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Climate Change: Why Is a Positive School Climate Imperative To Learning?

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Climate Change:

Why is a Positive School Climate Imperative to Learning?

Lindsay Frias

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Abstract

Many people look back with gratitude that high school is a thing of the past, primarily due to negative social interactions among peers. The focus of this Capstone Project is on obtaining a better understanding of the social climate in high school and how this is relevant to student development. This is an important issue because a student's feeling of belonging can be directly related to his/her academic success and overall wellbeing. Evidence supporting this claim was obtained through literature and interviews at a local high school.The three primary stakeholder perspectives analyzed were those of the principal and the two assistant principals at Ocean View High School. In addition, three action options were proposed in this Capstone Project to create a more welcoming school climate.

Climate Change: Why is a Positive School Climate Imperative to Learning?

Have you ever had a lot of "friends" but still felt lonely? This was something I endured throughout my adolescence. In high school I did not have a difficult time interacting with others; however, I feel as if I had a difficult time establishing deep friendships. I would say I made more acquaintances than actual friends. High school is an interesting time for most. In that, one is learning how to establish friendships while balancing multiple classes and a quite possibly a sport. In addition, friendships can come and go depending on what rumor is being spread that week, what clothes you are wearing, or perhaps who your boyfriend or girlfriend is.

Growing up in Southern Orange County was not easy by any means. It is certainly a materialistic place. I can remember putting True Religion Jeans and an Ipod Nano on my Christmas list in 2009 because I knew that everyone would come to school wanting to compare their gifts. In addition, I would sneaking my sister's clothes out of her closet because she always had the newest trends. To put it simply, it is easier to make friends in Orange County when you dress the part.

Freshman and Sophomore year were a breeze for me. It was after my close friends transferred to a different high school in the district when things started to get lonely. I went to a small school and it consisted of the same students who I went to elementary school and middle school with. One would think that it would be easier to attend a school where everyone knows each other well. This is not the case. Junior year was when I was left with the people who I did not consider close friends. This was an all time low for me. I missed my friends and now I was stuck with the daunting question, "Who am I going to sit with at lunch?" This was something that I endured every day until I graduated. I did not have a car so I would feel as if I was pestering people if I continually asked them to drive me off campus for lunch. Occasionally, I would not have the opportunity to ask people what their plans were for lunch and as a result I would be stuck on campus with the Freshman and Sophomores. This was quite possibly one of the most humiliating days that I experienced in high school. My sister is a living example that eating lunch in a bathroom stall really happens. I can remember being grateful for

Fridays because my mom worked half day and this meant that she would take me out to lunch.

Some people are lucky and come out of high school with life long friends I got neither. I vividly remember counting down the days until high school was over. I felt as if I could not relate to anyone at my school. It was all very strange because it is not as if I felt like an outsider because there were bullies at my school. It was quite the opposite. For the most part the students were friendly with the exception of a few individuals. I cannot understand why it was so incredibly difficult to make a connection with someone that was deeper than a surface level friendship.

What I envision is a high school where everyone feels comfortable. A place where venturing out of your set friend group is accepted. I believe this would make for a more friendly school climate. Ultimately leading to a school where people feel comfortable reaching out to their peers if they feel that they are lonely. I can only hope that schools will begin to assume responsibility for working towards a more inviting school climate. High school should be memorable, not a place to detest. It all starts with someone reaching out.

