

Addressing Barriers

to Learning

New ways to think . . .

Better ways to link



Volume 9, Number 3
Summer, 2004

Teachers in too many schools are confronted with too many students who have become disengaged from classroom learning. Re-engagement in classroom learning is the key to maintaining positive behavior.

Beyond Positive Behavior Support Initiatives

The essence of the teaching process is to create an environment that first can mobilize the learner to pursue the curriculum and then can maintain the mobilization, while facilitating learning. Behavior problems clearly get in the way of all this.

Misbehavior disrupts. In some forms, such as bullying and intimidating others, it is hurtful. And, observing such behavior may disinhibit others.

When a student misbehaves, a natural reaction is to want that youngster to experience and other students to see the consequences of misbehaving. One hope is that public awareness of consequences will deter subsequent problems. As a result, a considerable amount of time at schools is devoted to discipline; a common concern is classroom management. In their efforts to deal with deviant and devious behavior and to create safe environments, unfortunately schools have overrelied on negative consequences and control techniques. Such practices model behavior that foster rather than counter development of negative values and often produce other forms of undesired behavior. And, they frequently make schools look and feel more like prisons than community treasures. It is clear from the dropout rate that, over the long run, many students do not fare well in such situations.

The argument sometimes is made that the reason students continue to misbehave is because the wrong practices have been used or have been implemented inappropriately. In particular, schools are criticized for overemphasizing punishment. To move schools beyond overreliance on punishment and control strategies, there is ongoing advocacy for social skills training, asset development, character education, and positive behavior support initiatives. The move from punishment to positive approaches is a welcome one. However, most of the new initiatives have not focused enough on a basic system failure that must be addressed if improved behavior is to be maintained. That is, strategies that focus on enhancing positive behavior have paid too little attention to helping teachers reengage students in classroom learning. This is a topic we have discussed in previous newsletters and want to expand on here.

Disengaged Students and Social Control

Students not engaged in the lessons at hand tend to pursue other activity. As teachers and other staff try to cope with that segment that is disruptive, their main concern usually is “classroom management.” Currently, this is likely to emphasize providing “positive behavior supports” in and out-of-the-classroom.

While minimizing punishment, these approaches still encompass *social control* strategies aimed directly at stopping disruptive behavior. An often stated assumption is that stopping the behavior will make students amenable to teaching. In a few cases, this may be so. However, the assumption ignores the likelihood of *psychological reactance* and the need to restore an individual’s sense of self-determination. Moreover, it belies the reality that so many students continue to manifest poor academic achievement and the staggering dropout rates in too many schools.

Inside

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- Pages 8-10 – *Working with Disengaged Students*
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In most cases, the greatest consideration shouldn't be social control. What teachers need even more are ways to re-engage students who have become disengaged and resistant to standard instruction. Despite this need, strategies that have the greatest likelihood of re-engaging students in *learning* rarely are a prominent part of pre or in-service preparation. And, such strategies seldom are the focus of interventions applied by professionals whose role is to support teachers and students. To correct these deficiencies, we suggest that intervention thinking must move toward practices that embrace an expanded view of engagement and motivation (see Figure 1).

About Student Engagement

Engagement is related positively to achievement; disengagement is a precursor to dropping out of school.

A recent review* stresses that engagement is defined in three ways in the research literature:

- *Behavioral engagement* draws on the idea of participation in academic/social/extracurricular activities
- *Emotional engagement* encompasses positive and negative reactions to teachers, peers, academics, and school and is presumed to create institutional ties and influence willingness to do the work.
- *Cognitive engagement* draws on the idea of investment, thoughtfulness, and willingness to exert effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills.

Recognition of the importance of student engagement is basic to many efforts to improve schools and teaching. Antecedents to engagement have been organized into:

- *School level factors* (choice, clear/consistent goals, small size, student participation in school policy and management, opportunities for staff and students to be involved in cooperative endeavors, and academic work that allows for the development of products)
- *Classroom Context* (teacher support, peers, classroom structure, autonomy support, task characteristics)
- *Individual Needs* (for relatedness, autonomy, competence)

*"School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence" (2004) by J. Fredricks, P. Blumenfeld, & A. Paris. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109.

