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Danelle Shuler April 15, 2014

Creating a Positive Learning Climate: A Case Study of A Small Day School

by

Danelle Shuler

Dr. C. Aiden Downey

Adviser

Department of Educational Studies

Dr. Richard Rubinson

Committee Member

Dr. Vanessa Siddle Walker

Committee Member

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Abstract

By Danelle Shuler

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine how a teacher in a small day school in a major city in the southeastern United States constructs a positive learning climate through a family and primary caregiving model. In particular, the study explores how the teacher's pedagogical approach contributes to a learning climate that fosters positive identity development among preschool children. The findings of this study supports previous research about the role that connectedness plays in school climate and its positive effects on children's attachment and identity formation. The findings reaffirm the urgent need for schools to examine school climate and create intentional pedagogies to foster children's secure attachments and positive identity formation.

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Finally, I would like to thank my mother not only for her support, but also for being a constant source of inspiration. Without the countless hours I spent volunteering in her elementary school classroom, I would have never become interested in education. It was in her classroom that I realized the profound effect teachers have on their children academically, socially, and emotionally and first noticed the intentionality that underlies the creation of a learning climate.

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Chapter 1: The Research Problem

Introduction

During my childhood, due to my mom's insistence on ensuring my sister and I the best education possible, I attended four elementary schools and became very accustomed to the role of being the new kid. As the new kid, you learn very quickly that each school is has its own sets of norms and distinct school culture.

This knowledge served me well when I tutored in elementary schools in college. By my senior year, I had worked in seven elementary schools and had not encountered two schools that had the same culture. In addition, each of classrooms I spent time in had distinct cultural differences that contributed to a unique learning climate. Every time I start tutoring at a new school, I always have to adjust my teaching approach not only the school, but to the norms and expectations of each classroom. For example, when I visited the Imaginative Day School, I immediately noticed its distinctive and caring climate. Entering the room, I felt the sense of community and that the teacher cared about the students. In addition, the teacher allowed students a great deal of freedom in terms of defining tasks, completing tasks independently.

But I started to wonder how this specific teacher constructs the positive learning climate and what makes this environment distinct? What specific pedagogies did the teacher use and what was the effect on the children? Specifically, how does a positive learning climate impact identity formation? This process is vital for child's future growth and healthy self-esteem as positive identity formation helps form "greater attachment to school and provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning" (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002).

While identity formation is not explicitly taught in schools, it is implicitly taught through

attachments to caregivers, the surrounding environment, socialization, and lessons of civic engagement and cultural engagement. Bowlby (1969), who is considered a seminal expert on attachment in the field of psychology, notes that without positive identity formation, an individual will never attach properly to those around them and function normally in the world.

In the United States; however, the main goal of identity formation is to discover one's own personality and to learn how to relate to others. With America's diverse mix of cultures, it is especially important for children to develop not only a sense of self-awareness, but also an awareness of others, which fosters a sense of cohesion among individuals. In order to create well-adjusted, cooperative individuals, one must promote loving primary caregiving environments that encourage secure attachments (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004). Relationships shape a child's life. How much adults play with them, how they interact with them, and how they love them helps mold children's identities (Bowlby, 1969).

Children need to establish attachment which "is a strong emotional bond that grows between a child and an adult who is part of the child's every day life" (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004, p.8). These attachments help further identity formation by teaching a child to understand social cues such as facial gestures and how one should interact with others. If a child is consistently cared for and loved by a group of the same person or individuals, a secure attachment is formed which enables the child to not be preoccupied with their basic needs and to explore and interact with their environment which is an essential step of moral development (Erikson, 1950).

To strengthen these secure attachments in learning environments, it is important to establish a family model that connects parents, students, teachers, and childcare workers. The main function of this model is to create a "web of loving relationships that surrounds a child in a

well-functioning family" which forms a "community" of adults who love the children and who will work together to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004). Home visits, weekly or daily blogs, encouraging parent attendance at various school events such as informal dinners all encourage parents to see school as an extension of home and facilitates the exchange of information and trust that is essential to establish these connections.

With this interdependent model, teachers and parents can work together at a more unified level. Teachers will not have to guess why one child is tired today or why another is afraid of snakes. There will already be a dialogue between the teacher and the parent that provides explanations. If a parent trusts a caregiver, they will be more likely to share personal information, be up front with the caregiver, and try to see the caregiver's point of view (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004). The teacher and parent again will be able to satisfy the child's basic needs easier and establish a secure attachment across both settings.

The purpose of this case study is to examine how the teacher constructs a positive learning climate through a family and primary caregiving model. What characteristics are distinctive to this learning climate and how do they impact the children's sense of identity? The following three questions will structure how the study will be undertaken:

1) What are the distinctive features of the day school's learning climate?
2) How does the teacher's pedagogy and practices contribute to the school's distinctive climate?
3) How does the teacher seek to encourage positive identity formation?

With hundreds of schools struggling and failing around the country, it is essential that we understand how teachers create a positive learning climate. Previous studies have shown that certain strategies such as a challenging curriculum, promoting discipline, increasing the

aspirations of the students, and having a strong principal can contribute to a strong learning climate (Thapa, Cohen, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Little research though has been done; however, on how teachers working in early education create positive learning climates. This study is important because it offers a model for how an experienced teacher creates a learning climate to not only help children learn, but to grow on a intrapersonal and interpersonal level that is vital for a child's wellbeing and identity formation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

School Climate

Definition of School Climate

School climate is defined by the students' daily interactions at school and mirrors the site's norms, values, pedagogies, philosophical purpose, and relationships. The National School Climate Council (2007) defines positive school climate as a site that:

> Includes norms, values, and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotional, and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. Students, families, and educators working together to develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision. Educators model and nurture an attitude that emphasizes the benefits of, and satisfaction from, learning (p.4).

Importance of School Climate

The Safe and Supportive Schools (S3) effort being endorsed by the US Department of Education (2007) was created in order to encourage states to organize and increase research about school climate and its proper measurement. With school's climate significant correlation with student's emotional and physical health, school climate's importance is increasingly being

seen as one of the most critical areas of educational research (Hoge, Smit, and Hansen, 1990; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). Positive school climate has been found to improve self-esteem (Hoge, Smit, & Horsen, 1990) and emotional and physical health among students (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). These effects also improve student's self-concept and motivation to learn (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, & Reuman, 1993).

Regarding learning in the classroom among the students, positive school climate has been shown to increase cooperative learning, group cohesion, and trust (Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, 2003). Additionally, shared expectations and trust has also been found to encourage student engagement which helps explain school climate's positive association with academic achievement (Ostraff & Kinneley, 2003).

Clearly stated and consistent school rules have also been found to positively contribute to school climate (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Gregory, Cornell, Fan, Sheras, & Huang, 2010). Proper implementation of these rules were found to be negatively correlated with delinquency and bullying (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Payne, 2005).

Research has also shown that student engagement is positively correlated with a sense of safety. In Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, he helps explain this association by arguing that children need to feel safe before they can concentrate on learning. In turn, positive school climate helps children feel safe due to its negative association with bulling and aggression in schools (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006). However, the relationship between school climate and feelings of safety has only been found if the students have high levels of connectedness (Wilson, 2004).

Relationships have been consistently identified as a critical factor of school climate. Research has also identified characteristics such as "safe, caring, participatory, and responsive

school climates," that are related to "a greater attachment to school and provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning" (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002, p. 10). A negative relationship between a teacher and a student even in kindergarten has been found to increase the likelihood of children having future academic and behavioral problems (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

However, not only do the children need to feel connected to the teacher, but levels of school connectedness and the actual infrastructures and resources of the school also impact school climate (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). School connectedness is "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well about them as individuals" (Eaton, Kann, Kinchen, Shanklin, Ross, & Hawkins, 2009). Smaller schools and small learning communities have been found to increase connectedness (Cotton, 2001). Connectedness has been found to facilitate cohesion, tension, and students' adjustment (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006) and be negatively associated with future emotional and drug problems and graduation rates (Bond et al., 2007).

Overall, school climate due to its significant effect on emotional and physical health and academic outcomes, is an eminent topic in educational research. Many institutional factors are associated with school climate, but teachers do have the ability to construct positive learning climate with little support from the school's administration. Creating a school climate that fosters safety, trusting relationships, and connectedness helps students to not only achieve academically, but also to become well-adjusted adults.

Attachment

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969) developed attachment theory as a branch of psychoanalytic theory. He argues that attachment is critical for survival and that it serves two functions: a protective and instructive function. As a protective function, it forces the child to stay close to the caregiver when he or she could get hurt. In the instructive function, the caregiver acts a "secure base" for the child where the child can interact with the environment and learn (Bowlby, 1988).

