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The Elementary School Climate and Teacher Self-Esteem: A Study of Potential Relationship

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The Elementary School Climate and Teacher Self-Esteem: A Study of

Potential Relationship

by

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

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Abstract

The factors of self-esteem and the school climate have been independently studied for over a century and have been found as universal factors of importance. This study investigates the potential relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate. Fifty-nine elementary school teachers at public schools in the Midwest participated in a survey consisting of demographic information, self-esteem assessment, and a school climate inventory. The findings showed a moderate relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate. Additional sub-categories of relationships and teaching learning indicated moderate relationships with teacher self-esteem. These findings lead to suggestions for improving factors in the school climate including incorporating a positive-based intervention and support program. Suggestions for implementing inclusive and person-centered policies and procedures at school level, local, state, and federal levels and development of growth-based evaluations and supports for new teachers are explored. Other suggestions include additional research and testing on the newly designed school climate inventory which Cronbach's alpha of .863 indicated high reliability and further research on the multi-factored relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate.

Keywords: elementary schools; school climate; self-esteem; teachers

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The elementary school climate and teacher self-esteem: A study of potential relationship

There are many concepts to be studied in the realm of social sciences, but a concept that is universal and relevant to almost every aspect of life is that of self-esteem (Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). The notion of self-esteem is something that is commonly discussed in many disciplines and is used as a criterion in diagnosing over 20 mental illness according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual [DSM] (American Psychological Association, 2013). Self-esteem, sometimes referred to as self-regard or self-worth or confused with self-concept, is something that every human being has and is developed and re-shaped over the lifespan (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012; King, 1997). Self-esteem is the self-evaluation of oneself with regard to the feelings about oneself ("I like myself"), whereas self-concept is the knowledge, judgment, or thoughts about oneself ("I am good at math"); while the two can be related, self-esteem adds the evaluative thoughts about oneself about the traits known (self-esteem holds the value of the trait – "I think I'm a good person [esteem] because I am good at math [concept]") as well as an overall "global" self-esteem that summarizes evaluation of oneself (Rosenberg, 1965; King, 1997; Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, & Baumert, 2006; Guindon, 2001).

Self-esteem, although studied for over 100 years, is still debated regarding antecedents, outcomes, and implications of evaluation (James, 1890; Ferkany, 2008; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Several studies have indicated that positively evaluated self-esteem (generally termed as "high" self-esteem or optimal self-esteem) leads to happiness, school and workplace achievement, less criminal activity, and physical health (Kuster, Orth, & Meier, 2013; Ferkany, 2008; Orth, Robins, & Widaman,

2011; Trzesniewski et. al, 2006). Other studies have found that outside factors shape and affect self-esteem, including workplace and home environment, experiences, relationships, and achievement (Coopersmith, 1967; Scott, Murray, Mertens, & Richard, 1996; Scott, 1999; Twigg, 2008; Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). Due to the complex nature of self-esteem and the difficulty in evaluating causation, research on the topic is vast and sometimes conflicts with itself (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Trzesniewski et. al, 2006; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Some of the conflicted findings are around the causation of self-esteem on life outcomes, with Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs (2003) finding that self-esteem did not have a causative effect or even a significant relationship with many life outcomes other than happiness. Meanwhile, other similar studies, including Orth, Robins, & Widaman (2012), found that there were many life outcomes associated with self-esteem.

In effort to understand the relationship of self-esteem to the surrounding systems, several factors have been studied regarding self-esteem development and change, including the workplace; which found that there is a relationship between the workplace climate and worker self-esteem. A recent surge in research around self-esteem and the school climate has occurred in literature, informed by the statistic that positive self-esteem ratings drastically decrease somewhere during elementary school, with 89% of kindergarteners and only 20% of 5th graders evaluated positively (Admundson, 1991). The school climate, generally speaking, is the aspects of the school which become the felt experience present within the school, and has traditionally been described as a continuum between a humanistic and a custodial school (Beane, Lipka, Ludewig, 1980; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Interestingly, the school climate has been linked to

school achievement, connectedness, student self-esteem, and staff self-esteem (Cohen, et. al, 2009).

While there has been a definitive link between student self-esteem and the school climate, as well as student self-esteem and teachers' attitudes; there has been little study of teacher's self-esteem and its relationship to the school climate. Research on the workplace climate has found that there is a relationship to workers' self-esteem; the importance of this relationship is double when considering teachers in an elementary school – the place that has shown to impact students' developing self-esteem and relies on achievement for continuing funding. In order to more fully understand the potential for a relationship between the school climate and teachers' self-esteem, several concepts and past studied relationships are critical to examine.

Self-Esteem

The term and understanding of the construct "self-esteem" has significantly changed and evolved over the years. Rosenberg (1965) added thoughts that self-esteem has many individual characteristics that can be evaluated, as well as a "global" overall self-esteem that summarizes all the individual evaluations. He also emphasized that self-esteem is influenced and shaped by feedback from others (Rosenberg, 1965). Later theorists and researchers have added to the study of self-esteem by supplying thoughts on the components, outcomes, and possible antecedents of self-esteem, as well as the thousands of studies regarding evaluating self-esteem; however there is still a lack of consensus on the exact terminology and definition of self-esteem (Guindon, 2001).

Self-esteem has been used interchangeably with some related terms over the years, including self-regard (which has been deemed the same components) or self-

concept (King, 1997; Guindon, 2001). In hopes to clarify the confusion between self-concept and self-esteem, think of self-esteem as the affect-related evaluation of self-conceptual beliefs, which are more based in concrete and evidenced-based experience. Self-esteem is the self-evaluation of oneself with regard to the feelings about oneself ("I like myself"), whereas self-concept is the knowledge, judgment, or thoughts about oneself ("I am good at math"); while the two can be related, self-esteem adds the affective evaluative thoughts about oneself about the traits known (self-esteem holds the internal affective value of the trait – "I think I'm a good person [esteem] because I am good at math [concept]") as well as an overall "global" self-esteem that summarizes evaluation of oneself (Rosenberg, 1965; King, 1997; Trautwein, Lüdtke, Köller, & Baumert, 2006; Guindon, 2001). A definition adopted for this project, based on the overall literature findings from Guindon (2001) and Rosenberg's (1965) position on self-esteem, is that self-esteem is the affective evaluation of the self, developed and maintained through self-beliefs (ex: competence, achievement) and feedback from the environment including from other people and outcomes both tangible and felt.

In order to understand the self-esteem apparent in an adult, it is important to understand how self-esteem develops and is shaped. The development of self-esteem is not completely understood, but the origins of self-esteem is thought to be in early childhood attachment and experiences (Foster, Kernis, Goldman, 2007; Schmitt, 2005). There is a thought of a critical period of development of self-esteem being the first eight years of life, with alarming findings of an estimated 89% of kindergarteners having perceived high self-esteem and only 20% of fifth graders with high self-esteem (Scott, 1999; Admundson, 1999). Recent research has found that, in addition to this "critical

period" of development of self in early childhood to establish an initial self-esteem,

global self-esteem decreases from adolescence into early adulthood, then begins to grow

and peak around mid-life, with a decrease into old age (Orth, Robins, Widaman, 2011).

An additional variance in self-esteem was found between genders, with women having a

small but statistically significant lower level of self-esteem than men (Kling, 1999).

Although the research indicates changes in global self-esteem over the lifetime, Foster et.

al (2007) state that self-esteem is generally stable throughout the lifetime with small

changes at certain times, finding that greater variance in self-esteem scores is related to

more problems than the level of self-esteem.

Although some researchers have argued that self-esteem levels are not related to

life outcomes or other factors (Baumeister et. al, 2003; Foster et. al, 2007), a large

amount of research has argued that self-esteem is highly related to many outcomes and is

very important to invest in developing further (Ferkany, 2008; Orth et. al, 2011; Drago,

2000; Trzesnewski et. al, 2006). One of the most all-encompassing findings of literature

on self-esteem is the highly correlative relationship it has with happiness, with some

studies finding a predictive relationship from self-esteem to level of happiness (Cheng &

Furnham, 2003; Baumeister et. al, 2003). Another concept which has been shown to be

an outcome of self-esteem is increased empathic skills (Ceylan, 2009). Other concepts

correlated with self-esteem include feelings of physical attractiveness, competence, and

job satisfaction (Baumeister et. al, 2003; Christou et. al, 2001; Orth et. al, 2011).

Other more concrete outcomes of self-esteem have also been found. Orth et. al

(2011) found that many of life's outcomes were predicted by self-esteem, including affect

regulation, relationship skills demonstrated, and physical and mental health. These

findings were further supported by research that found self-esteem to predict clinical

depression among adults (American Psychological Association, 2013; Trzesniewski et.

al, 2006; Cheng & Furnham, 2003). An area that Drago (2000) found impacted by self-

esteem was earnings, which has been at the center of much debate amongst attracting and

retaining teachers. This was not found to correlate in research done by Kuster et. al

(2013).

