Addressing Barriers to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link

I suspect that many children would learn arithmetic, and learn it better, if it were illegal.

John Holt

Opening the Classroom Door

*N*o one likes it when achievement test scores are low. It is unfortunate when youngsters must be referred for special assistance because they are not doing well academically and/or are misbehaving in class. Few who work in schools or closely with schools believe these problems will be solved simply by formulating higher standards, aligning them with assessment and accountability or by providing inservice for teachers that mainly focuses on curriculum/instruction along with a small dose of how to control students or by enacting policies for ending social promotion and pursuing zero tolerance. What is widely acknowledged and hardly ever addressed in fundamental ways is how inadequate these "reforms"are in helping many students who manifest *commonplace* behavior, learning, and emotional problems.

If you are a support service professional employed by a school district, you know there are many more youngsters with behavior, learning, and emotional problems than you can hope to help. If you are a professional from outside of schools who has found your way inside, you quickly realize you can only meet with a few of the many in need. If you are a teacher, you are plagued with the awareness of how many students are not responding well to your best teaching efforts.

Contents

What's to be done about all this?

One line of thought proposes adding more service personnel and offering more services. More would be helpful, but the costs make it unlikely that many more will appear, and it's probably not the best way to meet the learning needs of many students who are performing poorly.

Another line of thought proposes using current service staff to offer more teacher consultation on what to do when a student performs poorly. This could have some benefits. Unfortunately, in too many instances, service professionals often know less than the teachers with respect to engaging and *re*engaging students in classroom learning. As a result, they lean toward consulting about classroom management (social control) strategies that, in some instances, can be counterproductive to the instructional agenda. Thus, this form of teacher consultation, while well-intentioned, is unlikely to stem the tide of referrals for out-of-classroom help.

> *What could stem the tide is inservice instruction focused on practices that enable teachers to engage and reengage students in classroom learning.*

As is widely recognized, preservice education only prepares a person to be a beginner in the complex system and culture that is a school. Teachers are among the first to acknowledge that preservice education didn't prepare them adequately for students who manifest behavior, learning, and emotional problems. And, the service professionals who consult with teachers are among the first to acknowledge their limitations with respect to their own training and experience as classroom teachers.

If all students are to have equal opportunity for success at school, teachers, administrators, and education support staff must learn (a) what should go on in a classroom to address common behavior, learning, and emotional problems and (b) how to help make this happen everyday in every class. Basic to all this is opening the classroom door.

At some time or another, most students bring problems with them to school that affect their learning and perhaps interfere with the teacher's efforts to teach. In some geographic areas, many youngsters bring a wide range of problems stemming from restricted opportunities associated with poverty and low income, difficult and diverse family circumstances, high rates of mobility, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, problems related to substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities.

Such problems are exacerbated as youngsters internalize the frustrations of confronting barriers and the debilitating effects of performing poorly at school. In some locales, the reality often is that over 50% of students manifest forms of behavior, learning, and emotional problems. And, in most schools in these locales, teachers are ill-prepared to address the problems in a potent manner. Thus, when a student is not doing well, the trend increasingly is to refer them directly for counseling or for assessment in hopes of referral for special help – perhaps even special education assignment.

In some schools and classrooms, the number of referrals is dramatic. Where special teams have been established to review teacher requests for help, the list grows as the year proceeds. The longer the list, the longer the lag time for review – often to the point that, by the end of the school year, the team only has reviewed a small percentage of those on the list. *And, no matter how many are reviewed, there always are more referrals than can be served.*

What Should Go on in the Classroom?

Curriculum content is learned as a result of transactions between the learner and environment. The essence of the teaching process is that of creating an environment that first can mobilize the learner to pursue the curriculum and then can maintain that mobilization, while effectively facilitating learning.

Mobilizing learners. No one has control over all the important elements involved in learning. Teachers actually can affect only a relatively small segment of the physical environment and social context in which learning is to occur. Because this is so, it is essential that they begin with an appreciation of what is likely to affect a student's positive and negative motivation to learn. This means, for example, paying particular attention to the following points:

? Optimal performance and learning require motivational readiness. Readiness should be understood in the contemporary sense of establishing environments that are perceived by students as caring, supportive, and stimulating places – places that offer vivid, novel, challenging, valued, and doable activities.

