RTTT Pilot Project Newsletter

Volume 3 Issue 2 January 2014

Seven Human Resource Reform Levers

- Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement
- Induction
- Professional Development
- Supervision and Evaluation
- Teacher Leadership
- Organizational Structure
- Adult Professional Culture

Inside this issue:

The Skillful Teacher and Classroom Climate

In the *Skillful Teacher* (2008), Jon Saphier, Mary Ann Haley-Speca, and Robert Gower summarize the limited but consistent research on classroom climate by stating, "Whenever students feel empowerment, acceptance, and safety to take risks and try things that are hard for them, they like school better and learn more." While educators widely recognize the impact of classroom climate on student engagement and achievement, many find it more challenging to identify the dimensions and essential elements that underlie a classroom climate that supports high achievement for all students.

The research is clear that humans have basic psychological needs and the degree to which these needs are met in students determines the amount of energy and attention that they are able to expend on learning. When the classroom climate satisfies students' basic needs for safety and security then they are able to concentrate on fulfilling their higher level needs of self-esteem, recognition, community, mutual support, confidence, risk-taking, influence and control (Saphier et al. 2008). Educators who understand what Saphier, Haley-Speca, and Gower describe as the "developmental aspects of climate", are able to create classrooms environments in which students know each other, learn cooperatively, take risks, and feel empowered.

Drawing on the research of Aspy and Johnson (1977), Wood (1994), and Johnson and Johnson (1995); the authors of the *Skillful Teacher* (2008) identify the dimensions of classroom climate and give examples and strategies for each in developmental stages.

Community and Mutual Support

Within classrooms that support high achievement for all students, students' feelings of being known, accepted, and supported extend over a continuum. At the first level students feel known and know others. At the next level students are greeted, acknowledged, listened to and affirmed. They feel respected and respect others. When students gain a group identity, feel responsible for one another and want each other to succeed, they are experiencing a more developed dimension of classroom climate. As community and mutual support build, students can be taught how to engage in cooperative learning and gain social skills which lead them to believe that they can help others and others will help them. At the highest stage of development students are able to learn strategies for resolving problems and conflicts that arise.

Through their actions teachers contribute to the climate of inclusion and affiliation (Cabello and Terrell 1993). In their interactions with students, teachers model appropriate behaviors and develop positive classroom climate in the way they handle conflicts between students, teach social skills and incorporate structures for cooperative learning into their lessons. (Saphier et al. 2008).

As Saphier, Halley-Speca, and Gower describe, teachers can build a classroom climate that develops community and mutual support through specific activities and teaching strategies at each of the 5 levels of development:

- **Knowing Others**
  Get-acquainted activities and community building strategies.
- **Greeting, Listening, Responding, Acknowledging and Affirming**
  Greeting activities, group meeting protocols, listening activities, and role-playing.
- **Group Identity, Responsibility and Interdependence –**Team building and cooperative learning activities.
- **Social Skills and Group Dynamics**
  Class meetings, consensus-seeking exercises that analyze behavior and results, and mystery solving activities.
- **Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution**
  Activities that train students in conflict resolution models, as mediators and in social problem-solving meeting.

Continued on Page 3.

CREATING A CLIMATE OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS

COMMUNITY AND MUTUAL SUPPORT	CONFIDENCE AND RISK TAKING			INFLUENCE AND CONTROL
	Believing that….			
Knowing others	Mistakes Help	vs.	Mistakes = sign of weakness	Empowering students to influence the pace of the class
↓	↓			↓
Greeting, acknowledging, listening, responding, and affirming	Care, perseverance, and craftsmanship Count	vs.	Speed counts Faster = smarter	Negotiating the rules of the "classroom game"
↓	↓			↓
Group identity, responsibility, and interdependence	Good Students solicit help and lots of feedback	vs.	Good students do it by themselves	Teaching students to use the principles of learning and other learning strategies
↓	↓			↓
Cooperative learning, social skills, class meetings, group dynamics	Effort and effective strategies….main determinants of success	vs.	Inborn intelligence = main determinant of success	Students using knowledge of learning style and making choices
↓	↓			↓
Problem solving and conflict resolution	Everyone is capable of high achievement	vs.	Only the few bright can achieve at high level	Students and their communities as sources of knowledge