The factors which may impact self-esteem in adulthood have also been found to

vary widely. Because it is difficult to determine a definite predictive relationship, many

of the variables found to be predicted by self-esteem have also been considered as

possible influencers of self-esteem. Some studies have found that self-esteem is

impacted by achievement (either in school or at workplace), a finding that has been

debated amongst the literature (Scott, 1999; Orth et al, 2011). Affect regulation, or the

ability to control one's emotions, has been found to have a predictive impact on self-

esteem in some studies (Caprara, 2013). Self-esteem is continuously being evaluated in

relation to other factors, and the body of knowledge is refined and shaped continuously.

Teacher Self-Esteem

Teachers are a group of people who are highly influential on the development and

well-being of children. Teachers are second only to primary adult figures at home in time

spent with a child and the influence of the relationship on the child (Scott et. al, 1996).

The relationship between a child and teacher, as well as the impacts a teacher may have

on a child, has been studied in depth. Scott (1999) found that teacher's modeling

variables associated with high self-esteem was strongly related to shaping behaviors and

attitudes of students. Other studies have found that teacher's self-esteem correlated with

overall competency in teaching, higher student achievement, and stronger relationships with students (Christou, Phillipou, Menon, 2001; Scott et. al, 1996; Spilt, Koomen, Thijs, 2011). Alarmingly, due to the critical developmental periods of children taught, elementary school teachers in particular have been found to have a lower score of self-esteem when compared to administrators or secondary school teachers (Scott, 1999; Blase, Blase, & Du, 2008).

A teacher's self-esteem is much more important than its link to students, although student achievement is unfortunately much of what is considered when thinking about teachers.   Teachers (especially special-education teachers) with lower self-esteem have been linked to higher rates of attrition – regardless of student achievement in the classroom (Buchanan, 2009; DeSio, 2011). Teachers' high attrition rates, coupled with the stress of the job, and impacts on self-esteem propose that the problem of teacher retention is more complex than "hiring better teachers" as had been suggested in previous studies and that work toward being emotionally supportive and improving self-esteem may be helpful in retaining teachers (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Krieg, 2006).

Other important skills of being a teacher, as well as overall well-being of a teacher, has been linked to self-esteem. According to Ceylan (2009), teachers with higher self-esteem had the ability to be more empathic, a skill necessary for effectively navigating relationships. Relationships with students have been found to have an effect on teacher self-esteem as well as benefits to students (Spilt et. al 2011). Other studies have found that teachers' personal satisfaction and feelings of efficacy are linked to psychological well-being and self-esteem; also related to the degree in which teachers

feel they can ask for support (Grayson & Alvarez, 2007; Vanderslice, 2010; Huang, Liu, & Shiomi, 2007).

A significant concern is that lack of self-esteem in teachers is highly correlated to depression, which is related to behaviors or actions such as poor concentration, poor attendance, and hopelessness (Beer, 1987). Low self-esteem in teachers has also been linked to teacher bullying of students, as well as negative attitudes displayed in classroom and school activities (Zembat & Gursoy, 2012; Twemlow, Fogany, Sacco, & Brethour, 2006). Overall, teachers' self-esteem is impactful and impacted by a variety of known factors unique to the school system. Teachers' self-esteem also is subject to the factors found in general populations and is thought that it probably is impacted similarly to other workplace climates' impact on workers, with a very unique system at play.

School Climate

The school climate has been researched for over 100 years, with research expanding in the past 20 years, partially due to new policies greatly impacting schools. Findings have indicated a multi-faceted impact of the school climate on almost all factors within a school (Cohen et al, 2009; Blasé et. al, 2008; Thapa et. al, 2013). Although the study of schools has been long-term, the literature (until recently) did not have clear definitions of a school climate or what the components of a school climate were (Thapa et. al, 2013). Due to this, there is a huge variance amongst measurement tools of school climate, as well as a lack of available school climate assessments which appropriately address the components of school climate.

School climate can best be generalized as the aspects of the school which become the "felt" or perceived experience within the school (Cohen et. al, 2009; Thapa et al,

2013). Earlier studies have described the school climate on a continuum from

"humanistic", which endorses collaboration and relationships, to "custodial", which

focuses on a rank-order of importance of contribution; although this continuum has not

been specifically used to describe the climate as it has evolved, literature often refers to

the words "humanistic" and "custodial" as descriptors of "positive" and "negative"

school climates (Cohen et al, 2009; Beane et. al, 1980). According to the National

School Climate Council [NSCC](2007), the school climate is described as being "based

on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values,

interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures"

(p. 1). The NSCC (2007) also describes a "sustainable, positive school" as one that

provides all components fully and in which each person feels respected, nurtured, and

able to contribute and achieve. This fits perfectly with the explanations given to building

and maintaining healthy self-esteem, where a person takes in the surroundings and the

information provided from outside sources about themselves (Rosenberg, 1965).

According to Cohen et. al (2009), the school climate has four essential components:

safety, teaching and learning, relationships, and environmental-structural; all of these also

have sub-components to be evaluated. These are the components which are essential to

evaluate when discussing the school climate and should be achieved for a positive school

climate (NSCC, 007; Cohen, et. al, 2009; Thapa et. al, 2013).

      The first component of the school climate that must be assessed is that of safety.

Safety, according to Thapa et. al (2013), refers to the psychological, emotional, and

physical safety, as well as consistent, fairly enforced rules. This component evaluates the

presence of a system of discipline and management of behaviors and the nuances of the

perceived norms of the school, such as at what level violence is tolerated and diversity is

embraced. Many studies have found that lack of perceived safety in a school has been

connected to lower achievement (students) and attrition (teachers); with 77% of teachers

reporting lack of safety stated it impacted teaching ability (Scott, 1999; Vanderslice,

2010; Blase et. al, 2008; Twemlow et. al, 2006). Higher ratings of safety, as well as

perceived level of support, has found to correlate with openness to seeking help and

increased ethical decision making skills (Twigg, 2008; Thapa et. al, 2013; Huang et al,

2007).

The second component of school climate necessary to evaluate is relationships.

As stated in much research, relationships are thought of as the basis of development, and

healthy relationships are necessary for positive growth (Scott, 1999; Rosenberg, 1965;

Coopersmith, 1967; Foster et. al, 2007). These relationships and the information

interpreted from the interactions also contribute to a person's self-esteem (Rosenberg,

1965; Coopersmith, 1967; Foster et. al, 2007). Relationships within a school climate are

complex and multi-level, as there are students, teachers, support staff, leadership,

community members, parents, and family members who all have relationships with each

other. The relationships sub-components measured include respect of diversity,

leadership, and social support (Cohen et. al, 2009; Thapa et. al, 2013). Social support

involves depicting the quality and reciprocity of relationships, evaluating connectedness,

shared decision making, and opportunities for participation (Cohen et. al, 2009, NSCC,

2007). Relationships are a more obvious, yet subjective, part of the school climate which

has been found to relate to nearly every other sub-component of the school climate, as

well as personal development of students and teachers alike (Scott, 1999; Cohen et. al, 2009; Spilt et. al, 2011).

The third component category in a school climate is surmised as teaching and learning. This includes sub-components of support for learning and social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning. The support for learning is understood to be both at a student learning and adult learning level. Support of student learning asks about differentiated instruction and individual attention given (NSCC, 2007). Components asked in both domains are type of feedback offered (and whether it is offered), level of support for asking questions, and level of independent thinking encouraged. Professional development and professional relationships being supported are components relevant to teachers' learning (Thapa et. al, 2013; NSCC, 2007). The sub-component of social, emotional, ethical, and civic learning assesses the level of effective listening present, amount of conflict resolution shown and taught, amount of personal responsibility displayed and taught, teachings about empathy, and ethical decision making (NSCC, 2007; Thapa et. al, 2013).

The final component of a school climate is environment. This is the only component that discusses a physically measurable aspect of the school, a component which has been linked to overall student achievement (Ferkany, 2008; Thapa et. al, 2013). The sub-measures are the physical state of the school and engagement. Physical state is the easily identified state of maintenance and upkeep, as well as availability of resources and supplies (Thapa et. al, 2013). Engagement, in this measurement, checks the level of participation and perceived collective ownership of the school (NSCC, 2007). It also checks how much a person identifies with the overall school norms. The school

climate, which impacts many aspects of life and development, is made up of the inter-related component categories and the further sub-components within the school.

Workplaces and Worker Self-Esteem

Every workplace wants positive production outcomes, a main principle of business. Workplaces began to investigate the role of self-esteem and different components to outcomes a few decades ago, and after finding significance in relationships, the field of organizational based self-esteem has been developed and tools developed for assessing the construct (Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, & Dunham, 1989). Organization based self-esteem is described as self-esteem only within the construct of the workplace, and is considered highly related to, yet more malleable than, global self-esteem (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Organization based self-esteem has been found to correlate with various aspects of the workplace, although sometimes the research findings are inconsistent. The concept of organization based self-esteem is similar to that of self-esteem within the school climate; however the school climate is dis-similar from the typical business setting which derived the concept of organization based self-esteem. Still, several concepts and factors from organization based self-esteem may be used in helping to identify potentially relevant components of the school climate on teacher's self-esteem.