?Practices must not only aim at increasing motivation – especially intrinsic motivation – but must also avoid decreasing motivation. (This includes not overrelying on extrinsics to entice and reward because to do so may decrease intrinsic motivation.)

?Motivation represents both a process and an outcome concern. Programs must be designed to maintain, enhance, and expand intrinsic motivation for pursuing learning activities and for learning beyond the lesson.

?Increasing intrinsic motivation involves affecting thoughts, feelings, and decisions. In general, this calls for practices that have the potential to reduce negative and increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies with respect to learning. For students with learning and behavior problems, this means especially identifying and minimizing experiences that maintain or may increase avoidance motivation.

The last point, minimizing experiences that maintain or may increase avoidance motivation, deserves special emphasis. Students who manifest problems may have developed extremely negative perceptions of school staff and programs. In such cases, they are not likely to be open to people and activities that look like "the same old thing." Major changes in approach are required if such students are even to perceive that something has changed in the situation. Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have these students (1) view teachers and other school staff as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent)

Center News

NEW Resources

Introductory Packet:

? *Early Development and Learning from the Perspective of Addressing Barriers*.

Developed in response to requests for info on prevention and a lifespan approach to healthy development. Summarizes research on early childhood interventions, school readiness, and resources for program planning.

Technical Aid Packet:

? *After-School Programs and Addressing Barriers to Learning.*

Discusses key components, resources for planning and funding, potential for addressing a school-wide component for safe schools and for enhancing academic enrichment and community connections.

Available online at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu. Click on Center Materials. Hard copies are available.

Want resources?
Need technical assistance?

Contact us at:
 E-mail: **smhp@ucla.edu**   Ph: **(310) 825-3634**
 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:
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 leave the subject line blank, and in the body of the message type: **subscribe mentalhealth-L**

 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.

Expanded and Revised Resources

Mental Health in Schools: Guidelines, Models, Resource & Policy Considerations. This field-defining document by the *Policy Leadership Cadre for Mental Health in Schools* has been revised and repackaged for easy reference based on feedback from across the country. An *Executive Summary* of the document has been sent to school and mental health leaders to assist in building stronger links and collaborations. The revised document and executive summary can be downloaded from our website at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu. Go to the Contents page, scroll down to Hosted Sites, click on Policy Leadership Cadre, and open the document (or request a hardcopy from the Center).

Latest Quick Finds *on Specific Topics*

For access to information on a hot topic go to our website at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu and click on *Quick Finds*. Center Responses are topics frequently requested for technical assistance. We have pulled into one place Center created resources, key online documents, connections to resource centers specializing in the topic, and a brief bibliography. Easy to use, updated regularly.

New Quick Find topics include:
> Alternative Schools/Education
> Business support of schools
> Change Agent/Organizational Facilitator
> Data management for schools/clinics
> Day treatment
> Evaluation of programs to address barriers
> Immigrant students and mental health
> Medicaid/managed care for school MH
> Prevention of social/MH problems
> Systems of Care
> Threat assessment: Resources and cautions

See Quick Find on Financing and Funding

To keep up with all our latest resources, see the *What's New?* page on the Center's website

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FOR THOSE WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS, ALL RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE BY CONTACTING THE CENTER.
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Kids need us most,

when they're at

their worst..

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

Moving Forward
New Initiatives

Reframing the Work of Support Services Staff

*A*s discussed in the lead article, one reason for opening the classroom door is to invite in support staff. The intent in doing so is to have them play a greater role in redesigning classrooms and working collegially with teachers and others in the classroom. Some of this involves direct interventions with students, some involves program development. All of it requires a major restructuring of the current roles and functions of school psychologists, counselors, social workers, and other pupil service personnel.

Our Center report entitled *Framing New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers* outlines new roles and functions and the types of changes needed in preservice preparation, certification, and continuing development of these professionals. The report reflects lessons learned from discussions across the country.