Current research suggests that attachment is a regulatory theory (Schore, 2000a, 2000b). A mother caring for a baby is regulating the baby's needs, levels of arousal, and emotions. During this interaction, the child learns how to adapt to the mother's behavior and as a result the parts of the brain in the right hemisphere that further develops the child's capacity to cope with stressors. A child's interactions with his or her caregivers are positively related to the infant's later ability to cope with stress (Schore, 2000a). Champoux, Byrne, DeLizio, & Suomi (1992) emphasize that even the smallest changes in the primary caretaker's behavior will not only impact the child's attachment, but also his or her rate of development.

Types of Attachment

Researchers have divided different kinds of attachment into three types: secure, anxious avoidant, and anxious-resistant (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). These types seem to solidify around four or five and as a result shape a child's behavior, disposition, and sense of others and self from childhood throughout adulthood (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988).

Secure attachment is broadly defined as a relationship with high levels of intimacy and safety between the infant and caregiver when they interact (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988). The child displays little distress when the caregiver leaves the child alone with another person (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The child is secure enough to understand that the caregiver will return. Liechman and Bowlby (1988) hypothesize that this sense of security is because of the

child's assurance of the caregiver's return, which then in turn encourages feelings of adequacy and connectedness. Insecure attachment, in contrast, often results because of neglect, severe emotional physical trauma, or just ineffective or unresponsive parenting. When observed, the primary caretakers' interactions with the children were characterized as distant, rejecting, and even anger (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

According to Ainsworth, the first type of insecure attachment, anxious-avoidant, is defined by the child's lack of need for physical comfort from or even interaction with the caretaker after he or she leaves the child. On the other hand, anxious-ambivalent children respond with the opposite by reacting with high levels of anxiety when the caretaker leaves and their anxiety do not decrease when the caretaker returns.

These attachments also persist throughout the child's schooling due to the attachment type often transferring to his or her teachers (Bowlby, 1969). In the *Law of Continuity*, Bowlby (1975) states that "the more stable and predictable the regime, the more secure a child's attachment" (p.261). In some cases, a parent is not the only adult who consistently interacts and cares for the child. In some households, it is lot of caregivers: the mother, father, grandfather, and even could extend to a preschool teacher or next-door neighbor (Bowlby, 1975). This implies that it is not only possible for children to attach to people besides their parents, but that it is also beneficial for the child especially in an educational context.

There are several theories of how children attach to multiple caregivers. Hierarchy theory asserts that the mother is the main attachment figure, but when absent a secondary caregiver can act as the "secure base" (Bowlby, 1988). The idea is that there is a hierarchy in terms of the child's attachment toward his or her caretakers in which the mother is the primary attachment and when she is absent other caretakers take her place. Independence theory argues that there

are multiple attachment figures, each of them domain specific. While Integration theory asserts that insecure attachments can be partially negated by a positive attachment to one or more of the child's others caretakers (van Ijzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992). However, previous literature suggests that additional attachments do not detract from the attachment between a mother and child (van Ijzendoorn, Sagi, & Lambermon, 1992). Educationally, it is important to emphasize this fact due to parents' common reluctance and aversion to their children building a strong attachment to their teacher in fear that it will detract from their relationship (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004).

Effects of Attachment Type

Children's early attachments play a vital role in shaping how they experience platonic and romantic relationships. Children often learn from their relationships with caretakers to develop a framework of what a relationship or interaction should look and be like (Verschueren, Marcoen, & Schoefs, 1996).

In addition, children also cannot learn if they are not securely attached. With insecure attachments, the child has no one to encourage them to try to do tasks they could not do otherwise without help from an adult and has no one who knows what they are capable of academically or physically. This assistance is called the zone of proximal development which is the "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). A secure attachment is one in which the caretaker is helping that child learn more than they would on their own by providing resources and learning experiences which encourages learning.

Secure attachments between who have been significantly associated with school achievement and experiences (Aviezer, Sagi, Resnick, & Gini, 2002). In a study conducted by Reio, Maces, & Sanders-Reio (2009), the researchers found that secure attachment was highly correlated with high school graduation rates.

Researchers have found that insecure attachment is positively correlated with a number of long-term problems such as future psychological issues and connecting in romantic relationships (Benoit & Parker, 1994). Insecure attachment also discourages children from exploring their environment, which later decreases their sense of autonomy and has been linked to high levels of recklessness (Sroufe, 1988). Similarly, Learner & Kruger (1997) observed that attachment seemed to be positively linked to academic motivation in middle school, scores on standardized tests and emotional maturity (Aviezer et al., 2002).

In terms of identity and emotional regulation, secure attachment also leads to positive effects. Emotional regulation was also seen to be positively associated with secure attachment (Main, 1990). Since attachment theory asserts that children automatically try to stay close to their caretaker by adapting and using techniques to increase the likelihood of the caretaker to respond (Main, 1990, as cited in Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). Main (1990) suggests that this increased emotional regulation is a technique a child uses to maintain an attachment with his or her caretaker. Children with secure attachments were also more likely to have increased ego-resilience and curiosity than childhood with insecure attachments and positive sense of self (Arend, Gove, & Sroufe, 1979).

In summary, children's attachments to caregivers are important for their emotional, physical, and academic outcomes. Attaching to a caregiver does not seem to subtract from the child's relationship to his or her parents and appears essential for successful and positive learning

and development. Secure attachments help well-adjusted adults due to its strong, positive relationship with emotional maturity and identity, which both help shape a child's identity (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004).

Identity Formation

Erikson's Model of Identity Formation

Erikson's (1963, 1968) model of identity development is a seminal conceptualization of identity in the field of psychology:

> The young person, in order to experience wholeness, must feel a progressive continuity between that when he has come to be during the long years of childhood and that which he promises to become in the anticipated future; between that which he conceives himself to be and that which he perceives others to see in him and to expect of him. Individually speaking, identity includes, but is more than, the sums of all the successive identification of those earlier years when the child wanted to be, and often was forced to become, like the people he depended on (Erikson, 1968, p.87).

In *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1993) questions the uniformity and the interdependent nature of an individual's personal development. With this mission, he delineates an epigenetic sequence of eight stages, which span from birth to old age. These stages unfold due to biological factors such as hormones and societal and cultural factors in the environment. These stages occur in a "preordained sequence" that are dependent on each other. In each stage, there is a psychosocial crisis that needs to be regulated by the ego in order for the person to become a "mature adult" (p. 269). As a result, every crisis that is successfully achieved or halted is "assumed to have a modifying influence on the later stages" and the personality (p, 272).

Erikson's Stages of Development and Identity Crises for Young Children

Psychosocial Stage 1: Trust vs. Mistrust

This stage usually comes into play from birth to eighteen months of age. If the child develops a secure attachment to a caregiver where they are receiving reliable care and affection, then they learn to trust people in this stage.

Psychosocial Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

Stage 2 is supposed to be completed during age one and two. It emphasizes the child's sense of control over their environment. Erikson uses toilet training as an example. By learning to control one's bowel movements without parental assistance, the child is learning to control their bodies and their environment which fosters independence. According to Erikson, not mastering this stage leads to the child feeling "secure and confident" versus "feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt" and will lead to indecisiveness in later years. Bartoszuk and Pittman (2010) suggest that parents can encourage this phase by teaching their children how to separate problematic situations from identity. In other words, not blaming them for their failures, but helping them realize the outside issues that is helping cause the problem, different approaches to problems, and the different consequences that can occur.

Psychosocial Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt

Stage 3 occurs during the preschool ages. It is an extension of stage 2 in that the child is further affirming their power and control through play and other social exchanges with peers and adults. This stage leads to the child developing leadership skills and a view of him or herself as a leader versus feelings of guilt, and self-doubt. Children master this stage by learning how to cooperate with others and self direct. Play is an essential part of children learning about their

environment and their own identity especially play that requires children to act out real life problems (Erikson, 1950,1969).

Psychosocial Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority

A child's sense of industry usually develops between five and seven years of age. Again through social interactions, children learn how to be proud of themselves in terms of their actions and their successes. By teachers and parents complimenting their success, they develop a sense of pride and feeling of adequacy. Without compliments, children feel a sense of inferiority and will question their abilities, which can lead to low self-esteem during later years.

Social Factors in the Development of Personal Identity

Since Erikson's theory is a psychosocial, it is important to recognize the environmental and social factors that shape a child's identity. One of the newly studied factors is "social agents." Schacter and Ventura (2008) define these agents as "individuals who actively interact with children with the intention of participation in their identity formation" (p. 449). This theory acknowledges the importance of parents and parental figures in the development of a child's identity.

