachers to team with each other in the classroom.

For more specific examples of ways to enhance
Classroom-based Learning Supports,
see the self-study survey at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/classroomsurvey.pdf>

For Free and Easily Accessed Online Resources Related to
Classroom-based Learning Supports
See our Center's Quick Find on
Classroom-Based Learning Supports
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/classenable.htm>

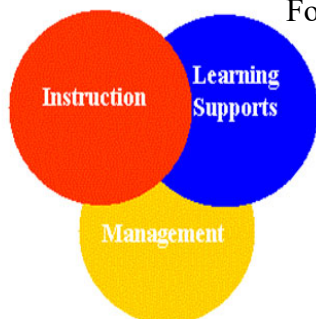
NOTE: In addition to classroom-related supports, a schoolwide framework for student/learning supports includes five other domains that function across a continuum of intervention. The other domains are

- Supporting transitions
- Increasing home connections to the school
- Increasing community involvement and collaborative engagement
- Responding to, and where feasible, preventing crises
- Facilitating student and family access to effective services and special assistance as needed

The six domains were generated by research that clustered and categorized the large variety of school-based student and learning supports. The prototype intervention framework consisting of the continuum of interventions and six domains captures the essence of the multifaceted ways schools are trying to address barriers to learning. The framework provides a foundation for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports.

For a detailed presentation, see
Addressing barriers to learning: in the classroom and schoolwide.
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Also see related topics listed on the Center's Quick Find menu at
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm>



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 promoting whole child development, advancing social justice, and enhancing learning and a positive school climate.

Appendix

A Few Words about Transforming Disciplinary Practices

Clearly, managing learning requires order in the classroom. Misbehavior disrupts; it may be hurtful; it may disinhibit others. When a student misbehaves, a natural reaction is to want that youngster to experience and other students to see the consequences of misbehaving. A hope is that public awareness of consequences will deter subsequent problems. As a result, schools spend considerable time and resources on *discipline* – often discussed in the broader concept of *classroom management*. To minimize misbehavior, schools stress the importance of student self-discipline and employ a variety of external disciplinary and social control practices. The latter include some practices that model behaviors which foster (rather than counter) development of negative values.

In schools, short of suspending the individual, punishment essentially takes the form of a decision to do something to students that they do not want done. In addition, a demand for future compliance usually is made, along with threats of harsher punishment if compliance is not forthcoming. And, the discipline may be administered in ways that suggest a student is an undesirable person. As students get older, suspension increasingly comes into play. Indeed, suspension remains one of the most common disciplinary responses for the transgressions of secondary students.

As often happens with reactive procedures, the benefits of using punishment to control behavior are offset by negative consequences. These include increased negative attitudes toward school and school personnel which often lead to anti-social acts and mental health problems. Disciplinary procedures also are associated with the school dropout problem. It is not surprising, then, that some concerned professionals refer to extreme disciplinary practices as "pushout" strategies.

Dropouts or Pushouts?

Increasing pressures for school improvements seem to have the negative consequence of creating policies and practices that in effect cleanse the rolls of troubled and troubling students and anyone else who may compromise the progress of other students and keep achievement score averages from rising. Examples are seen in zero tolerance policies, the end of social promotion, and the backlash to special education and to equity of opportunity.

The following excerpt from a resolution by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students was directed at zero tolerance policies but highlights some basic concerns about how schools handle behavior problems. They state that many approaches implement ... *predetermined, harsh and immediate consequences for a growing list of infractions resulting in long-term or permanent exclusion from public school, regardless of the circumstances, and often without due process. ... such policies are more likely to result in increased drop-out rates and long-term negative consequences for children and communities. ... such policies have a disparate impact on children of color, and do not result in safe schools and communities. ... alternatives to such policies could more effectively reduce the incidence of violence and disruption in our schools, including but not limited to: (1) creating positive, engaging school environments; (2) provision of positive behavioral supports to students; (3) appropriate pre-and in-service development for teachers; and (4) incorporating social problem-solving skills into the curriculum for all students.*

Addressing Misbehavior

With the growing awareness that widely used discipline practices are insufficient and often counterproductive, advocates for a more positive approach have called for greater emphasis on prevention by adding programs for character education and moral development, social skills and emotional “intelligence” training, and positive behavior support initiatives. Within the context of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we stress (a) prevention, (b) quick response to problems using guidance and supports, and (c) follow-up with special assistance if needed. Here are some examples:

- *Preventing misbehavior* (e.g., improving programs to enhance student engagement and minimize conditions that foment misbehavior; enhancing home responsibility for childrens’ behavior and learning; promoting a school climate that embraces a holistic and family-centered orientation; working with students to establish a set of logical consequences that are reasonable, fair, and nondenigrating)
- *Responding quickly when misbehavior occurs* (e.g., reestablishing a calm and safe atmosphere and applying established logical consequences, guidance, and supports in keeping with the framework for personalization and special assistance)
- *Following-up after an event* (e.g., making program changes if necessary; preventing further problems with those who misbehaved by following-up with special assistance as needed).