(You can download this reports from our website: http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu or order a copy from our Center.)

MATT'S ALWAYS BOTHERING
ME DURING CLASS.
WHAT SHOULD I DO?

HE JUST WANTS ATTENTION.
IT'S BEST TO IGNORE HIM.

I'VE TRIED THAT. NOW HOW DO I
GET HIM TO LET GO OF MY LEG?
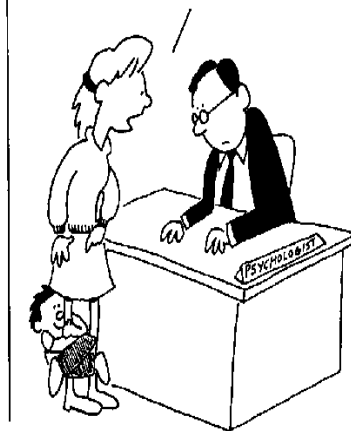
Hawai'i – Building Capacity for a *Comprehensive Student Support System* at Every School

Throughout Hawai'i, the state's Department of Educ. is developing a school-based *Comprehensive Student Support System*. (See Center report on *Pioneering Initiatives to Reform Education Support Programs*.) The effort has taken on urgency because of a court order that mandates improved school-based approaches in meeting mental health and special education needs.

Key to implementing the program is creation of new roles for school staff. In August, 1999, the position of *Student Services Coordinator* was created as a pivotal role in building school capacity for a Comprehensive Student Support System. This Coordinator plays a leadership role in developing and facilitating the team that coordinates school resources.

To train staff for this new position, the State is working with the University of Hawai'i. A certificate program has been established that encompasses five graduate levels courses. Instructors from the State department and the university are flying to provide classes on three islands. Parents from the state's *Families as Allies* also are part of the teaching team. To date, 130 Coordinators have begun the series of classes. In addition, this summer the program is connecting 75-100 Coordinators via video-conferencing.

In addition to the Coordinators, the State also created the position of a *Complex School Renewal Specialist* to coordinate resources among the family of schools in each local district. Staff in this position provide leadership, planning, and coordination of support services to schools within a complex. The Specialist is a "resource broker and linker to state office resources," coordinates professional development, assists with school and complex strategic planning, supports new teacher development, facilitates articulation among schools, and assists in the implementation of the comprehensive student support system.

The role of the complex resource teachers also has been enriched to connect with the two new positions. Resource teachers provide guidance and assistance as schools assess their student support programs/service and map their school/community resources.

It is clear that a comprehensive statewide plan with strong leadership, new positions to steer the process, and the university support for capacity building is a powerful combination for system change.

If you are interested in this initiative, you can contact: Norma Jean Stodden at the University of Hawai'i.

You may also want to read our Center brief entitled: *Organizational Facilitators: A Change Agent for Systemic School and Community Changes.* (On the web or order from the Center.)

(cont. from page 2)

and (2) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable.

In marked contrast to students who have developed negative attitudes, those who are intrinsically motivated tend to seek out challenges related to classroom learning and do more than what is required. In doing so, they tend to learn more and learn more deeply than do classmates who are extrinsically motivated.

Enabling learning. When a classroom teacher encounters difficulty in working with a student, the first step is to see whether there are ways to address the problem within the classroom and perhaps with added home involvement. To this end, it is essential to equip teachers with more than social control ("classroom management") strategies for responding to mild-to-moderate behavior, learning, and emotional problems.

The focus should be on the many ways to enable the learning of the diverse range of students found in classrooms. A few prominent examples of effective practices are: strategies to engage student interest and attention, one-to-one or small group instruction (e.g., tutoring, cooperative learning groups), enhancing protective factors and resiliency, and assets building (including use of curriculum-based approaches for promoting social emotional development), as well as a variety of special assistance strategies.

All this expands definitions of good teaching to encompass practices that enable learning and enhance effectiveness for a wide range of students. From such a perspective, good teaching begins with a caring context for learning, includes development of a classroom infrastructure that transforms a big class into a set of smaller units, and uses school and home strategies that prevent problems and address a wide range of problems when they arise.