Marcia (1993) found that family structure specifically is highly associated with identity formation. With men, divorce or no father figure seems to lead to higher levels of identity diffusion (Oshman & Monosevitz, 1976), while females from divorced families had higher levels of exploration and commitment to their identities especially in terms of jobs (Imbimbo, 1995). Also, family values seem to shape an individual's identity. Côte and Schwartz (2002) found that a majority of teens make commitments in ideological commitments in ideological domains with relatively little exploration, which shows a portion of adolescents seems to submissively allow parents to shape their values.

Social and Group Identity

Since humans are social beings, they are highly motivated and shaped by the threat of social exclusion. Erikson (1968) explained that as a result of human's social nature children up through adolescence must interact and create a bond with society by solidifying their religious and political beliefs and occupation. Even before a baby turns two they are able to identify what individuals are being excluded and which ones are not (Bennett, 2004) and children at five will adapt their behavior to match the group due to things as slight as third party exclusion (Over & Carpenter, 2009). These instances suggest that another important element in the development of identity is their social interactions even at such a young age.

With the importance of social understanding and inclusion, social identity is defined as "the individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p.157). Young children in particular have been found to have the ability to identify membership as young as five; however, studies have shown that they tend to define membership based on physical and visual characteristics, hair color or height, and behaviors versus by attitudes, such as kindness or loyalty (Bennett and Sani, 2004). Studies have shown though that despite age gender tends to stay defined by physical or dispositional traits versus philosophies or values even in different settings (Bennett and Sani, 2004).

Despite this ability, a child's social identity is impaired because while they might be able describe their group identity, they might yet have the understanding of its applicability to others. A child while they might have the ability to distinguish between groups and if they are part of the group, they still do not have the ability to distinguished "I" from "we" and therefore do not necessarily attribute people from the same group's behaviors as reflecting on their own sense of self (Bennett and Sani, 2004). For instance, if their friend is good at singing, they will not

assume that they are good at singing. While they understand group membership, they do not understand how other members reflect on them.

However, at the same time, this membership has been found to increase a child's motivation to learn during group activities (Master & Walton, 2013) and that positive self-esteem is highly correlated with the child feelings of belonging and acceptances among the group. Self-esteem and identity is positively associated with school especially because studies have found a strong correlation between high self-esteem and academic achievement (Lawrence, 1988). Those that feel this belonging seem to be associated with feelings of competence and adequacy, which extends back to Erikson and the child's personal identity.

Failure to Develop Individual and Social Identities

Overall, successful completion of these stages of individual and social identity formation is important because not only does it create "mature adults," but it also helps psychologists treat and prevent psychological problems such as depression and compulsions and allow psychologists and teachers to specialize intervention and educational programs to individual children based on the stage of development.

Especially with social identities, relationships helps children learn how to interact with others and learn appropriate norms and behaviors specific to groups. Group identification has been shown to be associated with "a greater attachment to school and provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning" (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart, 2002). With this increased attachment and higher levels of emotional and academic learning, relationships are consistently identified as an important factor of school climate.

In summary, certain climates and approaches create more secure attachments, which appear to contribute to positive identity formation by fostering a child's sense of adequacy,

group identity, and leadership skills. Childcare providers can encourage positive identity formation by using pedagogies that encourage group cohesion and attachment through promoting pretend play and independence.

. Chapter 3: Methodology and Setting

This qualitative case study focuses on one school that has students from the age of two to four years old. The purpose is to investigate the distinctive features of the school's climate and how the teacher creates such a positive school climate at the Imaginative Day School.

Recruitment

All of the students were from the Imaginative Day School. My thesis advisor, Dr. Downey, referred me to the day school. I visited the school and found that the school fit well with my interests and got permission from the director to observe on a regular basis. Since there is only one main teacher at the school, I focus on her as my major participant.

Participants

Participants were 6 students ranging in age from 2 to 6 years old. Participants were 4 girls and 2 males. All the students are Caucasian. In terms of SES, all of the children are from professional families and would be classified as mid to upper middle class.

Ms. Lowry has been a childcare provider for over thirty years. An expert in the field, she speaks at national conferences and has coauthored two books about childcare. She has served on numerous boards such as the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC) and the GA Association on Young Children (GAYC). Mr. Lowry, the business partner, is also an active participant. He was a computer programmer, but now teaches lessons; helps prepare food, and overall acts as a support throughout the day at the school.

Design Strategy

The current study utilized a case study design. To collect the qualitative data for the current study, I will go to Imaginative Day School once a week for three hours for a time span of four months to collect ethnographic data in one classroom.

This design strategy was appropriate for the current study because it allowed the researchers to view the climate with no manipulation. The researcher was able to view the teacher in her natural environment and see the learning environment through the teacher's perspective. Also, it allowed the researcher to explore the topic and not have to go in with a set question.

The researcher chose to conduct a case study because this method allows the collection of more detail, complexity, and interaction between different sources. Specifically, case study methodology is the "in-depth and detailed explorations of single examples (an event, process, organization, group, or individual) that are "an instance drawn from a class" of similar phenomena (Adelman, Jenkin, & Kemmis, 1983, p.3; as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Especially since the study is trying "to understand a larger phenomenon through intensive study of one specific instance," this study is more conducive because it allows the researcher to study school climate and identity formation in great detail versus studying these issues in a large array of schools with less data and insight (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.94). School climate and pedagogies can be defined quantitatively, but it often centers on specific categories, while a case study allows researchers to see the whole picture and focus on the details that are relevant to their research interest. Using the reasoning of analogy, the findings can be applied to other similar sites because of their high rate of similarities.

Data Collection

Since the study focused on one particular learning climate, all the students, parents, and childcare providers were included in it. Each participant was sent a letter to inform them of the study's intended purpose and methodology (See appendix A). Additionally, the site signed a letter allowing me to collect data at the site (See appendix B).

To make sure participants were fully aware of their rights in the study, the letter informed the participants that the data collected would be disposed of immediately after the study had been completed. The letter also clarified that besides the researchers and the advising committee no one would see the data. The parents were able to choose to have their children not participate in the study.

For the current study, I went to Imaginative Day School once a week to collect ethnographic data in one classroom. I made notes about the classroom environment and the students in the class. After each of these experiences, I went back to campus and recorded my experiences in journal entries using Microsoft Word. I carried a pad with me to the day school and throughout my visit I would jot down notes during transitions.

Due to Ms. Lowry's experience speaking and teaching, a large part of the study was the informal interviews that happened throughout my classroom observations. During my observations, I was able to observe every time period of the day. For most of the observations, I came during the morning, but for some I chose the afternoon, so I could observe nap, free play, and departures. The teacher often asked me if I had any questions and throughout the day and I would often ask her a few planned questions that I would think of when I was writing the journals or about specific instances that arose during the day. Often, I would ask her questions in between activities or during Breakfast Club.

The school's blog was another important source of data. I coded eight blogs spanning four months, which totaled 36 pages. In the blogs, the teacher narrates the events of the day, notifies the parents of any health or safety problems such as illness, wardrobe needs such as warm coats, etc. It also includes the teacher explaining her pedagogies, so the parents understand her techniques and are able to implement them at home. The teacher takes photos throughout the day and while the kids are napping she writes up a draft of the blog, which she edits and finishes while the children are being picked up. Each parent and volunteer at the school is sent a link to the blog everyday and all the blogs are easily accessible on the school's website.

Finally, the childcare provider's two books served as an important data source. I also attended two potlucks, which lasted a total of four hours, which allowed me to observe the interactions of the parents.

Data Analysis

To break down my field notes, I will go through each of my field notes multiple times and label and code each sentence. I will code using Rossman and Rallis' method (2003). Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (1995) defines coding as "a work or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analysis issue" (as cited in Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p.286). Categorically, I will be creating rules and identifying similarities to sort each sentence and develop a code that identifies major categories of the sentence. Then, holistically, I will use these codes to create a "narrative portrait" to help determine themes to unify the different categories that emerge (Rossman & Rallis, 2001). Simultaneously, my research questions and previous review of the literature help define and direct these areas of focus to again help in the process of grouping the categories into themes through deductive analysis.

Once I developed a code for the sentence, I recorded it on my code definition sheet and then wrote the selected code above the sentence. To identify major themes, I then made a code matrix for the codes, and then wrote all the themes on the top of the pieces of paper and wrote a synopsis of each sentence under the appropriate code heading and then indicated the date of each code.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study followed the guidelines and procedures set forth by Emory University. The data will not include names of the students or teacher and will not include the school's name. The researcher will create pseudonyms. All data will be put on a computer and protected with a password that will only be known by the researcher and the research advisor. Other people might view the data such as the Emory Institutional Review Board and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Emory is legally required to keep this data confidential to the point that they are required to do so by law. The study also will not be published.

