Building School Climate with Respect and Student Leadership

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Abstract

Students who are under motivated, prone to violence, or display other at risk behaviors, have a negative effect on others around them in school. Educators and classmates of these students experience concern, fear, and frustration which have a negative effect on learning (Petersen & Skiba, 2001). Providing students with options to develop leadership may promote a positive school climate where negative environmental factors are less prevalent. A review of available literature examines the relationship between school climate, respect, and student leadership. Implications for school counselors are included with an Adlerian viewpoint.
Building School Climate with Respect and Student Leadership

The trauma of a bad day at school can stay with a child into adulthood. Imagine if a child experiences trauma on a daily basis at the hands of school bullies. The sense of powerlessness is profound. According to Gentry (2006) retaliatory acts for bullying are more common in the United States than in Europe and Australian. In these countries however, suicide is a more common result of prolonged bullying (Gentry, 2006). Fear of school violence is just one of the factors that undermine the educational process, and challenge both students and educators.

Adults are compelled to demonstrate leadership in many aspects of daily life. While there is ample literature available to adults wishing to improve their leadership skills, there is a growing interest in bringing leadership qualities into schools (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). What if the sense of powerlessness victims of school violence experience could be addressed with leadership skills usually reserved for adults? Beginning with a brief overview of school climate, is it possible to improve school climate with leadership skills and student leadership programs?

School climate is comprised of the feelings that student, staff, and the community have about the school environment. School climate reveals whether or not the environment is supportive of learning. While a positive school climate is essential to student achievement and teacher morale (Cohen, Pickeral, & McClosky, 2009), a negative school climate is comprised of feelings of concern, fear, frustration, and isolation (Peterson & Skiba, 2001). MacNiel, Prater, and Busch (2009) define school climate in terms of organizational health. Dimensions of organizational health include the communication, cohesiveness, morale, and goals of a school.

Factors that challenge and undermine positive school climate include the demands of high stakes testing (Gentry, 2006), a variety of factors confronting students at risk (Suh & Suh, 2007), student apathy (Walsh, 2006) and school violence (Garrity & Jens, 1997). This thesis
examines these factors individually, and proposes student leadership opportunities as a means of fostering respect as the main feature in building a positive school climate. The second section reviews the significant findings of available literature on assessing school climate, the relationship between respect and school violence (Langdon & Preble, 2008), and student’s hope in the future in relation to school climate (Worrell & Hale, 2001).

Student leadership for students of all levels is defined and explained with specific examples and success stories in the third section. The fourth section specifies the school counselor’s role in building respect in the school climate through student leadership. Finally, several Adlerian concepts, including social interest, goal directed behavior, and significance, conclude this review of how school counselors can build a school climate of respect through student leadership.

The Importance of School Climate and Student Leadership

School climate is essential to student achievement and teacher morale (Cohen et al., 2009). Factors such as violence at school and school safety, apathetic students who do not value the educative purpose of school, and the demands on educators to meet the performance standards imposed by high stakes testing, can result in a diminished positive school climate.

Student leadership opportunities provide a means of motivating and encouraging apathetic students, while rewarding students who seem naturally motivated, by providing a sense of belonging. Direction for student leadership can only be known after assessing school climate. Student apathy and student engagement are factors examined by Walsh (2006) and Yazzie (2006) that demonstrate the importance of student leadership.
The Dangers of a Negative School Climate

School violence and bullying have been cited as major factors that threaten the positive nature of school climate (Hernandez & Seem, 2004; Gentry, 2006; Smokowski & Kopaz, 2005). Shu and Shu (2007) provide research on school climate factors that contribute to the behaviors of students at risk and dropout rates. While research by Gentry (2006) explains how the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 impacts school climate in a negative way.

School violence and bullying. School violence is not defined as just the obvious violent acts such as physical fighting, but also includes name calling, verbal insults, deliberate pushing and shoving in the hallways, and ethnic, racial or sexist comments that are based on a student’s physical appearance (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). From a school climate point of view, school violence is any action that negatively impacts the school. School violence is a school climate factor that concerns every student and teacher, and the community at large. When safety at school is diminished both students and educators possess a sense of fear and helplessness (Garrity & Jens, 1997). Violence at school creates a climate of fear. As fear increases, learning decreases (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). Effective methods of handling school violence diminishes the sense of fear and “reinforces a positive, prosocial [school climate] (Garrity & Jens, 1997, p.1).