Don't Lose Sight of Motivation

Those who argue we must focus on "basics" are right. But, the basics that need attention have to do with motivation. What many of us have been taught about dealing with misbehavior runs counter to what we intuitively understand about human motivation. Teachers and parents, in particular, often come to over-rely on reinforcement theory, despite their awareness of the importance of intrinsic motivation.

Efforts to engage and re-engage students in learning require drawing on an expanded understanding of human motivation. Such understanding underscores that

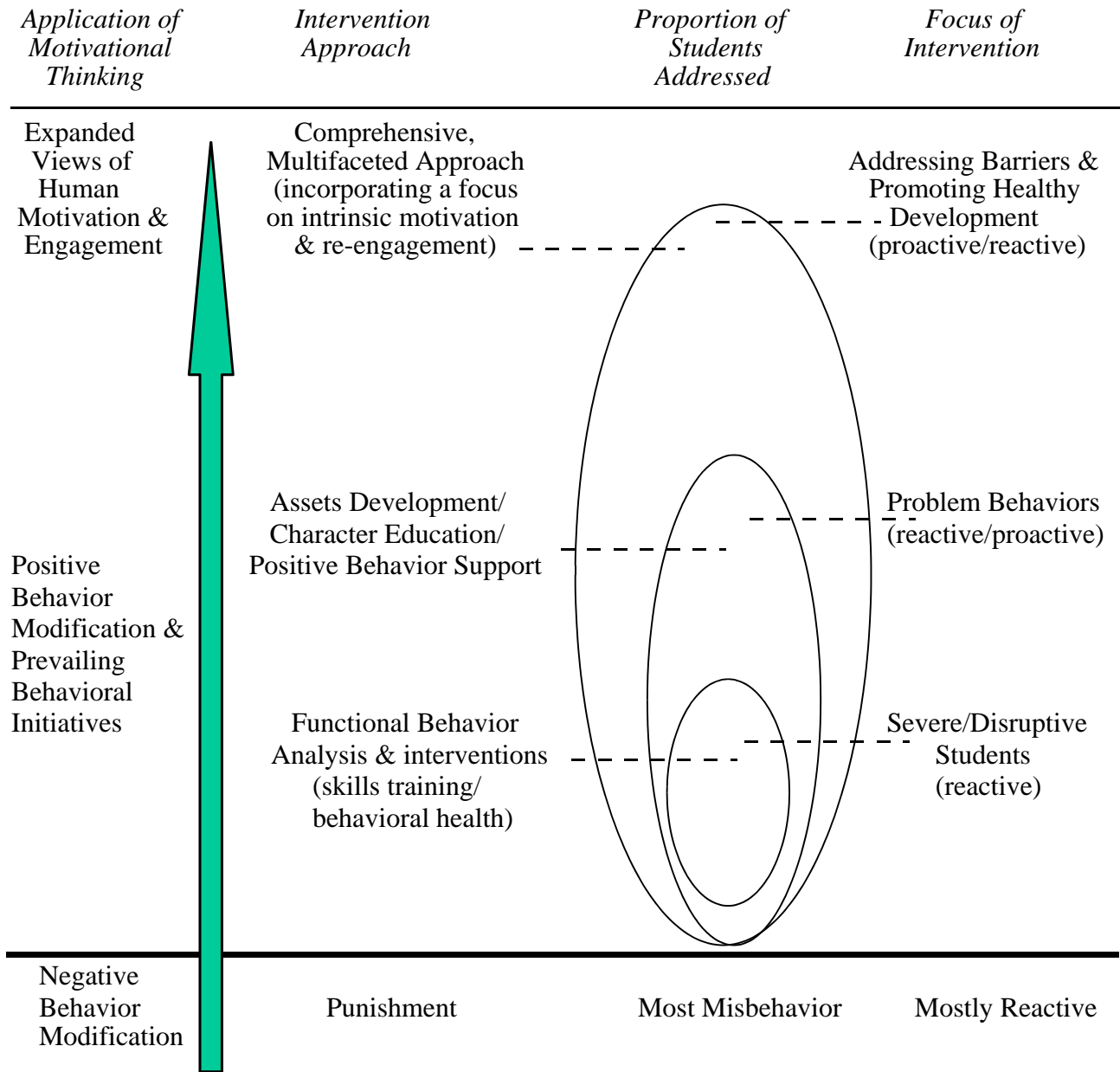
- motivation is a learning prerequisite, and its absence or distortion may cause learning and behavior problems and/or maintain such problems
- individuals may be motivated toward the idea of obtaining a certain learning outcome but may not be motivated to pursue certain learning processes
- individuals may be motivated to start to work on overcoming their learning problem but may not maintain their motivation
- individuals may be motivated to learn basic skills but maintain negative attitudes about the area of functioning and thus never use the skills except when they must
- motivated learners can do more than others might expect.