To ensure privacy, the school and the teacher's names have been replaced with pseudonyms. Ms. Lowry is a female, veteran teacher who has worked in a variety of places spanning from public day cares, schools, and also regularly speaks at conferences about early childhood development. Additionally, her husband, Mr. Lowry, helps the school regularly as a "volunteer." He often prepares food, eats with the children, watches them if Ms. Lowry needs someone else to watch them, and when she is absent often steps up as the main teacher.

Limitations

Since this case study only studies one teacher at one school, the findings cannot be generalized. I tried to vary my arrival times and decided to use her online blogs once narrates the whole day as part of my research methodology to make up for times during the day where I

did not observe.

Also, due to my observations usually happening on the same day every week, I also missed important weekly events such as family gatherings and holiday celebrations. To rectify this problem, I also utilized the blogs and tried to attend important events such as Valentine's Day and their pizza celebration.

While this school is unique in terms of class size and infrastructure, its philosophy and pedagogies can be applied to larger schools across the country. Due to its intense focus on one teacher it was able to capture detailed information about one teacher's construction of a positive learning climate, which can be used as a model for other teachers.

Setting

The Imaginative day school is in a converted house. The bottom floor is completely restructured and designed for the children. The living room is set up with a giant rug, two large sofas, and two chairs and then to the right is the dining room which was converted into the children's eating area. It has a small table and chairs with two adult chairs flanking it. Bookcases and shelves full of toys, books, and the children's art surround the room. Also, there is a kitchen through the dining area in which the children rarely enter except to deposit their plates and cups. One of the most used rooms; however, through the hallway between the living room and dining room which is the pretend room. In terms of furniture, the pretend room just includes a sofa and a table for drawing, but it also houses a full-scale play kitchen, a cash register, a window seat that has been converted to act as the children's car or whatever they imagine, and bookcases and shelves full of costumes and props.

Outside, she has a playground set up for the children. To the left, there is a play set which swings that are covered by a tent and then several playhouses throughout the yard for the

children to play in. There are also easels and other toys for the children to play with during play time. Toward the back of the outdoor space there is also a chicken coop.

Throughout the house, there is also memorabilia from Mrs. Lowry's many years of childcare. Past work and photos of old students, favorite quotes, articles and books that she has written, and notifications of school and state childcare policies. Amid the memorabilia, she also evokes a really homey feel by having a lot of rugs and pictures to make the children feel at home.

Unless there is a special event, the daily schedule is as follows:

8:45: Arrivals, Breakfast Club, and Free Play

Every day, Ms. Lowry has "Breakfast Club." Breakfast club is where all the parents are invited to come eat breakfast with the children. She always has coffee ready for them and Ms. Lowry, the children, and any parent that comes sits around the table and eats. Then once the children finishes their food, cleans their place, and puts everything away themselves they are allowed to go to the pretend room or stay to play quietly. Every child has a designated cup and food container, so they are responsible for putting it away in the designated containers.

9:30: Circle Time

Circle time is the part of the day where the curriculum is introduced. Usually, Ms. Lowry will start off with songs, have the helper help with calendar, and then will read a book and complete an activity with the children that correspond with the day's lessons. However, since some of the children are young and their attention spans are often shorter, twos are allowed to play quietly in the pretend room or nearby once they do not think they can control their behavior.

10:15: Child-Led Choices

Usually this part of the day is an extension of circle. If they were talking about food for instance, the child-led choice could be the children wanting to set up a restaurant in the pretend room. It can range from an art project, cooking experiment, to a pretend adventure.

11:50: Clean up

Clean up is a group activity. Ms. Lowry will sing a song and the children know to start picking up. Often, the tasks are designated by age and each child knows what they are responsible for doing during this time. No matter how young though they are expected to clean up after him or her self and help the other children.

12:00: Music Circle

Ms. Lowry leads songs. Usually the songs center on three themes: self-characteristics, other cultures, and the day's lesson.

12:15: Journaling and Pre-K Book Time

This time is highly individualized by the child's age and developmental level. For instance, a common task would be to have all the children draw a picture of a scenario and then have the older children try to write their names or a sentence about the sentence depending on their skills.

12:30: Lunch

Lunch again is a group event. The teacher and the children all sit around a small table and will eat all of the same food which Ms. Lowry and her husband prepare the night before.

1:15: Outside Time

In the back of the school, they have a play set, playhouse, easels, and tents set up. During outside time, the children are encouraged to play and use pretend play.

2:30: Rest Time

Rest time is another individualized activity. Most of the children nap on the mats, but the older children are also given the option to read books or play quietly with motor skill building toys.

3:30: Comfy Choices and Snack

Since the children are still waking up, often this time gives the children a chance to wake up at their own pace. Children will either take their time waking up, continue reading books, or play quietly with a small toy. They can also get their snack out of the snack containers if they want one.

5:00: Departments and Clean Up

The parents pick up the children and while they wait the children will help clean up. Ms. Lowry is often found also typing over and looking over notes of the day during pick-ups.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the distinctive features of Imaginative Day School learning climate?
2. How does the teacher's pedagogy and practices contribute to the school's distinctive climate?
3. How does the teacher intentionally direct identity formation?

While attempting to answer these questions, three main themes developed: basic constructs and goals of pedagogies, community, and parent and student interactions. Basic constructs and goals of pedagogies include categories such as lens of home, creating a relationship with parents, and acknowledging success and development. All of the categories center on Ms. Lowry's teaching practices and how she constructs her distinctive learning climate. Then, community focuses on how the teacher weaves all the students and parents into a community, which emerges as the main distinctive characteristic of the day school's learning climate. Finally, parent and peer interactions focus on

pedagogies that support group unity, relationships, and self-awareness. Independence, acknowledging success and development, adaptation according to developmental stage, and group identity all fall under this category because they all affect how the child sees themself and others. The categories pinpoint pedagogies that the teacher uses to direct positive identity formation.

Basic Constructs and Goals of Pedagogies

Lens of Home

Ms. Lowry puts a high importance on viewing behavior through the lens of home or "seamless care" (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004, p.18). To analyze a child's behavior, she will always consider or figure out what is going on at home in order to best service the child. She explains that children at that age span do not have a clear sense of the division between school and home, so it is highly important for parents and teachers to work together to create consistency.

Significant aspects of the way the adults act are perceived, interpreted, and incorporated into the child's developing sense of self. Adult's actions teach happening to them and around them. The closer significant adults are to one another in values, style of living, and expectations, the easier it is for a young child to incorporate these aspects into a clear sense of self (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004, p. 65).

Baker and Manfredi-Petitt (2004) uses the example of a child who is confused that she has to wear her shoes at naptime at school, but not at home. At most homes, children would be reprimanded for wearing shoes to bed, while at school it is critical for safety. Children became frustrated because they do not understand why they cannot wear shoes in bed at home, but at school. With the application of Ms. Lowry's lens of home, she would recognize the inconsistency in expectations and talk with the parents to create a rule that works in both domains. For this example, the authors suggested the child wear shoes

when she naps at home, so that she associates wearing shoes as an appropriate behavior during naps. This solution creates a consistency between home and school.

For instance, Mitch wet himself while I was observing one day. She explained that the "Dad constantly reminds him to go to the bathroom at home, so as a result at school with no reminders he had trouble remembering to go to the bathroom" (Journal, 10/20/2013, p.2). To counteract, Ms. Lowry reminded Mitch that she would not remind him at school to go to the bathroom and that he could go to the bathroom anytime he needed to during the day. Instead of reacting in frustration, instead she tries to figure out the antecedents to the behavior, "no one telling him," and explains the inconsistency in the school environment (Journal, 10/20/2013, p.3). She also informs the parent and tries to work with them to create a more standardized approach that they can both enforce at home and school.

One tool that she uses to have a clearer view of the child and to create a sense of community is home visits. When a new child enrolls or when a child is having academic or behavioral difficulties, Ms. Lowry visits the child's home and observes the child's environment and their natural interactions with his or her parents' and siblings. Home visits can "help create a shared context that enables the caregiver to more quickly understand a child, especially when the child's words are limited" and the informal setting encourages more open discussion (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004).

Creating a Partnership with Parents

With all of her communications, she tries to convey a sense a partnership between her and parents. She respects the parents' right to decide how to raise their child and as a result tries to regularly communicate with parents and create a hierarchy of attachment. She acknowledges that parents should be the primary attachment figure in a child's life.

In her blogs particularly, she always makes sure to thank parents when they send in food, an interesting show and tell object, or if they do anything where they had to go out of their way. There is

always an acknowledgement of thanks. She makes sure to establish a relationship with reciprocity where each party feels valued and respected.

