

Addressing Barriers

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link

to Learning

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Resilience means the personal and community qualities that enable us to rebound from adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other stresses – and to go on with life with a sense of mastery, competence, and hope.

President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health

Natural Opportunities to Promote Social-Emotional Learning and MH

In some form or another, every school has goals that emphasize a desire to enhance students' personal and social functioning. Such goals can be seen as reflecting views that social and emotional growth has an important role to play in

- C enhancing the daily smooth functioning of schools and the emergence of a safe, caring, and supportive school climate
- C facilitating students' holistic development
- C enabling student motivation and capability for academic learning
- C optimizing life beyond schooling.

Sadly, the stated goals too often are not connected to daily practices at a school. This seems to be even more the case as increasing accountability demands mount for quick academic gains on achievement tests.

Inside

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See pages 3 and 4.
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- C *Different Agendas for MH in Schools*
- C *Evidence-Based Practices, MH in Schools, and Leaving No Child Behind*
- C *Practitioners Are Asking . . .*

Thus, at the same time that calls for attending to social and emotional learning grow louder and a variety of programs report promising research findings, the focus on such matters continues to be marginalized for the most part in schools.

Some schools, of course, do provide prominent demonstrations of curriculum-based approaches to promote social-emotional learning and incorporate character education (including programs designed to address risk factors and prevent problems). Others have programs that pair students with mentors or engage students in helping peers or encourage participation in "service learning" activity, and so forth. District-wide, however, a full-scale commitment to such programs is rare. And, the situation is unlikely to change as long as the focus on social and emotional learning is viewed as taking time away from efforts to increase achievement test scores.

Given the last point, those concerned with promoting social-emotional learning need to place greater emphasis on strategies that can capitalize on *natural* opportunities at schools (and that can minimize transactions that interfere with positive growth. In keeping with this notion, our focus here is on (1) outlining a range of natural opportunities, (2) highlighting key principles underlying efforts to use such opportunities, and (3) suggesting who might take the lead in developing strategies for capitalizing on them. We conclude by suggesting it is time for a shift in research and training priorities and agendas.

What are Natural Opportunities?

The table on the next page offers examples of natural opportunities at schools for promoting personal and social growth. They are grouped into four categories:

- C daily opportunities
- C yearly patterns
- C transitions
- C early after the onset of student problems.

(cont. on p. 2)

Table

Examples of *Natural Opportunities at School to Promote Social-Emotional Learning & MH*

I. *Using Natural Daily Opportunities*

- A. In the classroom (e.g., as students relate to each other and to staff during class and group instruction; as essential aspects of cooperative learning and peer sharing and tutoring; as one facet of addressing interpersonal and learning problems)
- B. School-wide (e.g., providing roles for all students to be positive helpers and leaders throughout the school and community; engaging students in strategies to enhance a caring, supportive, and safe school climate; as essential aspects of conflict resolution and crisis prevention)

II *In Response to Yearly Patterns* – Schools have a yearly rhythm, changing with the cycle and demands of the school calendar. The following are examples of monthly themes the Center has developed for schools to draw upon and go beyond. The idea is to establish focal points for minimizing potential problems and pursuing natural opportunities to promote social-emotional learning.

- A. September – *Getting off to a Good Start*
- A. October – *Enabling School Adjustment*
- B. November – *Responding to Referrals in Ways That Can "Stem the Tide"*
- D. December – *Re-engaging Students: Using a student's time off in ways that pay off!*
- E. January – *New Year's Resolutions — A Time for Renewal; A New Start for Everyone*
- F. February – *The Mid-Point of a School Year - Report Cards & Conferences: Another Barrier or a Challenging Opportunity*
- G. March – *Reducing Stress; Preventing Burnout*
- H. April – *Spring Can Be a High Risk Time for Students*
- I. May – *Time to Help Students and Families Plan Successful Transitions to a New Grade or School*
- J. June – *Summer and the Living Aint Easy*
- K. July – *Using "Down Time" to Plan Better Ways to Work Together in Providing Learning Supports*
- L. August – *Now is the Time to Develop Ways to Avoid Burnout*

III. *During Transitions*

- A. Daily (e.g., capturing opportunities before school, during breaks, lunch, afterschool)
- B. Newcomers (e.g., as part of welcoming and social support processes; in addressing school adjustment difficulties)
- C. Grade-to-grade (e.g., preparing students for the next year; addressing adjustment difficulties as the year begins)

IV. *At the First Indication that a Student is Experiencing Problems* – Enhancing social and emotional functioning is a natural focus of early-after-onset interventions for learning, behavior, and emotional problems.