An increased understanding of motivation clarifies how essential it is to avoid processes that limit options, make students feel controlled and coerced, and focus mostly on remedying problems. Such processes are likely to produce avoidance reactions in the classroom and to school. Eventually, the students disengage from classroom learning. Re-engagement depends on use of interventions that help minimize conditions that negatively affect motivation and maximize conditions that have a positive motivational effect.

Of course, teachers, parents, and support staff cannot control all factors affecting motivation. Indeed, when any of us address learning and behavior concerns, we have direct control over a relatively small segment of the physical and social environment. We try to maximize the likelihood that opportunities to learn are a good fit with the current *capabilities* of a given youngster. And,

(cont. on p. 3 below figure 1)

Figure 1. Developmental Trend in Intervention Thinking: Behavioral Initiatives and Beyond



with engagement in mind, we try to match individual differences in *motivation*.

Matching individual differences in *motivation* means attending to

- *motivation as a readiness concern*
- *motivation as a key ongoing process concern*
- *minimizing negative motivation and avoidance reactions as process and outcome concerns*
- *enhancing intrinsic motivation as a basic outcome concern.*

Re-engagement in School Learning

Students who are intrinsically motivated to learn at school seek out opportunities and challenges and go beyond requirements. In doing so, they learn more and learn more deeply than do classmates who are extrinsically motivated. Facilitating the learning of such students is a fairly straightforward matter and fits well with school improvements that primarily emphasize enhancing instructional practices. The focus is on helping establish ways for students who are motivationally ready

(cont. on p.6)

Center News



***NEW AND UPDATED RESOURCES

Trying to enhance mental health in schools? Want to end the marginalization of learning supports?

As part of the “Summits Initiative: New Directions for Student Support,” a campaign is being launched to clarify how learning supports can be strengthened for all students. Workgroups in several states are forming to circulate info to policy makers and colleagues. The following resources have been developed so far, each of which can be used as is or quickly revised for use with various audiences. We are encouraging everyone to download these resources and help get the message out.

- C *A Comprehensive Learning Support System: Questions & Answers.* This talking points document answers the following five basic questions that folks frequently ask about initiatives for new directions.

- 1) *Why are new directions imperative?*
- 2) *What needs to be done to make it a reality?*
- 3) *What will it look like at a school?*
- 4) *What's the research-base?*
- 5) *What will it cost?*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/conceptpaper.htm>

- C *So you want higher achievement scores? It's Time to Rethink Learning Supports* Published in the journal of the National Association of School Boards of Education (NASBE), this short piece can be quickly read by busy policy makers.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/conceptpaper.htm>

- C *New Directions for School & Community Initiatives to Address Barriers to Learning: Two Examples of White Papers to Inform and Guide Policy Makers.* These papers, (along with talking points), were developed for a urban and suburban district respectively.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/Report/newdirectionsforschoolandcommunity.pdf>

- C *Summits Initiative Brochure.* Describes why new directions are imperative and what the Summits Initiative is about (also online in the "Outreach Campaign" section)
- C *New Directions for Student Support,* a concept paper which folks around the country already are adapting to meet their needs.
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/studentsupport.pdf>

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New Publication by Center Staff – “Classroom Climate.” In S. Lee, P. Lowe, & E. Robinson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of School Psychology.* Sage Pub.