Student and Teacher Surveys on Classroom Climate

Research for Better Teaching, Inc., Acton, MA, a teacher survey aligned with ***The Skillful Teacher*** dimensions of classroom climate (Saphier et al. 2008). Available at: http://www.rbteach.com/rbteach2/quiz/climate_survey.pdf

The MET Project: ***Asking Students About Teaching, Student Perception Surveys and Their Implementation.*** *Pages 23-24* includes student survey questions on classroom experiences. Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Available at: http://www.metproject.org/downloads__Asking_Students_Practitioner_Brief.pdf

California State University at Los Angeles, online survey questions on classroom climate for students in grades 6-12. Available at: http://www.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment/classroom_survey.html

TEACHFORAMERICA, a student inventory for assessing classroom culture. Available at: http://www.teachingasleadership.org/sites/default/files/Tools/INV/I-2/Tools/i2_classroomculture.pdf

Continued from page 1

Risk-taking and Confidence

In their examination of the beliefs that underpin student confidence and risk-taking, Saphier, Haley-Speca, and Gower believe that students' views on intelligence and their ability to succeed are manifested in the degree to which they are willing to take risks, persist and work hard. Teachers can develop a classroom climate that fosters and supports risk-taking and confidence by encouraging the following beliefs:

- **Error-** Helping students to see mistakes as opportunities for learning rather than failures or weakness. Teachers can model this belief in the way they handle their own mistakes and errors and by allowing students to provide feedback on classroom assignments and assessments. Rewarding students for taking on challenges even when they do not succeed also promotes risk-taking.
- **Speed-** Promoting perseverance and thoughtfulness over speed motivates students to keep trying and to take academic chances. Allowing students to re-take tests for full credit, re-teaching lessons, and providing wait time for student responses sends a strong message to students about the importance of persistence.
- **Getting Feedback and Help-** Encouraging students to learn from one another through activities that provide peer feedback and assistance boosts their belief in mutual support. Peer editing, cooperative learning and peer teaching activities model this belief.
- **Effort and Ability-** Fostering a belief in students that effort and effective strategies (Howard, 1993) determine success drives students to take risks. Teachers inspire students by articulating confidence in them and commitment to their success. Sending the messages: "This is important," "You can do it," and "I won't give up on you"- convinces students that they can do rigorous work.

Influence

Citing the research of Dodd (1995), Brooks and Brooks (1993) and others, *The Skillful Teacher* (2008) states "successful teachers find ways for students to have some ownership and influence over the flow of events and the intellectual life of the classroom". This ownership is reflected in the class rules, student choice and opportunities for discussion. Specific ways of empowering students and promoting influence are describe by the authors:

Teachers inspire students by articulating confidence in them and commitment to their success. Sending the messages: "This is important," "You can do it," and "I won't give up on you" convinces students that they can do rigorous work.

Saphier et al. 2008

- **Stop My Teaching-** Identifying signals for students to use to indicate they are not following a lesson or if they have questions enables them. (Katz, 1992).
- **Negotiating the Rules of the Classroom-** Providing students with the opportunity to shape class interactions and operations by involving them in creating routines and procedures empowers and engages students.
- **Teaching Students to Use Principles of Learning and Other Strategies-** Teaching students strategies for learning such as: sequencing, practice, goal setting and explanatory devices, gives them choices and ownership of their learning.
- **Learning Style and Choices-** Teaching students to use a framework of learning styles helps them adapt their effort, ask for help, and request modifications on assignments.
- **Using Students and Their Communities as Sources of Knowledge-** Helping students to build their own knowledge using constructivist theory provides a classroom climate that empowers students and creates influence. Similarly, culturally relevant teaching develops students' ownership and influence.

The dimensions of class climate and the strategies and beliefs that create a climate of high achievement for all students as described in the *Skillful Teacher* (2008) provide a framework for teachers to plan activities and practices that encourage student engagement, community and mutual support, empowerment, influence and control.