(cont. on p. 5)

Center News



***NEW AND UPDATED RESOURCES

*New Toll Free Number: 866-846-4843 – so those without access to the internet can connect with us for technical assistance and resources and to share information.

All Center resources can be downloaded from the website at no cost. Hardcopies can be ordered for the cost of copying and mailing.

***Addressing Barriers to Learning: A Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health in Schools* – This 5 unit continuing education module is designed for training leaders and staff and can be used to train other stakeholders. The units are:

- C Introductory Concepts related to Mental Health in Schools
 - C Policy Considerations
 - C Reframing how schools address barriers to learning, including mental health concerns
 - C Rethinking Infrastructure (leadership and mechanisms)
 - C System Change: Moving Schools Forward
- Concluding comments include “New Directions: Where’s It Happening?”

***About Infrastructure Mechanisms for a Comprehensive Learning Support Component* – This brief reading explores mechanisms that allow a learning support component to function and work effectively, efficiently, and with full integration with other major components of school improvement.

***Guidelines for a Student Support Component* – This resource was developed as part of the Summits Initiative: New Directions for Student Support. It provides indepth exploration of the rationale for each of the six guideline areas of a Student Support Component and outcomes that might be expected in each area. The guidelines are categorized under:

- C Major areas of concern related to barriers to student learning,
- C Timing and nature of problem oriented interventions,
- C General domains for intervention in addressing students’ needs and problems
- C Specialized Student and Family Assistance (Individual and Group)
- C Assuring Quality of Interventions,
- C Outcome evaluation and accountability

***New Directions for Student Support: Some*

Fundamentals. (Provides indepth readings on the rationale and research related to learning support)

***Sustaining School-Community Partnerships to Enhance Outcomes for Children and Youth: A Guidebook and Tool Kit*

***New Initiatives: Considerations Related to Planning, Implementing, Sustaining, and Going to Scale* (A Center Brief)

**“On Sustainability of Project Innovations as Systemic Change” *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 14,1-25.

See the full list of resources on the Center website at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>.

Let us know what you need. New resources can be developed and best practices identified. Also, let us know about the latest and greatest you encounter so we can update our resources and our colleagues across the country.

***JOIN: Practitioners’ Listserv

Every Monday a large group of folks involved with schools are part of a practitioner listserv. The email deals with concerns, questions, and responses from the field and facilitates sharing of experiences and resources. To join, email smhp@ucla.edu and ask to be added to the Practitioner Listserv. Send questions and topics for discussion to ltaylor@ucla.edu.

Popular Center Aids

Visitors to the Center website are gravitating to such resource aids as the intro packets *Learning Problems and Learning Disabilities* and *Conduct and Behavior Problems of School Aged Youth*. As resource aids and for use in staff development, they are using the various “Quick Training Aids” (which include fact sheets, tools, and overheads) on subjects such as Attention Problems in Schools; Assessing & Screening; Behavior Problems at School; Bullying Prevention; Case Management in the School Context; Confidentiality; Re-engaging Students in Learning; Suicide Prevention; and more. If you don't see what you need, let us know.

The future belongs
to those who
believe in the power
of their dreams.
Eleanor Roosevelt

Center Staff:
Howard Adelman, Co-Director
Linda Taylor, Co-Director
Perry Nelson, Coordinator
... and a host of graduate and
undergraduate students

Want resources?
Need technical assistance?

Contact us at:

E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu Ph: (310) 825-3634
Toll Free Ph: (866) 846-4843

Write: Center for Mental Health in Schools
Department of Psychology, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563

Or use our website: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>

If you're not receiving our monthly electronic newsletter (ENEWS), send an E-mail request to:

smhp@ucla.edu

or subscribe online @ – <http://lists.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/mentalhealth-L>

**FOR THOSE WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS,
ALL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE
BY CONTACTING THE CENTER.**

Exchange info on MH practices in school and network with colleagues across the country by joining (1) the **Weekly Listserv for School MH Practitioners** and/or (2) the **Center's Consultation Cadre**. Sign up by email at smhp@ucla.edu or by phone (toll Free (866) 846-4843)

Also, if you want to submit comments and info for us to circulate, use the insert form in this newsletter or contact us directly by mail, phone, E-mail, or the Net Exchange on our website.