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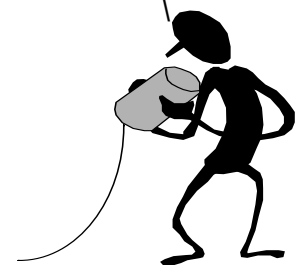
See the full list of Center resources online at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>. All the resources can be downloaded from the website at no cost. Hardcopies can be ordered for the cost of copying and mailing.

Also, 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.

School staff deserve a lot of credit.



Well, if we paid them more, they wouldn't need it.



No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Center Staff:

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

Interested in a Statewide Summit on New Directions for Student Support?

Starting the process in your state is simple. Just let us know you are interested by completing and faxing or mailing the response form inserted in this newsletter or email ltaylor@ucla.edu

- < As soon as a significant group of key leaders in a state has expressed interest, a state planning group is established to decide about date, location, and how to integrate the summit with other state initiatives and priorities. (Initial discussions are underway about summits in CT, KS, RI, DC, NY, TX, and TN.)

For those of you in WI, CA, MN, and IN, be aware that initial Steering Groups have been formed to follow up on the momentum and plans made at the state Summits. And, work groups are being convened to follow up on specific tasks. Two priorities have been identified: One is launching a social marketing campaign aimed at specific groups and key leaders (e.g., what to distribute, to who, how). The second priority is identifying school districts ready to move in new directions for student support (e.g., what criteria to use in determining readiness, who to contact for nominations, and how to engage decision makers). If you want to participate, email ltaylor@ucla.edu

- *** For more information on the Summits Initiative, see the info at <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>
Click on the green button labeled "Summits on New Directions."

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:

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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.

Center for School Mental Health Assistance at the University of Maryland, Baltimore

in partnership with The Policymaker Partnership of the National Assoc. of State Directors of Special Education

Ninth National Conference on Advancing School-Based Mental Health Programs

The School Mental Health Imperative
October 7-9, Hyatt Regency Dallas, TX

Also coming up – *Charting the Course for Our Children's Future*, August 2 - 6, 2004
CSMHA's 4th Annual SchoolHealth Interdisciplinary Program
Turf Valley Resort & Conference Center, Ellicott City, Maryland

For information, see <http://csmha.umaryland.edu>

(continued from page 3)

and able to achieve and, of course, to maintain and enhance their motivation. The process involves knowing when, how, and what to teach and also knowing when and how to structure the situation so they can learn on their own.

In contrast, students who manifest learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems may have developed extremely negative perceptions of teachers 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 the youngster is even to perceive that something has changed in the situation. Minimally, exceptional efforts must be made to have them (1) view the teacher and other interveners as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (2) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. Thus, any effort to re-engage disengaged students must begin by addressing negative perceptions. School support staff and teachers must work together to reverse conditions that led to such perceptions.

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

John Holt

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Many individuals with learning problems also are described as hyperactive, distractable, impulsive, behavior disordered, and so forth. Their behavior patterns are seen as interfering with efforts to remedy their learning problems. Although motivation has always been a concern to those who work with learning and behavior problems, the emphasis in handling these interfering behaviors usually is on using extrinsics as part of efforts to directly control and/or in conjunction with direct skill instruction. For example, interventions are designed to improve impulse control, perseverance, selective and sustained attention, frustration tolerance, follow-through, and social awareness and skills. In all cases, the emphasis is on reducing or eliminating interfering behaviors, usually with the presumption that then the student will re-engage in learning. However, there is little evidence that these strategies enhance a student's motivation toward classroom learning.