Bullying is likely the most prevalent form of school violence. Bullying includes not only physical aggression, but also social and emotional aggression. Researchers generally acknowledge four types of bullying. Two direct types include the physical behaviors of hitting and kicking; and verbal behaviors that use words to hurt or humiliate their victims. In the third type of bullying, relational bullies convince their friends to exclude other students. The final bullying type, according to Smokowski and Kopaz (2005), is reactive bullying, in which fighting
is impulsive and self-defense is claimed. The authors also point out that bullying is often carried out by a group, or several people, toward one individual who appears to be singled out. Victims may be reluctant to go to school or may develop psychosomatic symptoms such as headaches or stomach pains before going to school, or in the morning at school (Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). Students, out of fear, may avoid certain areas of the school that may be known to be unsafe, such as restrooms or certain hallways (Smokowski and Kopasz, 2005). Bullying poses a serious threat to school climate, involving those who bully, victims, and bystanders who project the appearance of tolerating school violence. When bullying has been tolerated, and school administrators and parents find themselves helpless to deal with a pervasive bullying problem, the safe, positive atmosphere children need in order to learn is jeopardized (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

**Students at risk.** Researchers have identified many risk factors that contribute to high school dropout rates that are related to school climate. The long list includes disliking school; student’s feeling that they cannot keep up with school work, poor relationships with teachers, parent’s low education level, and absenteeism including withdrawal from school life and alienation from school (Suh & Suh, 2007). The authors also found that the three main factors that affect students at risk are low grade point average, low socioeconomic status, and behavioral problems. Two school climate factors, limited educational enrichment and resources and a risk of harm at school, were found to impact the dropout rates for students of low socioeconomic status (Suh & Suh, 2007).

**The No Child Left Behind Act.** According to Gentry (2006) the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requirements are known to focus education on preparing for tests in order to demonstrate adequate yearly progress. With test performance as the sought after educational
outcome, the focus of education turns away from enrichment and toward test preparation. As education sets its sights on deficits and attempting to improve weaknesses, at risk students miss out on the opportunity to develop their strengths, only to find their weaknesses emphasized. While the intention of NCLB (2001) was to educate all children, in reality, more and more students are being “marginalized in a bare-bones educational system” (Gentry, 2006, p. 79). Student dropout rates are increasing as a result of NCLB because of a system that focuses, not on possibilities, but on weaknesses (Gentry, 2006).

**Student apathy.** One of the greatest challenges for teachers is the apathy demonstrated by the disengaged student. Despite teacher enthusiasm, efforts to offer extra study sessions, and extend deadlines, students find equally creative ways to express their apathy towards learning (Walsh, 2006). The apathetic student watches the clock or stares at nothing, leaves test answers blank, and makes excuses for late or missing homework. They may indicate interest in extra study sessions but do not show up. The message to teachers is to be firm and consistent, and to use control and punishment. These types of classroom management techniques lose the battle because student apathy is a complicated problem and requires a more complicated solution. Walsh (2006) views adolescent disengagement and apathy, not as individual cases of defiance, but as a pattern of practiced defense. Dealing with student apathy requires a system that allows educators to get to know their students, provides opportunity to talk to students to find out what is behind the apathy, and encourages teachers to depersonalize student apathy (Walsh, 2006).

**Student engagement.** Student engagement can be viewed as being similar to any other type of engagement that is based on relationships. Student engagement involves students’ relationships with the community, the school structure, rules and schedules, the curriculum and extracurricular opportunities, and staff and teachers. Engaged students feel that they are a part of
their school community (Yazzie, 2006). The engaged student interacts with the school and the school community. Engaged students have relationships with peers and adults, understand and follow the school’s schedules and rules, and participate in the school’s activities, both academic and extra-curricular. It is concerning to note that nearly half of the students that participated in the High School Survey of Student Engagement said that they did not feel that they were important to their high school communities (Yazzie, 2006).

**Assessing School Climate**

When only academic data is used to determine school success, the feelings of safety, and engagement that help students learn well, are ignored. A comprehensive school climate assessment takes into account how families and the community “see the school’s strengths, weaknesses, and needs” (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009, p. 48). The five components of a comprehensive school climate assessment include information regarding the health, safety, engagement, support, and challenge of students which creates positive learning environments (Cohen et al., 2009). An effective school climate assessment will reveal conflicting views between various groups. For example, school leaders can investigate further into students’ experiences should parents report bullying as a mild problem, but students report that bullying is prevalent (Cohen et al., 2009).

Hernandez and Seem (2004) assess school climate using three components. First, context refers to the school environment, the members of the school, relationships and community influences. The “philosophical assumptions about how the school members treat each other and how the school addresses violence” is one of the main elements of a school’s context (Hernandez & Seem, 2004, p.57).
The second component includes psychosocial variable such as the schools’ definition of violence, behavioral and academic expectations, rituals, traditions, communication and cooperation. The third component, school behaviors, is comprised of the sense of belonging, positive social relationships, and levels of trust and respect (Hernandez & Seem, 2004).