**WHAT'S BEING SAID ABOUT SCHOOLS
AROUND THE COUNTRY**

From an article by Ronald A. Wolk on the op-ed page of *The Providence Journal*

“No Child Left Behind is designed to force schools that enroll disproportionate numbers of poor, minority and non-English-speaking students to make every one of them proficient. But it's pure folly to expect schools to accomplish this as long as we tolerate the widespread poverty and racism that almost guarantee that such students will be at risk of academic failure.

This is not to say that society's problems must all be solved before our schools can succeed with poor, minority and immigrant students. There is no doubt that too many of the country's public schools are failing because of the way they are organized and the way that they do business, especially those serving the neediest students.”

The right to a quality education is just as much a God-given and American right as the right to vote or be treated equally. [The] movement to fix our public school system is another link on the civil rights railroad to equality.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg

But the importance of education is not just practical: a well-educated and enlightened and active mind, able to wander freely and widely, is one of the joys and rewards of human existence.

UN Committee on Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights

SUMMITS' INITIATIVE: *New Directions for Student Support*

We continue to be amazed at the response to the Summits Initiative. From what we can tell, the initiative is proving to be a powerful strategy for pursuing efforts to change (e.g., rethink, reframe, reform, restructure) the way student supports are conceived at schools (with mental health in schools solidly embedded in the changes). Building on the National Summit and several regional ones, we are now moving forward with plans to do a summit in every state. Several already have indicated interest and have begun to plan a state-wide summit on *New Directions for Student Support*. Let us know if your state wants to discuss doing so.

To keep up with the initiative, click on the *Summits'* button on the home page. Feel free to download and share info with others. See *Guidelines for a Student Support Component*. This document should be shared widely as a basis for a school's learning supports and a stimulus for advancing the work (e.g., developing standards and quality indicators). Various other documents can be used for policy, capacity building, training, and research.

(continued from page 2)

In effect, natural opportunities are one of the most authentic examples of “teachable moments.” A few points about each will help clarify this point.

Daily opportunities. Schools are social milieus. Each day in the classroom and around the school students interact with their peers and various adults in formal and informal ways. Every encounter, positive and negative, represents a potential learning experience. All school staff, and especially teachers, can be taught ways to use the encounters to minimize transactions that work against positive growth and to capitalize on many opportunities to enhance social-emotional learning.

Appreciation of what needs attention can be garnered readily by looking at the school day through the lens of goals for personal and social functioning. Is instruction carried out in ways that strengthen or hinder development of interpersonal skills and connections and student understanding of self and others? Is cooperative learning and sharing promoted? Is inappropriate competition minimized? Are interpersonal conflicts mainly suppressed or are they used as learning opportunities? Are roles provided for all students to be positive helpers throughout the school and community?

Of course, appreciating problems and opportunities is not enough. Pre- and in-service education must focus on teaching those working in schools how to minimize what’s going wrong and enable personal and social growth.

Yearly patterns. The culture of most schools yields fairly predictable patterns over the course of the year. The beginning of the school year, for example, typically is a period of hope. As the year progresses, a variety of stressors are encountered. Examples include homework assignments that are experienced as increasingly difficult, interpersonal conflicts, and testing and grading pressures. There also are special circumstances associated with holidays, social events, sports, grade promotions, and graduation.

Each month strategies can be implemented that encourage school staff to minimize stressors and enhance coping through social-emotional learning and shared problem solving. To support such efforts, the Center has developed a set of monthly themes as examples for schools to draw upon and go beyond. (See the Center website for a description of how to pursue such themes.) One set of examples are listed in the Table on page 2; other themes are readily generated. The point is to establish a focus each month and build the capacity of school staff to evolve the school culture in ways that reduce

unnecessary stressors and naturally promote social and emotional development.

Transitions. Students are regularly confronted with a variety of transitions – changing schools, changing grades, and encountering a range of other minor and major transitory demands. Such transitions are ever-present and usually are not a customary focus of institutionalized efforts to support students. Every transition can exacerbate problems or be used as a natural opportunity to promote positive learning and attitudes and reduce alienation.