She also uses her blog as a way to teach parents, which help, create a sense of understanding between the parents and the caregiver. They start to understand the logic behind her rules and activities. The parents are not just blind observers; they are informed about what is going on at the school. She actively tries to teach the parents how to extend these techniques into the home. An example of this education is explaining how she is promoting group cooperation by "scripting phrases for the children" and then explaining her technique so parents can replicate if they desire. In the blog on 02/22/14 she demonstrates this when she describes how the children joined one of the older children to build "a city" with blocks:

There was also an opportunity to practice our "Magic Phrase" of "How can I join you?" They usually answer: "Help yourself," but everyone is getting better at adding a detail or two […] If a child is doing something that is obviously a one- person activity, the question is "Can I have the next turn?" The answer to that is always, "Yes." If I am in ear shot, I ask that child to call his/her friend when finished.

With adjusting the curriculum, it also always a give and take with parents and she makes sure to check in with parents and respect their requests. Regarding holidays, she said that she "knows not everyone celebrates the same holidays and that it was really important to let her know." She then explained "all of the holidays are out there and she wants to expose them, but it important for her to know what they specifically celebrate so she understands what is going on at home and can explain" (Journal, 10/02/13, p.5).

Acknowledging Success and Development

The teacher also emphasizes the importance of acknowledging every child's success no matter how small. Especially in her blog, she makes sure to make parents aware of these steps and also praises the children often on the spot. "Harper demonstrated a leap in her verbal skills by asking for "More oranges, PLEASE!" and "More milk, please." Those are 3 word sentences- and polite!" (Blog, 10/28/13).

What is special about this praise is not only does not make sure the parents are aware of their children's growth, but also teaches them to also encourage and recognize it. She mentions in her blog that a common problem is the children learning how to button their jackets by themselves:

> My approach is to casually announce that it is time to get on our jackets, socks and shoes, and I start helping the youngest ones. By the time I get to the bigger ones, most have gotten tired of waiting and work on doing it themselves, often with surprising success. I always help anyone who is struggling AND trying to master the skill. It is HARD to watch a child push through the frustrations of self-help […] Smart kids know that if they whimper or fail repeatedly, adults will help. That is a very good thing to know. But it can also become a barrier. Independent dressing skills are hard to learn; some struggle is usually needed to succeed" (Blog, 10/21/13).

With these lessons, she also makes sure she informs the parents about the long-term effects and the reasons for her praise. By "[focusing] on what is basically correct, rather than what is perfectly correct…" and praising them for their success, it builds self-confidence and patience for others (Blog, 10/21/13).

Independence

With this praise, comes a fostering of independence. If a child builds self-confidence, they will be more likely to explore and try new things by themselves. At the school, encouraging independence even with the two-year-olds is a major goal.

Every meal, the children are expected to clean their area. As they get older, their responsibilities increase. A two-year-old child's main goal is to clean up their area by putting away their container in their cubby, but a three or four year old is responsible for also putting away their cups and filling up the younger children's cups. Often when parents visit the school, they are surprised about their child's increased autonomy at the school, exclaiming that they do not normally do half of the stuff on their own. When one of the twos' grandparents visited they expressed astonishment:

While they were watching Mitch clear the table and run off to be with the other children, they were amazed Mitch was doing tasks that his cousin would never do and they never thought possible a couple of months ago and never see at home. Ms. Lowry credited her hands off approach. She said that you just had to higher your expectations of the child (Blog, 11/11/13).

I learned this early on during my first day. This excerpt from my field notes illustrates these heightened expectations well:

> A two year old was having a hard time opening the contained where the tracks were kept and immediately as a reflex I lunged to help her. The lid was upside down, so all I needed to do was flip it. Ms. Lowry stopped me and proceeded to show me her technique. Her technique included her keep repeating directions calmly to the child until they had completed the task themselves. This direction was correct. Within two minutes, the child had figured it out and had completed the task herself (Journal, 10/28/13, p.4)

The philosophy of the school is that when children always have parents to do everything they will never try to complete tasks independently, so Mrs. Lowry tries first to have the child try him or herself. Only after significant effort, will she step in and help the child. However, often this push for the child to be independent results in increased self esteem and motivation, which encourages child to try new things and innovate.

One day during while I was observing on 11/25/2013, Ms. Lowry had the children create turkey collage made up of various cans, feathers, pom-poms, and googly eyes. One four year old, in particular, was having a rough time. Since she is older, she tends to be ambitious and as a result she decided that she wanted to use two cans as two different legs and the neck and have a box as a body. However, this turned out to be a difficult feat. The cans since they are curved would not glue to the flat boxes. Despite her frustration, the teacher still held back because she wanted Rebecca to figure it out herself. She just kept encouraging Rebecca to try new things. Eventually, Rebecca came up with gluing something to the bottom of the can to make it more flat. She chose paper, which still failed, but the teacher knowing that she was onto a good idea suggested that she glue buttons of the cans instead. The buttons worked. "Rebecca was overjoyed and could not stop looking at her turkey" (Blog, 11/25/13). Not only did the child gain a sense of pride, but she also gained confidence in her problem solving.

Ms. Lowry informally commented to me that this autonomy and trust in the child could be tiring and frustrating to a teacher (Journal, 11/25/13, p.4). While they were making the turkeys, a two year old typified this exchange. Since she is two, she quickly lost attention and her turkey ended up being a can with two eyes glued on it with one piece of paper glued to it. The teacher confined in me later that that is the hardest part. She was dying to add feathers to the turkey and prompted Emma to add some, but Emily was done and completely ignored the request. The teacher explained that "you often have ideas about what the crafts should turn out like, but you have to realize that ultimately they are the children's creations" (Journal, 11/25/13, p.4).

Adaptation According to Developmental Stages

Due to her masters in Educational Leadership from Bankstreet College, a progressive child centered instruction, her teaching techniques are often adapted to the different students developmental levels and abilities which the lens of home helps gauge.

During one of my observations, the teacher directed some of the older children to draw on the front door window door with window markers. She acknowledged that it was not an appropriate activity for some of the two year olds because it became really messy if they were not constantly supervised. However, once she realized that I would be there, she let them draw for a couple of minutes (Journal, 10/28/13). With the application of Vgotsky's theory, all activities are adapted unless there is an adult present who can assist the children in mastering tasks that they cannot do alone.

In terms of adapting the same activity, but still maintaining the theme, the ME books is a good example. The ME books are compiled of different pages detailing the child's family, hobbies, pets, etc. These books are sent home during the summer and the parents help the child fill out each page. On one occasion, Ms. Lowry first instructed each child to tell the rest of the group to identity each family member on the family page. After everyone shared, she proceeded to have the older children draw pictures of their families and label each member and then had the younger children color the actual pictures. This scaffolding allowed all the children to participate in the activity, but was individualized for each child's ability (Blog, 11/25/13). The teacher makes an effort to not just label the child as "bad." She tries to understand the situation from the child's developmental standpoint. This understanding often extends to the developmental understanding of the students.

Due to different age groups varying developmental levels, a childcare provider should view behavior depending on the individual child and his or her developmental stage and skill level. For instance, in trying to explain one of the two years olds taking a bike, Ms. Lowry stated in her blog on 11/18/2013:

The 2 thought the bicycle she had been riding was her property, even after she got off, so she did what any normal 2 year old would do, she took it back… sort of forcefully. She was able to tell me it was "MY bike!" and "MY turn!*"* so that gave me some insight, but you never know... I did what I

always do and took both in my arms and waited for the crying to subside, making the point that a friend had been hurt, by "unfriendly hands." It took a long time for the victim to calm, so I think the point was made. Sometimes adults jump to conclusions or resort to punishing the one who did the pushing, but that solves nothing. Two year olds are territorial and their brains rarely sees beyond their own egos (Blog, 11/18/2013).

Ms. Lowry did not automatically get angry with the two year old. She acknowledged two-year-old children's tendency to be "territorial" and "rarely see beyond their own egos" and as a result adapted her approach. She knew that the child did not mean to be mean, but developmentally did not understand that taking the bike was wrong.

During circle, the older children acknowledge their increased attention span and self-control and do not tell on the younger children for not sitting still or for not following the activity perfectly. They acknowledge that they are older and have different expectations. For instance, when I was observing the children clean up after naptime, one of the older girls told me "We put them here for them" referring the younger children's mats (Journal, 01/27/14, p.5). She understood that they were younger and she needed to help and be responsible. She did not complain that the younger children did not have to do it.