Literature Synthesis and Integration

When students do not feel as if they are connected to their school, serious repercussions are likely to arise. A student's ability to gain a sense of belonging is crucial to his/her academic success. School connectedness is directly associated to students' relationships with their teachers, peers, and school staff, shown in Figure 1. The relationships that students have at school could negatively or positively affect them. A disconnect in a student's sense of belonging can be related to deviant behavior and a student's involvement in early sexual activity (Whitlock, 2006). Interestingly enough, the school environment also plays a role in whether a student is bullied or becomes a bully. In addition, Blum states, "Major threats to school connectedness include social isolation, lack of safety in school, and poor classroom management" (Blum, 2005). Overall, the connection that a student has with their school can determine his or her future behavior.
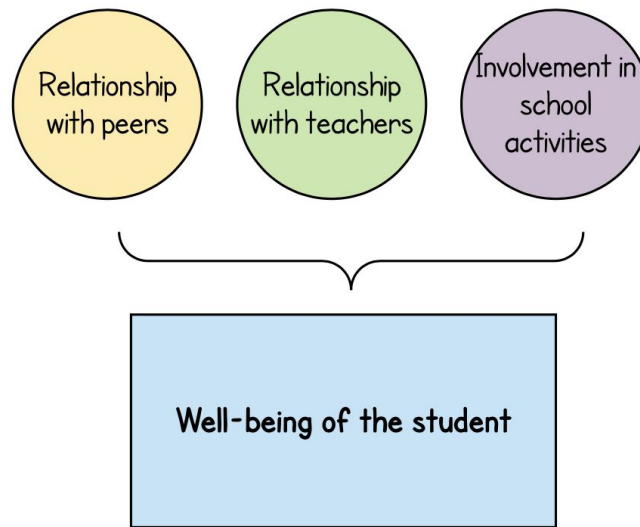
Figure 1, chart depicting the components which attribute to the well-being of a student.

What is the Issue?

The focus issue is a lack of interaction among high school students. Schools are not doing enough to push for a healthy school environment and are not fostering a sense of belonging in students, mainly due to the way classrooms are operated. However, teachers can play a role in improving the social environment of the school by the way they conduct their classrooms (Ryan & Patrick, 2001). Encouraging interaction with one another, and most importantly, encouraging interaction with classmates that students do not regularly associate with, can cause drastic improvements in the school setting (Schaps, 2014). Having a positive relationship with peers and school staff is proven to boost school performance and promote better decision making (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Gaenzle, Kim, Lin, & Na, 2011). Making friends is a difficult aspect of high school and in my opinion, it a school's responsibility to ensure the students all feel welcomed. High school students are generally established in their friend groups, leaving other "newcomers" so to speak, feeling left out (Schaps, 2014). Unfortunately for students, a poor school social climate can be linked to a setback in their academic achievement simply because they lack confidence in the classroom (Dadds, Ham, Montague, Shochet, 2006). Confidence in the classroom can be gained through a sense of comfort and belonging in the school (Dadds, Ham, Montague, Shochet, 2006).

Why is a Positive School Climate Important?

　　　　A positive school climate is important because academics are at risk.
Academic achievement can be directly related to a student's sense of belonging to
his/her school (Dadds, Ham, Montague, Shochet, 2006). When students have good
relationships with their school community, they are more likely to be present in classes,
graduate from school, and maintain an overall higher GPA (Ruglis, & Freudenberg,
2010). This is important because the State of California is extremely strict with school
attendance. Education Code Section 48260 (a) states the actions which will be taken if
a student is absent for three full school days or if they are 30 minutes late to a class on
three occasions without a viable excuse (Kopperud, 2017). To put it simply, when
students feel a disconnect to their school, there is more of a chance that they will skip
class. As a result, they are putting themselves at risk for law enforcement to intervene.
Building relationships is a key component in attaining a sense of belonging to one's
school. An involvement in school clubs, or a teacher who pushes students out of their
comfort zones to work in class with someone they do not usually work with, are
examples of positive interaction with peers. A sense of belonging to one's school can
also be directly correlated to a student's motivation in completing assignments and
striving for good grades (Dadds, Ham, Montague, Shochet, 2006). Schools are primarily
concerned with ensuring their students are academically progressing, however, they do
not take into account the impact that emotional health has on school performance
(Mohzan, Hassan, & Halil, 2013). Mohzan stresses the importance of EQ, also known
as Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to make decisions,
navigate social life, and managing behavior (About Emotional, 2017). EQ can be seen
as more important than students' IQ because those who have a high EQ have a better
ability to work well under pressure and also work well with others (Mohzan, Hassan, &
Halil, 2013). In addition, Emotional Intelligence can be directly correlated to the
performance level and motivation that a student brings to the classroom on any given
day (Mohzan et al., 2013). Emotional Intelligence is the strongest predictor of
performance in people (About Emotional, 2017).Interestingly enough, the human brain

has the ability to grow new connections whenever a new skill is learned, meaning that a students' EQ can develop in the classroom through group projects or socializing with peers (About Emotional, 2017). Therefore, it is important for schools to teach to the whole child, not just teaching for a particular letter grade.