Acknowledging and Affirming All Students

By Karen Schwartz

In the following story based on the author's research and classroom experience, a middle school teacher is determined to acknowledge and show respect for his culturally diverse students and their families by making certain that their names are learned and pronounced correctly by the community.

When he came across a series of articles written by teenagers about positive, early school experiences, middle school math teacher Anthony Russo recalls being particularly moved by a Korean-American student's warm recollection of the teacher who pronounced her name correctly, "the first time"! Reflecting on the article and the tone that this teacher set for inclusivity and honor in her classroom, Anthony considers two of his quieter eighth grade girls from last year, Ji-hye and Eun-ju. For the first weeks of school, he fumbled over the pronunciation of their names, causing tittering from them and their classmates. It all seemed in "good fun" and they certainly were not alone. There were many other students in his class with hard to pronounce names and families from "all over"; the kids all seemed used to correcting their teachers and each other. That said, Anthony admits that after the first month of school he felt awkward about asking students to repeat the correct pronunciation of their names yet again. With ninety plus students walking through his classroom door each day, it often felt too difficult to keep track. Anthony found it easier and safer to call on hands and leave the more challenging names out of the picture. He came to dread the parent-teacher conferences and other moments with families where he feared stumbling over their names as well.

The newspaper article hit a chord and helped Anthony reflect upon what he sensed already, that he was delegitimatizing the students and cultures in his classroom by silencing their names. After all, if he wasn't modeling a respect for the names in his classroom, then how could he expect the students from Brazil, Korea, Haiti, the Czech Republic and the United States to come together as a collective class community that respected each other? How could he expect his students' families to feel welcomed and connected to school if he couldn't address them properly? Admitting that he used to think that "all of that cultural awareness stuff was better left for the social studies teachers," Anthony shares how a new approach to the broad diversity of his students ultimately created a more positive learning environment for his students and their families. With the beginning of the school year just two weeks away, Anthony builds time into his lesson planning to get the year "started off right." Although class lists are bound to shift up until the last hour, Anthony requests preliminary lists of all of his classes and gets to work. He starts by circling any names that he is uncertain of pronouncing, and turns to pronunciation websites for assistance. Despite the fact that he lives close to the urban setting in which he teaches, Anthony realizes that he has not reached out to many people in his community beyond the "Little Italy" that he calls home. For the next two weeks, Anthony takes his class lists with him as he does his food shopping and daily walk. It is a lesson in connection, and sometimes false assumptions, as he shares his circled names with folks in his community that he thinks can help.

Bolstered by his own newfound connections, Anthony starts thinking beyond the scope of his own classroom. There must be other teachers in the school who struggle with pronunciation of names. And of course, there are the students and families themselves. Would they be more apt to connect across cultures if they had the confidence to pronounce each other's names correctly? While the thought of a whole school "names project" feels overwhelming to Anthony, he decides to experiment by creating a short "introductory video" of his students on the first day of school. He checks with his principal to gather the proper waivers, and is told that as long as the videos are used and kept for his classroom purposes, the project is acceptable. With the assistance of his students, he conducts a 2 minute "short clip" of each student on day one. One at a time, they sit before his flip camera and answer the following questions: What is your full name? What would you like to be called in this classroom? What do your friends call you? Does your name have any special significance to you? Can you share the names of the people you currently live with and who take care of you? Finally, what are you most excited and nervous about for math this year? Anthony shares that there is relief and a feeling of camaraderie over an "introductory" day where his students feel known and heard. There will be time for syllabus discussion on day two, and by then, Anthony feels more certain that he might just get all of his students' names right, "the first time!" Anthony is grateful for the video clips, which he watches many times over. Keeping track of the ninety-eight students in his charge this year somehow feels less daunting, even on week one. His students delight in an opportunity to view the video clips as a "treat" at the end of their first week of school. Anthony turns the "viewing session" into a math game, where culture and numbers blend in community. When he shares the video clips with other teachers on his middle school team, they are grateful for the knowledge imparted, and inspired to create their own video composites.

