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Happiness in US Schools: Students’ Subjective Well-Being as a Part of School Improvement Planning

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Happiness in US Schools: Students’ Subjective Well-Being as a Part of School Improvement Planning
Dodge Ram Passenger Van as an “In-Between Space”
What knows the US Public Educator...

- Anne @ Breakfast: Refusing to participate in the game of justification for “Non-Academic” domains.
- Peter et al. (August, 2014): Agency & Contributor
- Paul Care: Are my efforts helpful or hindering? e.g., does my quantification of SWB/Happiness somehow dilute.
School Improvement Processes in United States’ Public PK-12

- No Child Left Behind Act (2001)
- Requirement to document, “Adequate Yearly Progress”
- School Improvement Plan (SIP)
  - Recognized Nationally & Locally (State-level)
    - Dunaway, Kim, & Szad, 2012; Fernandez, 2011
- Business/Productivity Model
- Expansion of Domains Measured
  - Building off of Reading, Math & Science
School Improvement Plan (SIP)

School Name: CA Sink Elementary School
Principal: Mr. Richard Cleveland
Date: August 21, 2014
Subject: READING

Assessment Target:
State standardized assessment target will be: 64.7 + 1.88 = 66.58 percent of students meeting or exceeding standard in all subject strands.

S.M.A.R.T. GOAL:
Improve students' ability in subject area/strands by focusing on improving comprehension skills, both literary and informational from September 2014 through June 2015.

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- Continue K-2 daily five implementation with alignment to intermediate staff at staff meeting before winter break.
- K-2 teachers share Daily 5 to intermediate staff at staff meeting.
- Entire K-2 staff.
- Entire staff for meeting.
- Purchase of second book and resource guide.
- $450.00
- Continued participation in DRT support group.
- Reading specialist providing continued in-service support.
- Students actively engaged in DRT activities while teachers conduct guided reading.
School Improvement Plan (SIP)
Presence of School Climate in the School Improvement Plan (SIP)

- Expansion of Domains Measured
  - Reading, Math & Science \(\Rightarrow\) inclusion of School Climate
- School Climate Initially Operationalized as:
  - Truancy, Discipline, Suspensions

- Easily Quantifiable & Deficits-Oriented
  
  (Bulach et al., 1997; Klein et al., 2012)
School Climate

- Lack of consensus regarding definition of School Climate
- National School Climate Center Definition
  - 135 words, referring to further elaboration via 12 dimensions

- “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. [...] A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society.”

  (National School Climate Center website, August 2014)
Two emerging components:

1. Assessing positive rather than deficits-based aspects/outcomes
2. Incorporating subjective student perceptions
   
   (Cocorada & Clinciu, 2009’ Ding, Liu, & Berkowitz, 2011)

Towards a More Positive Outlook: Zulig, Huebner, & Patton (2011)

- Students’ Perceived Quality of Life (PQOL)
- Subjective + Objective indicators = Comprehensive
Instruments Assessing Students’ Subjective Perceptions

- School Leaders continue to employ homemade instruments
  - Confusion surrounding definition of school climate
  - Pressures applied via state/federal policies
  - Paucity of psychometrically sound instruments

(Adelman & Taylor, 2011; MMS Education, 2006; Zulig et al., 2010)
Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

- SWB is composed of a set of affective and cognitive appraisals evaluating an individual’s life (i.e., How good does my life feel? Does my life meet my expectations? How desirable is my life?, etc.)
  
  (Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 2000; Veenhoven, 1997)

- Three factors commonly attributed to identifying SWB and, by proxy happiness, are **frequent and intense states of positive affect**, an **average level of global life satisfaction**, and the **relative absence of negative feelings** such as anxiety and depression.
  
  (Kashdan, 2004; Robbins, Francis, & Edwards, 2010)
Overview of Research Study

- **Sample**
  - 428 Students grade 4-6 enrolled in private faith-based schools in Washington State, USA

- **Method**
  - 2 instruments were administered in the classroom setting by teachers

- **Analysis**
  - Statistical analysis: *Can the two samples be aggregated?*
  - Factor Analysis: *Do the 2 instruments retain factor structure?*
Subjective Well-Being Instruments

- Oxford Happiness Questionnaire – Short Form (OHQ-SF)
  - Single items requiring a Likert-scale response
  - 8 items theorized as unidimensional

- Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)
  - Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999)
  - Single items requiring a Likert-scale response
  - 4 items theorized as unidimensional
2 data sets merged for $N = 428$
  - Degree of normality of the 2 samples within tolerable limits

Exploratory Factor Analyses found both instruments retaining theorized unidimensionality
  - EFA PAF with oblique rotations if necessary
  - OHQ-SF 33.95% of shared variance
  - SHS 38.69% of shared variance
  - *Remembering scoring changes, and slight wording changes
Limitations

- **Sampling**
  - Elementary school age (4, 5, 6 grades) in two private schools
  - Student populations predominantly white

- **Instrument Administration**
  - Minimum researcher footprint
  - Mistake in administration at 1 site resulted in exclusion of grade 3
Recommendations for Future Research

- Increased Diversity in Samples
  - (i.e., racial/ethnic identity, SES, family structure, etc.)

- Correlational and Multiple Regression Analyses
  - Exploring convergent and divergent validity

- Confirmatory Factor Analyses
  - Further verify factor structures and psychometric soundness
Implications for School Improvement Processes

- Given growing awareness of school climate impact on academics and federal/state financial incentives has directed School Leader attention to more systemic conceptualization of school climate:
  - OHQ-SF & SHS used to assess subjective indicator of students’ perception of school climate
  - Pre/Post, Establishing a baseline, Global Needs Assessment, etc.
  - Results fit quantifiable requirements of SIP templates
  - Start the discussion & work of school climate in a strengths-based rather than deficits-focused manner
- Student “voice” (dare I say agency) in both school climate and school improvement processes
Thank you