Schools need to build their capacity to address transitions proactively and in the process to be guided by their goals for enhancing personal and social functioning. Examples of school-wide and classroom-specific opportunities include a focus on welcoming new arrivals (students, their families, staff); providing ongoing social supports as students adjust to new grades, new schools, new programs; and using before and after-school and inter-session activities as times for ensuring generalization and enrichment of such learning.

Early after the onset of student problems. Stated simply, every student problem represents a need and an opportunity for learning – and often what needs to be learned falls into the social-emotional arena. Whatever the first response is when a problem arises, the second response should include on focus on promoting personal and social growth.

Some Key Principles Underlying Efforts to Use Teachable Moments

A natural focus on social and emotional learning at school should be built upon the same fundamental principles that are advocated in discussions of good schooling and teaching in a democracy. This means, first and foremost, addressing principles reflecting overlapping concerns about distributive justice (equity and fairness) and empowerment. Adherence to such concerns requires that school staff have

- C clarity about the respective rights and obligations of all stakeholders
- C the time, training, skills, and institutional and collegial support necessary to build relationships of mutual trust, respect, equality, and appropriate risk-taking
- C the motivation and skill to create an accepting, caring, and safe environment and account for distinctive needs, assets, and other forms of diversity.

(cont. on p. 6)

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At a minimum, when designing and implementing instruction, practices must not have a negative impact on social and emotional growth. To this end, teachers should

- C tailor processes so they are a good fit to the learner in terms of *both* motivation and capability (i.e., meet learners where they are)
- C deal with students holistically and developmentally, as individuals and as part of a family, neighborhood, and community.

With a view to designing academic instruction in ways that will also enhance social and emotional learning, teachers should

- C offer real choices and involve students in meaningful decision making
- C contextualize and make learning authentic, including use of real life situations and “mentors”
- C foster joint student learning activity and products.

And, all the above also are applicable when pursuing the “teachable moments” that arise during other natural opportunities.

Making it Happen

Increasing a school’s focus on natural opportunities for personal and social growth requires advocacy, planning, and building the capacity of school staff. At most schools, student support professionals represent natural leaders for pursuing all this. As a starting point, such staff can form a small work group dedicated to moving the agenda forward.

The functions for a work group include:

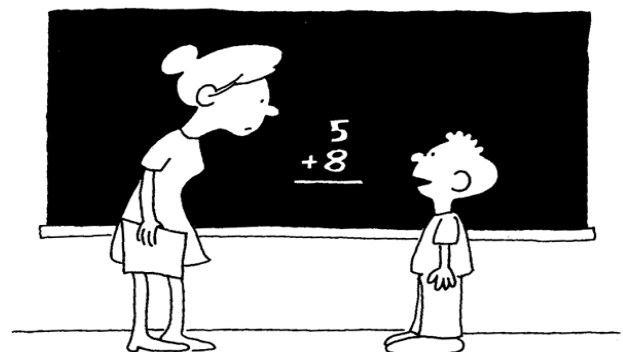
- C developing a “map” of natural opportunities for promoting social-emotional development
- C delineating ways in which students experience transactions that interfere with positive growth
- C clarifying ways for staff to minimize negative experiences and maximize use of opportunities to promote positive growth
- C providing a variety of learning opportunities for staff related to each of the above. (See the Winter, 2003 newsletter for examples of how student support staff can play a greater role in staff development.)

Time to Shift Priorities and Agendas for Research and Training

Teachers and other school staff have been described as prisoners of time. Those concerned about social and emotional learning at school understand this all too well. Proposals for adding new programs are rejected because there is sparse time available for teaching anything but standards-based academic subjects. Even when “nonacademic” programs are added, requests for time to train teachers are given short shrift because there is little time available for anything besides inservice related to academic instruction. The bottom line is that competition for classroom and teacher time is fierce. As a result, efforts to add a curriculum for social-emotional learning and train a district’s teachers to implement it with fidelity usually are stymied.

Given sparse time and resources, hard choices must be made. How much should be invested in curricular approaches to social-emotional learning? How much should be invested in pursuing natural opportunities to promote a school’s goals for personal and social functioning? Making such decisions at this point is difficult because so little research has been done on the latter approach or on the comparative impact of the two.