Schools have a responsibility to teach to the whole child. Another interesting component attributed to student achievement is the student's feeling of autonomy. When students feel as if they are in control of their learning, they are more likely to maintain motivation and an interest in their studies (Legault & Green-Demers, 2016). When a student is given responsibilities and treated as if he/she is capable of completing a task, the student then begins to assume responsibility for his/her learning (Legault & Green-Demers, 2016).

Learning to work with others is a skill that the school system should impart as a form of intervention. When students learn to problem solve and work together to accomplish an assignment, they put aside their differences and connect in a different way. They are collaborating, sharing ideas, showing their strengths and their creativity. This can be attributed to the Social Development Theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction. It even goes as far to say that social learning precedes development (McLeod, 2014). This is important to apply to classrooms because it reinforces the idea that group work is far more beneficial to a student's success than individual work.

Schools have a responsibility to show children right and wrong behaviors and the outcomes to these behaviors. When children feel as if they are connected to their school, they are less likely to engage in deviant behavior (Whitlock, 2006). Furthermore, when students experience a detachment to their school, it is possible that they will seek attention from other sources. Engaging in early sexual activity, getting involved in drugs, becoming a bully, and becoming involved in other deviant behavior, can all be attributed to a student's lack of belonging to his/her school. In contrast, a healthy school community also decreases the likelihood of school bullying (O'Brennan, Furlong, 2010).
What should be done?

Schools need to take a more influential role in regards to the social health of their students. There needs to be an understanding that they have a responsibility to shape the students to become the citizens that they hope to see in the world. Children spend more time in school than anywhere else, therefore, it is of the utmost importance to create an environment where everyone feels included and welcomed. This is important because if schools can succeed in instilling an inclusive mindset in their students within the school walls, then perhaps it can echo into the larger world. This should be the primary focus of schools; to create intelligent people who can work well with others. As stated by Ruglis, & Freudenberg, "Engaging youths in improving education, health care, and health promotion provides new opportunities for experiential education and the preparation of citizens who can contribute to solving the nation's social problems" (Ruglis, & Freudenberg, 2010). Schools should be teaching students to become mindful of how their actions can affect others. This is crucial in developing a healthy school environment. The ability to recognize the differences in others and develop a willingness to associate with students that one typically would not think to associate with, is a step in the right direction.Teachers should be encouraging students to work with those who they usually would not work with. Teachers need to build a sense of trust within their students. Create a non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom where students feel comfortable sharing their answers in class without worry of being embarrassed by a wrong answer. Teachers need to deviate from the traditional classroom, where working individually is the norm. Working with others has many benefits. Ultimately, learning to work in groups is a tool which can be used in the workplace (Mohzan et al., 2013). The advantages of early intervention are far reaching and have the potential of changing the course of a student's life. A contributing factor in students' feeling of school connectedness is when students feel their teacher cares about their overall well-being and what they are being taught is pertinent to their lives (Blum, 2005). With this in mind, teacher involvement can lead to student participation in school functions. Teachers have the ability to ensure a fair social environment. According to O'Brien,"It is our job to help young people plan school activities so that all children-not merely a "popular" or

"talented" few may enjoy and benefit from these educational opportunities" (O'Brien, 1995). Students need guidance, especially at such a pivotal time in their lives. There needs to be a voice of reason within the schools; someone to regulate who is in charge of school assemblies and club organizations**.** In addition, a push for students to get involved in extracurricular school activities, such as sports, decreases the likelihood of absences a student may have due to feelings of not belonging to their school (O'Brien, 1995). The less school a student misses, the more successful they will be in their classes.