Psychological scholarship over the last thirty or so years has brought renewed attention to motivation as a central concept in understanding learning and attention problems. This work is just beginning to find its way into applied fields and programs. One line of theory and research has emphasized the relationship of learning and behavior problems to deficiencies in intrinsic motivation. This work clarifies the value of interventions designed to increase

- feelings of self-determination
- feelings of competence and expectations of success
- feelings of interpersonal relatedness
- the range of interests and satisfactions related to learning.

Increasing intrinsic motivation involves affecting a student's thoughts, feelings, and decisions. In general, the intent is to use procedures that can potentially reduce negative and increase positive feelings, thoughts, and coping strategies with respect to learning. For learning and behavior problems, in particular, this means identifying and minimizing experiences that maintain or may increase avoidance motivation.

Activities to correct deficiencies in intrinsic motivation are directed at improving awareness of personal motives and true capabilities, learning to set valued and appropriate goals, learning to value and to make appropriate and satisfying choices, and learning to value and accept responsibility for choice.

For a brief discussion of general strategies for working with disengaged students see *Ideas into Practice* on pp. 8-10 of this newsletter and then take a look at the references cited at the end of this article.

Concluding Comments

Whatever the initial cause of someone's learning and behavior problems, the longer the individual has lived with such problems, the more likely s/he will have negative feelings and thoughts about instruction, teachers, and schools. The feelings include anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger. The thoughts may include expectations of failure and vulnerability and low valuing of many learning "opportunities." Such thoughts and feelings can result in avoidance motivation or low motivation for learning and performing in many areas of schooling. Low motivation leads to half-hearted effort. Avoidance motivation leads to avoidance behaviors. Individuals with avoidance and low motivation often also are attracted to socially disapproved activity.

It remains tempting to focus directly on student misbehavior. And, in doing so, it is heartening to see the shift from negative to positive strategies in addressing unwanted behavior. However, as long as factors that lead to disengagement are left unaffected, we risk perpetuating the phenomenon that William Ryan identified as *Blaming the Victim*.

From an intervention perspective, the point for emphasis is that engaging and re-engaging students in classroom learning involves matching motivation. Matching motivation requires factoring in students' perceptions in determining the right mix of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. It also requires understanding the key role played by expectations related to outcome. Without a good match, social control strategies can suppress negative attitudes and behaviors, but re-engagement in classroom learning is unlikely.

A Few References

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Note: also see the Center Quick Find topic, *Motivation*, at – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/motiv.htm>
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**The bigger they are,
the harder they fall on you.**

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What Do you Think About ... ?

Dropouts, Pushouts, and the Number Game

How big is the dropout problem? Are dropout rates going down, going up, or remaining stable? How many dropouts are really pushouts? What's the impact on society in terms of mental health and social problems and the economy? The San Antonio Intercultural Development Research Association reports that the Texas dropout rate has hovered around 40 percent for the last three years. At the same time, the four-year rate reported as part of the State's accountability system is cited as 6.8%. One Texas newspaper followed students in a single high school class and found a dropout rate of 15.9 %. From the perspective of graduation rates, a report from the Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute states that 55% of students in Texas graduated within four years (making it the lowest graduation rate in the country). Georgia's rate was 56%. The national average was 69%. With dropout rates such an important accountability indicator, concern is again rising about how many youngsters don't graduate and the need for comparable and better data on the problem. And, there is the lingering question of how many who "dropout" really are pushed out.

(Use the inserted response form to let us know what you think about this.)

Ideas into Practice

Working with Disengaged Students



Here are four general strategies to think about in planning ways to work with disengaged students:

Clarify student perceptions of the problem – Talk openly with students about why they have become disengaged so that steps can be planned for how to alter their negative perceptions and prevent others from developing such perceptions.

Reframe school learning – In the case of those who have disengaged, major reframing in teaching approaches is required so that these students (a) view the teacher as supportive (rather than controlling and indifferent) and (b) perceive content, outcomes, and activity options as personally valuable and obtainable. It is important, for example, to eliminate threatening evaluative measures; reframe content and processes to clarify purpose in terms of real life needs and experiences and underscore how it all builds on previous learning; and clarify why the procedures are expected to be effective – especially those designed to help correct specific problems.