Online Resources

http://www.pronouncenames.com/
A website that provides an "audio dictionary" for name pronunciation started by Pinky Thakkar, an engineer who lives in San Jose, CA.

http://www.audioname.com/how-it-works
Provides a means of recording and embedding names in documents. The website provides a 30 day free trial sign-up.

Learning Environments that Support Inquiry and Risk-Taking

Harvard University's Everyday Classroom Tools (EDT) Project is an inquiry-based science curriculum for kindergarten through sixth grade that promotes academic risk-taking. In *The Keys to Inquiry* Tina Grotzer, a research associate for Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, discusses the importance of providing an environment for risk-taking in the classroom. Grotzer describes a learning environment that supports risk-taking as one where:

- Question-asking is invited.
- "Mistakes" are valued for the learning they provide and as natural parts of the inquiry process.
- Open-ended questions are asked and appreciated.
- There's more than one possible answer.
- Theorizing and considering evidence is considered more important than a "right answer."
- Sometimes questions are asked and not answered.
- All ideas are okay to share.
- Ideas are discussed for their explanatory potential, ability to solve the problem, and so on as opposed to being called "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong."

Grotzer's research suggests that asking questions involves taking risks, and teachers can help students feel comfortable about taking risks in their thinking if the classroom environment supports it. When asked what they do to encourage inquiry and risk-taking in their classes, EDT Project teachers responded:

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Set up situations where children are asked to observe and predict.
- Take a "how could we find out" approach to kids' questions.
- Use the outside environment as a starting point for questions and observations.
- Model "what if?" situations.
- Encourage sharing ideas (all welcome).
- Validate and respect student responses (for instance, list them on a chart).
- Be non-judgmental.
- Welcome questioning.
- Model inquiry (as a teacher).
- Ask, don't tell.
- Make time to explore and observe.
- Create a positive atmosphere with encouraging words and actions.
- Allow for some uncertainty and ambiguity in the curriculum.
- Give students opportunities to learn ways of thinking that involve risk-taking and openness.

Strategies for Positive Classroom Climate

Carol Gerber Alfred in her 2008 article for ASCD's *Educational Leadership* Journal outlines *Seven Strategies for Building Positive Classrooms* that support the whole child and improve academic achievement. These strategies, validated by research and practice in schools across the country recommend that teachers:

1. Make Learning Relevant.
2. Create a Classroom Code of Conduct.
3. Teach Positive Actions.
4. Instill Intrinsic Motivation.
5. Reinforce Positive Behaviors.
6. Engage Positive Role Models.
7. Always Be Positive.

Alfred recommends that teachers discover their students' interests, talents and learning styles and use that knowledge to inform their teaching. To build ownership Alfred suggests that teachers provide students with opportunities to voice their opinions about the operations of the classroom. Through discussion students can be encouraged to identify how they would like to be treated in the classroom and build those behaviors into the classroom rules. Teachers also need to consistently and systemically teach positive behaviors to students about resolving conflict, problem-solving, social interaction, honesty, being responsible and goal-setting.

Of primary importance to Alfred is a focus on positive behavior and intrinsic reward. She suggests teachers recognize positive behaviors they see, but also notes that "it's important that they recognize the positive behavior, ask how it made the student feel, and tell the student the extrinsic reward is a reminder of that good feeling. When students make the connection between their performance and feeling good about themselves, intrinsic motivation is enhanced and positive behavior continues." (Alfred 2008)

Bringing positive role models into the classroom is also an important strategy for building a positive climate. As Alfred points out teachers need to be positive examples to students at all times despite how difficult that may be. Offering opportunities for parents and community members to participate in class and school activities provides other positive role models for students.

Alfred notes in her article that "It is challenging to implement all of these seven strategies continuously and well." In spite of the difficulty creating a classroom climate that is relevant, welcomes student voice, builds and supports positive behaviors, and links intrinsic reward to achievement, teachers who build these dimensions into their classrooms will positively impact student performance and foster success.