All this underscores the problem of basing practice only on approaches for which there already is evidence. Here is an instance where specific data exist on one approach (i.e., teaching a formal curriculum) but not directly on the other, and there is no comparative research. Questions cannot be satisfactorily answered about the *respective* or *complementary* range of impact, maintenance, generalization, iatrogenic effects (e.g., negative outcomes to individuals, families, schools), or about costs vs. benefits. There is a bit of data, however, that warrants the attention of decision makers. Most districts have not moved to adopt curriculum for social-emotional learning. And, in many schools, not only are natural opportunities to promote such growth not taken, current practices are having deleterious effects.



GOSH, MRS. THOMPSON, I WAS READY TO LEARN MATH YESTERDAY. TODAY I'M READY TO LEARN TO READ.

Ideas into Practice

School Responses to Natural Disasters



Hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters close schools and endanger communities. When such crises occur, district and school crisis plans and crisis teams are indispensable. Many schools need resources and info to guide their

responses. Relevant aids are accessible through our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>. On the home page, see *Responding to a Crisis* (in the yellow circle). Click and you will find samples of materials and guidelines, as well as links to other resources. Connect, for example, to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) link to – *Kids: Resources for Parents & Teachers*.

As a quick reminder in any emergency, the following are some general points frequently mentioned that may be of some help.

Responding to Crises: A Few General Principles

- (1) *Immediate Response – Focus on Restoring Equilibrium.* In responding, the following have been highlighted in most guidelines as essentials:
 - >> Be calm, direct, informative, authoritative, nurturing, and problem-solving oriented.
 - >> Counter denial, by encouraging students to deal with facts of the event; give accurate information and explanations of what happened and what to expect – never give unrealistic or false assurances.
 - >> Talk with students about their emotional reactions and encourage them to deal with such reactions as another facet of countering denial and other defenses that interfere with restoring equilibrium.
 - >> Convey a sense hope and positive expectation – that while crises change things, there are ways to deal with the impact.
- (2) *Move the Student from Being a Victim to Becoming an Actor.*
 - >> Plan with the student promising, realistic, and appropriate actions they will pursue when they leave you.
 - >> Build on coping strategies the student has displayed.
 - >> If feasible, involve the student in assisting with efforts to restore equilibrium.
- (3) *Connect the Student with Immediate Social Support (peer buddies, other staff, family) to provide immediate support, guidance, and other forms of immediate assistance.*
- (4) *Take Care of the Caretakers.*
 - >> Be certain that support systems are in place for staff in general
 - >> Be certain that support (debriefing) systems are in place for all crisis response personnel.
- (5) *Provide for Aftermath Interventions – be certain that individuals needing follow-up assistance receive it.*

Need more information? Contact our Center.

Emerging Concern: *Different Agendas for Mental Health in Schools*

Around the country, indeed, around the world – folks are talking about mental health in schools. But what’s being talked often differs in fundamental ways. This not only tends to confuse many stakeholders, it seems to be a source of increasing conflicts in the field.

The differences can be traced to the fact that the enterprises being discussed differ. This leads to varying perspectives and attitudes related to mental health in schools. In turn, this results in divergent agendas for policy, practice, research, and training.

It would help if folks using the terms mental health in schools and school mental health took some time to clarify, analyze, and discuss the implications of different agendas. To catalyze such activity, we have tried to group agendas in terms of the *primary* interests of various parties with respect to mental health in schools. We come up with seven major interests at work – each of which can be subdivided. (While some are complementary, many are not. Thus, it is not surprising that competing interests come into conflict with each other.) Here’s how we group the different interests:

- (1) Efforts to use schools to increase *access* to kids and their families for purposes of
 - (a) conducting research related to mental health concerns
 - (b) providing services related to mental health concerns.
- (2) Efforts to increase *availability* of mental health interventions
 - (a) through expanded use of school resources
 - (b) through co-locating community resources on school campuses
 - (c) through finding ways to combine school and community resources.
- (3) Efforts to get schools to adopt/enhance specific programs and approaches
 - (a) for treating specific individuals
 - (b) for addressing specific types of problems in targeted ways
 - (c) for addressing problems through school-wide, “universal” interventions
 - (d) for promoting healthy social and emotional development.
- (4) Efforts to improve specific processes and interventions related to mental health in schools (e.g., improve systems for identifying and referring problems and for case management, enhancing “prereferral” and early intervention programs)
- (5) Efforts to enhance the interests of specific disciplines, contractors, businesses, etc. that are
 - (a) already part of school budgets
 - (b) seeking to be part of school budgets.
- (6) Efforts to change (e.g., rethink, reframe, reform, restructure) the way student supports are conceived at schools
 - (a) through enhanced focus on multi-disciplinary team work (e.g. among school staff, with community professionals)
 - (b) through enhanced coordination of interventions (e.g., among school programs and services, with community programs and services)
 - (c) through appropriate integration of interventions (e.g., that schools own, that communities base or link with schools)
 - (d) through modifying the roles and functions of various student support staff
 - (e) through developing a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive component for systematically addressing barriers to student learning at every school.
- (7) Efforts to reduce school involvement in mental health programs and services (e.g., to maximize the focus on instruction, to use the resources for youth development, to keep the school out of areas where family values are involved).

To begin the discussion, let us know what your primary interest is and your concerns about areas of conflicting agendas (email: ltaylor@ucla.edu). We look forward to hearing from you.

Commentary

Evidence-Based Practices, MH in Schools, and Leaving No Child Behind

Commonly heard these days is the shibboleth:

In God we trust; from all others demand data!

Increasingly, policy makers and others who make decisions are demanding:

Show me the data!

In many arenas, the demand for data has outstripped the availability of good data and has increased the tendency to grab for whatever numbers are being circulated in the literature. As a result, when someone says: This is the best data available, it is essential to remember that *best* does not always mean *good* or *adequate*. This caution is particularly relevant related to mental health in schools where funding to support research and basic data gathering continues to be sparse and sound methodological practices are difficult and costly to implement.

Be clear: This is not a critique of the importance of research or of basing practice on science. It is a commentary on a growing dilemma arising from the politics and economics of the demand for evidence-based practice. From the perspective of researchers and policy makers whose agenda is to improve interventions for specific mental health and psychosocial problems (e.g., depression, ADHD, violence), the message is clear: all practice should be based on evidence. From the perspective of those working in schools, the response is clear: if we *limit* ourselves to evidence-based practices at this point in time, we will not meet the demands to close the achievement gap and ensure no child is left behind.

From the perspective shaped by a broad understanding of factors interfering with school success, much of the current research is not directed in systematic ways at addressing a full range of causal factors. That is, the underlying rationale guiding most research on how best to address the large numbers of learning, behavior, and emotional problems seen in schools is much too circumscribed. This is understandable with respect to the demand characteristics on researchers, but it is a serious deficit with respect to advancing knowledge, practice, and policy related to schools.

Given the nature, scope, and range of learning, behavior, and emotional problems, a reciprocal

determinist theoretical perspective hypothesizes a multitude of transacting factors. In terms of prevention, at the very least this suggests the need for interventions that are multifaceted (keyed to multiple factors). The majority of practices judged to have the best empirical support, of course, do not reflect this perspective. That is, most are highly circumscribed and extremely limited in the matters they address and the dependent variables they use to indicate efficacy.

Stated differently, only a few interventions on empirically-supported lists even approximate comprehensive, multifaceted approaches, and for the most part, the outcomes are short-term (albeit positive) objectives. Little data are forthcoming on maintenance, generalization, iatrogenic effects (e.g., negative outcomes to individuals, families, schools), and on costs vs. benefits. And, of course, there is the major concern about efficacy vs. effectiveness.

An irony of the efficacy-effectiveness discussion is the tendency of researchers to suggest that fidelity of implementation is the main problem in demonstrating effectiveness when these interventions are replicated on a large-scale. One might argue that the fidelity problem often is only a symptom. The cause of the implementation problem may stem from the likelihood that school staff often are expected to carry out an intervention in which they have no faith. That is, they understand the complexity of the many learning, behavior, and emotional problems they see every day at school and don't believe a "simple" intervention can make a significant dent in what they are experiencing.

Obviously, how one frames any problem shapes the type of research one does. And, political and economic agendas do play a role in how one frames problems.