To these ends, all teachers, administrators, and education support staff need to be taught an array of strategies for accommodating and teaching students in ways that compensate for differences, vulnerabilities, and disabilities. Teachers need to learn how to use paid assistants, peer tutors, and volunteers to enhance social and academic support and to work in targeted ways with students who manifest problems. Strategies must be developed that enable resource and itinerant teachers, counselors, and other student support staff to work closely with teachers and students *in the classroom* and on regular activities.

In practice, the adage: "Good teaching meets learners where they are" usually is interpreted as a call for *matching* a student's current *capabilities* (e.g., knowledge and skills). However, matching *motivation* also is essential. Such a motivational emphasis encompasses concerns about *intrinsic* motivation and overcoming *avoidance* motivation (see pages 10 and 11).

It is clear that the emphasis on matching capabilities is the prevalent orientation in the literature on teaching. Motivational considerations often are given short shrift. The irony, of course, is that most teachers recognize that motivational factors often play a key role in accounting for poor instructional outcomes. One of the most common laments among teachers is: "They could do it, if only they *wanted* to!" Teachers also know that good abilities are more likely to emerge when students are motivated not only to pursue class assignments, but also are interested in using what they learn in other contexts.

Classrooms must be designed in ways that (a) stress the necessity of matching both motivation and capabilities and (b) encompass both regular instruction and specialized assistance. They must reflect an appreciation that learning and teaching are dynamic and nonlinear processes, that some learners experience problems that require use of something more than the best personalized instruction offers, and an appreciation of the importance of a caring context. The design must also be built with the recognition that teaching and enabling learning are not the teacher's responsibility alone. Good teaching requires collaboration among teachers and other staff at the school and is fostered or hindered by what takes place outside the school.

Ultimately, any definition of good teaching must include the ability to make instruction fit all students and address a wide-range of problems within the regular classroom.

All students need instruction that is a good match for both their motivation and capabilities (e.g., teaching that accounts for interests, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations; approaches that overcome avoidance motivation; structure that provides personalized support and guidance; instruction designed to enhance and expand intrinsic motivation for learning and problem solving). Some students also require added support, guidance, and special accommodations.

Classrooms that can do these things help reduce the need for specialized services and enhance the promise of inclusionary policies. Accomplishing all of the above requires rethinking pre and inservice education for teachers, administrators, and support staff, as well as for paraeducators and other paid assistants, and volunteers.

As long as school reforms fail to address such matters, especially in schools where large proportions of students are not doing well, it will remain a myth to think that achievement test score averages can be meaningfully raised.

**Making it Happen:
Opening the Classroom Door**

New teachers need a considerable amount of on-the-job training.

All teachers and support staff need to learn more about mobilizing and enabling learning in the classroom.

Opening the classroom door is essential for enhancing the learning of teachers and other staff and increasing the productivity of classroom instruction. The crux of the matter is to ensure that effective mentoring and collegial practices are used.

Learning effectively from colleagues is not just a talking game. It involves opportunities for mentors to model and guide change (e.g., demonstrate and discuss new approaches, guide initial practice and eventual implementation, and follow-up to improve and refine). Depending on practicalities, such modeling could take place in a teacher's own classroom or be carried out in colleagues' classrooms. Some of it may take the form of team teaching. Videotapes of good practices also can be used in a variety of ways to enrich collegial sharing.

Another arrangement is for schools to use specialist personnel (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, special education resource teachers) to mentor and demonstrate rather than pursuing traditional consultant roles. That is, instead of telling teachers what they might do to address student learning, behavior, and emotional problems, specialists could be trained to go into classrooms to model and then guide teachers in implementing new practices to engage and reengage students in learning.