Classroom Climate and Control

Positive classroom cultures focus on relationships, student engagement and learning rather than control. As Alfie Kohn recommended in *Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Students Decide*, "Students must be permitted to make substantive decisions about learning and living together, and this will not happen until teachers and administrators understand that *control can't be the goal* – or even a technique." (Kohn 1993). Articulating the constructivist idea of student autonomy, Kohn explains how classroom choices allow students to see learning as within their control not outside of it. Kohn believes that students should be given opportunities to decide what they will learn, how they will learn and when they will learn. By working with students to develop classroom rules, select projects and assignments, schedule activities and hold classroom meetings, teachers can engage students, create ownership and foster a commitment to learning. These activities build essential skills in decision-making, problem-solving and conflict resolutions.

Also recognizing that positive classroom cultures are based on relationships not control, Richard Jones in *Strengthening Student Relationships* suggests, "Teachers need to create a climate for learning in the classroom. However, this is not a process to be managed. The classroom is made up of a group of students who desire and deserve high-quality personal relationships with adults and peers. It is the quality of these relationships that drives their behavior and leads to learning." (Jones 2008) Highlighting the differences in classroom climates that focus on management versus learning-based relationships, Jones identifies those distinctions in the following chart:

	Classroom Management	Relationship Building
Classroom Rules	Mandated	Negotiated
Power	Without question	Power with respect
Observation of Effectiveness	Students passive and quiet	Students actively engaged
Risk-Taking	Discouraged	Encouraged
Control Mechanism	Negative Feedback/punishments	Positive reinforcement
Primary Teacher Role	Absolute attention	Source of encouragement

(Jones 2008)

As Jones notes: teachers who value learning relationships over control show respect for students, are active listeners, encourage students to express their opinions, serve as role models, identify the unique talents and strengths of students, demonstrate enthusiasm and celebrate achievement.

Benefits of Academic Choice

- **Supports students' intrinsic motivation to learn-** Academic Choice helps students meet their innate need to feel competent, to belong, and to have some degree of freedom or autonomy. This frees them to pursue constructive learning experiences.
- **Encourages students to learn from each other-** Academic Choice gives students opportunities to consult each other about their work, see each other's finished products, and talk with each other about how they achieved their final result.
- **Draws on different strengths, abilities, and interests -** Having choices allows students to work from their areas of strength and personal interest. They're then more likely to feel invested in their work and to draw personal meaning from it.
- **Maximizes students' learning -**The planning, working, and reflecting process mirrors how students naturally learn. It allows them to generate their own goals, actively interact with concrete materials, and make sense of their experiences. This gradually broadens their knowledge and makes them more sophisticated thinkers.

Adapted from: Denton, P., " Academic Choice: A Powerful Tool for Motivating and Maximizing Students' Learning." *Responsive Classroom Newsletter*, April 2005. Retrieved from https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/article/academic-choice.

Classroom Culture that Fosters a Growth Mindset

Often teachers find that their efforts to engage reluctant learners in difficult work can be ineffective and unproductive. While some students may jump to the challenge of completing demanding assignments, others drag their feet, make excuses and look for the easy way out. Although many educators have chalked these difference up to students' work ethics, values or personalities, Stanford University professor Carol Dweck and her colleagues attribute these responses to variances in the students' mindsets. (Dweck, 1999, 2007; Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

Summarizing her decades of research, Dweck identifies "two distinct ways in which individuals view intelligence and learning. Individuals with a *fixed mindset* believe that their intelligence is simply an inborn trait – they have a certain amount, and that's that. In contrast individuals with a *growth mindset* believe that they can develop their intelligence over time". (Dweck, 2010)

According to Dweck these views of intelligence result in different behaviors in school. Students who view intelligence as fixed are more likely to value looking smart over learning. Their fear of showing weaknesses or underperforming often cause them to avoid challenging situations and limit their learning opportunities. In contrast, students who have a growth mindset enjoy challenges and see them as rewarding and fun.

