

Featured

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**This community of practice *Practitioner* is designed
for a screen bigger than an Iphone.**

For discussion and interchange:

>How can personalized instruction benefit from multi-age classrooms?

Teachers strive to address students' individual differences, preferably by personalizing instruction. Doing so is facilitated by schools developing a variety of ways that teachers can expand and integrate social capital into classrooms. One readily available set of resources are students themselves, and multi-age groupings can enable the process. Here's one teacher's experience.

From: ***How Multi-Age Groups Changed My Teaching Forever***

"...While it's conceptually more efficient to batch kids to teach them a sequential curriculum and have age-based standards, it denies the fact that children aren't standardized, and that diversity is an asset to learning and society. The lack of opportunities for mixed-age interaction removes a natural pathway for meaningful learning.... As we look to evolve schools for the future, we should reduce age segregation and increase opportunities for age mixing and multi-age grouping as a way to harness cognitive diversity and further engagement and learning. ...

Teaching a combined class of fifth and sixth graders for 12 years has shown me the value of multi-age learning and convinced me that it's simply our ideas about school that stand in the way of making this approach more widespread.

There was a tremendous amount that my students learned from each other in our multi-age classroom. Students were there for two years, and during that time, older students took the lead to teach routines and expectations, model discourse and deepen learning for their peers. Opportunities to interact with their younger peers allowed them to practice leadership and strengthen their understanding by teaching. There was an expectation that not everyone was in the same place with their learning, and that was OK. Students knew that they would learn from each other, and eventually, everyone would become both the student and the teacher....

Learning from someone just a bit more advanced than you is often easier than learning from an expert, because they remember the steps, difficulties and misconceptions that go into gaining a new skill or knowledge and can teach accordingly. Similarly, teaching someone just behind you helps solidify what you know and deepens your understanding and confidence with the topic....

Buddy time is a cherished routine in elementary schools. Older and younger students gather to read, play games or do crafts.... In particular, it was often my students who struggled academically who most looked forward to buddy time. While they might not have excelled in the traditional subjects, they often had the social skills or caring instincts that made them excellent older buddies, and they got to have the experience of being the expert. If we created more opportunities to learn academics in those environments, with some of the same-age pressure off, students who struggle might find more success. Why not encourage an older student who needs additional reading or math practice to work with younger students who are learning similar skills as a regular part of their learning?...

I justify buddy time as an opportunity for my students to practice leadership, empathy and giving their whole attention to someone else while using their reading, writing, and math skills. What matters most, though, is the joy of that time: kids laughing together, sharing the joys of learning together; the olders getting to be a little bit younger, sillier, more playful, but also responsible; the youngers getting to be more mature, more sophisticated, seen and valued for who they are...”.

For more on this, see our Center resources

- >[*Making Collaborative/Cooperative Learning Effective in Classrooms*](#)
- >[*Cross-Age Peer Mentorship Programs in Schools*](#)
- >[*Peer Tutoring: Part of Learning Supports.*](#)

About Personalized Instruction

In recent years, personalized instruction has become an increasing focus of discussion in education. Given this, we thought we should once again highlight a whole child/whole school view of

personalized instruction and what a school needs to do to make it work.

See: Chapter 3 “Personalizing Learning: Making it More than another Buzzword” in *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide* (available as a free resource at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html)

From the Chapter:

Personalized instruction defined: The terms individualized and personalized instruction often are used interchangeably. However, these are two different concepts. Both concepts call for knowing when, how, and what to teach and when and how to structure the situation so students can learn on their own. And the two concepts overlap in their emphasis on developmental differences. Indeed, the major thrust in most individualized approaches is to account for individual differences in developmental capability.

In contrast, we define personalization as the process of accounting for individual differences not only in capabilities but also with respect to learner motivation. 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 as essential as differences in capability are, motivational differences often are a primary consideration in creating a good set of learning conditions.

From a psychological perspective, we also stress that it is the learner's perception that determines whether the instructional “fit” or “match” is good or bad. This has fundamental implications for all efforts to assess students, manage behavior, and enable learning.

For motivated learners, either individualized or personalized instruction can be quite effective. For students with learning, behavior, and emotional problems, however, low and avoidance motivation for classroom learning is likely and must be addressed. In such cases, the concept of personalization provides the best guide to practice (and research).

Making it Work: To frame what is involved, the chapter outlines:

- A sequential and hierarchical framework for enabling classroom learning
- What is involved in addressing barriers to learning in a classroom
- Personalized Structure for Learning
- Learner-Valued Options and Mutual Decision Making
- Flexible Interest Grouping to Enable Personalization
- Homework that Motivates Practice and Everyday Use
- Conferencing
- Response to Intervention (RtI): Assessment to Plan; Feedback to Nurture

For discussion and interchange:

> Ensuring students with disabilities graduate

There is widespread recognition about the public health and civil rights imperative for reducing the high rate of school dropouts. But relatively little focus has been on the dropout problem related to students with disabilities. Here's an excerpt from a recent literature review on the matter.