Awareness of Diversity

The day school's curriculum is also heavily aimed to encourage the children to be aware of each other's and other people's cultures. The school celebrates a variety of holidays spanning from: Winter Solstice, Hanukkah, and Christmas, to Chinese New Year. Ms. Lowry purposely tries to expose the children to different cultures and holidays. She explains that children need to be prepared to deal with people from a variety of cultures and holidays are a developmentally appropriate way to introduce culture to preschoolers. "All of the holidays are out there and [she] want[s] to expose them, but it

important for [her] to know what they specifically celebrate so [she] understands what is going on at home and can explain (Journal, 10/02/13, p.2).

During circle time, culture is a major topic. A common starting song is their "multi-language greeting song" which has the children greet each other in various languages. Ms. Lowry even has the children name the language they want to do next to support understanding of the words representing a different language.

During the holidays, the holidays often shape the lesson. During Hanukah, the children had a weeklong lesson on the holiday. One day they learned a simple version of the story, another about the menorah, and another about the specific customs. They also learned songs and read books associated with the holiday. The day I came the children were excited to show me the menorah they had been lighting every day (Journal, 01/31/14).

Even in terms of diversity of family structure, Ms. Lowry tries to encourage an understanding of families of all types. During my visit on 02/07/14, the lesson was family and she had each child draw a picture of their family. After they were drawn, she had each child introduce their family. When one child commented that she lived with her mom and dad, Ms. Lowry also noted that families come in all sizes and that she lived with both of her grandparents. She explained that everyone is different and "special."

Promoting Self Awareness

Besides songs, activities promoting self-awareness are also a large part of Circle time. While the children are forming a circle, Ms. Lowry will tell the children to jump when she says something that they either like or is true for them. These categories can range from birthdate, current clothing, food they like, to parents' names. After playing she informs me that it helps the children distinguish their own likes and dislikes, in a sense their identity, and see how they differ from the other children (Blog, 11/18/13).

The ME books are also a good tool for promoting self-awareness. The children have one throughout their time at the school and as they age, they update the book. While cleaning up the books, Ms. Lowry uses the books to encourage them to think about him or herself as an individual. In the book, like with the previous activity, the child talks about their favorite things, their family, and other interests.

Asserting the child's independence also plays a role in the children's emerging self-awareness. One day, 11/11/13, the teacher casually referenced one of the student's gains and assertiveness since the beginning of the school year. When the child started at the school, he had never cleaned up after mealtime and could not zip up his jacket, but now he could accomplish both tasks by himself. These successes seemed to fill him a sense of inner confidence that spurred him to assert his opinions more and be more aware of what he was capable of by himself.

Community

To promote attachment and well being in the learning climate, a family model has to be created which connects parents, students, teachers, and childcare workers. The main function of this model is to create a "web of loving relationships that surrounds a child in a well-functioning family" which forms a "community" of adults who love the children and who will work together to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004, p. 138-139).

One ways in which she achieves this is through the school's daily Breakfast Club. She invites all the parents to join and eat breakfast with the children at the small table. This club has a vital role in assuring attachment. She asserts that an important part of securing a secure relationship with a child is by the child observing pleasant interactions between the parent and the caretaker otherwise they might feel conflicted about loyalty or not feel safe to trust the teacher.

Through this strengthened attachment, a strong sense of community is encouraged. The adults get to interact with Ms. Lowry and develop a trust and a personal relationship with her. She becomes not

just "someone they pay," but someone they trust and can share personal information with when needed. Also, they get to bond with other parents, which strengthens bonds between the children. It is common within the school for parents to get together outside of school for birthdays and church events.

Potlucks and Pizza Nights are monthly traditions that Ms. Lowry believes develop the sense of community within the school. For the potlucks, each family brings a different dish and all the families sit down and talk while the children also show off the month's songs or a new poem they learned and pizza nights are often hosted at different parents' houses (Journal, 10/02/13). This event especially provides a space for the parents to unwind and get to know each other. As the following excerpt illustrates, not only do this events promote the exchange of the students, but also a sense of community among the parents. My field note from a potluck on 10/02 captures this:

> Three of the parents all know each other really well, so they were all talking openly. Asking about children, joking the holidays were good except for the kids, talking about one of the mom's new job. When the kids started to sing "You Are My Sunshine," one of the moms even started to serenade the other parents. And Megan's mom reminded Rebecca's moms about their scheduled play date by breaking out in a song from a musical. They all freely were interacting with each other (p.6).

In terms of events, while attendance is strongly encouraged, parents also have an input in determining what they want for their child. During a school potluck, the teacher had a discussion with parents to plan the next two events. She did not just single handedly choose a date; she consulted parents and acknowledged their time commitments (Journal, 10/02/13, p.3).

Parent and Peer Interactions

Developing Loving Relationships

Ms. Lowry also often references the idea of love and trust and the role of caregiver. She

recognizes attachment as "a strong emotional bond that grows between a child and an adult who is part of the child's every day life" (Baker & Manfredi-Petitt, 2004). If a child is consistently cared for and loved by a group of the same person or individuals, a secure attachment is formed which enables the child to not be preoccupied with their basic needs and to explore and interact with their environment, which is an essential step of identity formation. She often refers to the fact that in order to have a child learn optimally they must feel a sense of attachment toward the caregiver.

Even when she becomes frustrated with one of the children, she makes to ensure the child that they are loved, but it is the behavior that she is mad at. For example, when one of the twos bit another child she reprimanded the two by stating, "I love you, but I do not like you biting other people. They are your friends. We are happy dolphins, not hungry sharks" (Journal, 02/19/2013, p.3).

Also, when a child is away she makes sure to hug the child and acknowledge how much she missed them and frequently even mentions their absence on the daily blog. She makes sure each child knows his or her individual importance to her.

However, she is careful to distinguish the role of the caregiver from one as the parent. While both act as attachment figures, she acknowledges that optimally the parent needs to be the main figure in the hierarchy. When a parent is present, this hierarchy is seen clearly:

One of the two year olds starting crying, then streaked out, and was crying hysterically. It was quite interesting because Ms. Lowry completely stepped back. She let the child run to her parents and let the parents identify the situation and comfort her. Then when she heard that someone in the playroom pinched her, she went in to investigate, but did not directly interact with Hattie (Journal, 10/02/13, p.2).

She explains that it is important to establish professional boundaries alongside developing the attachment. The parent should always be the primary attachment. During the potluck, she complimented and used one of the children's nannies as an example. The nanny is a second-generation nanny. Ms.

Lowry noted that the nanny formed a close bond to the infant earlier and quicker than most. She also noted that you could tell she is second generation because she has a clear sense of her boundaries. She respected the families' opinions about how to care for the baby, despite her differences of opinion, and knew to step back when the parents were present (Journal, 10/02/13).

The importance of this attachment results in a better understanding of each other which results in less conflict within the school:

When children trust me to trust them, they begin to make more thoughtful choices. It takes a while, but eventually [preschool] kids believe in their own decisions and can usually tell you WHY they made a choice if questioned. If there is a problem, we negotiate. I tell them why I am uncomfortable and we find a solution to the conflict (Blog, 10/28/13).

She promotes this sense of trust by also encouraging them to always call for help. She believes that children often do not speak up to avoid "tattling," so she urges them to call for help from an adult. By developing this skill, she believes it will translate into being able to ask for help in the future and helps develop a child's conscience. A strong conscience requires a sense of right and wrong and asking for help in situations where the child is unsure if a situation is safe allows adults to help direct the child's sense of safety and morals (Blog, 10/28/2013).

Awareness of Others

With every interaction there is also a strong emphasis on the children understanding how their actions affect others in the group and generally an awareness of others. One of the best examples of this awareness of others was on 10/20/13 when one of the younger two year olds stepped on a three year old's foot with costume high heels. The four year old did not yell or blame the two-year-old; she just silently sat there quietly trying to compose herself. The teacher found her; however, and praised her for not yelling and understanding that the other girl did not do it on purpose and was younger. She also had

the little girl apologize and hold a cold towel on the girl's toe. She then let the girl sit on her lap until she calmed down and then had the group comfort her by getting their doctor kits and was "examining" her. When an individual becomes injured by accident, the children are also taught to comfort him or her, which again reinforces the children's sense of how others are feeling and how they should react.

Specifically, when one of the two year olds bit another child not only did assert her distaste in the behavior, but not in her, but she also tried to get the child to acknowledge how the behavior affected the group. She asked the child "How would you feel if she bit you? Would it hurt? Isn't she your friend? Would you want your friend to bite you" (Journal, 02/19/2014, p.2). With this conversation, she approaches the problem from a developmentally appropriate angle by having the two-year-old view the problem from a self-perspective and promotes her thinking about how her actions impacted others.