Describing the thinking of students with fixed mindsets, Dweck reports that these students see themselves as "dumb" when they have to work hard or encounter obstacles to their learning (Dweck 2008).They may stop trying and may even resort to cheating to succeed. Unable to handle setbacks, they often become discouraged or defensive because they expect to succeed quickly. Dweck explains that students with growth mindsets expect to work hard and value effort. They tend to persist in their problem-solving, engaging new strategies and using resources. They do not feel threatened by situations that require them to take risks and stretch.

Despite these differences, Dweck believes that teachers can create a classroom culture that promotes a growth mindset by:

Providing the right kind of praise and encouragement.
Recognizing students for their effort, the processes they have used, their strategies, and persistence is far more beneficial than telling them that they are "smart".

Stressing deep learning over fast learning.
Explaining that sometime students learn more and understand what they have learned more deeply when they take more time. Dweck recommends that teachers share the stories of historical figures who were not fast learners such as Albert Einstein.

Teaching the concept of the growth mindset directly.
Sharing the concepts of efficacy and growth mindset with students, highlighting the importance of risk-taking and the significance of making mistakes as part of the learning process.

Goal Setting and Planning.
Setting goals with students and helping them develop plans to achieve their goals demonstrates problem-solving and the importance of effort.

Providing Meaningful Work
Giving students meaningful work promotes achievement and resilience.

Challenging Every Student
Designing lessons that provide additional learning opportunities for students who have easily mastered the initial assignment teaches students to look for challenges. Describing challenges as fun and exciting, while rewarding students for persistence and applying new strategies encourages students to persevere.

Recognizing Progress
Helping students see the progress they are making allows them to connect their effort to their improvement. Pre-testing and post-testing, challenging homework assignments and graphing completed tasks are ways that students can see their progress.

Grading
Using grading methods that value effort and challenging work promote a growth mindset. As Dweck reports using the word "yet" is important when discussing progress with students. Students who have "not yet" achieved a standard or level are being told that they can and will eventually improve.

As Dweck states "meaningful work can also teach students to love challenges, to enjoy effort, to be resilient, and to value their own improvement. In other words, we can design and present learning tasks in a way that helps students develop a *growth mindset*, which leads to not just short-term achievement but also long-term success." (Dweck 2008). Teachers who build a classroom climate that promotes a growth mindset understand the importance of giving students meaningful work, praising effort and persistence, demonstrating student progress and improvement, and sharing the joy of learning.

Additional Resources

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Mission of the Working Group for Educator Excellence

WGEE is a broad coalition of 60 individuals from 26 statewide organizations who are united in the belief that the most effective way to provide every child with an excellent education is to take a systemic approach to influencing what teachers and educational leaders know and can do. We believe when key elements of the human resource system are strengthened to align with one another and with a common research-based, field-tested core of professional knowledge, the cumulative effect will be improved student achievement and a more efficient and effective system that strengthens teacher and leader expertise.

Human Resource Pilot Project

The pilot project, funded by the RTTT initiative, is a joint effort by the WGEE and DESE to systematically and strategically create, strengthen, and align the key influences on the quality of teaching and leadership in three school districts: Attleboro, Brockton, and Revere. The influences, or levers, include Recruitment, Hiring, and Placement, Comprehensive Induction, Professional Development, Supervision and Evaluation, Teacher Leadership, Organizational Structure, and Adult Professional Culture. Through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, we aim to determine whether alignment will improve the quality of teaching and leadership. The goals of the project include increasing student achievement; using cost, time and resources with greater efficiency; improving teaching and leadership practices; increasing the satisfaction and retention of teachers and leaders; and improving school and district culture. The project fosters integration of lever plans with other district initiatives, promotes the use of district change plans to guide decisions and infuses the knowledge base of teachers and leaders.

WORKING GROUP FOR EDUCATOR EXCELLENCE

Editor: Linda Hayes

Special thanks to all who contributed to this newsletter especially:

Jon Saphier
Mary Ann Haley-Speca
Robert Gower
Susan Freedman
Karen Schwartz

Please send suggestions to:

Linda Hayes (lindaahayes@comcast.net)