In conclusion, the school social climate is a topic that needs more attention within the school system. There are many components that contribute to a healthy school climate. Thus, teacher involvement, feeling safe in the classroom, establishing relationships with peers, and an involvement in school activities are all factors in determining a student's attachment to their school.

Method

For this Capstone Project an investigation was conducted to determine how the social climate of high school can affect students' overall development. High school is a challenging time for most; therefore, the researcher wanted to gain a better understanding of what exactly makes up a positive school climate. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher will use what she has learned to formulate an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

This research took place at Ocean View High School[1]. This is in Monterey County, California. Ocean View High School is one of two high schools in the Ocean View School District. It is located near downtown and also in close proximity to the beach. Ocean View High School opened in 1980 and to this day, the school is expanding (Ed-Data, 2017). Recently the school added a performing arts studio, math building, library, and a new science facility (Smith, 2014). The students at Ocean View

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[1] Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.

High School are academically proficient, in that, they are ranked in the top 50 high schools in California (How Does Ocean View, 2017). Most of the students are in Advanced Placement classes (Smith, 2014). Ocean View High School has 856 students enrolled, 47% are female and 53% are male. The school is made up of 65% Caucasian students, 18.9% Hispanic students, 3.5% Asian, and a small percentage of other ethnicities (How Does Ocean View, 2017). There are 22 students per classroom at any given time (How Does Ocean View, 2017). The students at Ocean View High are heavily involved in school activities such as, sports, school band, drama, or clubs (Smith, 2014). Currently, the school is being run by Principal Smith (Ed-Data, 2017). He has been the principal at Ocean View High for nine years. His staff is comprised of primarily Caucasian teachers. Teachers at Ocean View High are 87% Caucasian, 5.6% Hispanic, 3.7% Asian 1.9%, Pacific Islander, and 1.9% unreported (Ed-Data, 2017). In addition, English Language Learners only make up 0.8% of the school population (Ed-Data, 2017). The school offers free and reduced priced meals for its students, 12.8% of students are registered for this program (Ed-Data, 2017).

Participants and Participant Selection

Researcher. This research was conducted by a fourth year, Liberal Studies student at California State University Monterey Bay, Lindsay Frias. I am earnestly pursuing a career in the field of education. I have been privileged with many opportunities of service learning at various elementary schools in Orange County, CA and Monterey County, CA. These service learning opportunities have given me a significant amount of insight to the strengths and weaknesses in the public school system.

In regards to this capstone project, this concern is personally meaningful to me because I struggled with the social climate at my high school. I spent the majority of my school days worried about who I would go off campus to lunch with and if I couldn't find a group, I knew I would be forced to eat lunch in the hallway or pretend that I was catching up on homework in the library.

I think I am capable of relating to those who are in the same shoes that I once

was in. My ability to empathize and my listening skills will certainly benefit me with this project. My education and ethnicity differentiate me from the influentials. I am roughly seven years older than these students and the majority of them are Caucasian, whereas I am Hispanic. This could impact the work because the students might refrain from telling their honest opinion about their social lives because they feel as if they cannot relate to me. I also believe the age difference could be a factor when conducting these interviews. Although I am able to empathize with these students, my biases of what I believe high school is like could skew my perception of what is truly the case at Ocean View High School. I am aware of my biases and have made the conscious effort to make my research as unbiased as possible.

   Informants. Principal Smith was the first participant to be interviewed.The principal has overseen the school for nine years now, therefore, he is well-versed in dealing with the social climate of this particular school over a long period of time. The second interview was with the assistant principal of the school; Megan Jones. Megan has recently been hired as the assistant principal for Ocean View High. She has twenty eight years of experience in the educational field. She was a teacher for twelve years and then worked her way into administration. The last interview was with another assistant principal, Richard Johnson. Richard has been the assistant principal at Ocean View High for two years.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. How would you describe the social climate at your school?
2. Do the students work together in class or is it more individualistic?
3. What is the social environment like during lunch?
4. What do you see as the challenges with the social wellbeing of your school?
5. What are your concerns when it comes to students' social interactions?
6. What is currently being done to improve social interactions/ establishing a healthy sense of community at your school?
7. What steps does this school take in integrating a new student?
8. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the social interactions

between your students?