Generally, in every physical negative encounter, Ms. Lowry requires the perpetrator to sit with the victim until he or she feels better and apologies and hugs are exchanged. By waiting with the victim, the perpetrator is forced to see how their actions affect the other person and also learns self-control (Blog, 11/18/2013).

In another less physical instance, one of the four year olds kept feeling the need to direct and kept telling children to use this instrument or to start leading. After the teacher noticed this behavior, she kindly told her "the other kids might not want to do what she wants to do and that she needs to listen to them" (Journal, 11/11/13, p.4). Consistently, she tries to remind the children to consider the other children's likes and needs.

Pretend Play

The first month I observed at the school it was "dramatic play month," so imaginary play was a dominant theme in activities. However, roleplaying and other imaginary play is a common activity throughout the year. The school specifically has a "pretend room." It is filled with costumes and props

such as ovens, cash registers, and toys in which to role-play. Most of the students' free play is conducted in the pretend room, so it is one of the most crucial areas of the school especially for social learning. Ms. Lowry encourages the children to make up their own games instead of reenacting movies, television shows, etc. The four-year-old boy in the class is used to playing by himself and mostly playing on the computer and watching television, but once she sees him simulating shows, she immediately discourages him and prompts him to come up with his own idea.

Pretend play is also often integrated in the lessons. When the children were learning about Native Americans, they transformed the pretend room into a "reservation," when they were talking about food, it was converted into a fully working restaurant with tables, a kitchen, and a pick up area, and then when discussing Jamaica they transformed it to a plane and then a beach. Besides self and interactive role-play, object role-play is also introduced. During circle, a game that is sometimes played is "imaginary animals" Each child has a turn naming an animal and for example if the first child picks cat, than they hold the cat in their arms or hands and has to mimic the animal and pass the animal to the next person with the appropriate gestures and sounds determined by the size of the animal that they created (Journal, 11/11/13). Not only do they have to imagine an animal, but also they have to adjust their behavior and conceptualize other people's thoughts.

The children often use this imaginative play to play out real life scenarios and develop an understanding of roles and their effects on behavior. When they were playing restaurant, the children assigned everyone a different role: waiter, cook, hostess, diner, etc. (Blog, 11/18/2013). When I tried to interact with the cook, I was promptly told that he could not hear me because of the noise of the kitchen. I was also told that the cook could not come to the tables because he was supposed to stay in the kitchen. They were highly aware of the different roles and enforced them.

The rigidity in roles was also found when I was playing doctor with one of the three year olds. I broke character for two minutes to say that I needed to go back to school and I was reminded that doctors are done with school.

Group Identity

As a result of the emphasis on community and cohesion, glimpses of group identity are often seen throughout the day. Even with group activities such as singing, group identity is promoted:

> We sang our multi-language greeting song, as we have been a lot this month. Today, I gave each child a chance to lead us in the "*Ohhhhhhhhh…YEAH!"* part when s/he suggested a language or a way to say hello in a different way. Usually, they watch my hands and head cues to know when to say, "yeah." We say "*Ohhhhhhhh"* as I shake my head and hands, then I nod my head and lift hands up high for a shared "*YEAH".* Waiting for the leader and finishing together helps us feel like a sense of unity as a group. Taking turns as leader shares the power. Both are important parts of becoming equal members of our learning community" (Blog, 11/18/2013).

Individual chores and tasks are also seen as being "part of the community" and having a role within the group (Journal, 11/11/2013, p.2). "Helper" is a daily example of this role assignment. Every child is given the opportunity to change the calendar and check the weather. Ms. Lowry mentions in her blog that as the children age they start to have an increased awareness of not only their turn as helper, but the duties of the position (Blog, 10/28/2013). They start to recognize their role within the group.

In terms of curriculum, this concept is also reinforced. One-week friendship was a major topic. As a point of discussion, the teacher had each child name their best friends and encouraged them to name everyone in the class, so the children would recognize that "[they] are all friends" and members of a group (Blog, 02/22/2014).

Clean up is also a good example of the children's sense of membership. Each child knows the role in the team. Whether it is helping the smaller children clean up after they are done, helping put the mats up, filling cups, every child has a role that must be completed for the team to successfully clean up.

Teaching Philosophy and Motivation

When asked about why she teaches, Ms. Lowry will mention her long history of activism. She views her **"**work with young children as a way to send glimmers of peace into the future" (Blog, 11/11/13). She acknowledges though "it is an easy goal to have, but challenging to do in real life with children" (Blog, 11/11/13).

Through her instilling the importance of working together and being aware of others, she actively tries to prepare the children for the world and teach them how to work together cooperatively through tolerance of others. She actively encourages the children to celebrate diversity and see it as an everyday part of life.

An example of this goal is when she was teaching about Thanksgiving. She tries to avoid stressing her pacifist views in respect to the parents; however, she does try to "coach young children in the art of cooperation and peaceful living" (Blog, 11/11/13). She describes both sides as "good, well-meaning people and greedy, dangerous bullies in both groups" which prompts children to learn to look at both side fairly and not see conflict as the immediate answer (Blog, 11/11/13).

Summary

Overall, the analysis of the blogs and the observation field notes complemented each other and showed similar themes. By using the blogs, it reinforces what was seen in the field notes and also adds another perspective and allows me to understand her thought process through her voice. With both of these methods, the sources allowed me to examine all of my research questions. Together, by triangulating data, the findings from all three sources answer the study research questions and are

presented below.

For the first research question, "What are the distinctive features of Day School learning climate?" several themes emerged from the data: Creating a relationship with parents, awareness of diversity, promoting self-awareness, and developing a loving one on one relationship.

The high level of connectedness is the major distinctive feature of the day school's school climate. The partnership with parents, awareness of diversity, and developing the one on one relationship with the children all act together to not only encourage the children's attachment to the caregiver, but also to help the child feel connected to the school and feel loved.

To encourage this climate of connectedness, three main themes emerged from the data: lens of the home, promoting community, and teaching philosophy. Ms. Lowry consciously creates the climate of connectedness by encouraging the parents and students to form a community or "network." With the potlucks, pizza nights, and other activities such as Breakfast Club, she is purposely trying to create a cohesive climate where the adults and caregivers are working together toward the same goals to support the child and provide the child with a sense of love and safety.

The lens of home, in turn is used to support the climate by helping create that dialog between Ms. Lowry and the parents. Without creating that dialog, the parents would not be active participants in what is going on and the teacher would not always understand what is going on with the children. Without context, she would have more difficulty connecting to the children because she would have such a high understanding of the child's motives and thinking.

Overall, though, all of these methods are used to support her teaching philosophy to encourage cooperative learning. To encourage the children to feel safe and loved and therefore connected, she emphasizes the importance of "working together" and love and understanding to create a connected climate.

Finally, the last research question, "How does the teacher intentionally direct identity formation?" seem to have five main components: independence, acknowledging success and development, adaption according to developmental stages, pretend play, and group identity.

An important part of fostering a child's identity is helping a child gain a sense of control over his or her environment. By Ms. Lowry encouraging the children to learn independence do a task by themselves, they are learning a mastery of control of their bodies and their environment by asserting their independence by not needing a parent to assist. According to Erikson, mastering this stage leads to the child feeling "secure and confident" versus "feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt" and will lead to higher levels of decisiveness in later years.

A child's sense of agency and adequacy is something that is actively promoted the day score through acknowledging success and development and adaption according to developmental stages. Through Ms. Lowry constantly acknowledging the children for their successes and not being overly critical, the children learn to be proud of their accomplishments, which boost their self-esteem and therefore their sense of adequacy. Without compliments, children feel a sense of inferiority and will question their abilities, which can lead to low self-esteem during later years. If Ms. Lowry did not adapt the activities according to their development and held all the children to the same standard, the children would start to doubt their abilities too, and would also be less likely to explore.

Additionally, pretend play is used as a tool to promote the students sense of "power" and control through play and other social exchanges with peers and adults. They learn how to take on roles and be a leader. Children master this stage by learning how to cooperate with others and self direct. By having the child take on different roles, they have to learn how to take each other into consideration and adapt their behavior to others'. By acting out real life problems, the students gain a confidence in interacting with others and in different contexts.

Looking at the program as a whole, the family model strongly reinforces the child's sense of group identity. By creating the sense of connectedness and community, children learn to see themselves as part of the group. Positive self-esteem and academic achievement has been found to be correlated with a child's feeling of belonging and acceptance within the group and school among the group and school (Lawrence, 1988). Those that feel this belonging seem to be associated with feelings of competence and adequacy, which extends back to Erikson and the child's personal identity.