**Three school climate scales.** School climate is an important consideration for preventing bullying. A school climate where violence takes place without intervention empowers bullies to act without fear of consequences, and encourages bystanders to remain passive (Unnever & Cornewll, 2003, as cited in Bandyopadhyay, Cornell, & Konold, 2009). Furthermore, in such an environment, victims of bullying feel hopeless reporting their experience, or expecting help (Olweus & Limber, 2000, as cited in Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). The Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire has few questions concerning school climate, but 40 regarding frequency and type of bullying, and victim response to bullying (Solberg & Olweus, 2003, as cited in Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). Similarly, measures assessing school climate do not directly assess the experiences of school violence. Bandyopadhyay et al., (2009) suggest that while it is not practical to administer two types of assessments, “it is desirable to measure aspects of school climate that are closely related to the goals of bullying prevention” (p. 339). While the School Climate Bullying Survey is not a comprehensive school climate survey, it narrows its focus to specific aspects of school climate that could influence efforts directed toward bullying prevention (Cornell & Sheras, 2003, as cited in Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). Bandyopadhyay et al.(2009) focused on 24 items in the SCBS using three school climate scales concerning the prevalence of bullying, the extent of student’s aggressive attitudes, and the presence of help-seeking attitudes. “The Prevalence of Teasing and Bullying scale of the SCBS asks students whether bullying is a problem at their school and how much teasing occurs about clothing and
physical appearance, sexual topics, and race” (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009, p. 340). “The Aggressive Attitudes scale of the SCBS is comprised of 7 items assessing aggressive attitudes toward bullying, such as whether some students deserve to be bullied or teased” (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009, p. 340). “The Willingness to Seek Help scale of the SCBS was developed to measure student willingness to report and seek help for bullying and other dangerous behaviors” (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009, p. 340).

The results of the Bandyopadhyay et al., (2009) study showed that two aspects of school climate impede bullying prevention efforts. The first aspect is student attitudes that support and encourage bullying and aggression. Second is school personnel’s success in convincing students that they can seek help and will be supported when they do (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009). In addition, results showed that “schools characterized by students with more aggressive attitudes were associated with more bullying and gang violence at school, and less student help-seeking behaviors as reported by teachers” (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009, p. 350).

The role of respect. Hurford et al. (2010) emphasize that administrators favoring a particular group of students is a major factor contributing to school climate. If certain groups of students are more or less liked by adults, students can become frustrated by others receiving preferential treatment. Additionally, administrators and staff contribute to a negative school climate as they ignore some behaviors, such as bullying, or the negative behaviors of some groups of students. “The need for equality in student treatment by staff and administrators should clearly be a priority” (Hurford et al., 2010). Related to the preferential treatment of some is the finding that disrespectful treatment of students, and disrespect between students, contributes to a negative school climate (Hurford et al., 2010). These authors suggest that modeling respect for students significantly improves school climate. Hernandez and Seem (2004) agree. When
students feel respected, and see the justice and clarity of rules, school climate is positively influenced.

A culture of respect, “where bullying is not only not tolerated but is not necessary” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p.108) is of absolute importance. Everyone must work together to ensure that respect and recognition are equally distributed across the student population. Those who contribute to a negative school climate can be influenced “to discover alternative forms of personal power and more effective ways to obtain recognition or vent their frustration” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p.108).

Mitchell, Longhurst, and Jacob (2008), contend that when children and adults are not forming respectful relationships, a cycle of conflict begins to develop (Mitchell et al., 2008). Schools using shame and dominance as discipline, pushes youth further away from healthy relationships with adults (Mitchell et al., 2008). Adults must create a climate that allows children to care about each other and to achieve greatness (Mitchell et al., 2008). Training students as leaders empowers them to stand up and begin to break the cycle of disrespect.

The relationship between respect, bullying and school climate. Langdon and Preble (2008) confirm that numerous studies have found that school violence causes a variety of possible negative outcomes for aggressors, victims and bystanders. Further findings indicate that numerous interventions have been identified in response to school violence; and that the basis of these interventions is the concept of respect (Langdon & Preble, 2008). Langdon and Preble (2008) believe that there is empirical research that explores the relationship between respect and school violence. Kassen (2004) found that school climate was “significantly related to changes in bullying. Specifically, the less chaos and more academic focus in school, the less bullying there was” (as cited in Langdon & Preble, 2008, p. 487). While it is reasonable to assume that there is
a correlation between respect and caring, response to authority, and accepting difference, the relationship is largely untested. Langdon and Preble (2008) used data collected from an earlier school climate and student leadership project to “more directly assess the relationship between bullying and respect. Their data indicated that a high percentage of students, 96.6 percent, had witnessed or experienced bullying, and that levels of respect varied by school and by demographic. “Higher levels of respect were associated with less bullying frequency” (Langdon & Preble, 2008, p. 492). However, the direction of the relationship between levels of perceived respect and levels of perceived bullying is undetermined. While it is possible that low levels of perceived respect are caused by high levels of perceived bullying, it is also possible that “bullying is caused by lack of respect within the school climate” (Langdon & Preble, 2008, p. 496). The authors discuss the limitations of their study, but maintain that there is a relationship between bullying and respect, regardless of which comes first, high levels of bullying or low levels of respect. Langdon and Preble (2008) contend that unacceptably high levels of bullying, and moderate levels of respect, provide an approach for developing new interventions. They conclude by stating that perceptions of bullying and respect are important components of school climate; and that their findings were similar to previous studies. “A positive school climate could be created and the likelihood of bullying reduced” (Langdon & Preble, 2008, p. 499).