9. Have you heard of Mix It Up Day? Is this something you could see yourself implementing in your school?

Procedure

For this procedure, interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the school climate at Ocean View High School. The researcher first visited the school to find out if the principal would be willing to participate in an interview for this capstone project. After an appointment was scheduled, the interview took place. After the interview was completed, the researcher asked Principal Smith for permission to interview members of his staff; specifically the assistant principal and a school counselor. The interviews were completely anonymous in order to protect the participants. The participants who were interviewed were told about the pseudonyms that would be used. In addition, they were asked if the interview could be audio recorded. After the agreement was made, the participants were asked to sign consent forms. At the end of each interview, the researcher asked the participant to provide suggestions for improving the school climate. The researcher then offered her own suggestions for improvement.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the researcher reviewed the notes taken and listened to the audio recordings, in order to find similarities between the interviews. Once the researcher sectioned off important parts in the interview, she then went on to apply this newfound information to literature which was previously researched. This lead to more research in order to delve deeper into new ideas which emerged through the interviews. These newfound ideas will help the researcher in her pursuit of understanding what makes up a healthy school climate and also what actions need to be taken to ensure a positive learning environment.

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Results

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For this Capstone Project, Ocean View High School administrators were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve social climate of their high

school. This is important because a student's feeling of belonging can have a direct impact on his/her overall development. In that, a strong feeling of school connectedness can be directly related to a student's academic success and emotional wellbeing. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: Probability of Impact, Feasibility, and Time. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Probability of Impact	Feasibility	Time
Provide an environment where students feel comfortable interacting with one another through the program: Mix It Up Day.	High	High	Medium
Implementing quiet time during the last few minutes of class to allow students time to decompress.	High	High	Medium
Organize lunch locations for Junior and Senior students to meet up.	High	High	High

Creating a welcoming environment

The students at Ocean View High are unique, in that, they have been alongside each other since elementary school, making the friend groups very tight knit, and in my opinion, hard to break out of. When asked about the atmosphere during lunchtime, Principal Smith stated, "When you look at our amphitheater, it looks like all the kids are together, but they're not, they're in pockets of five and ten, and is that cliquish? I think yeah, I think you can say it's cliquish" (personal communication, Oct. 25, 2017). It is

important for schools to create a welcoming school climate because socialization is one of the biggest aspects of a student's high school experience. Establishing deep connections with one another is pertinent to the student's social well-being primarily because it gives the student a feeling of belonging (Schaps, 2014). The connections students are making with one another can be directly related to the school's performance and promoting better decision making in the students (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Gaenzle, Kim, Lin, & Na, 2011). A recommended action for the school to take would be implementing the program Mix It Up Day (Mix It Up, 2017). Mix It Up Day is an opportunity, once a school year, for students to interact with other students who they usually do not communicate with on a regular basis. The point of this program is to break down barriers and encourage interaction among peers. Although it is great to have long-term friendships, it is also important to remember to welcome others into the group (Mix It Up, 2017). As shown in Figure 1, I believe Ocean View High is very likely to adopt this program, primarily because it is likely to have a high impact on the student's willingness to interact with others and make new friends. In addition, it would not cost the school any money, other than printing flyers, if needed. Lastly, other than getting the program approved, it would hardly take any time to implement. Mix it up day has the potential to break up the deeply rooted friendships, and allow for more interaction among the rest of their peers.