The workplace has many factors which could impact self-esteem. Perceived respect from leaders had a strong positive correlation with self-esteem (Pierce et. al, 1989). Additionally, the perceived amount of "ownership" of an organization, as well as an organization's focus on fulfilling employee needs and interests positively impacted self-esteem (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Role ambiguity was found to decrease self-

esteem, as was feelings of insignificance (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). Further studies have found trusting relationships, supportiveness, leader relationships, pay levels, and workplace discrimination to correlate with self-esteem without a causation relationship found (Pierce & Gardner, 2004).

Self-esteem was also found to be the impacting construct on workplace outcomes in some studies. Kuster, Orth, and Meier (2013) found that self-esteem predicted better work conditions and work outcomes through examining a long-term study. Self-esteem was also found to impact earnings in some studies, while competition for higher earnings in workplaces was found to negatively impact self-esteem (Drago, 2000; Pierce & Gardner, 2004). An interesting finding was that workplace changes and stress have a more impact on women's self-esteem than men's (Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996).

This is important to consider when factoring in the elementary school as the workplace, in which the workforce is 90% female (Curran, 1991; Spilt et. al, 2011). The workplace climate of the elementary school adds in additional factors outside the normal workplace, as the involvement of consumers includes children, families, and all members of the community and general society (Cohen et al, 2009). This leads to more complex relationships and often times higher levels of stress, expectations, and community judgement (Buchanan, 2009; Grayson & Alvarez, 2007). Still, interpersonal relationships are a factor which has been found to relate to self-esteem of workers in a general workplace and that of the school setting (Spilt et. al, 2011; Twemlow et. al, 2006; Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Blase et. al, 2008). Other factors which translate from general workplaces relating to worker self-esteem in the school, including a person's perceived value and belonging (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). Overall,

workplace domains and self-esteem are still inconclusive, but there are many possible relations between a workplace and self-esteem with additional complexities when this workplace becomes the school setting (Kuster et. al, 2013; Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Orth et. al, 2011).

School climate and teacher self-esteem

There has been research into a myriad of factors thought to impact self-esteem or be an outcome of self-esteem, and the school climate has not been exempt from that (Scott, 1999; Kuster et al, 2013; Baumeister et. al, 2003; Cohen et. al, 2009). However, much of the research on the school climate and self-esteem is directed towards the relationship between it and the student (Scott, 1999; Ferkany, 2008). Research linked certain factors within the school climate to adult self-esteem, notably the amount of perceived support, supervisory relationships, stress, and connectedness or participation (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Thapa et. al, 2013; Grayson & Alvarez, 2007; Huang et. al, 2007).

Of the studies which did evaluate some of the same things that are components of school climate and teacher's self-esteem, several things were found to be significant. Positive relationships with students, a component of school climate, was found to impact teacher self-esteem and beliefs of efficacy (Spilt et. al, 2011; Twemlow et. al, 2006). Additionally, negative relationships with principals or administration had a significant negative impact on teacher self-esteem (Blase et. al, 2008). Grayson and Alvarez (2007) found that the school climate affected self-esteem in an indirect way, by observation that the climate caused unhealthy amounts of stress which impacted self-esteem. The impact of teacher's self-esteem has also been supported through literature which indicates that

teachers' attitudes and behavior (impacted by self-esteem) impact the school environment (Twemlow et. al, 2006; Thapa et. al, 2013;   Overall, although research has not conducted many studies directly on the school climate and teachers' self-esteem, the research has supported further investigation into the relationship between self-esteem and the school climate.

Conceptual Framework

Ecosystems theory states that all parts of a person's surrounding systems have an interactive relationship with that person (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).   The systems may be large, such as society's values and beliefs; small, such as a relationship with a significant other or co-worker; formal, such as the legislature; or informal, such as a neighborhood. It borrows from biology and ecological theories, in that the person and their systems have a reciprocal relationship of impacting and affecting one another. There are many types of relationship exchanges in this approach, but the most common forms of interaction are "mutualism" which benefits both parties; "commensalism" which is one benefitting and the other not benefitting or being harmed; and "parasitism" which is described as one benefitting and the other being harmed (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008).

It is maintained that all the systems are constantly changing and adapting due to each system's environment, including the interactions between systems. It states that individuals (as well as symptoms) will adapt (or create coping mechanisms) to survive in an ecosystem.   Ecosystems theory states that the person should be evaluated and worked with while maintaining perspective of the possible impact of the person's surrounding environment and relationships, sometimes called a "person-in-environment" approach (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008).

Ecosystems theory fits well when studying a person's self-esteem because it is believed that there are factors outside of the person that affect self-esteem; it is also believed that self-esteem impacts outside factors and environments. This exchange of potential influence fits perfectly with the concepts laid out in ecosystems theory. Furthermore, the notion that a person may adapt or create coping mechanisms to "survive" a system gives light to particular behaviors or thought processes that occur given a certain environment; this also provides a perhaps critical understanding of *why* a person's environment may cause someone to use certain coping mechanisms, including new self-perceptions and evaluations.

Methods

One of the most common methods of evaluating self-esteem is through the use of a self-evaluation by means of an assessment or questionnaire. There are a plethora of instruments to choose from, as self-esteem has been studied widely over the past several decades, but the most widely used and empirically supported tool is the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (Schmitt & Allik, 2005). The purpose of this study was to find whether there is a relationship between the elementary school climate and teachers' self-esteem through evaluating both a self-esteem scale and school climate inventory answered by each teacher.

Research Design

The research design was a quantitative assessment using survey research. The research was conducted by an online response survey. Self-reported survey as evaluation of self-esteem has been widely used for several decades, and has been found to obtain information accurately, as the concept being measured is a subjective concept (Orth et. al,

2011; Schmitt & Allik, 2005). Survey research allows for a participant to be anonymous, as the researcher does not collect data in person. Survey research also allows for a longer amount of time available for each potential participant to respond, because the survey is available at the participant's convenience, instead of a specific time dictated by the researcher's availability. The survey was intended to be brief, taking the respondent no more than 10-15 minutes to complete. The intentional briefness was designed to maximize response rate by removing the barrier of excessive time commitment to potential participants.

Participants

Participants were recruited from within four public school districts in Iowa. School districts were first approached randomly based on known school districts in Iowa of a medium size. The school districts agreed to allow participation for their teachers, and the reported total number of participants available was 185. The participants were all currently employed and practicing teachers of Kindergarten through 5th grades at elementary schools in Iowa public schools. The participants were forwarded an e-mail through a district contact person with an explanation of the survey and invitation to participate (Appendix A), informed consent (Appendix B), and a link to the survey, which provided a page on informed consent before proceeding to the survey. The initial response rate of participants was 44% when including all participants (n=78); however, this changed due to 12 respondents dropping out before answering any questions, and 7 additional respondents identifying themselves as teachers outside the sampling population. The final response rate used was 33% (n=59), which is a high response rate in the mode of survey research (Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Saris & Gallhofer, 2007). The

number of elementary school teachers who were part of the sample population within the

school districts after checking post-participation invite and identifying teachers sent the

invite outside of the sampling population was 175.

Protection of Human Subjects

Prior to administering the survey, the researcher gained approval of proposed

research from the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure

that the research adheres to ethical standards of human-subject research and to ensure that

measures to protect the participants have been made in the research design. The research

methodology was set up so that the answers and participation of participants is

completely voluntary and anonymous. The participants received a forwarded e-mail

(from the researcher) from a district contact explaining the research and an invitation to

participate, along with a link to the survey. Prior to completing the survey online,

respondents were asked to review a one page document on informed consent (see

Appendix B), which entailed comprehensive details about the purpose of the study,

instructions on how to complete the survey, and risks and benefits associated with

participating in the study. The letter of consent also contained information on how the

researcher will maintain confidentiality of the research results and how the research data

was stored and utilized.

Research data was stored securely online using a password protected user account

accessible only by the researcher. Participants were informed that participation in the

survey will be voluntary and that they may choose to skip any of the survey questions or

stop the survey at any time, for any reason. There are no known risks or benefits to

participating in the survey. The participants were provided with the contact information

for the researcher and for the University of St. Thomas IRB for questions or concerns regarding the research.

Research Instruments

Demographic data. Each participant was asked demographic data on gender (D1), number of year experience as a teacher (D2), years at current school (D3), type of classroom setting (D4), and grade level taught (D5). Gender and type of classroom setting were in multiple choice formatting, while number of years' experience and years at current school were open entry. Grade level(s) taught was a multi-answer question with an open field for other responses. The demographic data gathered was used for determining sub-sets of teachers which have been shown to be significant in previous research and to gain a fuller understanding of the sample respondents.

Self-esteem Instrument. Self-esteem was measured by the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scales [RSES]. Questions were asked on a likert-type scale with responses from "Disagree strongly" to "agree strongly". The RSES scale was modified to be a 6 point likert scale to give more variance. A score of 45-50 on the RSES scale in this study was considered as having positive self-esteem with anything below 35 considered negative self-esteem. The positive skew of the range was established according to studies suggesting a higher normative score established as positive and only requiring negative evaluation on half or more questions as conditions indicative of negative self-esteem. Questions included assessed different contributing aspects of self-esteem, such as "I feel that I have a number of good qualities". The scale has been researched for decades to establish validity and reliability of the instrument. The scale included 5 reverse-scored questions and 5 questions scored at face value.