**How hope in the future and school climate relate to graduating.** Hope is dependent on three concepts: a shared purpose, a belief that the future will be better than the present, and a belief that there is meaning in the past (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Worrell and Hale (2001) conducted a study to examine the impact of hope in the future on students at risk, and to relate hope in the future to school climate. Students at risk for dropping out, based on the fact that they were assigned to a continuation high school, also called alternative high school in some regions,
participated in a study that focused on the protective factors of hope in the future, and school climate (Worrell & Hale, 2001). Risk factors cited by Worrell and Hale (2001) include low grades, truancy, dissatisfaction with teacher interest and discipline, and demographic risk factors such as low socioeconomic status and parent’s education level. Protective factors, those that promote resilience and result in students staying in school include hope in the future, optimism, perceived chances of success after high school, and other definitions of hope that seem to be related to resilience in youth at risk for dropping out.

School climate was identified as a separate potential risk factor in the Worrell and Hale (2001) study. “Students who identify with school are more likely to participate in school and less likely to drop out. Thus, a student’s sense of belonging to school and being valued by the school is a potential protective factor” (Finn, 1989, as cited in Worrell & Hale, 2001, p. 375). Much like hope in the future, school climate is a cognitive variable (Worrell & Hale, 2001). Their hypothesis was to see if protective factors related to school climate could significantly predict dropping out or graduating.

Worrell and Hale (2001) formed two cohorts of students from an alternative high school as participants in their study. Two groups were formed from the retrospective cohort of students that had graduated: students who graduated were called the retrospective graduate group, and students who had dropped out were called the retrospective dropout group. Dropout and graduate groups were formed of students currently attending the alternative high school by gathering data for the prospective groups, and then placing them in their respective group once they left the school as either drop outs or graduates.
The retrospective groups were asked to report perceived school climate for their last year in school using a 20 item school climate inventory. The prospective groups were asked to report risk factors and perceived school climate for the previous year of school.

The most significant results from the Worrell and Hale (2001) study showed that the likelihood of dropping out was reduced by engaging with the curriculum and attending classes. The authors caution that their results may be influenced by hindsight. Since the two retrospective groups left the school with different outcomes, those that left the school with a diploma may have viewed the school more positively because of their diploma, and it is not known how they viewed the school prior to graduation. For these reasons, the authors also gathered prospective data. The two prospective groups did not show a difference in their perceptions of school climate. However, the limitation here is that the study used students from a single school as their sample.

Worrell and Hale (2001) conclude their findings stating that “variables relating to hope in the future play an important protective role in the lives of at-risk students” (Worrell & Hale, 2001, p. 383). However, they called their result “interesting but not interpretable (p.384) and call for further research that examines the “differences on perceived school climate within and between schools (Worrell & Hale, 2001, p. 384).

The role of student leadership in school climate. Students often feel reluctant to report other students when violent or aggressive behavior has occurred (Hernandez & seem, 2004). Bystanders who may be reluctant to report what they have seen need to be empowered; they need to know which adults they can connect with when speaking out (Mitchell et al., 2008). As long as children feel protected, they are willing to lend their support to solving a problem. Garrity and Jens call the 85% of students who are neither bullies nor victims, “the caring majority” (1997, p.
When bystanders are empowered to speak out, and victims are supported, the imbalance of power if shifted away from the bullies (Garrity & Jens, 1997).

Students who bully can also be included in student leadership. Their need for power needs to be redirected; their positive qualities need to be encouraged. Student leadership interventions can foster replacement behaviors for the bully’s need for power (Garrity & Jens, 1997). Could it be dangerous to give responsibility to students who seem to be irresponsible (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Bockern, 2002)? The real danger is in holding on to “attitudes that keep young people from assuming responsible roles in our schools and communities” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p.116).

Inclusion and social cooperation have become greater challenges as schools become more and more diverse (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). Brendtro et al., (2002) suggest that representatives from all groups and subgroups in a school, including those not seen as positive by school personnel, be organized into small problem solving groups. In these groups students first learn to respect and support each other before making their skills available to the school as a whole (Brendtro et al., 2002). Student leadership, defined as peer involvement by these authors is beneficial to creating a positive school climate, especially among youth who might not trust authority or school administrators.

