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

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LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY
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 2014-15

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

Assessment Target:
State standardized assessment target will be: \( \frac{64.7 + 1.88}{2} = 66.58 \) 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.M.A.R.T. Processes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue K-2 daily five implementation with alignment to intermediate staff at staff meeting before winter break</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continued participation in RTI support group. Reading specialist providing continued in-service support</td>
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Students actively engaged in RTI activities while teachers conduct guided reading.
Presence of School Climate in the School Improvement Plan (SIP)

- Expansion of Domains Measured
  - Reading, Math & Science ⇒ 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)
School Climate

- 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
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
Results of Research Study

- 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
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