If all children are to have an equal opportunity to learn at school, much more attention must be paid to addressing the full range of factors interfering with the progress of a great many students. Given this, one of the most neglected research problems is that of *developing* comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approaches that play out at every school – *and, then*, gathering the type of data that evaluates the total impact using the most rigorous methodology feasible.

Intervention research and development are a spiraling process which begins with development of a well-conceived and designed prototype. Addressing learning, behavior, and emotional problems in schools requires prototypes that account for the greatest variance in problems that are interrelated and that feasibly can be adopted by every school in a district in ways that are consistent with the district's primary accountability demands. To do any less is to certainly leave too many children behind.

Practitioners Are Asking . . .

Practitioner Request: “Our school-community has experienced a number of high-profile suicides in the last 10 years. Three years ago, we planned and implemented prevention programs which now occur annually at grade levels 7, 9, and 11. I have 2 questions. Are there model programs for younger aged students (e.g., 5th graders)? Are there any examples of state-wide initiatives?”

Center Response: With respect to model programs, our online materials offer examples, and we provide links to a broad range of relevant aids and Centers. At <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>, click on the Quick Find search; use the drop down menu and click on “Suicide Prevention.” You will find, for example, the following downloadable Center resources:

- > *School Interventions to Prevent Youth Suicide* (a Technical Assistance Sampler)
- > *Suicide Prevention* (a Quick Training Aid)
- > *Affect and Mood Problems Related to School Aged Youth* (an Introductory Packet)
- > *Youth Suicide Prevention: Mental Health and Public Health Perspectives* (a presentation and training aid)

Also, see *Safe and Sound: An Educational Leader's Guide to Evidence-based Social and Emotional Learning Programs* from the Center for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning www.casel.org

Programs cited include:

- > *Caring School Community* (K-6) www.devstu.org/
- > *Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies* (K-6) www.preventionscience.com
- > *Project Achieve* (K-8) www.coedu.usf.edu/projectachieve
- > *Reach Out to Schools: Social Competency Program* (Open Circle Curriculum – K-5) www.open-circle.org
- > *Responsive Classroom* (K-6) www.responsiveclassroom.org
- > *Skills, Opportunities, and Recognition* (K-6) www.preventionscience.com
- > *Social Decision Making and Problem Solving* (K-6) www2.umdnj.edu/spsweb/index.htm

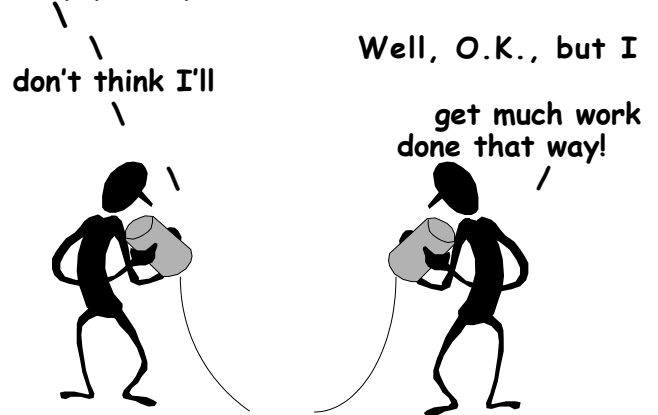
With respect to state-wide approaches, see the Children's Safety Network National Injury and Violence Prevention Resource Center (www.childrensafetynetwork.org/). The site links to state plans. The center's focus is on the leadership role for state Maternal and Child Health Agencies in fostering collaboration, awareness, comprehensive approaches, research-based recommendations, and community involvement for suicide prevention. Their guidelines call for state plans to include

descriptions of the problem that are state-specific, goals/objectives/timetable, actions emphasizing prevention, and engagement of the community.

Also, review the

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention
www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/default.asp.

**Keep your nose to the grindstone,
Put your shoulder to the wheel,
Keep your eye on the ball . . .**



Practitioner Request: "We received a 3 year grant for MH services in schools. What should we be thinking about as we move forward?"

Center Response: Think in terms of using all facets of the grant to move in ways that (a) more comprehensively address the well-being of many youngsters at the schools and (b) lead to sustainability after the grant ends.