As has been stressed, opening the classroom door also allows for the addition of a variety of forms of assistance and useful partnerships. Student learning is neither limited to what is formally taught nor to time spent in classrooms. It occurs whenever and wherever the learner interacts with the surrounding environment. All facets of the community (not just the school) provide learning opportunities. Anyone in the community who wants to facilitate learning might be a contributing teacher. This includes aides, volunteers, parents, siblings, peers, mentors in the community, librarians, recreation staff, etc. They all constitute what can be called the teaching community.

When a classroom successfully joins with its surrounding community, everyone has the opportunity to learn and to teach. Indeed, most schools do their job better when they are an integral and positive part of the community. The array of people who might be of assistance are:

- ?Aides and a variety of volunteers
- ?Other regular classroom teachers
- ?Family members
- ?Students
- ?Specialist teachers and support service personnel
- ?School administrators
- ?Classified staff
- ?Teachers-in-training and other professionals-in-training

Increasingly, it is becoming evident that teachers need to work closely with other teachers and school personnel, as well as with parents, professionals-in-training, volunteers, and so forth. Collaboration and teaming are key facets of mobilizing and enabling learning. These practices allow teachers to broaden the resources and strategies available in and out of the classroom to enhance learning and performance.

Examples of Opening the Door to Assistance and Partnerships*

Using Aides and Volunteers in Targeted Ways

Chronically, teachers find classroom instruction disrupted by some student who is less interested in the lesson than in interacting with a classmate. The first tendency usually is to use some simple form of social control to stop the disruptive behavior (e.g., using proximity and/or a mild verbal intervention). Because so many students today are not easily intimidated, teachers find such strategies do not solve the problem. So, the next steps escalate the event into a form of Greek tragedy. The teacher reprimands, warns, and finally sends the student to "time-out" or to the front office for discipline. In the process, the other students start to titter about what is happening and the lesson usually is disrupted.

In contrast to this scenario, teachers can train an aide (if they have one) or a volunteer who has the ability to interact with students to work in ways that target such youngsters. The training of such individuals focuses on what the teacher wants them to do when a problem arises and what they should be doing to prevent such problems. In reaction to a problem, the aide or volunteer should expect the teacher to give a sign to go and sit next to the designated youngster. The focus is on re-engaging the student in the lesson. If this proves undoable, the next step involves taking the student for a walk outside the classroom. It is true that this means the student won't get the benefit of instruction during that period, but s/he wouldn't anyway.

Using this approach and not having to shift into a discipline mode has multiple benefits. For one, the teacher is able to carry out the day's lesson. For another, the other students do not have the experience of seeing the teacher having a control contest with a student. (Even if a teacher wins such contests, it may have a negative effect on how students perceive the teacher; and if the teacher somehow "loses it," that definitely conveys a wrong message. Either outcome can be counterproductive with respect to a caring climate and a sense of community.) Finally, there has not been a negative encounter with the targeted student. Such encounters build up negative attitudes on both sides which can be counterproductive with respect to future teaching, learning, and behavior. Because there has been no negative encounter, the teacher can reach out to the student after the lesson is over and start to think about how to use an aide or volunteers to work with the student to prevent future problems.

Team Teaching

The obvious point here is that partnering with a compatible colleague enables team members to complement each others' areas of competence, provide each other with nurturance and personal support, and allow for relief in addressing problems.

Collaborating with Special Educators and other Specialists

Almost every school has some personnel who have special training relevant to redesigning the classroom to work for a wider range of students. These specialists range from those who teach music or art to those who work with students designated as in need of special education. They can bring to the classroom not only their special expertise, but ideas for how the classroom design can incorporate practices that will engage students who have not been doing well and can accommodate those with special needs.

*From the Center's continuing education curriculum: *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling*

Creating a Caring Context

From a psychological perspective, it is important that teachers establish a classroom atmosphere that encourages mutual support and caring and that creates a sense of community. Such an atmosphere can play a key role in preventing learning, behavior, emotional, and health problems. Learning and teaching are experienced most positively when the learner cares about learning and the teacher cares about teaching.

Stated simply, the whole process benefits greatly when all the participants care about each other.

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. That is, the classroom curriculum should encompass a focus on fostering 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 is 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. Clearly, a myriad of strategies can contribute to students feeling positively connected to the classroom and school.