Renegotiate involvement in school learning – New and mutual agreements must be developed and evolved over time through conferences with the student and where appropriate including parents. The intent is to affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. The focus throughout is on clarifying awareness of valued options, enhancing expectations of positive outcomes, and engaging the student in meaningful, ongoing decision making. For the process to be most effective, students should be assisted in sampling new processes and content, options should include valued enrichment opportunities, and there must be provision for reevaluating and modifying decisions as perceptions shift.

Reestablish and maintain appropriate working relationships (e.g., through creating a sense of trust, open communication, providing support and direction as needed).

To maintain re-engagement and prevent disengagement, the above strategies must be pursued using processes and content that:

- minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and relatedness to valued others
- maximize such feelings (included here is an emphasis on a school taking steps to enhance public perception that it is a welcoming, caring, safe, and just institution)
- guide motivated practice (e.g., providing opportunities for meaningful applications and clarifying ways to organize practice)
- provide continuous information on learning and performance in ways that highlight accomplishments
- provide opportunities for continued application and generalization (e.g., ways in which students can pursue additional, self-directed learning or can arrange for additional support and direction).

Obviously, it is no easy task to decrease well-assimilated negative attitudes and behaviors. And, the task is likely to become even harder with the escalation toward high-stakes testing policies (no matter how well-intentioned). It also seems obvious that, *for many schools, enhanced achievement test scores will only be feasible when the large number of disengaged students are re-engaged in learning at school.*

All this argues for

- (1) minimizing student disengagement and maximizing re-engagement by moving school culture toward a greater focus on intrinsic motivation and
- (2) minimizing psychological reactance and enhancing perceptions that lead to re-engagement in learning at school by rethinking social control practices.

From a motivational perspective, key facets of accomplishing this involve enhancing learner options and decision making (see Exhibit 1).

(cont. on p. 10)

Exhibit 1: Options and Decision Making

If the only decision Maria can make is between reading book A, which she hates, and reading book B, which she loathes, she is more likely to be motivated to avoid making any decision than to be pleased with the opportunity to decide for herself. Even if she chooses one of the books over the other, the motivational effects the teacher wants are unlikely to occur. Thus:

Choices have to include valued and feasible options.

David wants to improve his reading, but he just doesn't like the programmed materials the teacher uses. James would rather read about science than the adventure stories his teacher has assigned. Matt will try anything if someone will sit and help him with the work. Thus:

Options usually are needed for (a) content and outcomes and (b) processes and structure.

Every teacher knows a classroom program has to have variety. There are important differences among students with regard to the topics and procedures that currently interest and bore them. And for students with learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems, more variety seems necessary.

A greater proportion of individuals with avoidance or low motivation for learning at school are found among those with learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems. For these individuals, few currently available options may be appealing. How much greater the range of options needs to be depends primarily on how strong avoidance tendencies are. In general, however, the initial strategies for working with such students involve

- further expansion of the range of options for learning (if necessary, this includes avoiding established curriculum content and processes)
- primarily emphasizing areas in which the student has made personal and active decisions
- accommodation of a wider range of behavior than usually is tolerated (e.g., a widening of limits on the amount and types of "differences" tolerated)

From a motivational perspective, one of the most basic instructional concerns is the way in which students are involved in making decisions about options. Critically, decision-making processes can lead to perceptions of coercion and control or to perceptions of real choice (e.g., being in control of one's destiny, being self-determining). Such differences in perception can affect whether a student is mobilized to pursue or avoid planned learning activities and outcomes.

People who have the opportunity to make decisions among valued and feasible options tend to be committed to following through. In contrast, people who are not involved in decisions often have little commitment to what is decided. And if individuals disagree with a decision that affects them, besides not following through they may react with hostility.

Thus, essential to programs focusing on motivation are decision-making processes that affect perceptions of choice, value, and probable outcome. Three special points should be noted about decision-making.