Reducing stress

After interviewing the administrators at Ocean View High School, it was evident that the school is centered around academic success and the steps needed to achieve this.The students at Ocean View High are, for the most part, excelling in their academics. In addition to a demanding school schedule, community service and extracurricular activities consume the remainder of these students' free time. This can create a stressful and competitive environment. When asked about the school climate, Assistant Principal Jones explained how the culture is very academically driven. Assistant Principal Jones then went on to state, "It's a part of the culture, it's not that way in other schools, you know it may not be that cool to be academically driven but

here it's not cool if you're not academically driven" (personal communication, Nov. 9, 2017). Since the climate of the school can be overwhelming, in regards to academics, stress management among students is a primary concern for Principal Smith and Assistant Principal Jones. They fear that students may turn to alcohol and drugs as a way to "release" from the stressful school week. According to Principal Smith,

> One of our most primary concerns is our student use of drugs and alcohol...I think a lot of what we hear about drug and alcohol use on our campus stems from students working hard academically and thinking perhaps they deserve play hard time; work hard play hard (personal communication, Oct. 25, 2017).

Assistant Principal Jones had a similar response to the question: What do you see as the primary concern of the social wellbeing of your students? Her response was,

> The social and emotional piece of it. You know, are they pushing themselves too much? Are they taking care of their whole self? Is sleep getting lost because they are doing homework? Is the stress and worry of the grades too much? (personal communication, Nov. 9, 2017).

At Ocean View High, it is evident that a stressful and competitive atmosphere is the norm. It is important that schools realize the severity of creating a healthy balance between academics and the student's mental health because the well-being of the school climate depends on it (Mohzan, Hassan, & Halil, 2013). Furthermore, a healthy school climate reduces the risk of deviant behavior, including the use of drugs and alcohol (Whitlock, 2006). It is evident that stress management has become a concern at this school and a solution to this issue has yet to arise. After reviewing interviews and reflecting back on the literature, it became clear that Ocean View High is in need of a form of stress release during the school day. I believe that incorporating a few minutes of meditation, or simply quiet time, at the end of each class can have tremendous positive effects on the student's mental health. This would be a great way to allow time to decompress from a demanding class period. As seen in Figure 1, there are three forms of evaluation for this option. I believe this is a realistic Action Option primarily due to the fact that it will in no way burden the school financially and it will certainly have

positive effects on the students. On the other hand, Ocean View High is extremely cautious in regards to not wasting class time. In that, every minute of instruction is utilized at this school. As a result, teachers may be opposed to sectioning off five minutes of quiet time during their class period.

Intervening

Essentially, this action option is centered around establishing structure to a non-structured period; i.e. lunch time. At Ocean View High School, juniors and seniors, who are in good academic standing, are granted permission to have lunch off campus. This level of freedom is great for students, however, this can also cause feelings of loneliness in those who do not have friends to go off campus with. When asked about students willingness to venture out of their friend group during lunch, Assistant Principal Johnson stated, "Kids definitely hang out with kids they are friends with" (personal communication, Nov. 9, 2017). As previously mentioned, the friendships at this school are deeply rooted, therefore it may be difficult for new students to integrate seamlessly. This is an issue, not only emotionally but academically as well. In that, a student's feeling of involvement is incredibly important because it has an effect on his/her motivation in striving for good grades (Dadds et al., 2006). Furthermore, when students feel comfortable at their school, they are more likely to be present in class and thus, maintaining higher GPA's (Ruglis & Freudenberg, 2010). If the school were to establish optional meeting spots a few days a week, I believe this would provide students with a better opportunity to connect with others. Perhaps taking advantage of their close proximity to the beach would be a good option for a picnic lunch location. It is easy to lose contact with the majority of classmates when everyone goes to a different venue for lunch, therefore, this would be a great way to ensure that the upperclassmen still feel that sense of community among their peers. The likelihood of Ocean View High implementing these lunch meetups is high. As shown in Figure 1, it would take some planning with the staff and student body, however, once established, it will reap great rewards. Second, this would cost the school absolutely no money, which increases the likelihood of implementing this program. Lastly, I think this Action Proposal has a high

probability of impact, mainly because it allows the students to have some structure during lunch but still maintain that freedom that they have earned in leaving campus.