**Pathways to Student Leadership**

Certainly, how a student defines leadership is important in whether or not a student views him or herself as a leader. Yet leadership is not easily defined and depends on an individual’s experiences and beliefs (Shetzer & Schuh, 2004, as cited in Marckett & Kadolph, 2011).

Students lead formally through leadership positions, such as team captain, or informally through the school or classroom culture (Lizzio, Dempster, & Neumann, 2011). Student
leadership is usually thought of as mainly occurring through formal positions, however, those opportunities are limited and do not apply to the general population of the school. Lizio et al. (2011) conducted a study to better understand ways schools either help or hinder student’s motivations to lead, both formally and informally.

Teacher to student relationships, and student to student relationships, friendships, are cultural factors considered by Lizio et al. (2011). They found that student perceptions of a positive and respectful teacher to student relationship are vital to student’s academic and social success. Many have argued that student attitudes and beliefs in the justice of school administrators impact a student’s motivation and willingness to participate and contribute as a leader. “The extent to which a person identifies with a group or organization appears to moderate the level of their engagement and contribution” (Lizio et al., 2011, p. 89). Ensuring the safety of students, encouraging them, and helping them to feel confident so that students envision themselves as leaders is the main challenge to be understood. Lizio et al., (2011) first studied students in formal leadership positions to distinguish their motivations from their peers. Secondly, they researched ways to motivate all students to lead, using 167 eleventh graders as participants. Approximately half of the participants were members of a school team, club or other group, 31 of which held formal leadership positions.

The students who held leadership positions reported significant differences from their classmates, having a more positive view of peer relationships, stronger identification with the school, and motivations to lead (Lizio et al., 2011). It might be expected that students who have a higher status such as holding these types of positions might feel more positively about their school and be more motivated to lead. However, Lizio et al. (2011) consider that the qualities of motivation and positivity may have led to their being chosen to be leaders. Lizio et al. (2011)
found that the participants who were not members of a school club or team reported higher levels of leadership motivation than those who were leaders. This could be because the formal leaders may have been selected because of their skill and experience rather than those who were selected because of general leadership qualities or capabilities (Lizzio et al., 2011).

“Membership in a school club or team was not found to be a significant predictor of school identification” (Lizzio et al., 2011, p.97). However, the positive peer networks, and community building opportunities that can be generated by participating in extracurricular activities should be considered valuable (Lizzio et al., 2011).

Anderson and Kim (2009) studied a Chicago area agricultural high school to understand student’s perceptions of the value of leadership in their lives, identify opportunities these students had to learn and practice leadership, and to identify preferences for leadership training experiences. For this study, leadership was defined as “the ability to motivate self and others to achieve worthwhile goals” (Anderson & Kim, 2009, p. 10).

Leadership was found to be of high importance but was rated as being more important in their anticipated future careers. These findings indicate that students believe “that it is important for them to motivate themselves and others to achieve worthwhile goals” (Anderson & Kim, 2009, p. 17). The authors noted that of the six leadership areas identified: school, organizations, future career, peers, family, and community; community received the lowest rank of importance for leadership. Opportunities to practice leadership skills were ranked in order of sports activities, work, and organizations. Activities such as student council, band, and scouts were rated the lowest as providing opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills (Anderson & Kim, 2009). Of some concern to the authors was the low rank of community leadership and low community involvement. The authors point out that without learning the importance of
volunteerism and civic responsibility, students may find the transition into young adulthood to be challenging. While students understand that leadership has an important role in their daily lives, the areas in which they receive leadership education were the most important to them (Anderson & Kim, 2009).

The respondents reported that their technical classes were the setting they preferred leadership training to occur. However, the opportunities their student professional organization provided with officer positions, chapter meetings, workshops, and international experiences, were also ranked of high preference for leadership training. Qualities of student preferred training experiences were identified and ranked as being interactive, organized, and fun; but also should have practical application and include group work (Anderson & Kim, 2009).

**Leadership Qualities**

In an article published in *Techniques: Connecting Education & Careers*, Rice (2011) discusses effective student leadership, which begins with individual leadership. Successful student leaders take risks and are not afraid of failure (Rice, 2011). For them, “failure and disappointment are a normal part of growth” (Rice, 2011, p. 28). Rice (2011) believes that as Anderson and Kim (2009) found in their research, youth need opportunities that give them practice and training in leading.