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.

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 incorporates newcomers into the organization.

An Inservice Curriculum

To fill the critical void highlighted in this article related to inservice education, our Center has developed a curriculum entitled: *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling*. The set of modules covers how regular classrooms and schools should be designed to ensure *all* students have appropriate opportunities to learn effectively.

Our aim is to place the curriculum in the hands of school administrators, teacher educators, teachers, school support staff, those who train pupil service personnel, community members, and others.* The material is directly available to everyone interested in independent learning through the Center's website (or a hard copy can be ordered).

Module I provides a big picture context for understanding the problems schools face and why every school must develop a component to address barriers to learning. This component encompasses six programmatic areas. One of these areas is designated as *Classroom-Focused Enabling* – which is designed to enhance classroom teachers' capacity to address problems and foster social, emotional, intellectual, and behavioral development.

Module II focuses on the nuts and bolts of Classroom-Focused Enabling – covering how to transform the larger class by developing small learning groups and independent learning options in order to enhance student engagement, facilitate positive learning, prevent problems, and provide special assistance.

Module III explores the role teachers can take in ensuring their schools provide a context that supports and enhances classroom learning.

An accompanying document contains brief, related readings and a set of "tools" that expand on the topics discussed – providing indepth ideas and practices.

*We are exploring various ways to design and deliver this inservice curriculum. If you have ideas about these matters, please let us know (see newsletter insert).

*A Caring Context for Learning and Healthy Development**

Learning community

Learning is neither limited to what is formally taught nor to time spent in classrooms. It occurs whenever and wherever the learner interacts with the surrounding environment. All facets of the community (including the school) provide learning opportunities – thus the term learning community.

Teaching

Whenever a surrounding environment tries to facilitate 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 happens most positively when the learner wants to learn something and the surrounding environment wants to help the learner do so. That is, positive learning is facilitated when the learner *cares* about learning and the teacher *cares* about teaching. The whole process undoubtedly benefits greatly when all the participants *care* about each other.

Caring has moral, social, and personal facets

All facets need to be addressed. 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.

Teachers are all who want to facilitate learning

This includes professional teachers, aides, volunteers, parents, siblings, peers, mentors in the community, librarians, recreation staff, etc. They all constitute what can be called *the teaching community*.

Everyone is a learner and may be teachers

In the learning/teaching community, all are learners and probably play some role as teachers.

Teaching benefits from organizational learning

Organizational learning requires an organizational structure "`where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision and improve shared mental models' [Senge] by engaging in different tasks, acquiring different kinds of expertise, experiencing and expressing different forms of leadership, confronting uncomfortable organizational truths, and searching together for shared solutions" (Andy Hargreaves).

Communities of colleagues

In schools, as Andy Hargreaves has stressed, the way to relieve "the uncertainty and open-endedness in teaching" is to create "communities of colleagues who work collaboratively [in cultures of shared learning and positive risk-taking] to set their own professional standards and limits, while still remaining committed to continuous improvement. Such communities can also bring together the professional and personal lives of teachers in a way that supports growth and allows problems to be discussed without fear of disapproval or punishment."

*From the Center's continuing education curriculum: *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling.*

Ideas into Practice About Motivation*

Editor's Note: In the lead article of this newsletter, we stress the critical importance of opening the classroom door. Throughout the discussion, we highlighted the central role of attending to motivational differences. Below, we go into a bit more detail on this crucial topic. The reason for doing so is that we find everyone talks about motivation, but too little is done to account for it.

External reinforcement may indeed get a particular act going and may lead to its repetition, but it does not nourish, reliably, the long course of learning by which [one] slowly builds in [one's] own way a serviceable model of what the world is and what it can be.