From: *A systematic review of the literature related to dropout for students with disabilities*

"...Two consistent patterns emerge across the full set of studies included in this review.

>First, school engagement is an important construct for understanding school completion for students with disabilities. Whether that engagement is indicated by relationships with adults and peers or perceptions of school climate and curriculum, the way students with disabilities feel about their schools and themselves as members of the school community appears to be a critical determinant in their persistence in school.

>Second, and perhaps relatedly, restrictive educational placement is negatively associated with graduation with a regular diploma...., Late entry to restrictive educational placement, particularly for students with satisfactory academic performance, should be avoided whenever possible.

From a school policy perspective, findings from these studies indicate that in-grade retention, exclusionary discipline, and late placement in a restrictive educational placement, common school responses to extreme behavioral and academic difficulty, are not always in the best interest of the students to whom they are applied, particularly when viewed through the lens of school engagement. Each of these measures serves to disconnect students from their teachers, peers, and schools, lessening the likelihood that they will form or maintain strong school engagement.

School leaders should establish processes to identify students who are struggling academically before those challenges become engines of disengagement. This should include close monitoring of attendance, behavior, and academic progress in core classes. Robust early intervention and the provision of intensive and individualized instruction can reduce student frustration, boost academic engagement, and avoid the need for retention in-grade or credit recovery, both of which are associated with lower engagement.

IEP teams should conduct comprehensive behavioral assessments and establish behavior plans for students who are struggling behaviorally, monitor the fidelity with which those plans are implemented, and adjust their strategies when warranted to promote positive student behavior. Before considering restrictive educational placement, teams should consider the student's academic, behavioral, social, and emotional needs and a determination should be made as to whether counseling, mentoring, connections with community support, or other measures might help to improve the student's overall well-being and behavior. Teams should consider restrictive educational placement a measure of last resort, with the understanding that separating a student from peers, particularly in middle or high school, is likely to disrupt important relationships and connections that may be significant in maintaining school engagement.

Administrators should seek alternatives to exclusionary discipline including restorative justice approaches and the use of culturally responsive positive behavior supports, each of which have the potential to build both behavioral and emotional engagement. These alternative policy approaches capitalize on opportunities to build rather than break students' connections with and investment in school.

Perhaps the most intuitive best practice related to bolstering student engagement is providing students with the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with adults. Students who engage in respectful interactions with school-based adults, particularly in contexts that go beyond accountability or interactions within the classroom have demonstrated stronger engagement.... School personnel should seek opportunities to engage with students in informal ways, build relationships, and actively engage students in extracurricular activities to support emotional engagement.

In the classroom, teachers should actively communicate the relevance of their content areas and the skills students are learning as a part of building investment in lessons and academic engagement. Teachers should also include choice in their lesson plans and incorporate technology and high-interest examples and activities in their teaching, measures that are associated with higher cognitive engagement...."

Next are excerpts from a few other articles discussing the matter.

From: *School Completion Toolkit*

“The School Completion Toolkit is intended as a resource that states, school districts, schools, parents, and other interested parties can use to gain a basic understanding of matters related to school dropout, graduation, recovery, reentry, and school completion in general.

- >Section 1 of the toolkit provides a basic introduction to school completion...
- >Section 2 contains information about the predictors and practices related to school completion and quality transition programming. Each segment of Section 2 is organized to provide an overview, information about the core components, some school-based and home-based strategies to support the construct, and finally, a collection of links to resources which inform that facet of school completion.
- >Section 3 comprises a framework and process for developing, installing and implementing a local school-completion initiative.

In general, students with disabilities have lower academic achievement, lower graduation rates, higher rates of suspension and expulsion, and ultimately higher dropout rates than their nondisabled peers.... The combination of economic and social factors, as well as push and pull factors is exacerbated by a having a disability. Too often, these youth struggle in school and ultimately drop out....”

From: *Improving Graduation Rates*

“Being a student with a disability comes with numerous hurdles rooted in systemic barriers, societal stigma, and widespread misconceptions.... It is unacceptable that students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of high school compared to their non-disabled peers....

We designed a comprehensive research study to explore the critical factors leading to high school success versus high school incompleteness among students with LD, centering the young adult voice....

One of the most concerning findings from the study was that roughly one-third of respondents recalled not having their basic needs met during high school. This finding underscores the essential role that basic needs play in academic success and the road to high school graduation. When basic needs such as hunger, shelter, and physical and psychological safety are not met, the risk of dropping out of high school increases. Additionally, the study found these common experiences among respondents:

- >Absenteeism, tardiness, and classroom disengagement
- >Interactions with law enforcement
- >A lack of autonomy and choice in the classroom and their educational path
- >A lack of connectedness to teachers and peers, including experiences of bullying
- >A lack of participation in high school transition supports’...”