Rice (2011) found that schools are using organized programs and created a list of successful structured programs. The list includes: DECA, which is described as an association of marketing students; FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America); FCCLA (Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America); TSA (Technology Students of America); and JROTC (Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps). The structure of these programs fosters camaraderie, builds a sense of belonging, and provides opportunities for service and leadership.
Expanding this list, Reese (2008) categorizes these organizations as “career and technical student organizations” (p. 18). Building on the premise that leadership is such an important component of these organizations that they include leadership in their mission statements, Reese describes how some of these organizations instill leadership concepts into student’s lives. DECA focuses on developing skills and competence for marketing careers, builds student’s self-esteem, helps them to experience leadership, and practice community service (Reese, 2008). Leadership development occurs in the classroom and in DECA activities. “A bridge of leadership skills helps members advance from technical, cognitive classroom learning to operational abilities that put these narrow skills to broader use (Reese, 2008, p. 19).

Family, Career and Community Leaders of America promotes personal growth and leadership development through family and consumer science education. The multiple roles of family member, wage earner, and community leader are main focuses. Organizational sponsored regional meetings offer students the opportunity to receive formal leadership training and experience. Chapter projects focus on a variety of issues that concern youth such as teen pregnancy, family relationships, nutrition, fitness, and substance abuse. Through character development, creative and critical thinking, interpersonal communication and career preparation, members develop skills for life (Reese, 2008). Additional life skills developed through participation are planning, goal setting, problem solving, and decision making (Reese, 2008).

The National FFA organization uses agricultural education to develop student’s potential leadership, personal growth and career success. A series of leadership and personal growth conferences are offered to students at middle school, freshman and sophomore, and junior and senior levels (Reese, 2008).
The Technology Student Association is described by Reese (2008) as an organization focusing on “personal growth, leadership, and opportunities in innovation design and engineering. Members apply and integrate science, technology, engineering and mathematics concepts through co-curricular activities, competitive events and related programs” (Reese, 2008, p. 28). Teamwork is used at the middle school level as students develop a plan of action to address a specific challenging situation provided at the site of the leadership challenge event; and finalists develop a team presentation (Reese, 2008).

A review of current literature found that schools are not only using organized programs to train students to be leaders, but are also using their own creative programs. One of these schools is in Vancouver. The Vancouver school uses ROARS, an acronym that coincides with the school’s Tigers mascot. ROARS stands for respect, ownership, attitude, responsibility, and safety. A brief definition of the ROARS code of conduct defines the expectation for respectful behavior as “communicate with others in a positive and respectful way” (Whishaw, 2010, p. 3). The expectation for ownership is defined as “make amends for mistakes by apologizing, repairing or replacing” (Whishaw, 2010, p. 3). The attitude expectations include being well-mannered, compassionate and helpful. The code for responsibility has students using their planners and emphasizes commitment; and safety reminds students to follow directions from staff. Students learn about ROARS at eighth grade (the lowest grade at the school) orientation, and through skits, and games. A group of student leaders promote ROARS and new teachers are fully trained in the importance of the program from their beginning (Whishaw, 2010).

Whishaw (2010) reports that the staff can at times be divided into three groups of varying support for the program. However, those who provide continual leadership for the program find support from the administration and students. Staff leaders participate in dramas performed for
new teachers; and a newsletter uses common language of “ROARS emergency” for situations that violate the ROARS code, and “ROARSalicious” for situations that are noted as being remarkable (Whishaw, 2010, p. 4).

The ROARS student leadership program involves cards, or tickets, to be given to students as recognition for being good leaders. These tickets can be turned in to be redeemed for weekly drawings for movie passes. At the end of the year is a bigger drawing for a bigger prize. Additional student leadership opportunities occur when teachers review the code with students and students are given an opportunity to add to it or make suggestions for revisions. One example provided is students writing a section on internet safety (Whishaw, 2010).

The success of the program has taken this school by reputation as a school that parents tried to not have to have their children go to, to a school that now has a waiting list. By the end of the fifth year of the program, “the number of classes students failed plummeted by 50% in every grade and every curricular area” (Whishaw, 2010, p. 5).

A Colorado High School responded to changing their school climate when four students committed suicide in an eight month period, and it was discovered that other students had prior knowledge but felt unequipped to help their classmates. Austin (2010) observed students struggling with loss or missing school due to illness. Discipline problems had resulted from students falling behind and then skipping more school out of embarrassment from being behind. Conversely, Austin (2010) also noticed students wanting to help. However, without direction students did not know how to get started. The idea for the new Believe It Or Not, I Care (BIONIC) team began to develop from there. The first BIONIC team selected team leaders and organized into smaller goal oriented teams. The teams reach out to new students, hospitalized
students, student’s families or staff who have experienced the death of a loved one, and other nearby schools that have experienced a tragedy (Austin, 2001).

Austin (2010) reported that during the program’s first five years 550 members reached out to 30,000 people. BIONIC team members reported that they benefitted individually from the check-in process that is held after each outreach. Grief training is a part of the check-in, and former members reported bringing the skills they learned with them as they moved on to college.