School Climate Instrument. Questions were formulated from the four essential components of school climate, and were scored on a 6 point likert-type scale from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly". Questions were divided into sub-categories of school climate, and the sub-categories were scored as a scale score as well as an overall school climate score. Questions addressed sub-categories of safety (C1), teaching and learning (C2), relationships (C3), and environmental-structural (C4) components of the school climate to form the overall school climate inventory scale (Appendix C). The score was formulated so that a more humanistic, or favorable of growth and learning type school climate, produced a higher score on the scales.

The overall school climate inventory was comprised of 30 questions assessing the four components of school climate with an additional question of overall evaluation of school. The safety sub-scale was comprised of 7 questions assessing physical, social, and emotional safety within the school climate which include questions such as "Students her often bully or taunt" and "There is consistent and fair enforcement of the rules". The relationships sub-scale was comprised of 7 questions assessing different aspects of relationships and belonging within the school including "Voicing concerns at school is not encouraged" and "I feel like a valued member of my school". The teaching and learning sub-scale was comprised of 10 questions assessing the teaching and learning opportunities offered and endorsed for both students and the continued professional development of teachers. This scale included questions such as "Asking questions is viewed as a negative thing here" and "Children here learn how to be an empathetic person". The environmental-structural scale was comprised of five questions which assess the physical structure of the school climate as well as the institutional

environment. Questions included in this scale include "I feel connected to my school" and "My school is dirty and not maintained properly". Some items in each sub-scale had reverse scoring to add to reliability measures of the instrument.

The questions chosen were based in literature on the topic of school climate and specifically based on Cohen et. al's (2009) adaptation of the specific components of school climate. Questions were also specifically derived from factors found to have significance in the workplace and other instruments designed to evaluate workplace climate and factors which were found to relate to self-esteem (Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). The overall school climate inventory as well as the sub-scales were tested for reliability during data analysis as these are newly developed scales. The overall school climate inventory had Cronbach's alpha of .863, which is well over the .70 considered reliable for research in social sciences (Saris & Gallhofer, 2007). The subscales each had Cronbach's alpha coefficients over .70 themselves. This indicates high reliability of the scale and subscales.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data was collected using the University of St. Thomas Qualtrics system. First, potential school districts were contacted and consent was gained to invite teachers to participate in research. The researcher then identified and sent e-mails describing the procedure for inviting teachers to participate and the e-mail to be forwarded to teachers. The district contact for each site e-mailed the message to teachers and sent a response to the researcher indicating that this step had been completed. From there, participants read the invitation to participate and clicked into the link if they wanted to participate. Before being able to participate in the survey, each participant read

and agreed to the informed consent process provided both in the invitation email and the page before the survey. Without agreeing to the informed consent, participants were unable to complete the survey. A follow-up e-mail was sent to the district contacts requesting confirmation of the first e-mail being sent (if they had not done so already) and a second reminder e-mail be sent to teachers. Researcher included the e-mail to again be sent to teachers. The district contacts followed up with researcher by providing confirmation of the second e-mail being sent out to potential respondents. Researcher closed the survey to responses at a cutoff of one week post-reminder e-mail to districts, as indicated in the second invitation for participation.

Data Analysis

  Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics were run for each question relevant to the research question in the survey, including demographic information, self-esteem scale, school climate scale, along with subscales and specific factors in the scales. Descriptive statistics in the demographics section gives a better understanding of a representative sample of elementary school teachers in regards to gender, years of experience teaching, years at current school, what type of classroom is taught in, and the grade level(s) taught by teachers. The descriptive statistics of the self-esteem scale help to gain a better understanding of the range of scores of self-esteem, as well as any groupings of teachers' scores for self-esteem. The descriptive statistics for the school climate inventory scale as well as sub-scales will provide information regarding teachers' range of scores and evaluations of the school climate as well as sub-components of the school climate. Additional factors which were evaluated for relationship to teacher self-esteem included connectedness, feeling valued, and inclination to ask questions. Each of

these factors have been found in previous research to be linked to teacher self-esteem and will provide a fuller understanding of sub-categories of teachers and ranges of responses to individual factors. The descriptive data analysis provides a thorough understanding of the sample's response to each question.

      Correlation and Means Difference Statistics. Inferential statistics were completed using SPSS to display any connection between two or more variables, as relevant to the research question: Is the elementary school climate related to teacher's self-esteem? To explore the question more in depth, several more direct questions were explored. Questions that were asked include: 1) Is there a sub-group of teachers which show a relationship between self-esteem and the school climate, 2) Are there sub-categories or factors within the school climate that have a relationship with teacher's self-esteem, and 3) Is there a combination of sub-groups of teachers and sub-categories or factors of the school climate which have a greater or lesser relationship? Inferential statistics were completed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software package. Measurements of the statistical relationship between variables are reported in the findings section, and statistically significant relationships discussed. Statistical significance for all factors was evaluated at a P=.05 level. Statistical tests, including means variance (Chi square) and correlation tests were conducted to address the following variables.

      Rosenberg self-esteem score and demographic data. Inferential analysis will be performed on each of the demographic data responses and RSES scores as a way of answering the question "Is there a difference between general RSES cores and sub-groups of teachers?" This question was analyzed through running several tests. For D1,

a t-test was run with an independent variable of gender (operationalized as 1 for female, 2 for male) and a dependent variable of RSES score. The research hypothesis for this question was that there is a difference between RSES scores according to gender. The null hypothesis was that there is no relationship between RSES scores and gender. D2 was run through a correlation test with RSES scores, with a research hypothesis of a relationship between number of years' experience and RSES scores and a null hypothesis of no relationship between number of years' experience and RSES scores. D2 was also re-categorized into years taught with 0-9 years=1; 10-19=2; 20-29=3; 30+=4; and to run questions based on literature suggesting certain ranges of teaching correlate with self-esteem ratings. D3 was run through a correlation test with RSES scores, with a research hypothesis of a relationship between number of years' experience and RSES scores and a null hypothesis of no relationship between number of years at a school and RSES scores. D4, type of classroom setting, was operationalized as standard classroom=1, special education=2, and specialist=3. A t-test was run with a null hypothesis of no relationship existing between type of classroom setting and self-esteem score. D5, grade level taught, was re-categorized to run inferential statistics. D5 was categorized for answers of kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grade into "lower grades" and 3rd, 4th, and 5th into "upper grades". Teachers who indicated more than one grade taught were be discarded for this test if they cross the line of "lower" and "upper" grade level taught but included when teaching multiple grade levels within the limits. A t-test with a dependent variable of RSES scale and independent variable of lower or upper grade level taught to assess difference in scores between upper and lower grade level taught.

Rosenberg self-esteem score and overall school climate score. The question addressed with this is the overall research objective of "Is there a relationship between the overall RSES score and the overall school climate inventory score?" The research hypothesis is that there is a relationship between a teacher's RSES score and overall school climate score. The null hypothesis was that there is no association between RSES score and school climate score. To assess this, a correlation test was run with RSES score and school climate inventory score. Sub-groups of teachers' RSES scores also went through the same procedure with that group's RSES scores and overall school climate scores to determine a specific correlation for the sub-group.

Rosenberg self-esteem score and sub-categories of school climate. The question that was addressed with statistics is whether there is a relationship between RSES score and certain sub-categories of school climate. To determine this, a correlation test was run on RSES score and each sub-category of school climate, including safety, relationship, learning and teaching, and environmental-structural (as discussed in instrument section and shown in Appendix C). The questions comprising each category were compiled and Cronbach's alpha was established for the sub-scale before analyzing the sub-scale with RSES. There will be four correlation tests run in total, one for each sub-category with RSES score. Any statistically significant sub-categories of teacher's RSES scores will also be run through the same tests. Factors from the school climate of connectedness, asking questions, and feeling valued will also undergo a correlation test with RSES and any corresponding statistically significant sub-categories of demographic groups.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths. The nature of survey research is a strength in that it uses a format which helps to ensure anonymity and potentially boost the accurate sharing of possible negative ratings which may be inhibited if anonymity is not assured. The survey set-up is flexible on timing of participation in the study and allows for participation at a time most convenient to the respondent. An additional strength of the study is that it uses a similar population for data collection but allows the populations to vary in geographic locations within a state, which allows for a more accurate portrayal of the teaching population.

The study was designed to be brief, taking no more than 15 minutes, which is helpful to attract a higher response from the population. The study used one of the most used tools for assessing self-esteem, which has been found to have high validity and reliability. The remainder of the assessment tool is based in current research on school climate and provides a broad and encompassing assessment of the components identified by leaders in the field to be essential to school climate.