Remember: The aim is not just to temporarily control bad behavior. Misbehavior presents a teachable moment for enhancing social, emotional, and moral development. Students can learn about personal responsibility, integrity, self-regulation/self-discipline, a work ethic, appreciation of diversity, and positive feelings about self and others.

“If I was going to stay in education, I knew I had to get past the discipline issues. . . . I wrote down what I liked and hated about my own teachers I remembered how much I wanted the teachers I adored to like or notice me; I remembered how criticism bruised my fragile ego; I remembered how I resented teacher power plays. Mostly, I remembered how much I hated the infantilizing nature of high school.... I reminded myself that I already know a lot – just from the student side of the desk. If I could keep remembering, I could convey genuine empathy and have honest interactions.” Margaret Metzger

For more on addressing misbehavior, see
Misbehavior, Social Control, and Student Engagement
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/misbeh.pdf>

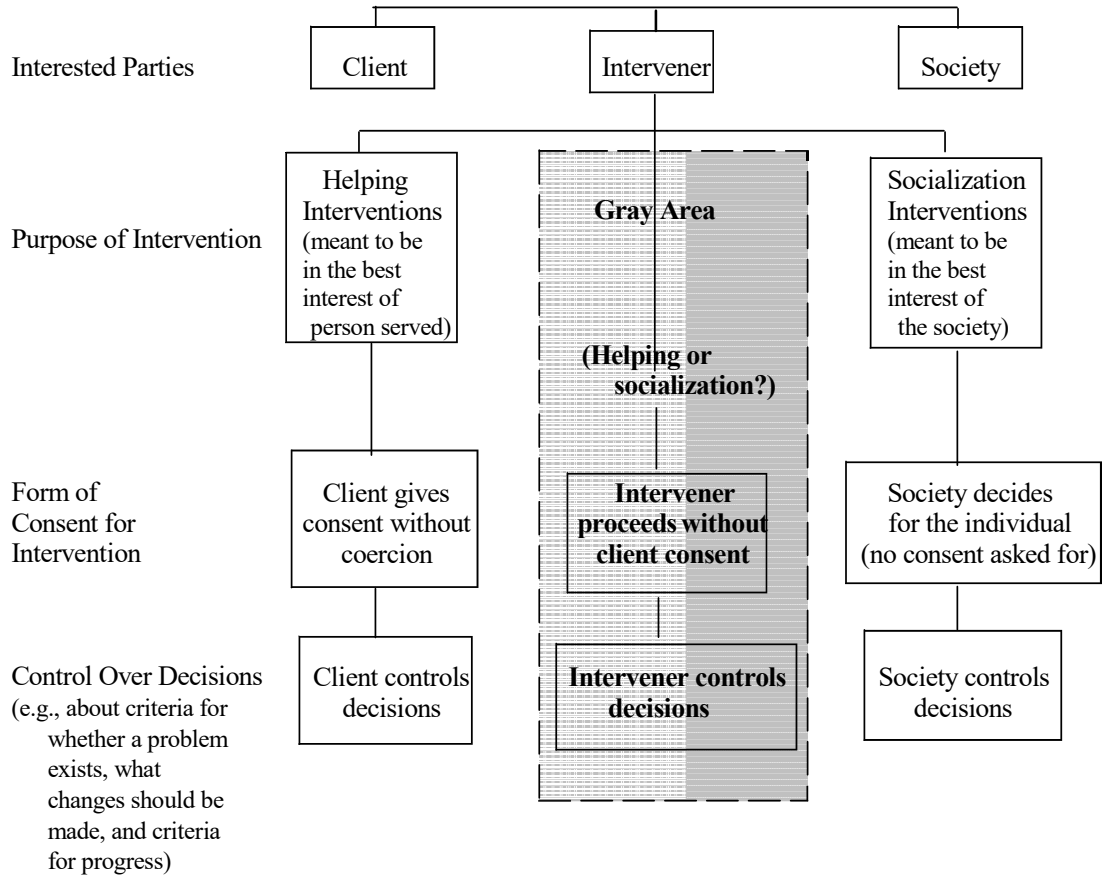
A Note About When Socializing and Helping Practices Conflict