Leaders at five Minnesota elementary schools credit the change in their school climate to their comprehensive counseling program called The Kindness Project (Gritz, 2010). The Kindness Project empowers staff with a common language and provides a format to empower students leaders. Counselors developed the program to focus on how to act, rather than the negative behaviors such as bullying or disrespectful language. Among the many barriers to learning, bullying was the most prevalent. Students reacted by withdrawing, lashing out, or crying.

Student leaders are selected among the fourth graders, by a variety of methods, depending on the school. The student leader’s responsibilities include making posters, writing announcements, performing skits and recognizing kindness. Students have remarked on the difference The Kindness Project has made in their lives, and student continue to use the kindness language in their homes and lives outside of school (Gritz, 2010).

Respect, Relationships, Responsibility, and Results is the slogan used by Memphis schools to support the behavior initiative using the student leadership qualities of self-discipline and positive student behavior to transform school climate (Cassellius, 2006). Certainly, changing school climate is not easy, and adds to the complexity of education (Cassellius, 2006). Memphis schools evaluated data on student attendance, behavior, and achievement as a clear indicator of
whether practices are being used in ways that meets school goals and raises student achievement (Cassellius, 2006).

Having reviewed the research on school climate, student leadership, and some of the student leadership programs schools have found to be successful, there are certainly implications for school counselors. In the next section the ASCA National Model will be used, along with supporting academic journal articles, to narrow down the broad number of options for school counselors to transform school climate from negative to positive, using student leadership and respect as a basis.

**Implications for School Counselors**

The research reviewed to this point offers a myriad of suggestions for school counselors when intervening with the challenges of school violence, students at risk for dropping out, the No Child Left Behind Act, student apathy and student engagement. Focusing on student achievement and leadership school counselors can:

- Advocate for educating the whole child
- Offer a variety of educational experiences and leadership opportunities
- Develop the gifts and talents of a diverse student body
- Work with students individually to focus on strengths
- Focus students at risk to see their strengths and consider future plans
- Seek out talented youth to consider duel enrollment in high school and college (Gentry, 2006).

To foster a school climate of respect, and encourage student engagement, school counselors can use positive regard. Positive regard allows one to separate the student from the behavior. “Students who are treated with respect, even while acting disrespectfully, keeps the
door open for future contacts (Walsh, 2006, p.14). Student’s positive behaviors are recognized and acknowledged even when a student says he or she does not care. Identifying positive qualities offers a counterbalance to the negativity of student apathy (Walsh, 2006).

A school counseling program that uses Career and Technical Student Organizations as part of their student leadership program will select advisors from the faculty who reflect the values of respect and leadership (Reese, 2011). When teachers and administration interact respectfully it is more likely that school staff and faculty will interact respectfully with students (Lizzio et al., 2011).

An article written by Rezai, Fisher, and Mason (2011), published in ASCA School Counselor magazine aligns student leadership with the ASCA National Model. The ASCA National Model (2005) uses the four quadrants of foundations, delivery system, management system and accountability as a framework for school counseling programs. A school counseling program can follow the ASCA National Model to incorporate student leadership. The foundation of the ASCA National Model is visioning. School counselors can involve students and staff from the very start of the visioning process by discussing how leadership is defined. At the elementary level student leadership should be classroom based and alternate between all students as leaders. At the middle school level student leadership can go beyond the classroom and extend to entire grade levels, while in high school, student leadership responsibilities extend to the entire school (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011). A vision statement for the student leadership program would include answers to questions such as what leadership means to the individuals involved; what qualities students need for good student leadership; ideas about how students can demonstrate leadership in the classroom, school and community; and “what activities exist or can be created to encourage student leadership” (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011, p. 22).
To plan the student leadership program an evaluation of school climate will help to identify what characteristic are lacking among the student population. Students can then be included in planning leadership opportunities, and staff will have reliable information about which activities to encourage students to participate (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011). The authors recommend involving students in creating a timeline and master calendar of student leadership activities. Involving students at this phase begins to instill belonging and connection as they take ownership of the student leadership program. Students can begin to learn that leadership involves planning and management (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011).

Delivery in the ASCA National Model involves large group guidance curriculum, small group guidance curriculum, and individual counseling or planning. Rezai, Fisher, and Mason (2011) suggest that student leadership activities can be involved in each of these areas with character education, student council, peer helper groups, and service learning projects (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011).

Small groups such as student council provide an opportunity for students and teachers to work together and share ideas for organizing events, fundraising activities and service projects. The interaction between teachers and student leaders widens if students make presentations in various classrooms (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011).