From what we have seen around the country, it is a mistake to use all the grant funds to buy staff to provide only clinical services. The narrow focus on providing a few more MH services for a few more students at a school not only is highly expensive, it generally cannot be sustained after a project ends. In contrast, building the capacity of school and community personnel, creating a cooperative infrastructure for them to work together, using the funds to leverage systemic changes in schools and agencies. – all helps build a more comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach to mental health in (and out) of schools and does so in ways that maximize sustainability.

To approach MH in schools with only an individual and small group therapy model is to
(cont. on p. 11)

ensure that (a) the number of referrals increases well beyond the availability of services, (b) a relatively small percentage of those in need receive services, and (c) when the grant ends, most of the MH services cannot be sustained. These problems have been highlighted over and over again across the country. For example, among the things many schools are trying to do better (especially as they implement special projects) is develop improved triage and referral processes (e.g., case-oriented teams to process students). Within a couple of months after a good process is put in place, the systems become swamped with the names of students who someone would like to see counseled. *We call this the field of dreams effect: Build it and they will come!*

Inevitably, not only can't a team process all who are identified, but many more students are triaged and referred than there are available services. As a result, only a relatively small number of the identified students ever get the help they need; the rest just sit on the lists.

What seems to have the widest impact and what lays the best foundation for sustainability is to embed mental health activity into a systemic framework for achieving the school's mission to educate. From this perspective, advancing mental health in schools involves much more than expanding a few services or creating "full service" schools. It encompasses efforts to establish and sustain comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approaches that help ensure schools are caring and supportive places that maximize learning and well-being and strengthen students, families, schools, and neighborhoods. This requires embedding efforts to enhance mental health in schools into a full continuum of interventions. In turn, this requires weaving together a schools resources with whatever resources the community has that can fill gaps in the continuum.

The continuum ranges from systems to promote healthy development and prevent problems (e.g., perhaps beginning with one or two school-wide and/or classroom-based programs) through a range of interventions that students and families can access easily when problems first arise, and finally focusing on treatment (e.g. brief therapy where feasible; referral for more intensive assistance as necessary). Development of such a continuum benefits from, but cannot be limited to, the growing research-base (including the programs that have already found their way onto the lists of evidence-based practices).

With all this in mind, it is essential to establish a resource-oriented focus in working at a school. The mechanism for ensuring such a focus often is a resource-oriented team. This type of mechanism allows mental health professionals (school staff and community providers) and others providing student support to work together mapping and analyzing all relevant resources. In turn, this provides a basis for developing a comprehensive, multifaceted approach (the full continuum) and doing so in ways that involve key stakeholders in ensuring that all resources are deployed in a cohesive and most productive way.

From an everyday perspective, it is infrastructure mechanisms such as a resource-oriented team that ensure broad, programmatic coordination, braiding of resources, efficient communication, effective referral and triage systems to get people to the right programs and services quickly and effectively, continuous monitoring of progress and outcomes, setting of priorities, and shared decision making.

Moving forward in this way helps to minimize counterproductive competition among school staff and with community providers (which has been an unfortunate by-product of school-linked service and colocation or satellite clinic initiatives).

For more on all this, go to our website (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>). For example, on the homepage, click on "About Mental Health in Schools". Also, see the Center Report entitled: *Resource-Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports* and the brief reading: *About Infrastructure Mechanisms for a Comprehensive Learning Support Component*.

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A tourist in New York was trying to find a famous landmark. He came upon a street musician and stopped to ask directions.

How do I get to Carnegie Hall? he asked.

Well, dude, the young musician said, you've got to practice, practice, practice.

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The Parable of the Lamppost

It was a dark and stormy night . . .

I left the building and started to run across the street to the parking lot. As I reached the curb, I bumped into a somewhat dazed acquaintance who was down on hands and knees searching for something.

What did you lose, I asked.

My keys, he said.

He looked so frazzled I just had to help. A half hour later, soaked to the skin and frustrated, I said,

We need to do this more systematically.

Tell me just where you think you dropped them.

Oh, he said, across the road in the parking lot.

What! I screamed. Then why are we looking over here.

Well, he said – looking a bit sheepish, the light is so much better here under this lamppost.

Moral: Where there's light, there may be hope,
but solving problems requires looking in the right place.

Use the enclosed response form to ask for what you need and to give us feedback.
And, please send us information, ideas, and materials for the Clearinghouse.

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