Limitations. The proposed research will not be able to be generalized to larger populations, and due to the timeline and the nature of the study, there will not be the ability to draw any sort of causative relationship between factors. Another limitation of the proposed research is that it will use a tool which has not been previously used, so its reliability and external validity are unknown other than face value of potential results. The participants involved in the study must have computer access to complete the survey, and must have time to complete the survey either while at the school in which they currently teach or be able to forward the link to a personal e-mail and retrieve the link at home.

The study is also limited to K-5 teachers and misses some staff in elementary

schools which may provide important data on the school climate, including teachers in

other grade levels, secretaries, principals and other administrators, para-educators,

support staff, custodial staff, and other non-certified teaching positions or consultative

associates with the school such as occupational therapists, district or area education

agency (AEA) social workers, physical therapists, nurses, and speech pathologists. The

target population of teachers also reflects a limitation, as districts may have an

elementary system set up differently than building structures which house kindergarten to

5th grade, as illustrated in the previous literature. This leaves possibilities of incomplete

responses from within districts on the individual school climate, as pre-kindergarten, pre-

school, and 6th grade teachers are outside the target population.

The sample chosen for this study also limits the study as all districts are from

within the same state, and all districts are in a medium-size or smaller district. This is

limiting as different states and larger districts may have very different school climates

and experiences which are not able to be reflected in this study. The study is also

somewhat limited in that it requires consent for potential participation from the district

prior to any teacher completing the survey, and this process may change the type of

school-bases able to be reached as well as teachers who respond.

Findings

Demographics

There was a total of 78 recorded respondents. Of these 78 respondents, 12 were

"drop outs" which did not complete the whole survey. The responses of these

respondents, since none completed the RSES or school climate inventory, have been

eliminated from both response rate tabulations and data analysis of results. The remaining 66 respondents eliminated an additional 7 due to teachers responding with grade level outside of the target population (pre-k and 6th grade). The population creation numbers were carefully re-tabulated to ensure only teachers from kindergarten to 5th grade were included for data population. The remaining population of 59 was used for data analysis of all components. The original response rate (with drop outs) was 44% with a finalized response rate of 33%. This response rate allows for the response to be generalized to the sample for this particular study without having issues with internal validity, according to the central limit theorem.

The respondents were made up of 54 (91%) female and 5 (9%) males. The years of teaching experience varied from 0 to 41 years, with a mean of 19.24 years and a standard deviation of 11.106 years. The years at current school varied from 0 to 41 years, with a mean of 12.14 years and a standard deviation of 10.344 years. There was a total of 33 respondents who reported teaching in regular education classrooms, 11 special education teachers, and 14 specialist teachers (guidance/counseling, art, music, gym, behavioral specialist). The grades taught, which allowed for multiple response, reported a total of 104 responses from the 58 respondents. The fill in responses from "other" were added into respective

columns, if indicated in the response.

To define categories of "lower" and "upper" grades taught, Kindergarten, 1st grade, or 2nd grade responses were re-coded and operationalized as "1" and responses of 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade were re-coded and operationalized as "2". Respondents indicating multiple grade levels taught including either lower and upper grades or not indicating a

specific grade level taught were re-coded and operationalized as "0". The variable after

categorization is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Grade level taught: categorized into lower and upper grade level taught

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid All level or unknown	11	19.0	19.0	19.0
Lower (K, 1st, 2nd)	31	53.4	53.4	72.4
Upper (3rd, 4th, 5th)	16	27.6	27.6	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 1.1

Self-esteem findings

The total respondents for the Rosenberg self-esteem scale was n=56. The scale

range was 10 to 60 with the minimum reported score of 32 and maximum score of 60.

The mean score was 52.46 with a standard deviation of 6.14. Self-esteem and years of

experience (when re-coded into categories) was found to have a correlation of .286 with a

p=.032 but not a significant difference between means. All other sub-groups of

demographics in relation to self-esteem were found to have correlations and differences

in means, but these correlations and means differences were not significant for all areas

of demographics in the sample.

School climate findings

The school climate inventory scale was tested for reliability and was found to

have Cronbach's Alpha of .863. The school climate inventory scale had n=56 with a

range of 98 to 173 of a total possible range from 30 to 180. The mean score was 139.73

with a standard deviation of 18.44. Sub-groups of demographics in relation to school

climate scale with significance included gender (although the sub-group is too small for

comparative nature so was ruled-out of statistical consideration for this study). Years of

teaching experience, years at school, and type of classroom setting did not have

statistically significant findings with school climate. Grade level taught (after re-coded

into categories) was found to have a significant difference between groups. The mean for

teachers of lower grades was 133.06 with a standard deviation of 17.93 while upper

grades had a mean of 148.93 with a standard deviation of 16.87. The F value was .749

with Levene's test of .391. The difference in means was found to be significant with a p

value of .006 (see Table 2).

Table 2

School Climate Inventory Score and Grade Level Taught (in categories)

	Grade taught	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Schoolclimatescale	Lower	31	133.0645	17.92565	3.21954
	Upper	15	148.9333	16.86699	4.35504

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.749	.391	-2.867	44	.006**	-15.86882	5.53426	-27.02238	-4.71525
Equal variances not assumed			-2.930	29.388	.006**	-15.86882	5.41588	-26.93920	-4.79844

Notes. N=56. **p≤.01, two-tailed.

The sub-categories of the school climate inventory were calculated based on the previously grouped questions. The safety sub-scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .704 for the 7 questions. The safety sub-scale had a range of 7-42 with a reported range of 21 to 42. The n=58 with a mean of 33.68 and a standard deviation of 4.90. The relationship sub-scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .829 with a total of 7 questions. The range for the scale was 7 to 42 with a reported range of 22 to 42. The scale had a n=57 with a mean of 33.12 and a standard deviation of 4.91. The scale of teaching and learning recorded a Cronbach's alpha of .813 for the 10 questions. The range for this sub-scale was 10 to 60 with a reported range of 30 to 56 with an n=57. The mean was 44.25 with a standard deviation of 6.53. The sub-scale of environmental-structural had a Cronbach's alpha of .704 for the five items. The range for the scale was 5 to 30 with a reported range of 12 to 30 with a n=57. The mean was 23.17 with a standard deviation of 3.73.

Self-esteem and climate correlations

The Rosenberg self-esteem scale and the school climate inventory scale was run through a Pearson correlation test and found a correlation of .348 at the p=.01 level (see table 3) with an n=54.

Table 3.

Correlation of self-esteem scale and school climate inventory

		SeScale	Schoolclimatescale
SeScale	Pearson Correlation	1	.348[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010
	N	56	54
Schoolclimatescale	Pearson Correlation	.348[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	
	N	54	56

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Teacher Self-Esteem and School Climate Scale Ratings
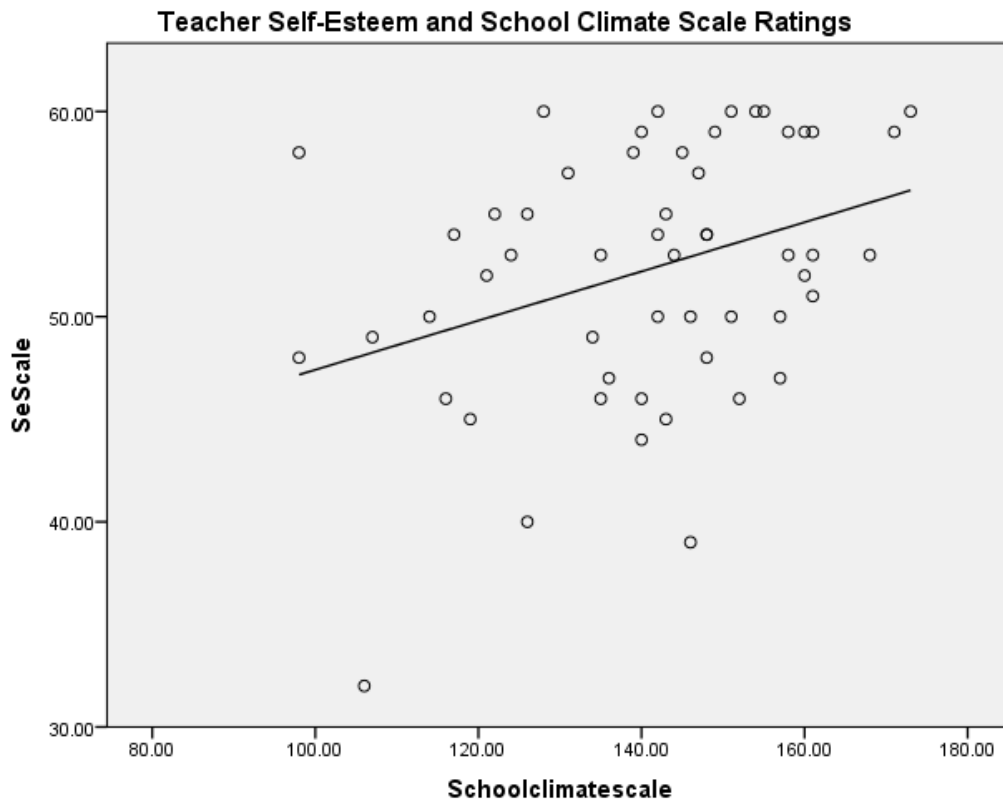
The sub-categories of demographics were added in to check for variance and it was found that there was a correlation of .46 at p=.01 level for the sub-group of regular education teachers, but no significance was found for special education or specialists. The number of years taught when re-coded into categories was found to have a correlation for the sub-group of teachers with 0 to 9 years of experience (correlation=.636 with p=.026), while none of the other categories of years of experience had a statistically significant correlation. Grade level taught (recoded into younger/older level) was found to have statistically significant correlation for upper grade levels with correlation of .659 at a p=.01 level.