Student leadership ideas in individual planning include using students as greeters for students that transfer to the school during the year. Individual students could also assist in delivering classroom guidance lessons, especially those that involve activities with younger students. In the classroom situation, student leaders are provided with an opportunity to be leaders as well as observe a school counselor being a leader in a classroom (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011).
The last component of the ASCA National Model is accountability, or evaluating the program. School counselors can show student leaders how to evaluate their own progress toward any individual goal involving grades, attendance, homework completion, or activity participation (Rezai, Fisher, & Mason, 2011). Additionally, school counselors can show student leaders how to evaluate the success of the activities they created and lead. Rezai, Fisher, and Mason (2011) suggest that involving student leaders in the accountability process teaches decision making and problem solving skills, and helps them to see the meaning of their leadership activities. The authors provide a clear description of how using the ASCA National Model as a framework enables school counselors to involve students as leaders within a comprehensive school counseling program.

**Adlerian Concepts**

A sense of belonging has been mentioned as one of the benefits of student leadership. Working together and cooperation are also part of student leadership. This section discusses in greater depth, Adlerian concepts that are part of building a positive school climate and culture of respect through student leadership.

Social interest is one of the main pillars of Adler’s theory. When people develop social interest and contribute to society, a sense of belonging is also fostered (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999). School is the primary setting in which children could develop social interest and a sense of belonging. When cultural and socio-economic situations cause so much distraction for student that they are not academically successful, an opportunity for student leadership can provide a source for both social interest and belonging. A child’s security is based on his sense of belonging; children gain a sense of belonging through usefulness and participation (Dreikurs,
Children who have a well developed sense of belonging generally perform better academically and are more mentally healthy (Edwards & Mullis, 2001).

Adlerian theory suggests that all behavior is goal directed and everything a child does is aimed at finding his or her place in society (Dreikurs, 1964). Children draw conclusions about how he or she will fit in, belong, or gain significance from their observations of others. While children are excellent observers, they make mistakes when interpreting what they have observed. From these mistaken interpretations, children often “choose mistaken ways in which to find their place” (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 15). For example, a child who bullies assumes “that one is big only when he can show his power” (Dreikurs, 1964, p. 50).

The Adlerian approach recognizes four mistaken goals of behavior that children typically choose. The first mistaken goal is that children who feel they do not belong pursue a goal of undue attention. Students will use any array of tactics to meet their need for attention and thereby establish a sense of belonging. Next, a struggle for power is pursued. The third mistaken goal is retaliation or revenge; while the fourth is complete discouragement or inadequacy.

School counselors are often brought in to work individually with students who disrupt the classroom with mistaken goals of misbehavior. Counselors can begin by using respectfulness to connect with the child (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999). The Adlerian approach to counseling uses respect by:

- Guessing how the child might be feeling and checking with the child if the guess is correct
- Without condoning or agreeing with the child’s behavior, let the child know the he or she is understood
- Ask if he or she would like to hear your feelings
• Feelings are shared in a nonaccusing manner

• Work with the child to find a solution to the misbehavior or conflict (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999, p.304).

Student leadership and opportunities for student leadership can help children to channel student’s search for significance and usefulness by offering opportunities for cooperation. Talking freely and processing together after a group activity is the best way to gain cooperation (Dreikurs, 1964). The student leadership activities discussed earlier typically conclude with an opportunity to process what participants saw and felt during the activity.

The Adlerian approach to counseling offers school counselors the principles of social interest, respect, and belonging as a means of making a difference in how children view their place in society.

**Conclusion**

The first step in solving a problem is to recognize that there is a problem. Despite the obvious intention of the No Child Left Behind Act, students continue to be marginalized in systems that focus on their weaknesses rather than their possibilities (Gentry, 2006). Building on the skills of the caring majority a positive tone for the school can begin to grow. In this positive, safe, and caring climate, everyone can learn, and character can blossom (Garrity & Jens, 1997).

Available literature on the relationship between student leadership and school climate is limited (Dempster & Lizzio, 2007). Research has not provided studies that directly link school climate, respect and student leadership. As a result, the implications and conclusions here are limited.

Future studies could focus on American middle school student’s definition of leadership. As students of middle school age attempt to figure out their place in society it would be
informative to know how students in 5th through 9th grade view peer leaders and adult leaders differently. With that information educators would be able to develop specifically appropriate interventions and programs that prepare middle school students to be effective peer leaders in high school.

Additional research could collect data on leadership programs schools are using across the nation. Cross-cultural studies would determine if certain leadership programs are more or less relevant based on cultural demographics.

In addition to the lack of clear research there are subcultures within schools that do not outwardly value leadership or respect. Additional programs may be needed in order to improve the school climate to the desired level for optimum achievement for all students. However, providing the opportunity for student leadership which fosters respect, and training students and staff to identify and train leaders, is a place to start. With student leadership opportunities, beginning with one educator and one student at a time, school counselors can find the focus to intervene for all students.
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