In conclusion, I believe that Mix It Up Day would be a great program to implement at Ocean View High. I think some limitations would be the students feeling as if the school is controlling who they are friends with. As a result, a possible negative outcome could be the students not participating in this program. However, if the school adopts this program, and the students are willing to participate, then I believe that this would be the beginning of building that sense of community that the administrators are hoping to see. Although the recommendation for Mix It Up Day has been made, the other two action options have the potential to be very effective. Implementing meditation or quiet time at the end of each class will allow the students to gather their thoughts, reflect on what they have learned, and prepare themselves for their next class period. The other action proposal of creating structure to a non-structured lunch period is another effective way to create a sense of community among the upperclassmen.

Action Documentation and Reflection

The focus issues of this Capstone Project are a lack of interaction among high school students and a stressful school environment contributing to a damaged school climate. Over the course of this capstone project, I was able to interview the principal and two assistant principals at Ocean View High School. After speaking with these stakeholders, three action options emerged in order to move forward in improving the social climate at this particular high school. The first option was implementing the program Mix It Up Day. The second option was incorporating meditation or quiet time at the end of each class period. The final action option was scheduling locations for upperclassmen students to meet at, while off campus for lunch. After much contemplation, I decided to move forward with option 1; Mix It Up Day. I believe this was a great option because it sets a precedence for the underclassmen. In that, if they are comfortable interacting with peers whom they do not usually associate with early on in their high school experience, then they are likely to be more willing in the future to do the same. I proposed this action option to Principal Smith at the conclusion of our

interview. Principal Smith was willing to implement this program at Ocean View High because he saw it as a way to enrich his school. Below is the website of the Mix It Up Day organization, along with the URL link.

URL: https://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up

In order to bring forth change at Ocean View High School I proposed the idea of Mix It Up Day to Principal Smith and Assistant Principals Jones and Johnson. I informed them about this program and why I believed it would be beneficial to add to their school calendar next year. Below is a follow up email to Principal Smith proving that I proposed this action option to those in charge at Ocean View High.

The changes I needed to make were in regards to which action option I wanted to pursue. I had a difficult time deciding which action option would be more effective at this school. Ultimately, I chose Mix It Up Day. Principal Smith stated that he would be open to implementing this program at his school, however, he would need to have it approved by his staff before he could move forward. I was surprised with how quickly Principal Smith agreed to implement this program. I am aware of this particular school's small population and how set the students are in their friend groups. Had I known this from the start, I would have broadened my topic to include a larger school in my research. It would have been interesting to compare the social climate of a small school to a larger school. The next steps to be taken would be to get approval from the school to implement this program.

Critical Reflection

From this project, I learned that I am incredibly passionate about the overall well-being of students. I learned that I can use my struggles from my K-12 experience and put action into motion to create a better environment for socializing and learning for future students. From this Capstone Project, I have also learned that there are many factors that contribute to a successful school experience, such as interactions with peers and the school staff. In order to achieve a healthy school climate, student's overall well-being needs to be taken more seriously.

The themes of the Liberal Studies department have impacted my professional development in many ways. I believe MLOs 1, 2, and 4 specifically helped me expand my knowledge in this field the most. In that, I have learned about how we all carry a responsibility in ensuring a nurturing and welcoming environment in schools. I have learned, through MLO 1, the many responsibilities that exist for teachers beyond the general academic requirements. Furthermore, MLO 2 has taught me the importance of representing each culture in the classroom. In that, it is crucial that students "see themselves" in the curriculum. Lastly, MLO 4 showed me the importance in creating equity in the classroom. Through service learning, class discussions, and through research, I have gained much wisdom in what it takes to create an equitable classroom learning environment.

The necessary next steps in my life are to obtain a multiple subject teaching credential. However, in order to become the professional that I envision being, I need to continually work on myself. I believe attending workshops to better understand my future students is a way to achieve this. Developing relationships with my future students and their parents will be a crucial aspect in achieving the classroom environment that I envision.

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