The sub-scales of school climate were all run through correlation tests with self-esteem scales. The sub-scale of relationships was found to have a correlation of .447 at a p=.001 level (see Figure 2). Years of teaching experience was found to have a significant relationship for those with 0-9 years' experience (Pearson correlation=.718 with p=.009) when considered as a sub-group of teachers for the correlation of self-esteem and the sub-scale of relationships. The other categories of years of experience had correlations which were not statistically significant of .406 (10-19 years), .325 (20-29 years), and .481 (30+ years). The group of 30+ years had a p level of p=.096. The teaching and learning sub-scale was found to have a correlation of .308 at a p=.05 level. The sub-category of years of experience found teachers with 0-9 years experience had a correlation of .616 with

p=.033.

Figure 2
Correlation of self-esteem and relationship sub-scale by years of experience
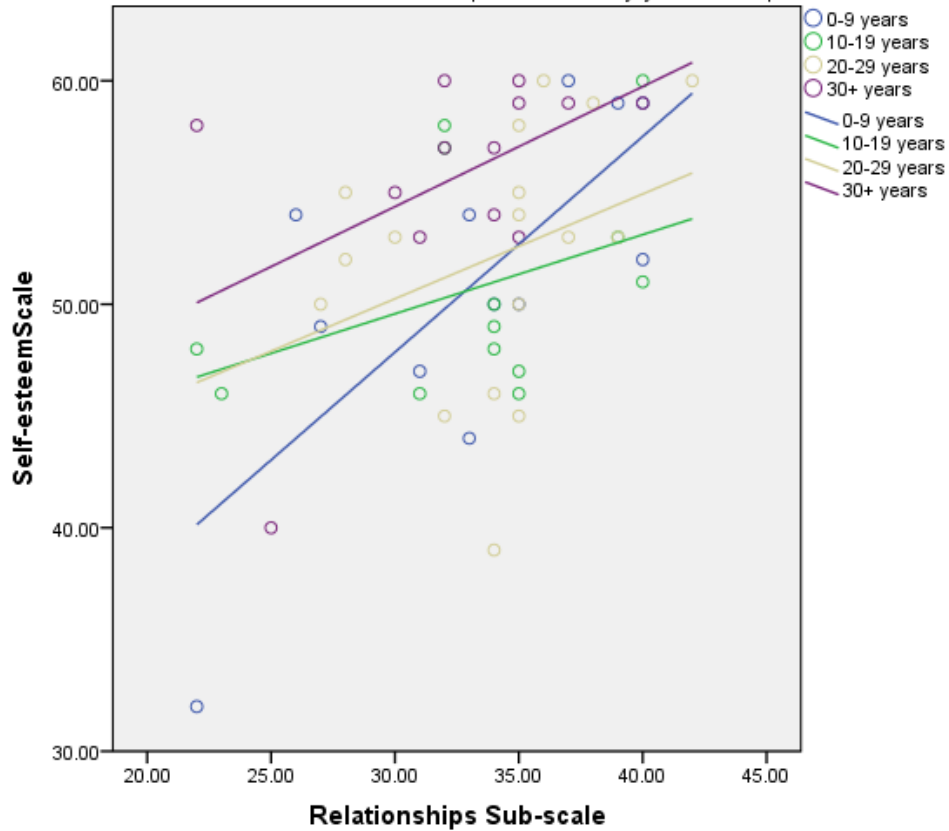
Specific factors within the school climate were run for correlation with self-esteem. Connectedness to the school had a correlation of .262 but with a p of .053, was not significant. Feeling valued had a correlation of .501 at a p=.001 level (p=.000). This was further broken down by years of teaching experience, with statistically significant correlations for 0-9 years of experience (.805 at p=.002) while other years had correlation of .414 with p=.159 (10-19 years); .178 with p=.493 (20-29 years); and .463 with p=.111. "Asking questions is viewed as a negative thing here" was found to have a correlation of -.306 with p=.023.

The school climate was checked for specific correlation to questions of the RSES. Four questions were found to have statistically significant correlations to the school climate scale. "I take a positive attitude towards myself" had a correlation of .441 at p=.001 level. Pride about self "I do not have much to be proud about" had a correlation -.266 at p=.05. "All in all, I'm inclined to believe I'm a failure" had a correlation of -.302 at p=.05 level. "I feel I have a number of good qualities" showed a correlation of .299 at p=.05 level.

Discussion

Teachers who participated in this study had a high overall self-esteem rating, which an average over 50. The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale has found through various applications that an average score to determine positive self-esteem would be somewhere around 45 with a poor rating of self-esteem being anything 30 or lower. This indicates that teachers in the sample overall showed a positive evaluation of their own self-esteem. Several things could be impacting this finding, as teachers were only from four school districts, and the districts themselves may not have been very diverse in what is happening within the school. Also, the teachers in this study could have had a tendency to more positively rate both themselves and their surroundings based on a Midwestern neutrality-positivity bias in survey research. The sample size with a response rate of 33% allows for statistics to be processed without internal validity issues according to central limit theorem; however, it limits this particular study's applicability to the population of teachers outside of the sample population. The sample did appear to be representative in gender for teachers in elementary schools, with an overwhelming amount of respondents identifying as female (91%). This sample did have a larger number of teachers who were

either special-education of specialists than was expected as representative of the sample, which could have affected the findings. Additionally, there was a higher amount of teachers who reported teaching lower elementary than there was for upper elementary. Clearly, this is a study of the subjective experience of teachers and their views on the school climate, which may or may not be accurate in a larger population. The number of years of experience appeared to be normative to the teaching profession or even slightly higher than overall, with the same being true for number of years at the current school.

Research on teacher's self-esteem had previously suggested that the stress and other factors within the school climate may contribute to a teacher's lower self-esteem, especially teachers who are vulnerable by being newer to the teaching profession (Blase et al, 2008; Spilt et. al, 2011). This study supported this by means of the overall findings, but also added evidence when checking for sub-categories of teachers. The sub-category of teachers with fewer than 10 years of experience had multiple factors which were highly associated with their self-esteem ratings, including relationship subscale (strong correlation of .636), teaching and learning subscale (strong correlation at .616), and feeling like a valued member of the school (with a strong correlation of .805). At the same time, teachers with fewer than 10 years of experience were not found to have statistically significant differences in self-esteem ratings or overall school climate ratings alone. This sub-group of teachers had a more significant correlation than other groups of teachers when looking at the relationship between self-esteem and the school climate.

Another difference in categories of teachers was found in relation to rating of the school climate, with teachers in lower grades reporting a lower evaluation of the school climate than those in upper grades. The literature indicates that there is a possibility that

teachers in younger grades, due to the nature and content of study, are more inclined to seek out a more humanistic environment, and therefore may be more attuned with certain aspects of school climate or more sensitively aligned with certain factors which may not be noticed by other teachers, such as whether teachers are critical of students' work, how much students are taught to be empathic people, or the level of support felt by other adults. Contrary to indication from previous findings of special-education teachers and regular education teachers having differences in both self-esteem and the school climate in studies evaluating these independently, this sub-category of teachers did not have any statistically significant differences between the groups when looking at self-esteem and school climate.

The main hypothesis of a relationship existing between teachers' self-esteem and the school climate rating was supported by the findings of this study. This study found that there was a moderately strong correlation between a teacher's self-esteem rating and their assessment of their school climate. This is supportive of the systems approach that the environmental context and relationship is related to the self and self-evaluation, which is also related to others in the same (and other) environments in their lives. The literature has already indicated a relationship between student's self-esteem ratings and the school environment and also between the student's self-esteem ratings and teacher's self-esteem (Christou et. al, 2001; Spilt et. al, 2011; Scott, 1999; Schmitt, 2005). These previous relationships found have been supported in a systems approach by this study supporting the triangular relationship and providing a "missing link" of a relationship between teacher's self-esteem and the school climate in the findings of a moderate correlation between a teacher's self-esteem and rating of the school climate.

The correlations of the school climate and self-esteem expanded into the sub-scale of relationship, which found that relationships within the school climate are even more highly correlated with teachers' self-esteem than the school climate as a whole. The importance of relationships has been well established in many realms of social science, including the study of self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965; Scott, 1999; Foster et. al, 2007). It has been reported as one of the basic tenants of forming and maintaining a positive self-esteem. Furthermore, the relationships one has at work has been found to impact self-esteem in other lines of work (Ceylan, 2009; Spilt et. al, 2011; Kuster et. al, 2013). This supports the belief that interpersonal relationships are correlated with self-esteem; in this case it expands previous research establishing this relationship to teachers' relationships within the school climate.

