

BACKGROUND

San Francisco International High School (SFIHS) promises to provide a safe, supportive environment that prepares immigrant youth for college and their careers. This community-engaged case study explored how the core values system SFIHS can support the integration of recently arrived immigrant youth. The four values – Act with Empathy, Learn Together, Challenge Yourself, and Create Change – are considered essential for the school to achieve its mission/vision, which is linked to the broad goals of integration: social acceptance and access to opportunity. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions: 1) How do members of the school community describe the school values system at SFIHS? 2) How is each of the four school values at SFIHS intended, implemented, and attained? 3) For each of the four values, how loosely or tightly coupled are the intended, implemented, and attained curricula?

Methods & Framework

Sources of data included student (9) and staff (9) interviews, classroom observations (12), and text analysis of the school mission statement and other documents related to the school values. The values were situated within a broad definition of curriculum, allowing for an analysis of each value as intended, implemented, and attained. The intended curriculum for each was established based on school documents and conversations with the principal and several members of the founding staff team. Findings reported on the implemented curriculum stemmed from classroom observations and interviews with staff. Finally, evidence of the attained curriculum arose in classroom observations and interviews with students. This framework, along with Karl Weick's theory of loose coupling in schools, encouraged a hunt for

gaps among the values as represented in the intended, implemented, and attained curricula – without assuming that these gaps were necessarily problematic.

“Challenge Yourself” was perceived to be applicable to students’ academic goals, but also to students’ lives outside the school, owing especially to their immigration experiences.

Key Findings

The data showed that the values were coupled with the school's mission/vision statement, and instilled via school structures, class projects, explicit reminders, student discipline, modeling of behavior, awards, artifacts such as t-shirts and posters, and pedagogical approaches such as collaborative grouping. The values maintained a near constant and mostly prized presence at SFIHS. Among the four values, the extent of loose or tight coupling between intended, implemented, and attained curricula varied considerably.

Tight coupling was evident between the intention, implementation, and attainment of Challenge Yourself, which was perceived as applicable to students' academic goals, but also to students' lives outside the school, owing especially to their immigration experiences. “We're English learners,” said one student, “so we have to work harder.” The SFIHS principal claimed, “Our kids are doing [Challenge Yourself] all the time, they all understand what it is.” **Tight coupling also characterized Learn Together, as the heterogeneous group work found in all classrooms was well understood by the school community to reflect this value. Said one teacher, “It's a challenge to get students to work together, but because**

everyone, all the teachers, are expecting it all the time, students do it.” Despite evidence of such tight coupling, Learn Together also somewhat paradoxically seemed to frustrate students the most, and presented significant challenges for the school as student demographics become more homogenous (particularly among the younger grades). Act with Empathy, considered crucial for mitigating student discipline issues and fostering positive relationships across diverse backgrounds, exhibited a mix of tight and loose coupling between intention, implementation, and attainment – students and staff tended to connect Act with Empathy with acts of kindness toward new students, but students did not explicitly discuss discipline issues in this context, as staff often did. **Thus, even as staff described this value as “a little blurry” and “the one we struggle with the most,” Act with Empathy did seem to resonate with older students who recognized and remembered how hard it was to enter a new school in a new country.** “When you begin to learn English and you don’t know anything...you need other people to help you,” explained a senior. Findings related to Create Change were characterized by loose coupling, as staff tended to highlight not only community leadership but also individual growth as two separate intentions behind this value. One of the founding teachers expounded on this topic: “[Create Change] can be connected to the small things that students do, when their own behavior changes, or their own way of thinking about things change, or they take more responsibility and start to kind of push themselves more on their classes...[and] can

also be connected to what they’re doing, what they’re learning, so how are they impacting their school, how are they impacting their community.” The initial intention seemed more aligned with a focus on community leadership, but loose coupling was present between implementation and attainment. The staff was generally aware of

“Create Change” was characterized by loose coupling, as staff tended to highlight not only community leadership but also individual growth as two separate intentions behind this value.

the gap, but it was less clear if this constituted a problem; many students spoke passionately of Creating Change in their own lives, suggesting that the value was meaningful for them.

Implications

These findings suggest that there are areas for improvement with regard to implementation of the values as intended; namely, clarifying the intention behind Create Change, striving to ease the frustration of Learn Together among younger students, and seeking stronger student attainment of Act with Empathy – at least as that value relates to student discipline. International High School plans to take these insights into account in order to address the gaps and strengthen the enactment of these values.