



TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD'S VISION FOR LEARNING: ACADEMIC OPTIMISM

Academic Optimism Definitions

Academic optimism is a powerful motivator because it focuses on potential with its strength and resilience rather than pathology with its attendant weakness and helplessness (Smith & Hoy, 2007, p. 567).



Academic optimism (AOP) has emerged in recent years as a model that combines academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust into an organizational construct that can effect student achievement (Eren, 2012; Hoy, Tarter & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; Malloy, 2012). It is separate from educational optimism and involves academic self-efficacy, trust, and academic significance on an individual and organization level (Hoy & Tarter, 2011). In the last decade “academic optimism has constantly been confirmed to be a potent force that can foster high student achievement regardless of student population and nationality” (Wu & Sheu, 2015, p. 663) or school socio-economic status (SES) (Hoy & Miskel, 2012). It is the relationship between AOP and student achievement that “represents a powerful force to be used in school reform [since] the overall construct of academic optimism is grounded in the framework of positive psychology” (Ruyle, 2014, p. 35). Academic optimism can impact the norms in a school (Guvercin, 2013; Smith & Hoy, 2007), therefore “leaders may be able to replicate success by facilitating beliefs in student excellence and the resilience to persevere through setbacks” (Ruyle, 2014, p. 35).

“AOP is a school characteristic that can have an impact on student achievement when SES and previous achievement are controlled” (Wu & Sheu, 2015, p. 663) as AOP can be utilized to reshape the very culture of

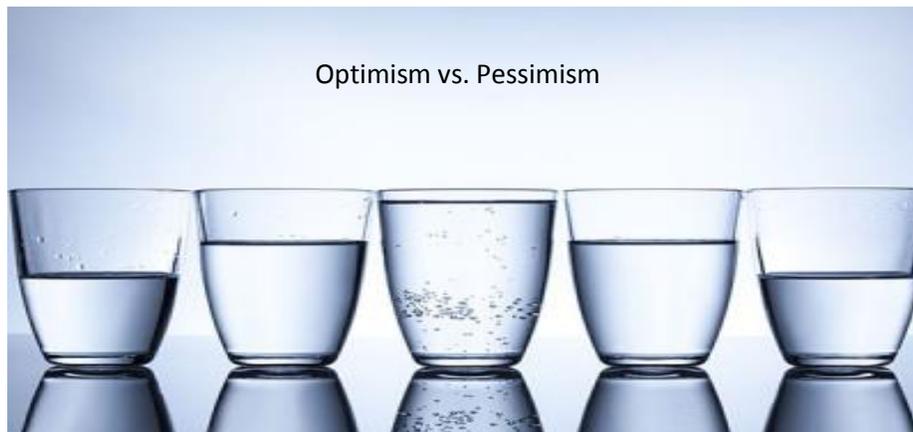
“. . . optimism is the positive expectation of something that is forthcoming. It represents a state of cognition, emotion and motivation regarding the future” (Sezgin & Erdogan, 2015, p. 9).

any school leading to overall improvement in student success (Malloy, 2012). Current findings suggest a “positive correlation between teacher academic optimism and hope” (Sezgin & Erdogan, 2015, p. 16). Indeed, “academic optimism, hope and zest for work are seen to be clearly related to variables such as leadership styles, school climate and culture” (p. 16). It is these interrelationships regarding future time perspective, planned effort, planned persistence, and professional development aspirations that were completely mediated by AOP (Eren, 2012; Guvercin, 2013; Malloy, 2012).

Yet, recently Mitchell & Tarter (2016) explained: “*School Academic optimism (SAO)* is not dispositional optimism or a belief that things will get better” (p. 2). Rather, it is a combination of efficacy, trust, and climate that mitigates SES so it does not dictate nor control educational outcomes. Whether AOP or

SAO, the roots extend into positive psychology with its foci of positive feelings - “rather than drawbacks - and aims to improve the quality of work and life. Individuals with a positive psychological state are likely to be healthy, happy, flexible and productive” (Sezgin & Erdogan, 2015, p. 16). Recently research has demonstrated that teacher efficacy, teachers trust of students and parents, and a teachers’ “sense of academic emphasis were strongly predicted by the AOP” (Eren, 2014, p.76). This is not news since over a decade ago researchers McGuigan and Hoy (2006) stated that AOP is a,

shared belief among faculty that academic achievement is important, that the faculty has the capacity to help students achieve, and that students and parents can be trusted to cooperate with them in this endeavor - in brief, an organizational property based on confidence that students will succeed academically. (p. 2)



Source: (Soots, 2016, p. 1)

Concluding Remarks

Even in 2016 it is accurate to suggest that AOP is an emerging construct needing more research. There are many variables in the “relationship of optimism to dependent variables other than academic achievement and those relationships should be subject to theory building and testing” (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016, p. 3). It is currently possible to conclude that the adoption of a professional orientation towards leadership establishes “norms that free up teachers to engage in behaviors that are collegial, that involve collective deliberation, inquiry and professionalism” (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016, p. 3). Contemporary research has determined that the, “correlation of professional teacher behavior to school academic optimism ($r = 0.36, p < 0.01$) suggests that both optimism and professional teacher behavior may require the development of professional norms of practice” (Mitchell & Tarter, 2016, p. 3).

Educators can choose to look at the negatives as in the glass is half empty or look at the fullness of the glass as half full (positives). It is the optimistic teacher who chooses to

“Academic optimism emphasizes the potential of schools to overcome the power of socioeconomic factors that impair student achievement” (Straková & Simonová, 2015, p.55).

highlight “student strengths and good properties of the classroom, the school and the committees. Academic optimism is a collective construct involving behavioral, affective, and cognitive constituents” (Narenjithani, Youzbashi, Alami, & Ahmadzadeh, 2015, p. 161). Academic optimism is appealing as it “offers a rich explanation of school team behaviour in terms of cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions” (Boonen, Pinxten, Van Damme, & Onghena, 2014, p. 8).

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