Finally, secure attachments to the caregiver also seem to encourage the children's sense of identity. Because they are not afraid of criticism and their needs are being met, they are not afraid to explore and try new tasks, which lead to more identity exploration and self-awareness.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications for Practice

While these findings are not generalizable, they provide insight into one school's approach in constructing a positive learning climate and how it in turn affects personal and group identity. As a whole, certain climates and approaches seem to create more secure attachments, which appears to contribute to positive identity formation. The reinforcement of the idea of community's link to positive learning climates is vital for today's school and should be encouraged in schools. Using the day school's techniques as a blueprint, the school's construction of community can be replicated and tested to help construct positive learning climates.

An important aspect is the intentionality of Ms. Lowry's pedagogies and the psychosocial basis of her approach. It is important to distinguish whether her practices are scientifically based, how do they align with the research, and the intentionality of these pedagogies. Ms. Lowry's practices are based on developmental and educational psychology which are heavily cited and mentioned in her two books in which she establishes the scientific base of her strategies.

This study supports previous findings that positive school climate is associated with self-concept

(Eccles et al., 1993). The day school's climate seems to facilitate the children's identity formation due to factors such as connectedness and caring relationships, which facilitates the children's feelings of belonging to the group. The teacher actively tries to encourage loving relationships by promoting compliments, and individualized roles within the group and connectedness with her emphasis on jobs and parental involvement. Additionally, the day school's climate seems to be associated with group identity which is consistent with previous literature that suggest that school climate is positively linked to group cohesion.

In terms of connectedness, the findings also highlight that relationships are an important part of school climate. Without the secure attachments between the teacher and the children, the children would not be so engaged and well adjusted due to the link between "safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school climate" often leading to higher levels of attachment to school (Blum, McNeely, & Richards, 2002). In one of her books, the teacher in the study acknowledges this link by stressing "that young children and their identities are shaped by relationships" and that "to develop a healthy sense of self, children need to be cared for by adults who take the time to attune to their emotions and understand their cues." Due to this awareness, she always builds her relationship with the child by observing their behavior through a lens of home. Through home visits and creating a loving relationship, she purposely seeks out to learn about each child as an individual and is able to analyze the child's behavior not just by what is apparent during the day, but what goes on at home.

Regarding attachment, in her books Ms. Lowry's notes that close relationships with students must be intentionally created because attachment types tend to be fully developed until a person is four or five years old and "through interactions with adults-parents and caregivers alike-infants develop a sense of who they are, what's important in the world, and how much influence they bring to relationships with other people." As seen in the findings, she always tries to acknowledge the parents' as

the primary attachment figure, due to use of Bowlby and past literature in her books, and as such their importance by constantly trying to engage and communicate with parents through her blog, the potlucks, the home visits, and overall her lens of home.

These efforts to create high levels of attachment are deliberately used to aid in the child's positive identity formation. This connection reflects Erikson's (1950, 1968) model, which emphasizes the importance of promoting independence and working with others with preschool children and its effect on identity. Specifically, she trains parents to have the children do as much independently as possible and stresses the importance of praising children for their accomplishments. In her blog on 02/22/2014, she acknowledges its importance by informing parents that by "[focusing] on what is basically correct, rather than what is perfectly correct…" and praising them for their success, it builds self-confidence and patience for others. She purposely praises the children in order to promote future independence and therefore identity formation.

In summary, this study examines construction of positive learning climate and its relationship with identity formation. Future research should look at the generalizability of this model and how what parts would be applicable to larger schools across the country,

With this case study in mind, I believe it is important for schools to emphasize community and connectedness. The literature states that connectedness is positively associated with cohesion and student adjustment, which are primary components of school climate (Loukas, Suzuki, & Horton, 2006). This case study supports the importance of connectedness in enabling self-exploration and attachment, which has been found to promote positive academic outcomes (Aviezer, Sagi, Resnick, & Gini, 2002). Ms. Lowry creates an intentional community model that can be adapted in other settings. Nationally, home visits are becoming popular and mandatory for some lottery-funded preschools and could be implemented in schools naturally with some adjustments. Early education teachers could try at least

once a school year or semester to visit the home not necessarily to observe, but to engage with the parent to create that bond.

While Ms. Lowry's blog is definitely extensive, it could also be adapted to what? Even just picture accounts of the day or weekly newsletters would be more manageable and helpful to parents. During my tutoring experiences, I have noticed that many elementary teachers issue weekly newsletters, but the majority of it is just announcements and a listing of concepts. Teachers could be taught how to incorporate not only what the children are learning, but explanations of the classroom procedures and ways to continue it to the home. This would help facilitate communication and understanding between parents and teachers and help bridge the gap between the school, home divide. As shown with the attachment literature and with the case study, it is important to acknowledge the importance of the primary caretaker and create a dialog which the blog helps start.

Another part of the study that could be applicable is her scripting of situations to encourage cooperation and group identity. For example, the earlier example of what she teaches the children to say when they want to join someone:

There was also an opportunity to practice our "Magic Phrase" of "How can I join you?" They usually answer: "Help yourself," but everyone is getting better at adding a detail or two […] If a child is doing something that is obviously a one- person activity, the question is "Can I have the next turn?" The answer to that is always, "Yes." If I am in earshot, I ask that child to call his/her friend when finished (Blog, 02/22/2014).

Due to young children's limited vocabulary, it is often difficult for them to express themselves, so it is beneficial to have a script for a child to follow. It allows the children to deal with situations themselves, fostering independence, and helps them know what to expect, which additionally promotes secure attachment. Scripting would also be easier to replicate in different environments than a majority

of pedagogies. These "scripts" could be standardized and condensed and distributed to teachers across the country. They are not subject as much to the teacher's demeanor or interpretation since they are word for word.

Through illustrating a framework of how one teacher intentionally creates their climate, the study offers a model for further research on learning climates and its effects on identity formation and a way to go on to pinpoint the specific pedagogies that positively influences learning climate and identity formation. While this study focuses on a school with all white, upper-middle class children, more research needs to be done with a more racially and socioeconomically diverse samples to explore the finding's validity and how ethnic identity interacts with school climate and identity formation.

Considering all the findings, this case study suggests that teachers have the ability to intentionally create by using pedagogies that encourage attachment and positive identity formation. Schools should focus on this research to identify pedagogies that will help other struggling schools replicate these results and as a result create positive learning climates. While all classrooms and schools are different, a teacher's potential power over the creation of learning climate is significant and needs to be explored.

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Appendix A: Site Permission Letter

Date: October 17, 2013

Institutional Review Board
Emory University
1599 Clifton Road, 5th Floor East
Atlanta, GA 30322

To Whom It May Concern:

Researchers at the Emory University Department of Educational Studies have requested permission to conduct the research project named below at the [insert school name] during the period of October 16 to March 19, 2013. This letter notifies you that I/we grant permission to research staff members of the Emory University Department of Educational Studies to conduct this research at the location listed below.

Research Project Title: **Impact of Schools on Learning Climates**

Principal Investigator:

Study Site Location:

Permission granted by:

_____
Name of Individual (print) and Title

_____ _____
Name of Individual (Signature) Date

Appendix B: Letter of Intent for Parents

Emory University Division of Educational Studies
North Decatur Building, Suite 265
1784 N. Decatur Rd.
Atlanta, Georgia 30322

Impact of Schools on Learning Climates

I am writing to inform you that I am conducting a research study in your child's day school. I am interested in understanding how a teacher creates a positive learning climate.

I will volunteer in the classroom once a week to observe during the fall semester during the normal school day. I expect that this project will end no later than March 09, 2013. For the most part, I will be just observing, but after each visit I will be compiling my experiences in a journal. My journals and the final study will not include student names or photographs and the children will have pseudonyms. Also, the work will not be published and I will be following all IRB rules set about by Emory and will be supervised by Dr. Downey, a professor at Emory University and a parent of a alum.

Please contact me by phone at 678-333-8903 email: dlshule@emory.edu to request additional information or if you have any concerns.

Sincerely,

Danelle Shuler

Appendix C: Sample Coding Sheet

Sample Observation and Blog Codes:

Parent and Peer Relations (PP): Features of Students' Relationships with Teacher and Peers

Developing Loving Relationships (PP1)

Awareness of Others (PP2)

Pretend Play (PP3)

Group Identity (PP4)

Teaching Philosophy (PP5)

Basic Construct and Goals of Pedagogies (G): Teacher's Purpose and Basis of Lessons and Strategies

Lens of Home (G1)

Creating a Relationship with Parents (G2)

Acknowledging Success and Development (G3)

Independence (G4)

Adaptation According to Developmental Stages (G5)

Awareness of Diversity (G6)

Promoting Self Awareness (G7)