The ratings of teachers on the teaching and learning portion of the school climate has been previously supported as important to teacher's evaluations of their own abilities, students' evaluations of both their abilities and of their teachers, and, in some ways, evaluated by policies which are implemented and curriculum which is shaped to hopefully assist in the endeavor of being both a teacher and a continuing learner. The relationship of teaching and learning within the school climate and its relationship to self-esteem had not been previously studied in the literature, so the finding of a moderate relationship between the two suggests that the research done independently on self-esteem of teachers and policies implemented regarding school climate perhaps have a relationship to one another.

Additional factors of both the school climate and overall self-esteem as well as specific factors of self-esteem and overall school climate were found to have a

relationship in this study. Pierce and Gardner (2004) had previously supported a relationship between self-esteem and school connectedness, and although a positive correlation was found in this study, the relationship was not found to be significant. Feeling as though the school client was open to teachers asking questions and getting help was also found by many previous studies to be a factor which impacted both teacher self-esteem and teacher attrition (Vanderslice, 2010; Twigg, 2008; Thapa et. al, 2013; Huang et. al, 2007). This study found a moderate correlation between teacher's self-esteem and feeling as though the school climate encouraged asking questions and learning. This indicates that the ability to ask questions without feeling like a person will have chastising, condemnation, of negative feedback from others at work may be related to that person's self-esteem. Feeling like a valued member of the school was a third factor highlighted in previous studies for being related to a person's self-esteem (Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). This study supported the previous findings that feeling like a valued member of a group is related to a person's self-esteem. In fact, this study found a strong correlation at a statistically significant level of p=.0001; in other words, the probability that this finding was just by chance is nearly none. This correlation, already strong, was found at an even higher correlation (.805) for teachers with 0-9 years of teaching experience. What this suggests is that although feeling like a valued member is correlated with all teachers' self-esteem ratings, it is even more closely related to teachers with fewer years of experience. This is important to remember due to the plethora of research on teacher attrition that suggests the first 5 to 10 years are the most likely years for a teacher to quit, as well as studies which link low self-esteem and depression to high levels of teacher attrition (Spilt et. al, 2011; Buchanan, 2009).

The final factors looked at in this study were factors with well-established history in the study of self-esteem to the overall school climate. Four factors of assessing self-esteem were found to have statistically significant relationships to the teachers' evaluations of the school climate. First, there was a moderate (.441) and highly significant (p=.001) correlation between teachers' assessment of taking a positive attitude towards themselves and their evaluation of the school climate. Other research has been limited on its' specific study of this factor of self-esteem, but have found it to directly link to happiness (Cheng & Furnham, 2003; Baumeister et. al, 2003). Additionally, there is belief in many theories including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy that being able to take a positive attitude with oneself leads to changes in the brain, or a re-training of the brain, to become more neutral to positive of external stimuli in the environment (Beck, 2011; Linehan, 2015). Additional factors which have not been studied in previous research but found to have weak to moderate correlations with school climate included pride about self, feeling accomplished, and recognizing good qualities. These all suggest that it is important for teachers to be recognized for their successes and good qualities, and for schools to embrace a strengths-based approach to teachers, as their recognition of self as having accomplishments, pride about self, and recognition of good qualities all are things which can be supported and focused on with external reminders such as praise, compliments, and feedback.

Implications

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study have impact across various professions, including educators, administrators, social workers, professionals such as educational psychologists

and consultants, and the general public. It is important to understand the implications of these findings and similar previous findings and to incorporate it into the educational system at the elementary school level both in practice and policy. It is also important for social workers to understand the implications of this study as it relates to work in elementary schools, with families, with individuals who work in the school system, and with children and human development.

Implications for elementary educators. Educators, including all professionals within the school climate, are at the center of those who need to be aware of the potential relationship between teachers' self-esteem and the school climate. These professionals in the school system are a rich inter-professional team themselves of teachers, administrators, para-educators and support staff, custodians, nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals who are on the "front lines" of the interaction between the systems of the school climate and teachers every day. Along with these professionals who are physically within the school setting, policy-makers including school boards all the way though national congress-people impact the everyday interactions of the school climate and teachers.

In order to create an environment and self-esteem levels which are positive and more conducive for learning and teaching, those within the school climate may want to incorporate a positive-based intervention and interaction model, such as PBIS or any number of positive-focused models. Teachers, staff, and other professionals should be acutely aware of, but non-judgmental of, the interactions between and amongst different persons within the school and should practice empathy and effective problem-solving skills to resolve issues. This may help to develop and maintain healthy relationships

amongst all different people involved in the school system, including teachers, administrators, staff, students, families, and community.

This approach may additionally potentially foster an inclusive environment. The development of policies and attitudes of inclusivity supported by this study's findings and previous research would help to improve the school climate rating of teachers, students, and community members. This would include small steps such as ensuring accessible facilities to persons with disabilities, policies which are inclusive of different backgrounds and beliefs, clear and consistent bullying, harassment, and discrimination policies, as well as physical inclusiveness including posters, decorations, and varied teaching methods. Additionally, all staff should hold themselves and each other accountable for maintaining the positive and inclusive environment by self-monitoring and practicing mindfulness of themselves and others. Some elements of mindfulness may be helpful to incorporate into classroom practice as a way of emphasizing inclusivity, self-care, and self-compassion.

Administrators in particular may have a unique opportunity to foster a humanistic climate and relationships for teachers. As a leader, administrators are able to set an example of the tone and values of their building. As such, administrators may want to ensure that they are modeling the inclusivity, professionalism, empathy, and open-ness that is in line with both the school district vision and the climate they want to set.

Of course, administrators (as well as others within schools) have a complex and multi-faceted job, which should not be minimized. However, taking simple steps to increase positive relationships amongst staff, increase cohesion, increase openness and growth, and ultimately create a climate in which teachers (and all staff) feel valued may

decrease the workload and the issues that often become a large part of the administrator's varied duties. This effort to improve relationships is critical to improving both teachers' self-esteem and the school climate, which may ultimately relate to an improvement in other systems within the school, including student self-esteem, truancy, and academic achievement.

Some small steps which may create this change include ensuring that each teacher receives positive feedback or notes once a week (or an attainable amount of teachers, per discretion of the administrator), creating grade level teams for consultation and team-building, allowing teachers to be part of the hiring process, meeting with "team leaders" to discuss issues and improvements in a way that aligns with practice in other professions, and ensuring things like birthdays and other life events are noted personally by the administrator (by means of a card for each teacher on their birthday, a note, phone call, or visit for life events, or mention during a team meeting of celebrations). These practices may also impact the level of empowerment felt by teachers, which has been shown to directly impact teachers' abilities to teach effectively and to receive and implement feedback. Administrators should pay special attention to the development and learning of teachers with under 10 years of experience, as this is a critical time of professional development and development of interactional and teaching patterns. Administrators could set up a mentoring program with more experienced teachers for teachers to consult and regularly receive feedback. Additionally, staff development especially for newer teachers could be put into place to foster growth and learning. Another simple thing that administrators could do especially for newer teachers is to do

something to welcome new teachers at the beginning of term and to personally greet teachers.

Policy-makers have the tenuous task of balancing the interests of academic achievement and regulation of schools and the growth and development of the whole person (both student and professionals). This research indicates that policies which favor a "push" for achievement at the detriment to the well-being of people or that take away from schools in need is counter-productive to their purpose of achievement. Policy makers instead should consider policies which both favor achievement and growth and development of schools, students, and professionals. Schools which struggle with achievement should be given funding and support to enhance the growth and development and resolve issues and decrease the stress which all too often creates high rates of teacher attrition and ineffective teaching. Policy makers should consider allowing schools to develop a plan for the additional support and funding which includes any highlighted areas of not only academic need of the school but areas of school climate as well.

Policy makers should prioritize knowledge of the inter-related relationships of the school climate, teacher self-esteem, and student self-esteem and achievement during all policy development and implementation. Policies which encourage teachers to be learners and cognizant of their own growth should be enacted at the local through national level in order to create a climate void of fear and dismissal based on factors outside the teacher's control and to create a national stance on education which encourage professional longevity amongst teachers. Practical policies, including policies which increase funding for teachers to attend workshops and professional development,

would be achievable at all levels. Policies which add to the fear-based climate of dismissal should be re-evaluated and schools could encourage consultation groups and mentoring or teams of teachers to foster and encourage growth. Lastly, policy makers should strive to create policies which allow for emphasis to be placed on the individual growth of each child in areas of academia, social, moral, and emotional growth. These policies would provide adequate funding and provisions for schools so that the demands are in line with the time it takes to foster growth and development of the youth of this nation.