- Decisions are based on current perceptions. As perceptions shift, it is necessary to reevaluate decisions and modify them in ways that maintain a mobilized learner.
- Effective and efficient decision making is a basic skill, and one that is as fundamental as the three Rs. Thus, if an individual does not do it well initially, this is not a reason to move away from learner involvement in decision making. Rather, it is an assessment of a need and a reason to use the process not only for motivational purposes, but to improve this basic skill.
- Among students manifesting learning, behavior, and/or emotional problems, it is well to remember that the most fundamental decision some of these individuals have to make is whether they want to participate or not. That is why it may be necessary in specific cases temporarily to put aside established options and standards. As we have stressed, before some students will decide to participate in a proactive way, they have to perceive the learning environment as positively different – and quite a bit so – from the one in which they had so much failure.

Reviews of the literature on human motivation stress that providing students with options and involving them in decision making is an effective way to enhance their engagement in learning and improve their learning and performance. For example, numerous studies have shown that opportunities to express preferences and make choices lead to greater motivation, academic gains, increases in productivity and on-task behavior, and decreases in aggressive behavior. Similarly, researchers report that student participation in goal setting leads to more positive outcomes (e.g., higher commitment to a goal and increased performance).

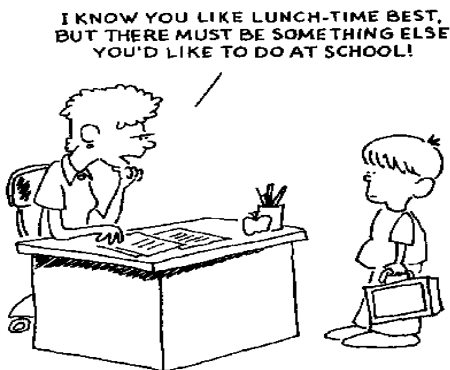
Simply put, people who have the opportunity to make decisions among valued and feasible options tend to be committed to following through.

Conversely, studies indicate that student preferences and involvement tend to diminish when activities are chosen for them.

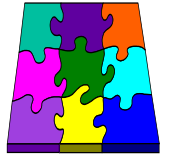
That is, people who are not involved in decisions often have little commitment to what is decided.

Moreover, if individuals disagree with a decision that affects them, besides not following through they may react hostilely. The implications for classrooms of all the research in this area seem evident: Students who are given more say about what goes on related to their learning at school are likely to show higher degrees of engagement and academic success.

Optimally, this means ensuring that decision-making processes maximize perceptions of having a choice from among personally worthwhile options and attainable outcomes. At the very least, it is necessary to minimize perceptions of having no choice, little value, and probable failure.



Lessons Learned Addressing Truancy



Too many truancy programs mainly threaten students and parents. Many reflect little understanding of the broad range of factors that result in chronic absences and truancy. The result seems to be increased numbers of students who are “pushed-out” of school.

We all need to learn from reviews of relevant research such as the 2003 report from the **Wilder Foundation** entitled: *Effective truancy prevention and intervention*. <http://www.wilder.org/research/reports.html?summary=1100>

The report from Wilder notes:

Much research has focused on factors outside of the individual truant child, such as factors that motivate youth to attend school. ... Many researchers conclude that schools need to make systemic changes in order to re-engage students who have poor attendance. These systemic changes promote improvements in school climate and practices that can have a positive impact on all students.

From Wilder: What Works

- >Relationship-building: Students need individualized attention at school ... and build strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect. Students need strong, positive relationships with teachers and other adults at school. In addition, research has found that older youth need strong and healthy relationships with peers, and that these can be a motivator for attending school.
- >Contacting parents re. absenteeism (works best with 10th grade and younger), creating meaningful incentives for parental responsibility, and including parents in all truancy prevention activities.
- >Strong and clear attendance policies.