Jerome Bruner

*F*rom the perspective of addressing barriers to learning and promoting healthy development, motivation, and especially *intrinsic* motivation, must be considered in all facets of an intervention. What's required is

? developing a high level of *motivational readiness* (including reducing avoidance motivation) so participants are mobilized

? establishing *processes that elicit, enhance, and maintain motivation* so that participants stay mobilized

? *enhancing motivation as an outcome* so that the desire to improve oneself and address problems increasingly becomes a positive intrinsic attitude that mobilizes activity outside the intervention situation

An increased understanding of human motivation clarifies how essential it is to avoid processes that make people feel controlled and coerced, that limit the range of options, and that limit the focus to a day-in, day-out emphasis on short-term outcomes. From a motivational perspective, such processes often can produce avoidance reactions and thus reduce opportunities for positive learning and development of positive attitudes.

Valuing and Expectations

Two common reasons people give for not bothering to do something are "It's not worth it" and "I know I won't be able to do it." In general, the amount of time and energy spent on an activity seems dependent on how much the activity is valued by the person and on the person's expectation that what is valued will be attained without too much cost.

About Valuing. What makes something worth doing? Prizes? Money? Merit awards? Praise?

Certainly!

We all do a great many things, some of which we don't even like to do, because the activity leads to a desired reward. Similarly, we often do things to escape punishment or other negative consequences that we prefer to avoid.

Rewards and punishments may be material or social. Rewards often take the form of systematically giving points or tokens that can be exchanged for candy, prizes, praise, free time, or social interactions. Punishments include loss of free time and other privileges, added work, fines, isolation, censure, and suspension. Grades are used both as rewards and punishments.

Because people will do things to obtain rewards or avoid punishment, rewards and punishment often are called *reinforcers*. Because they generally come from sources outside the person, they often are called *extrinsics*. Extrinsic reinforcers are easy to use and can have some powerful immediate effects on behavior. Therefore, they have been widely adopted in the fields of special education and psychology as "incentives" for those with behavior and learning problems, Unfortunately, the immediate effects are usually limited to specific behaviors, rote learning, and outcomes often last for a short duration. Moreover, extensive use of extrinsics seems to have some undesired effects. And sometimes the available extrinsics simply aren't powerful enough to get the desired results.

Although the source of extrinsic reinforcers is outside the person, the meaning or value attached to them comes from inside. What makes some extrinsic factor rewarding to most people is the fact that it is experienced as a reward. And what makes it a highly valued reward is that the person highly values it. If you don't like candy, there is not much point in our offering it to you as a reward.

Furthermore, because the use of extrinsics has limits, it's fortunate that humans sometimes do things even without apparent extrinsic reason. In fact, a lot of what people learn and spend time doing is done for intrinsic reasons. Curiosity is a good example; it leads to a great deal of learning. Curiosity seems to be an innate quality that leads all of us to seek stimulation and avoid boredom.

People also pursue some things because of what has been described as an innate striving for competence; humans seem to value *feeling competent*. We try to conquer challenges, and if none are around, we often seek one out.

Another important intrinsic motivator appears to be an internal push toward self-determination. People seem to value *feeling that they have some degree of choice* and freedom in deciding what to do.

And people seem to be intrinsically moved toward establishing and maintaining relationships with others. That is, people tend to value *feelings of being interpersonally connected.*

About Expectations. We may value something greatly; but if we believe we can't do or obtain it without paying too great a personal price, we are likely to seek other valued activities and outcomes. Expectations about these matters are influenced by previous experiences.

Areas where we have been unsuccessful are unlikely to be seen as paths to valued extrinsic rewards or intrinsic satisfactions. We may perceive past failure as caused by our lack of ability or effort or due to the unavailability of needed help. If we think little has changed with respect to these factors, our expectation of succeeding now will be rather low.

> *Interventions that provide a good match increase expectations of success by providing a person with the support and guidance he or she wants and needs.*

Expectancy times Value

In general, then, what we value interacts with our expectations, and motivation is one product of this interaction. Motivation theory captures the sense of this as $E \times V$. If this equation stumps you, don't be surprised. The main introduction to motivational thinking that many of us were given in the past involves some form of reinforcement theory. Thus, even though motivational theorists have wrestled with intrinsic motivation for a long time, and

intuitively, you probably understand much of what they are talking about, you may not have read much of what has been written on the topic.**

For our purposes here, the *E* deals with an individual's expectations about outcome (e.g., success or failure). The *V* deals with valuing, with valuing influenced by both intrinsic values and extrinsic reinforcers, albeit in a complicated way. Such theory recognizes that human beings are thinking and feeling organisms and that intrinsic factors can be powerful motivators.