   Implications for social work. Clinical social work practice encompasses many areas, including school social work, preventative services, policy, therapy for children, individuals, and families, and advocacy work. It is important for social workers practicing within any of these areas to be aware of the school climate and its relationship to other factors, especially self-esteem.   Social workers work amongst systems to understand and help solve issues which may be affecting individuals so they can function optimally in their lives. As such, social workers practicing in most any theoretical framework can use knowledge of the relationship between school climate, teacher self-esteem, and students to inform potential support or pitfalls in a person's development. Social workers could use the base of understanding of the inter-relatedness to advocate for changes to the school climate which would improve relationships, teaching and learning opportunities, openness, and a culture of inclusivity which may impact clients directly or indirectly. Social workers could also use the findings of relationships and feeling valued to inform advocate for, practice, and directly teach or intervene for populations in the school climate.

Social workers have been used for years in schools as a means to help students and their families in a variety of ways. A way for social workers to use the findings of this study is to work with students and families in ways which would both indirectly and directly impact the school climate, such as teaching communication skills, advocating for needs, creating learning plans which best help the student, and conducting individual or group therapy to address needs. A role in which school social workers may have been under-utilized is that of consultant for administration for creating an effective and cohesive environment for students, teachers, and community. Unfortunately, the varying set-up of school districts and differences in collaborative efforts has been a past barrier to utilizing social workers as school advocates and consultants.

Social workers should be aware of the potential relationships between the school climate and teachers' self-esteem and also the interactions between teachers and students as well as students and the school climate. Social workers could provide suggestions which could improve the school climate to administrators seeking support, conduct groups to address needs of students, or advocate on behalf of student, families, or teachers regarding changes or improvements needed to the school climate. Social workers in schools should advocate for environments which are inclusive of diversity, establish healthy relationships amongst teachers, students, families, and administrators, and monitors the well-being of individuals in a non-punitive nature. Social workers should also be aware of how policy and stressors impacting the school climate affects the self-esteem of teachers. Social workers could additionally advocate on behalf of those affected by the elementary school climate (which, in effect, is everyone), to create

policies which emphasize growth and development of the person and hold the priority of dignity and worth of the person as well as the rights of individuals.

Implications for Future Research

The lack of research directly looking at the relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate suggests that this area of research needs to be further studied by replicating this study. Furthermore, this study should be applied to other geographic areas, different sizes of school districts, and other grade levels taught to determine the relationship of school climate and teacher self-esteem. Another suggestion for future research is to expand this study to include students as a way of comparing the relationships between school climate and student achievement and self-esteem, school climate and teacher self-esteem, and teacher self-esteem and corresponding student self-esteem and achievement. More studies should be conducted on teachers new to the profession and the interaction of the school climate on their self-esteem, development, and attrition. The research also needs to further study the relationship between feeling valued and teacher self-esteem. Research could investigate further the nature of the relationship between self-esteem and specific factors of the school climate by investigating strategies to raise ratings of specific factors and then implementing those strategies in the school climate and comparing pre and post-intervention ratings of the factors and self-esteem scores. Additional research methods may be helpful in continuing to understand the relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate, including: in depth interviews, surveys, observations, experimental approaches, longitudinal study, or policy analysis and effects on the schools.

Conclusion

Self-esteem is a factor which has been studied in a myriad of ways throughout the development of psychology, social work, and sociology. Self-esteem has been studied in correlation to outcomes of a person's life, in relation to effectiveness at work, and as it relates to other facets of a person's life. Likewise, the school climate has been studied in several areas to determine its relationship to achievement, student self-esteem, and related factors. The relationship between the school climate and self-esteem of a teacher overall had not been studied to examine a relationship similar to the relationship found with each factor and other systems within the school.

The findings from this study suggest that there is a relationship between teacher self-esteem and the school climate, which adds to the body of knowledge on teacher self-esteem, the school climate and its relationship to students' achievement and self-esteem, teacher self-esteem and student achievement and self-esteem, and knowledge about the school climate. There are many things which can be done to incorporate this knowledge into practice, including creating environments at schools which promote growth and development of the person, inclusivity, and openness and honesty. These improvements can be made through individual efforts and mindfulness, school-by-school implementation of strategies, and through systemic and policy changes which emphasize the healthy development and growth of the whole person.

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Appendix A – Invitation to Participate

Potential respondents will be sent the following email from their district contact person inviting them to participate in this clinical research project.

To: Respondent

From: kdstewart@stthomas.edu /district contact person

Subject: Clinical Research Project: School climate and teachers' self-esteem

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in a clinical research project investigating the relationship between the school climate and teachers' self-esteem. This research seeks to identify whether a relationship exists between the school climate and teachers' reported self-esteem evaluation. The survey has three sections, and will take between 10 to 15 minutes to complete. You have been selected as a potential participant because you are an elementary school teacher within the public school systems.

This study is being conducted by Kelsey Stewart, a MSW student in the St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas Masters of Social Work Program. Felicia Sy, PhD, is supervising this clinical research project.

For additional information about this study and to participate in the study please click the link

below:

Questions about the survey should be directed to the researcher:

Kelsey Stewart

St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas MSW Student

kdstewart@stthomas.edu

Appendix B – Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Teacher Self-Esteem and the Elementary School Climate
681612-1

I am conducting a study about teacher self-esteem and the elementary school climate. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an elementary school teacher in a public school district. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kelsey Stewart, a Master's level student in the School of Social Work at the University of St. Thomas. Felicia Sy, Phd., LICSW, is advising the project.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine a potential relationship between teachers' self-esteem and the elementary school climate. This will be determined through the completion of an anonymous online survey comprised of demographic questions, a self-esteem scale, and a school climate inventory which will take approximately 15-20 minutes. This study will generate information to create best practice strategies around improving overall school climate for students, personnel, and community.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to complete a 15-20 minute survey. The survey will be comprised of general demographic information, a self-esteem scale, and a school climate inventory. You are asked to be as honest as possible in your answers while moving through the questions without thinking too long about any individual question. .

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has no known direct risks or benefits for participating.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.   The types of records I will create include a master data set and data analysis records. These records will be kept in a password protected computer drive accessible only to the researcher. The data records will be destroyed after completion of this study, by July 1, 2015.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your individual school or school district or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until you complete and submit your survey. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you, your data will be used as the researcher will not be able to discern which record is yours*.* You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Kelsey Stewart. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-547-9306*.* You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Felicia Sy, at 651-962-5813. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-6038 with any questions or concerns.

You are encouraged to print a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age.

By clicking the "Next" button, I am providing my electronic consent to participate

Appendix C – Survey Instrument

Q1 What is your gender
❍ Female (1)
❍ Male (2)

Q2 How many years of teaching experience do you have?

Q3 How many years have you been at your current school?

Q5 I currently teach in:
❍ Standard classroom (1)
❍ Special education (2)
❍ Specialist (gym, art, music, counseling, etc.) (3)

Q4 In which grade(s) do you currently teach?
❑ Kindergarten (1)
❑ 1st (2)
❑ 2nd (3)
❑ 3rd (4)
❑ 4th (5)
❑ 5th (6)
❑ Other (7) _____

Q6 Please rate the following from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly" based on your beliefs about yourself

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Slightly Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on equal basis with others (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I feel I have a number of good qualities (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
All in all, I am inclined to believe I'm a failure (3)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I am able to do things as well as most people (4)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I do not have much to be proud about (5)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I take a positive attitude toward myself (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself (7)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I wish I could have more respect for myself (8)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

I certainly feel useless at times (9)*	○	○	○	○	○	○
At times, I think I'm no good at all (10)*	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q7 Please respond to the following regarding your beliefs about your current school

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Slightly Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
I feel I will not be physically harmed while at school (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Students here often bully or taunt (2)*	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel taunted, alienated, or bullied by my peers (3)*	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel taunted, alienated, or bullied by my administrator(s) (4)*	○	○	○	○	○	○
The rules and procedures for discipline are known by everyone here (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Harassing or making fun of others is not tolerated (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is consistent and fair enforcement of the rules (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q9

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Slightly Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
All aspects of diversity are welcome and appreciated (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel socially supported in my school (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have positive relationships with other adults within the school (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Voicing concerns at school is not encouraged (4)*	○	○	○	○	○	○
Everyone takes part in making decisions at my school (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
My administrator(s) show strong leadership skills (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like a valued member of	○	○	○	○	○	○

my school (7)						

Q10

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Slightly Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
Meaningful professional development opportunities are available to me (1)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Asking questions is viewed as a negative thing here (2)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Children receive instruction that fits their learning styles (3)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Teachers are critical or negative of students' work here (4)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Constructive feedback is provided to me regularly (5)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Conflict resolution skills are modeled by adults in my school (6)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Children here learn how to be an empathetic person (7)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
People don't take responsibility for themselves here (8)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Emphasis is placed on the students' emotional and social growth here (9)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
It is evident that people in my school really listen (10)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Q11

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Slightly Disagree (3)	Slightly Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
My school is dirty and not maintained properly (1)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I feel connected to my school (2)	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Families aren't engaged at this school (3)*	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Everyone helps out to keep our school looking its best (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
I generally have the supplies I need (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I enjoy spending time at my school (12.1)**	○	○	○	○	○	○

*Question is reverse-scored during data analysis.

**Question is not included in the environmental-structural scale, but is grouped with questions in environmental-structural.