



Cultivating a Positive School Climate

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Third in a Series

12 Dimensions of School Climate

Last month this newsletter noted the dimension of relationships as a measure of school climate. This included relationships at every level, and most especially, with Jesus. Connecting to our Catholic faith and traditions builds a strong foundation for a future filled with Hope.

The *School Climate Research Summary: August 2012*, addresses 12 dimensions of school climate, which are divided into five essential areas of focus: Safety, Relationships, Teaching & Learning, Institutional Environment, and School Climate, the Processes of School Improvement. These categories contribute to an overall experience associated with outcomes.

Teaching & Learning

The two aspects of this dimension of school climate are support for learning, and social and civic learning.

Support for Learning: Noted author Jane Bluestein, in her book, *Creating Emotionally Safe Schools* (Health Communications, Inc., 2001), provides a good self-assessment for educators to consider as a guide for reflection on practices that contribute to a positive learning experience for children. Here are some considerations:

- Discover what motivates students and use that for planning. Not all motivation is extrinsic, so know that cultivating a love of learning is essential.
- Accommodate individual learning needs – strengths, styles, modalities, temperament and personalities
- Some can pay attention without sitting up straight or making continual eye contact
- Offer choices to students as much as possible
- Accommodate needs for tactile, kinesthetic & movement experiences

Many opportunities arise each year to keep staff updated with best practices in teaching, and advances in technology have changed the way we

think about education. We are also learning more and more about the brain and its development, so 21st century learning is opening new avenues waiting to be explored. The National School Climate Center also encourages environments that foster curiosity and critical thinking skills. This must allow for risk-taking that leads to independent thinking.

Social and Civic Learning: In public schools, civility and social skills are taught. These help children learn acceptable behaviors such as manners, etiquette, social skills, and civic-mindedness. Catholic schools have the added dimension of the fruit of service within the community and the impact it can have on individuals as they actively engage in Catholic Social Teaching and the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy.

The beauty of the Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline work is that it cultivates the habits for human excellence in context of our apostolic mission for Catholic education. Here are some activity ideas:

- Rose garden for Mary, the virtue of obedience
- Living history of the saints with virtues they represent – and how their lives would look in today's world
- Community peace garden with a bench for reflection and solving conflicts peacefully
- Creating a courtyard that is attractive for senior citizens living in the community, with space for students to visit with them
- Helping/serving at homeless shelters as a show of the virtue of charity
- Living rosaries and spiritual bouquets for those who need special prayers

Students can decide ways to live the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. These activities also inspire leadership in taking responsibility for school culture and climate. The social and civic learning can be directed to the school environment as well as the greater community.

Parents and Pastors

Measuring Climate Beyond School

Using the measures of safety at school, can we apply these dimensions of safety in our churches and homes? Here is another dimension to consider.

Teaching and Learning

Fostering a love of learning begins at home. Whether or not you were a good student, it is important to express your desire to have your child succeed in school. Many times parents project their own experiences on their children, and as much as possible it is important to allow children to have their own authentic experience free from our opinions.

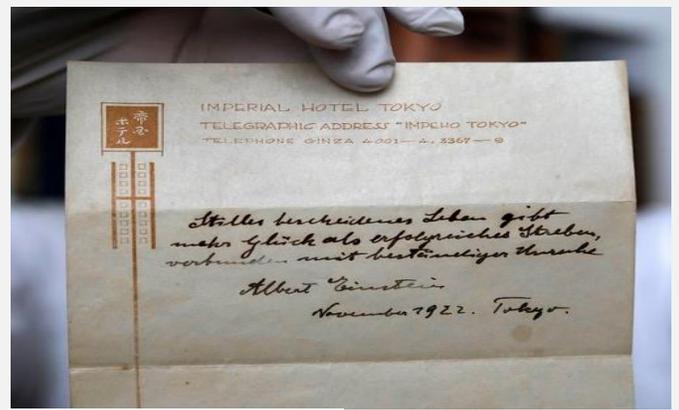
When your child comes home to complain about a teacher, be as positive as possible and become curious about what the teacher's perspective might be. Here are some tips:

- Do not email about conflict. Make an appointment to speak in person.
- Be as objective as possible, assuming the teacher has your child's best interest at heart.
- Help your child adapt to varying styles of teaching – this is a lifeskill that will be helpful in the adult workplace.
- Remember - success comes from the inside out, and is built on trial-and-error, and failure.
- Pray with and for your children as they head off in the morning for school. It is a great start to the day and can be sustaining in the low points they may face.
- Focus on the experience of school overall, asking about what is going well rather than emphasizing problems. Situations that come up can be challenging, but be solution-focused.

Social and Civic Learning

Encourage service projects that can be done with your child. Gathering clothing for the poor, helping with parish projects, and joining organizations that support giving back are all ways to encourage generosity and empathy. As you engage in these activities, your home will be more peaceful because your family will appreciate what you have and learn to be content rather than envious of others.

Being involved in activities that bring Catholic teaching and traditions home will help your child to see the greatest good and learn lifelong lessons about the value of living their faith.



Menahem Kahana/AFP/Getty Images

Can Money Buy Happiness?

That depends...Albert Einstein had no cash with which to tip a bellboy in a Tokyo hotel in 1922, so he scribbled his theory for happiness on a piece of paper and handed to him. The note recently sold at an auction for \$1.56 million. The message, written in German, read:

"A calm and humble life will bring more happiness than the pursuit of success and the constant restlessness that comes with it."

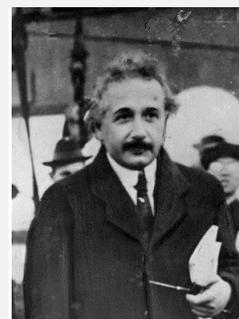
Scripture says,

"For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." 1 Tim 6:10

The bellboy may not have been prosperous at the time he was handed the message, but if it was his to sell at the auction, the success of that transaction was sure to bring some happiness.

Einstein also wrote, *"Where there's a will there's a way."*

Perhaps school hallways could hold this Pulitzer Prize winning scientist's words of wisdom to inspire students in practicing the virtues of humility and perseverance.



Einstein arrives in the port in Kobe, Japan, in November 1922. Crowds thronged his lectures in the country, which he toured just after winning the Nobel Prize.

The Asahi Shimbun/The Asahi Shimbun via Getty Images