



## Restoring Safety and Social Learning to Schools

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In particular we provide ideas for salvaging the creativity and life affirming options for youth embedded in systems that privilege parts of their identities while subjugating others. Many institutions that house youth today from schools, to sports arenas, detentions centers and mental health centers all claim ownership over the identities of these youth.

From the criminal justice system to bullying in schools, public spaces and the Internet, we make a case for advancing strategies of resistance and embracing liberatory practices for the empowerment of ALL children.

An educational culture that focuses on competitive academic success, high scores on tests, and student retention, mutes those voices that foster key ingredients to success. Research that illuminates contextual factors necessary to be a successful citizen require more than academic performance.

These findings are not systematically integrated into most classroom and school teachings. We avail those who sign up for these tutorials all the tools and research they need to make the case to educators and administrators the imperative of a learning context that builds, emboldens and embraces character strengths (BEEC) alongside academic achievement.

### **HOW SCHOOLS CAN PARTNER WITH PARENTS, CHILDREN/YOUTH AND THE COMMUNITY TO MAKE SCHOOLING A WIN-WIN EXPERIENCE FOR ALL.**

The intention of Brown vs. The Board of Education Supreme Court ruling was to create equal access to high resource schools and quality educations. The idea of economic mobility was intrinsically linked to the mandate for quality education for all children.

Several decades in the making and this dream is not a reality in the US. What is missing in the public debate and public policy for schools is the structural social and political climate that dominates the majority of schools. Success is usually driven and defined by academic prowess and student retention.

Since the laws and policies are focused on material redistribution of resources they have not invested in embracing fundamental relationships among school actors, like administrators, educators, students, parents and staff, says Prudence Carter author of *Stubborn Roots* (2012).

This critical context which embodies the social, cultural and political life of all the players is not tapped into creating a narrow vision of educational success rather than interrupting in-school societal boundaries to create active venues of inclusion a key variable to promoting true equity through education.

Here is an excerpt, from one of several hundred youth interviewed by Prudence Carter on their experience of being in integrated schools and meeting academic expectations that captures this sensibility:

***Judah “.....It’s about you being able to connect with other people. You being able to question what the teachers are teaching you.....You being able to take what they’re teaching you and try to apply it to you know, real-life scenarios but the problem is the stuff they’re teaching us, well I’m not sure if I have the credentials to say this, but the stuff they’re teaching us, I don’t think does us much justice. I think that they should teach us more about, you know, morality, more about like the relationship with society. How we can change society?.....”***

***The school doesn’t really appreciate us for our hardships, all the things that we go through. Nor do they appreciate us for our integrity, or character, and I feel like it’s unfair and that it needs to be changed, and I think that’s part of the reason why a lot of us feel disconnected from the school.....”***

Research on what it takes to be successful in school and in the workplace strongly advocate for the building and embracing of character strengths, including the successful navigation of adversity with positive outcomes which contributes to the foundation of academic success, work and an all round citizen. Schools are a natural laboratory for this type of creative learning and inclusive connections to occur.

Unfortunately with all of the emphasis on narrow definitions of learning albeit important but not sufficient the opportunity to create spaces of interconnectedness and shared resiliency among diverse students is lost.

Hence the separate lunch tables, the separate interest groups, the separate clubs, exclusionary systems that are often adopted by students from marginal spaces to succeed within these constrained spaces.

It requires leaving the rich complexity of their identities outside of the classroom , cafeteria and social and play areas as these sources are not captured and built upon.