- >Family counseling that recognizes and builds on the family's own strengths and resources, with the overall goal of increasing attendance. (The study that found impact included up to six months of family counseling.)
- >Intensive school interventions (examples include a mix of the above strategies and also mentors, individualized plans, a team approach, and "learning circles" efforts by teachers to provide education relevant to the cultural background of the community and to provide a controlled environment that emphasize academics and discipline).
- >Establishing ongoing truancy prevention programs for school, rather than a one time effort or an effort that only targets high risk students.
- >School staff that are trained, committed, and supported to provide high quality, responsive services and keep at-risk youth in the educational mainstream.
- >With every approach taken, it is necessary to include ongoing, rigorous evaluation to measure the impact of the program.

From Wilder: *Strategies with Inconclusive Results*

- >Rewards and/or incentives for attendance (i.e., fast food coupons or prizes from local businesses). Some studies found increases in the number of students with perfect attendance. Studies are mixed on the benefit of this approach for chronically truant youth.
- >Peer group counseling (in-school group sessions with other truant youth). Two studies found increases in school attendance for group counseling participants. However, both studies had very small samples (less than 20 participants).
- >Probation officers devoted to truancy cases. This approach looks promising in reducing truancy, but the studies are limited by lack of a comparison sample of truant students who did not receive these services, and lack of clear delineation of the services youth receive through the program.

From Wilder: *What Doesn't Work*

- >School uniforms did not have an impact on truancy.
- >Financial sanctions against families who use TANF, tying their benefits to their child's school attendance, did not have an impact on truancy.

Also see

- C *New Approaches to Truancy Prevention in Urban Schools* (2003). An ERIC Digest. http://iume.tc.columbia.edu/eric_archive/digest/186.pdf
- C *Tools for Truancy* (including "Best Practices in Developing Truancy Reduction Programs" and "Model Truancy Prevention Programs") on the website for the National Center for School Engagement: Promoting Truancy Prevention and Schools Success. <http://www.truancyprevention.org/downloadsPage.html>
- C *Approaches to Truancy Prevention* online report describing several model programs prepared by the Vera Institute of Justice http://www.vera.org/publications/publications_5.asp?publication_id=197
- C *Truancy Prevention Through Mediation Program* from the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution & Conflict Management: www.disputeresolution.ohio.gov/cc/truancysummary.htm
- C "School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence" (2004) by J. Fredricks, P. Blumenfeld, & A. Paris. *Review of Educational Research*, 74, 59-109.

And see our Center Quick Find Topics for more.

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From a creative writing in math contest. Students were asked to finish the sentence "Math is like a box of chocolates..."

The grand prize winner:

Math is like a box of chocolates - it's best when you use your fingers.

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The Parable of the Policy Making Owl

A field-mouse was lost in a dense wood, unable to find his way out. He came upon a wise old owl sitting in a tree. "Please help me, wise old owl, how can I get out of this wood?" said the field-mouse.

"Easy," said the owl, "Fly out, as I do."

"But how can I fly?" asked the mouse.

The owl looked at him haughtily, sniffed disdainfully, and said, "Don't bother me with the details, I only decide the policy."

Moral: *Please bother us with details.*

Please see the insert and take a few minutes to provide us with some feedback and/or to make a request.

**School Mental Health Project/
Center for Mental Health in Schools
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Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563
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The Center for Mental Health in Schools is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project in the Dept. of Psychology, UCLA. Support comes in part from the Office of Adolescent Health, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration. Co-funding comes from the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Both HRSA and SAMHSA are agencies of the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services.



Response (Newsletter, Summer, 2004)

(1) Share your thoughts about "Dropouts, Pushouts, and the Number Game" (see p. 7)

(2) Do You Want Your State to Organize a State Summit for New Directions for Student Support

A key aspect of the Summits Initiative: *New Directions for Student Support* (See p. 3 of **Newsletter**) is to help each state organize a statewide summit. Indicate your interest below:

___ I want my state to organize a statewide summit on *New Directions for Student Support*.

___ I might be interested; let me know if you plan one in my state.

Below are some people the Center should contact to see if they are interested:

Name

Contact Info

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

(4) 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.

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