One major reason for *compulsory* education is that society wants schools to play a role in socializing the young

Whenever interveners focus on deviant behavior, the following question is pertinent: *Is the agenda to help or to socialize or both?* The key to differentiating helping from formal socialization interventions is to determine whose interests are served (see Exhibit on the next page). Helping interventions are defined in terms of a primary intention to serve the client's interests; socialization interventions primarily seek to serve the interests of the society and often involve social control interventions.

Exhibit

Helping and Socialization Interventions



How does one know whose interests are served? Criteria include the nature of the consent and ongoing decision-making processes. That is, using these criteria, the interests of individuals are served when they consent to intervention without coercion and have control over major intervention decisions. In contrast, socialization agenda usually are implemented under a form of social contract that allows society’s agents to decide on certain interventions for individuals without asking for consent; and during intervention, society maintains control over major intervention decisions.

In schools, helping and socializing interventions often come into conflict with each other. As the above discussion of misbehavior underscores, one example is when decisions are made to use social control practices and ignore causal factors and related interventions.

When a youngster misbehaves at school, one facet of responding involves bringing the deviant and devious behavior under control. Interventions usually are designed mainly to convince students they should conform to the proscribed limits of the social and instructional setting.

Students for the most part do not appreciate efforts to control their behavior, especially since many of their actions are intended to enable them to escape such control. And while parents tend to value a school's socializing agenda, they also want schools to provide special help when behavior, learning, and emotional problems arise.

Practitioners commonly are confronted with situations where socializing and helping agenda are in conflict. Some resolve the conflict by clearly defining themselves as socializing agents and in that role pursue socialization goals. In such a context, it is understood that helping is not the primary concern. Others resolve the conflict by viewing individuals as "clients" and pursuing interventions that can be defined as helping. In such cases, the goal is to work with the consenting individual to resolve problems, including efforts designed to make environments more accommodative for the person being helped. When practitioners are unclear about their agenda or are forced by circumstances to try to pursue helping and socialization simultaneously, this adds confusion to the situation.

Circumstances arise when the intent is to serve the individual's interest but eliciting truly informed consent or ensuring the individual has control is not feasible. Interveners, then, are forced to operate in a gray area. This is likely to arise with young children and those with severe and profound behavior and emotional problems. Interveners also work in a gray area when intervening at the request of a surrogate who sees the intervention as in a person's best interests despite an individual's protests. School staff experience this situation when they make decisions that students don't like.

The problem of conflicting agenda is particularly acute for those who work in "institutional" settings such as schools, special education facilities, and residential "treatment" centers. In such settings, the tasks confronting the practitioner often include both helping individuals overcome underlying problems and controlling misbehavior to maintain social order. At times the two are incompatible. And, although all interventions in the setting may be designated as "remediation" or "treatment," the need for social control can overshadow the concern for helping. Moreover, the need to control individuals in such settings often leads to coercive and repressive actions. Ultimately, every practitioner must personally come to grips with what is morally proper in balancing the respective rights of the various parties when interests conflict.

***Decisions that place misbehaving students together:
Is it a helping intervention?***

Researchers are reporting (and school personnel have long recognized) levels of deviancy increase with concentrated groupings of students who are being punished for misbehavior. Concerns are raised that the resulting student groupings exacerbate negative outcomes such as increased misbehavior at school, neighborhood delinquency, substance abuse, and dropping out of school. As Dishion and Dodge note: "The influence of deviant peers on youth behavior is of growing concern, both in naturally occurring peer interactions and in interventions that might inadvertently exacerbate deviant development." Such a contagion effect has relevance for student groupings resulting from discipline policies, alternative school assignments, special education placements, and more.

Concluding Comment

Prevailing discipline practices overemphasize social control and overrely on extrinsic motivators. This tends to produce psychological reactance and decrease intrinsic motivation for engaging in classroom instruction. As a result, such practices can be counterproductive and not effective in preventing misbehavior over the long-term. In place of extrinsic controls, schools are being called upon to move toward more autonomy-supportive approaches in dealing with misbehavior and to include a focus on enhancing engagement in learning and supporting teachers' efforts to reengage disconnected students.

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