Motivational theory has immense implications for learning, teaching, parenting, and psychosocial interventions. For example, high expectations and high valuing tend to produce high motivation, while low expectations (E) and high valuing (V) produce relatively weak motivation. High expectations paired with low valuing also yield low approach motivation. Thus, the oft-cited remedial strategy of guaranteeing success by designing tasks to be very easy is not as simple a recipe as it sounds. Indeed, the approach is likely to fail if the outcome is not valued or if the tasks are experienced as too boring or if doing them is seen as too embarrassing. In such cases, a strong negative value is attached to the activities, and this contributes to avoidance motivation.

In sum, motivation is not something that can be determined solely by forces outside the individual. Others can plan activities and outcomes to influence motivation, learning, and behavior change. However, how the activities and outcomes are experienced determines whether they are pursued with a little or a lot of effort and ability or are avoided.

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* From the Center's inservice curriculum: *Enhancing Classroom Approaches for Addressing Barriers to Learning: Classroom-Focused Enabling.*

** In addition to our curriculum, a good starting point is a book by Deci & Ryan entitled: *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior.* New York: Plenum.

Mother to son: *Time to get up and go to school.*

Son: *I don't want to go.*
It's too hard and the kids don't Like me.

Mother: *But you have to go –*
you're the teacher.

Reports and Briefs Related to System Restructuring to Address Barriers to Learning

Recently, we have produced a number of brief reports related to addressing barriers to learning in response to requests for concise overviews to catch the attention of various stakeholders (e.g., administrators, policy makers, parents, teachers, community partners, support service personnel). This series of reports are organized by the following areas of focus:

OVERVIEW/VISION/RESEARCH BASE
>**Expanding Educational Reform to Address Barriers to Learning: Restructuring Student Support Services and Enhancing School-Community Partnerships**
>**Addressing Barriers to Student Learning & Promoting Healthy Development: A Usable Research-Base.**

POLICY DIRECTION & COMMITMENT
>**Addressing Barriers to Student Learning: Closing Gaps in School/Community Policy and Practice**
>**The Policy Problem and a Resolution to Guide Organizations Working toward Policy Cohesion**
>**Restructuring Boards of Education to Enhance Schools' Effectiveness in Addressing Barriers to Student Learning**
>**Pioneer Initiatives to Reform Education Support Programs**

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING LOCAL CAPACITY
>**Resource-Oriented Teams: Key Infrastructure Mechanisms for Enhancing Education Supports**
>**Organization Facilitators: A Change Agent for Systemic School and Community Changes**
>**Financing Mental Health for Children & Adolescents**
>**New Initiatives: Considerations Related to Planning, Implementing, Sustaining, and Going-to-Scale**

NEW PROFESSIONAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS
>**Framing New Directions for Schools Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers**

All these can be downloaded from our website. Indepth guidebooks also are available on many of the topics. You can also order hard copies from the Center.

Please use the enclosed form to ask for what you need and to give us feedback.
Also, send us information, ideas, and materials for the Clearinghouse.

**School Mental Health Project/
Center for Mental Health in Schools
Department of Psychology, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563**
PX-68

Response Form

(1) As indicated on page 8, we are exploring various ways to design and deliver the described inservice curriculum. If you have ideas you can share, please do so here or let us know that we can contact you about this.

(2) If you have any resource requests, list them below.

(3) As always, we welcome your feedback on any facets of the Center's operations.

Your Name _____ Title _____

Agency _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (____)_____ Fax (____)_____ E-Mail _____

Thanks for completing this form. Return it by FAX to (310) 206-8716 *or* in a separate envelope to: School Mental Health Project, Center for Mental Health in Schools, UCLA/Department of Psychology, Box 951563, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563.