From: *“I Just Needed Someone to Hear Me”: Listening to Student Voices on Secondary School Support*

“Although inclusion remains a key goal of education globally, there are still many challenges that exist to supporting students with accessibility requirements and/or disability within secondary school who are already at higher risk of not graduating. ... A significant number of students acknowledged the importance of relationships when receiving support within the school environment. These relationships were primarily centered on a sense of care, connection, personalization, and consistency.....

Students repeatedly described experiences of informal and formal social and emotional support through engagement with teachers, mentors, and paraprofessionals which demonstrated that inclusive practice extends beyond tangible and academic accommodations to the affective experience of support. These experiences were centered on students feeling a level of personalized care and support that was founded on genuine human connection, having someone to talk to, and feeling heard. This feeling of care was bolstered when staff would follow up with them at a later date, something also valued by students in higher levels of education...

It is essential that students can access appropriate educational accommodations throughout their secondary school studies to enable them to learn and perform to their fullest potential, setting them up for positive outcomes, whether that be for future employment or further study....

The findings from this study shed light on the power and strength of connection and care within education and its impact on not only the overall wellbeing of students, but also inherently their motivation and desire to engage in learning. Social and emotional support was just as important as academic support. ...”

For more, see our Center resources

- >*Learning Problems and Learning Disabilities*
- >*Enhancing Classroom Teachers' Capacity to Successfully Engage All Students in Learning: It's the Foundation of Learning Supports*
- >*Response to Intervention and Classroom & Schoolwide Learning Supports: A Guide for Teachers and Learning Supports Staff*

>**Links to a few other relevant shared resources**

- >>*Special education case management*
- >>*Social isolation and achievement of students with learning disabilities*
- >>*Using Stimulant Medication for Children with ADHD: What Do Parents Say?*
- >>*A scoping review of state-sponsored mental health training programs for children and youth to support use of evidence-based treatments*
- >>*Extracurricular Activities—Extra Beneficial: The Role of Motivation for Extracurricular Activities on Outcomes in High-School Students*
- >>*Public school funding nears \$1 trillion*
- >>*TK–12 Education Governance in California: Past, Present, and Future*

A Few Upcoming Webinars

For links to the following and for more webinars, go to the Center's Links to Upcoming/Archived Webcasts/Podcasts
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/webcast.htm>

12/10 Strategic planning for education leaders
12/10 Partner with families around learning
12/10 The power of belonging within a school community
12/11 AI integration in education
12/11 Shifts in federal education funding
12/11 Finding balance and wellness
12/15 Person centered prevention
12/16 Resilient leadership
12/16 Changing systems to enhance wellness
12/16 Teaching strategies to improve impact
12/16 Minimize classroom disruptions
12/17 Creating a low stress environment
12/17 Understanding grief
1/2 Building belonging in schools
1/5 AI in K-12 education
1/13 Positive classroom interactions
1/13 Artificial intelligence risks and benefits
1/14 School avoidance and mental health
1/15/26 Elevating school staff talent and recruiting
2/10 Strengthening school community partnerships
2/10 Prevention core competencies
2/24 Whole school approach
3/3 Strong leaders make strong schools
3/24 Student voice and advocacy

How Learning Happens (Edutopia's series of videos explores guiding all students, regardless of their developmental starting points, to become engaged learners).

Unpacking the Impacts of Structural Racism on Youth (Webinar recording)



National Initiative for Transforming Student and Learning Supports

Our Center emphasizes the opportunity to start now to transform how schools address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students.

An Agenda for Improving Student/Learning Supports: A Month-by-Month Guide for Systemic Change with Existing Resources

Let Us Know about what ideas are being proposed for moving in new directions for transforming how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

And if anyone is thinking about increasing the capacity of a district or school with respect to developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports, we can help. Send all info to ltaylor@ucla.edu

To Listserv Participants

- Please share this resource with others. (Everyone has a stake in the future of public education and this is a critical time for action.)
- Let us know what's going on to improve how schools address barriers to learning & teaching and reengage disconnected students and families. (We can share the info with the over 140,000 on our listserv.)

For those who have been forwarded this and want to receive resources directly, send an email to ltaylor@ucla.edu

Looking for information? (We usually can help.)

Have a suggestion for improving our efforts? (We welcome your feedback.)

We look forward to hearing from you! Contact: ltaylor@ucla.edu

THIS IS THE END OF THIS ISSUE OF THE PRACTITIONER*

**THE MORE FOLKS SHARE, THE MORE USEFUL AND
INTERESTING THIS RESOURCE BECOMES!**

**Send resources ideas, requests, comments,
and experiences for sharing
Ltaylor@ucla.edu**

*Who Are We? Our national Center was established in 1995 under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project (which was established in 1986). We are part of the Department of Psychology at UCLA. The Center is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor.