Rural High School Libraries: Places Prone to Promote Positive School Climates

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This multiple case study (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Stake, 2006) of three new rural high school libraries, located in two states in the U.S. Midwest, and the school communities they serve is part of a long-term research agenda grounded in a critical perspective (Anderson, 1989). The study is devoted to deepening the understanding of the relationships between teenagers' student peer culture, commonly perceived as intrinsically problematic in the U.S., and the contributions of informal learning environments and non-classroom spaces to school social climate (Voight & Nation, 2016). I found that school libraries are places prone to promoting positive school climates.

"I was opposed to changing things because I was afraid it would be like a recess area. My attitude has changed greatly. I like to see the kids come in and work together" (Librarian at Prairie High).

School Libraries' Contributions

School libraries and the time students spend there have been connected to increased test scores, high literacy levels, and the improvement of students' academic achievement since standardized testing became an important tool to assess student learning (Kachel, 2013; Lance et al., 1992). Numerous school library impact studies have confirmed that libraries helped student learning (Todd & Kuhlthau, 2005) and positively affected student achievement (Achterman, 2008; Gretes, 2013; Lance & Kachel, 2018). Low-income students especially profited from access to school libraries and associated resources (Gretes, 2013). Meaningful correlations have also been made between access to computers and the internet in school libraries and students' levels of motivation (Akande & Bamise, 2017; Small, Snyder, & Parker, 2009). Responsible for these educational outcomes was first and foremost a group of engaged educators: the librarians (Lance & Kachel, 2018). However, the role of the physical environment has also been acknowledged: "The library's welcoming, safe, and comfortable environment is a positive influence on library use for both students and teachers" (Small et al., 2009).

Next to the body of research on measurable impact factors, there is also a body of thought focusing on the role libraries can play as important places (Aabø & Audunson, 2012; Council on Library and Information Resources, 2005). An interdisciplinary group of authors have reflected on the role library spaces play in the digital age and on their social dimension as places for informal gatherings. The library-as-place literature, however, is centered around public libraries or libraries in institutions of higher education. The current manuscript explores specific high school libraries as places (Cresswell, 2004), provides new insights into a range of prosocial educational outcomes (Moore & Lackney, 1993), and discusses the contributions of library spaces to local school climates (Voight & Nation, 2016). It expands the current understanding of the role of the physical environment as part of the social school climate (Voight & Nation, 2016).

School Climate

Consistently, evidence has suggested that positive school climates are associated with higher academic achievement, effective risk prevention efforts, and positive youth development (e.g. Bosworth et al., 2009; Davis & Warner, 2015; Garner et al., 2006; Robinson, 2017; Zullig et al., 2011). Educational researchers have been trying to develop comprehensive frameworks and synthesize findings around strategies that can foster positive school cultures in a quest to build a knowledge foundation and to provide guidance for policy makers, educators, and students to understand and improve school climates. The U.S. State Department of Education (USEOD) endorsed a framework that revolves around the terms of engagement, safety, and environment. These broad categories are further defined into the respectful relationships between all stakeholders in diverse social school communities; the emotional and physical safety and wellbeing of all community members; and the nature of the academic, disciplinary, and physical characteristics of the school environment.

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While the growing body of research focusing on school climate usually has considered the school building as part of the institutional or non-social dimension of the concept (Voight & Nation, 2016), the building's meaning and the identification of particularly relevant spatial characteristics deserve further investigation. My goal is to help expand educators' and designers' understanding of the contributions of the physical environment as it relates to school libraries and to offer suggestions on how to optimize its effects during everyday practices at school.

I used the school climate framework as endorsed by the U.S. State Department of Education (USEOD), and adapted by Voight and Nation (2016), to guide my analysis of the data (Figure 1). It is a conceptual model of how programs and practices relate to dimensions of school climate and their impact on student achievement and wellness. I will illustrate how school climates are influenced by the six dimensions of relationships, respect for diversity, student school participation, school safety, the disciplinary, and most importantly in this case, the physical environment.

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What happens regularly during the non-instructional times at these high schools?
2. What are the most popular student spaces during the non-instructional times?
3. How can these spaces be described and understood?
4. How do these spaces contribute to the local school climate?

Library Spaces

Library design traditionally revolved around objects and library functions like reference and circulation desks followed by a transitional phase during which school libraries were understood as media or technology centers. Recently, designers started to strive to design libraries for learning instead. Researchers are still trying to determine which aspects of the physical environment can support learning. It remains unclear whether valid connections can be made between students' preferences and their study style (Gotsch & Holliday, 2007).

But at the core of this manuscript is not the question of whether spatial qualities can promote learning; instead, I try to illuminate the interplay between the physical environment and the five other dimensions of school climate, and the effects school library environments can have on which students think of themselves as library users.

This inquiry was informed by a number of other inquiries in which non-classroom spaces in general (Altenburger, 2019), and school libraries in particular, are understood as spaces for informal social encounters where behavior is facilitated by the institutional rules and disciplinary practices. Schilling and Cousins (1990) found that social factors are integral parts of school libraries' success as learning environments and argued that "the spatial dimensions of social interaction should become central to analyses of educational differentiation." In a comparative
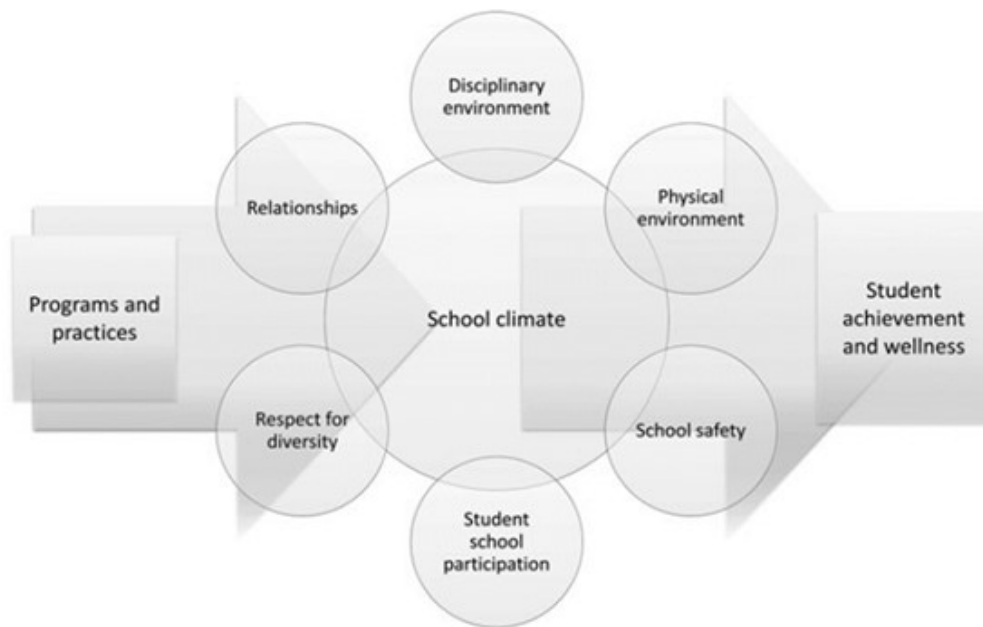

Figure 1. **Conceptual model on how programs and practices relate to dimensions of school climate, student achievement, and wellness. Adam Voight and Maury Nation, 2016.**

case study, they used two concepts that are located on opposite ends of a spectrum: student colonization and teacher regulation of spaces. They described the excluding effects the colonization of a school library by a group of loud, card playing, male students had on girls and younger boys, and compared it to another site where student access and behavior was highly regulated by adult gatekeepers. In this second school library, teachers were enforcing an atmosphere they considered conducive to quiet study. The library was understood as a place to work. As a result, it was used by students and adults engaging in quiet and focused work but also used by teenagers in need of quiet, comfortable meeting spaces. This second group of social library users managed to turn the library into a place to meet their friends by pretending to work and complying with the expectations for low noise levels. In both schools, the nature of the local disciplinary environment, the lack of spaces intended for the social use of students, and the geographic locations of the libraries affected what kind of students became library users.

In a recent comparative socio-spatial analysis, Loh (2016) mapped the physical, social, and affective spaces of two vastly different school libraries. She revealed "a misalignment between official discourses and situated everyday practices of literacy" that related to the social class of each school's student population. The library space in the school that served lower- and middle-class students was an alternative classroom, a site for tests and detention, a space for "enforced work," and it was generally empty. Even students who identified themselves as avid readers did not think of their school library as a space, they wanted to spend time in. The second library was part of an elite boy school, located at its center, and full of adult role models,

technology, examples of students' projects, groups of students engaged in project work, and messages that celebrated reading. Students here reported to "like" their library.

Methods

The current study relied on qualitative methods to investigate how library spaces affected students' everyday experiences at school. It describes student behavior in the informal learning environments and the social affordances (Heft, 2001) of three school buildings, each representing a different building type in a range of rural community contexts (Figure 2).

Research Site Selection and Data Collection

Two small rural schools of similar demographic and socioeconomic context, Country High School and Prairie High School, were selected as well as one in a small-town context, New High School (pseudonyms). Country High served a single small community and had 385 students; while Prairie High, with a student population of 540, was located at the center of a geographically large school district in the same state. Country High inhabited a contemporary school building from 2014 in which the classrooms were clustered around shared open zones designed to foster student collaboration. The library was located prominently at the school's entry. Prairie High occupied an institutional building typical for the time of its construction in 1972. Its characterization includes narrow locker-lined hallways and a dense layout of classrooms. Very few changes had been made to the building since then except for the renovation of the library in 2017.

Figure 2. **Entries to three school building types. From left to right: New High School, Country High School, Prairie High School.**

The third library space was part of an architecturally ambitious and large high school building that served 2,216 students. The construction of New High School was completed in time for the 2014-2015 school year. Its architects had intended to design a school environment that fostered 21st century learning and teaching activities. I had selected this school for a previous study and started my prolonged engagement there in the fall of 2015. New High is located in a different state and the term 'small town' in the U.S. Midwest captures its context best. It will serve as a point of comparison to the two library spaces in truly rural school contexts where I and two collaborators spent several hundred hours over the course of the 2018-2019 school year making observations, writing ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), creating behavioral maps, and interviewing participants from different groups of stakeholders. We also collected and analyzed documents such as student handbooks, bell schedules, and architectural plans.

Participant Selection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, counselors, and librarians at all three schools, seven students at Country High, five students at Prairie High, and twelve students at New High. Administrators at each school had identified potential participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and peer groups, different genders, and from several grades. At New High, sponsors of student clubs had helped me select a group of twelve students that were engaged in a wide variety of extracurricular activities from ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) to the hip-hop club. I talked with the teenagers about their favorite spaces at school using the same interview guide I used in 2018 and 2019 at Country High and Prairie High.

Data Analysis

I used a two-phase coding process consisting of open coding and focused coding to analyze main data sources. My small support team and I collaboratively grouped codes into the categories (Weston et al., 2001): locations, space, times, rules, supervision, students hang out, digital social space, and place/culture. Once grouped, we studied strong code co-occurrences. I then conducted a cross-case analysis and used experiences as documented in field notes, behavioral maps, and the content of informal conversations at the schools to compare, expand, confirm or disconfirm participants' understandings and made connections to the content of relevant documents.

After the research assistant who had helped with data collection and transcriptions graduated, I engaged a new assistant in peer debriefing (Given, 2008) of the analysis of an important data subset. I asked her to code the three librarian interviews, introduced her to Voight and Nation's (2016) model of school climate, and instructed her to use the concept's dimensions as codes. She summarized what all sources seemed to have in common concerning each of these school climate dimensions and the distinct differences between the transcripts for each component. What my new research assistant, who had never met any of the participants, shared with me about her understanding of this data subset showed an encouraging level of alignment with the findings the original team had constructed during the prolonged engagement and with a subsequent analysis of a larger, richer data set consisting of more diverse data sources.
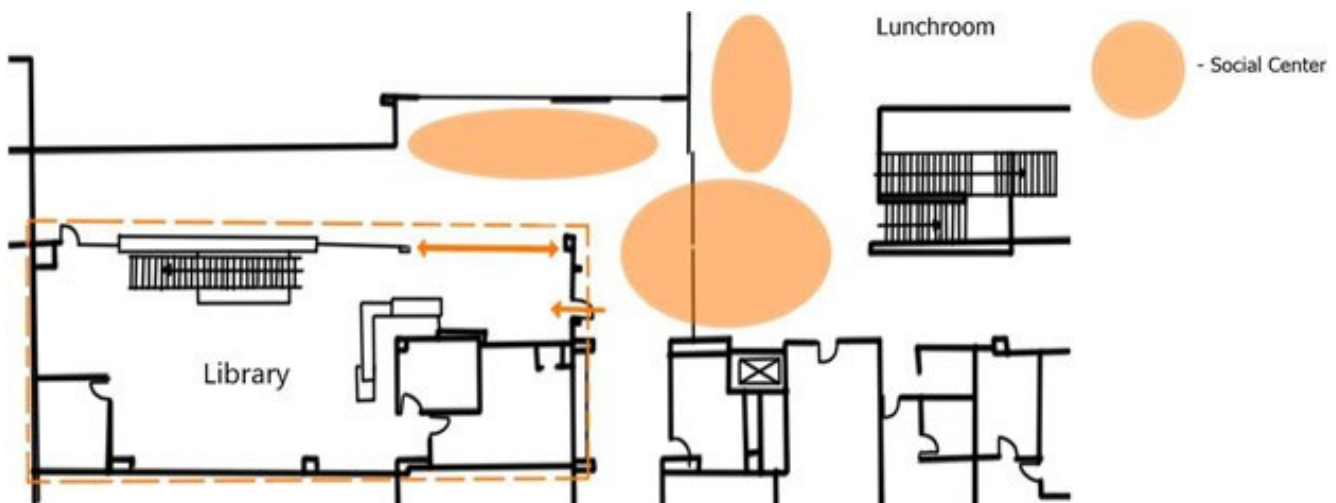

Figure 3. **New High School: Library location and access.**

Figure 4. **New High School: Large custom sliding glass door that allows the informal social center to connect with the entry zone of the library space.**

Findings

A School for the Future: An Unused Library Space

The architecturally most ambitious library was, sadly, the most underutilized due to strictly guarded access by library staff. The library at New High was located distant from the main entrance but in proximity to the lunchroom and adjacent to the students' informal social center. Groups of students regularly met in front of the library at its convenient location, where the central staircase connected all three building levels (Figure 3). A 24-foot-wide sliding door would have allowed for a physical connection of this popular meeting space and a lobby-like space in front of the library desk (Figure 4). The librarian, however, thought this custom door, that doubled as a display case, was "just for decoration" and thought the extra space in front of the library desk was "a waste of space." She was worried about noise levels that were not conducive to library users' needs or an appropriate use of the space.

We found that it makes for a lot more noise because of all the traffic out there. They don't really want to come in and use the library. They just would come in and talk. If we keep the large sliding door shut it helps keep some of the noise out for the kids who do want to come in and use the library. (New High Librarian)

Very few students spent any time in the library and most of the teenagers who met their friends there were not considered serious library users. "There are about four of them that are avid readers, the rest of them fiddle around on their phones." The door the library staff did consider the entry to the library was not only very small but also often locked. Students had to knock and then wait until one of the librarians would open it.

While none of the participants at New High School considered themselves current library users, several remembered spending more time either in their middle school library or in the high school library of the old school building. Interestingly, the same librarian had overseen this previous and much more popular library space. The main differences participants reported were that students back then had to visit the library in order to use the computers, the library was one of very few spaces that was considered pleasant and comfortable, and the consumption of food had been allowed. At the New High School, there were now numerous comfortable non-classroom spaces throughout the whole school building to choose from during non-instructional times. Though the design of this New School building had been the result of a participatory design process, the architects had insisted on carpeting the library. "If they had put tile flooring over there, I probably would have let them have their coffee."

Most of my student participants saw no reason to spend time in the library. The president of the book club, an avid reader herself, summed it up like this:

I could just go to the library, but we can't eat in there….If you are in the library, the librarians probably think you're checking out a book, so they'll be waiting for you to hurry up and get done so…I just don't hang out in the library and I don't see people hanging out in the library. We've had to go check out library books, but that is the only time I honestly go to the library.

A girl I interviewed because she spent a lot of time at the social center told me: "I sit at the same table every day, right there, between the cafeteria and the library. Right in front of the library." When I asked her whether she ever spent time *in* the library she responded in a very serious manner and a calm tone: "We are not allowed to."

How Did the Library Space at New High Affect the Local School Climate?

There were extremely limited social interactions in this usually teenage-free space, which needs to be understood as a lack of student participation. The disciplinary environment used a variety of parallel channels to send strong messages that the physical environment was operated by and for the adults that controlled it (Astor et al., 2002) rather than being a place (Cresswell, 2004) for students. The gatekeeper's perception of the carpeted floor as not suited for the consumption of food led to rules that prevented a more diverse user group from feeling welcome and by extension from becoming library users—an unforeseen design consequence that had negative effects on the school climate.

The library was filled with natural light and equipped with a variety of furniture arrangements including soft lobby-like settings (Figure 5) meant to foster students' desire to spend time there. However, the large sliding glass door, custom designed to lure students from the adjacent space, that the architects had accurately expected to become the school's social center, remained closed. The librarian, driven by worry about the colonization of the space (Shilling & Cousins, 1990) by nonreaders, contributed to the lack of student participation. In addition to these barriers and limitations to students' access and comfort, the disciplinary environment sent messages of distrust in the form of prominently displayed posters that reminded the students that food or drink was not allowed, that instructions should be followed "immediately, exactly, and without arguing," and that respectful behavior was expected.

This library was a place which the adults in charge and the designers of the space had approached with vastly different goals in mind. David Canter argues that in places with conflicting goals, one will have to understand which is the dominant one (1997). Dominant was clearly the social goal to keep things quiet and clean for avid readers that were not determined enough to overcome the discouraging effects the micro-disciplinary environment had created. This library's effect on school climate was, sadly, negative.

Figure 5. **New High School: Library space filled with natural light and comfortable furniture arrangements.**

A School for Success: An Informal Library Space for High Performers

The centrally located, intimate, Country High library served as an informal learning environment for high-performing students. The library was located at the main entry of the school building and was equipped with a variety of furniture arrangements including soft lobby-like settings like the rest of the school. The library was connected through several parallel points of entry to the large lobby space that

doubled as a cafeteria and was also close to the open staircase that connected both school levels. Small groups of students gathered toward the end of each lunch period at the bottom of this staircase near the open corner entrance of the library (Figure 6). The librarian valued the prominence of the location: "I love our location where you walk in the front door…and the kids are walking by all the time…it feels like a good location." Her decision to keep all doors open over the course of the school days complemented the central location. Figure 7 illustrates how the school library spatially appeared like an extension of the lobby.

A handful of students could always be found in the library, whether the librarian was in attendance or not. She had to split her time between several schools and the library was, therefore, regularly without any obvious adult supervision. The doors, however, remained open and the students used a clipboard to check out books (Figure 8). They looked at their phones, worked on their laptops, engaged in quiet conversations with their peers relating to class work and private matters, or engaged with the books. They sat on the chairs or on the floor between the low stacks. When very few students were present, they would sometimes lay across two or more soft, armless chairs in a furniture arrangement that the principal referred to as the "firepit" or hang their legs over the armrests in the seating arrangement close to the façade (Figures 9a-c). It was always quiet, and the calm, low-key atmosphere never seemed to change, whether adults were present or not.

There were several other informal spaces located between groups of classrooms at Country High. They were used as breakout spaces for student group work outside of, but in proximity to, classrooms and for social student encounters during breaks. Teachers did not casually supervise the library environment through their open classroom doors even though it was across from the main office. "It's better than a classroom because nobody is there to tell you what to do. You get to work at your own pace, and I like that. You got to be kind of quiet, it's the library and people are working so…" (Country High student). Students thought of it as a comfortable, quiet workspace that also afforded opportunities to talk to their friends as long as they respected the expectations for low noise levels in order not to disrupt the library users who did study. "It is kind of an escape place for me when I like quiet and peace, but I can still talk to my friends in a whisper" (exchange student from Europe). The students' activities varied. Some engaged in truly independent work with online AP classes. Others watched YouTube videos while waiting for the drivers-ed instructor to return. Some browsed for new books or printed their homework. There were also students who used the library purely to "talk about what was going on in (their) lives" (Serena).
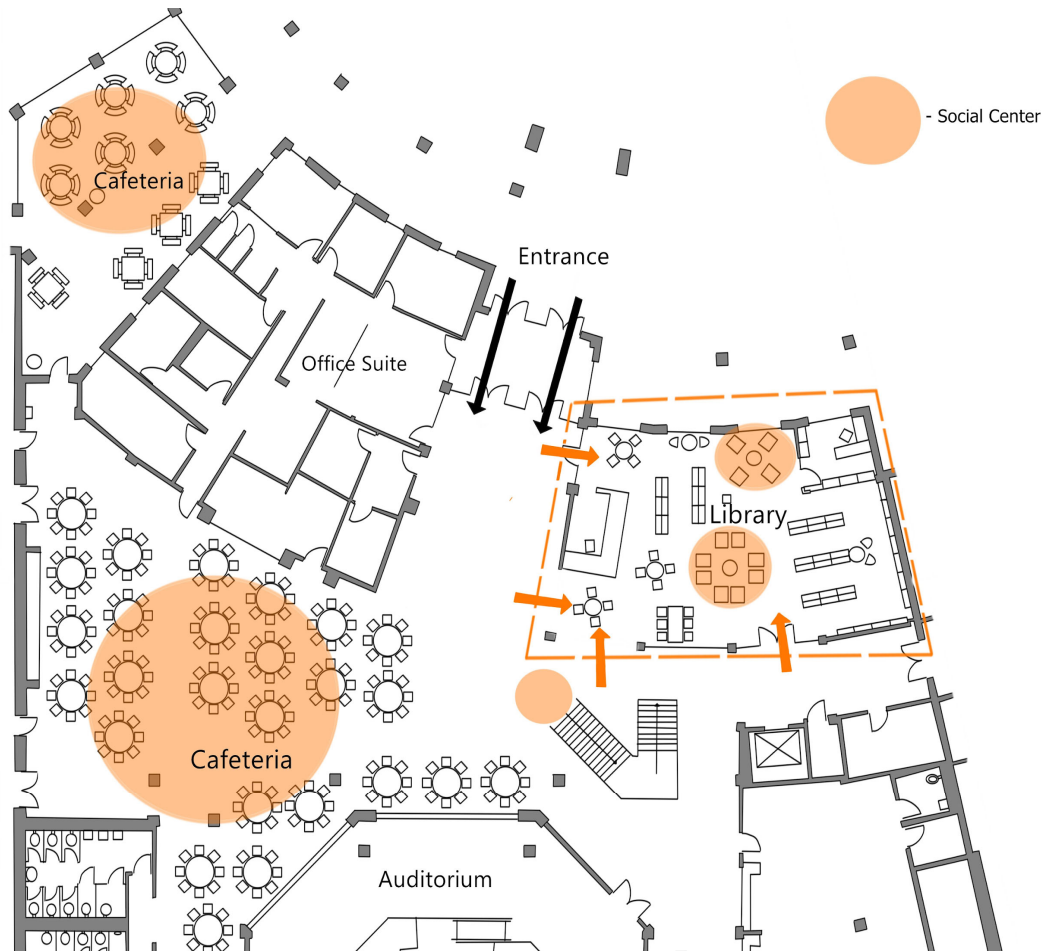
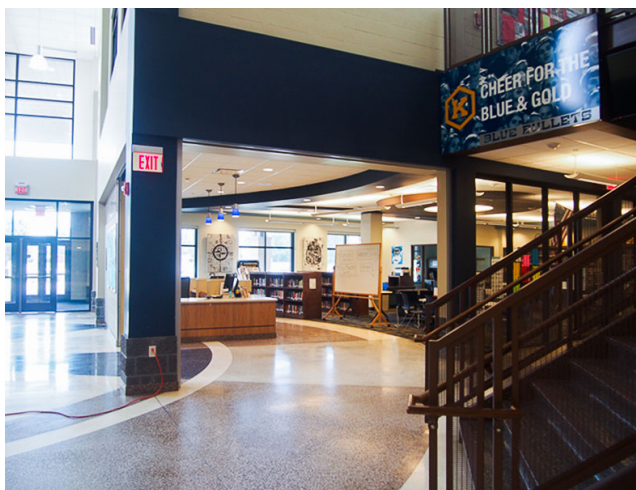*Figure 6.* **Country High School: Library location and access**

Figure 7. **Country High School: Library appears as extension of the lobby space.**

But independently of where the students fell on the continuum of possible user behavior, their perception of the social affordances (Heft, 2001) and the rules of the place (Canter, 1991) included work and play. Following are comments by library users: "If they are trying to learn, I'll be quiet. That's how you think about a library as a place to study. I think all libraries kind of deserve a certain amount of quietness" (Kristopher, basketball player). "It's more of a place to hang out for me but I do know that a lot of people do think of it as a place to study" (Serena, drama club). "It's definitely a little bit of both because you can definitely go and hang out there with your friends and use it as a social space (…). When you really put your mind to it you can get a lot done down there too" (Mark, football player).

How Did the Library Space at Country High Affect the Local School Climate?

The data collected for Country High's library was rich and belonged to all six dimensions of school climate. The disciplinary environment, the physical environment, and evidence for local respect for diversity interacted and informed each other to promote a positive school climate.

The space was more defined by things that were allowed than by things that were not. The self-checkout procedure exemplified the nature of the disciplinary environment of the school in general. Food was not explicitly encouraged, but tacitly permitted. Slouching and laying on the furniture and on the floor were acceptable. The librarian did not react with the same judgment to the students' use of phones as the librarian at New High and talking was allowed since students who studied did not seem to get frustrated.

Adult and teenage participants at Country High talked about the school's disciplinary culture in very similar terms as one built on "earned freedom" or "deserved trust." They did not need prompting to describe the close familiarity between the small and tightly knit rural student body, their families, and the adult stakeholders. They reported that, slowly, disciplinary routines had gotten more and more relaxed as the school year proceeded without major disciplinary problems. The librarian did not see the need to display posters with rules, nor could she remember ever having used her library introductions to clarify ground rules. "I don't really go over any rules…They don't really need that." Instead, she reported that her overarching goal was to have as many students as possible associate the library with positive feelings and think of the library as "a place that they can just come and be themselves and hang out" whether they were reading or not.

The relaxed disciplinary environment was complemented by the quality of the physical space. It was generously connected to the most important space for social interaction, the cafeteria. The centrally located shelves were low, which allowed users to casually check the three different furniture arrangements for availability without having to leave the public circulation paths (Childress, 1993). The small groups of furniture were of a similar variety as can be found in many college libraries: two lobby-like settings with soft furniture and a group of light tables and chairs of two different heights (Figure 10).

The space was enriched by prominently placed messages to convey it as a place for a diverse group of users. One poster welcomed library users in 26 languages. A second one explained the proven benefits of reading, including the reduction of stress and improved self-awareness. A third announced: "This is a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ students and their allies." Finally, there was a whole rack with propaganda fliers from the U.S. army.

The school library at Country High was a place where three components of social school climate—the disciplinary environment, the physical environment, and evidence for the respect of diversity—together successfully fostered a favorite place at school and a space in which positive peer relationships between teenagers were maintained and

deepened. The students reported to feel independent and trusted when left to their own good judgement.

Figure 8. **Country High School: Self-checkout while librarian is absent.**

Figure 9a. **Country High School: Typical library users.**

Figure 9b. **Country High School: Typical library users.**

Figure 9c. **Country High School: Typical library users.**

A School of Self-Advocacy: A Library as Relief Space

The remotely located third library offered several furniture arrangements for a range of user groups engaging in a variety of learning and social activities. The library at Prairie High was not located close to the social center, which revolved around an open space between the lunch room and the auditorium, or the entrance to the building. The library was tucked deeply into the center between surrounding classrooms (Figure 11). The entry doors first opened onto a

relatively long hallway that eventually led into the library space. It was a destination space. Library visits usually started with an active decision to visit since there were no visual or spatial connections between the informal learning environment and any of the public spaces that could have allowed for the casual check of the presence of friends before entering the space (Childress, 1993).

Despite its less public and visible location, Prairie High's school library was also a lively space. Aside from the bathrooms, it was to my knowledge the only space that had seen substantial renovations since the school's opening in 1972. It was also the only pleasant and comfortable space designed to foster a variety of learning activities. "It's just a really nice place where you can go and work if you need to" (Sophie). "Most of the kids... go there for a quieter place to do their work" (Steven). Except for the simple but comfortable booths, its furniture was either light or equipped with casters. The librarian reported to encourage the students regularly to move the furniture around to best suit their needs. A relatively large group of students used to come in and rearrange the 10 soft lounge chairs around a large table. The booths seemed to be a good fit for single users who were working on their laptops, as well as for teenage couples. Groups of students could regularly be found occupying the light chairs and tables on casters (Figure 12, 13).
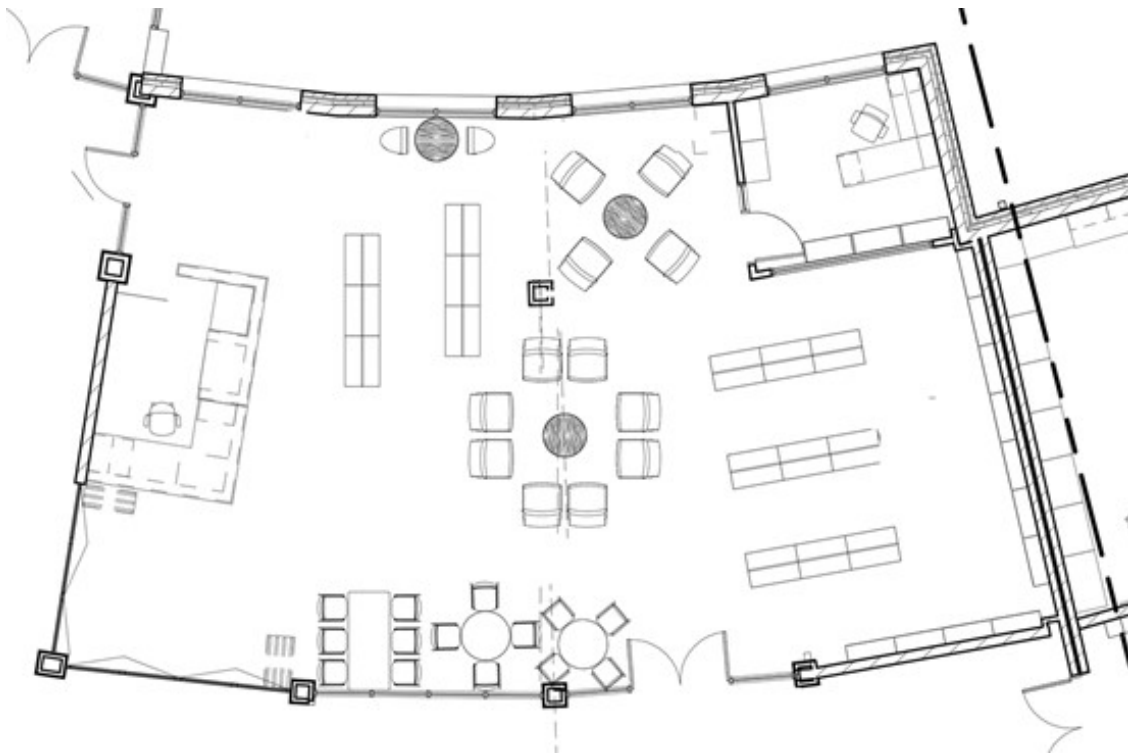

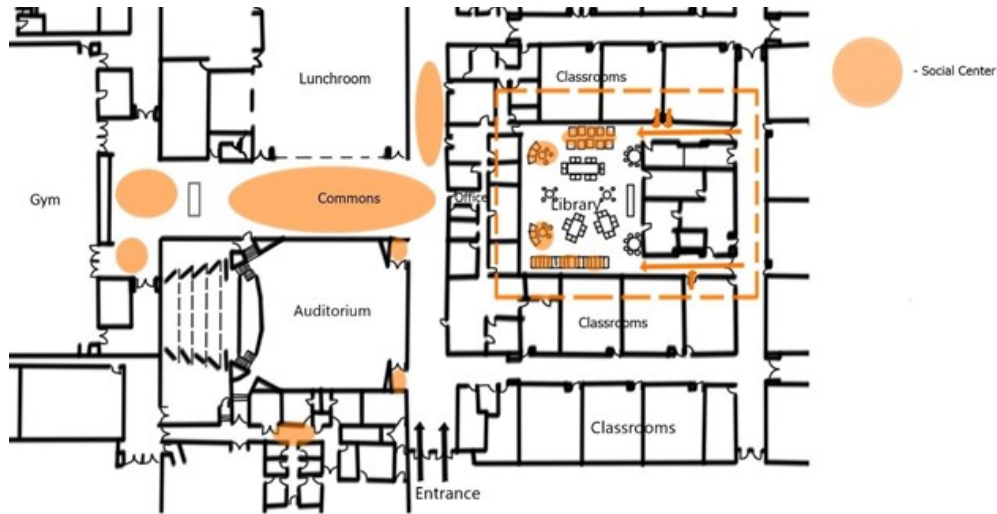*Figure 10.* **Country High School: Furniture arrangements.**

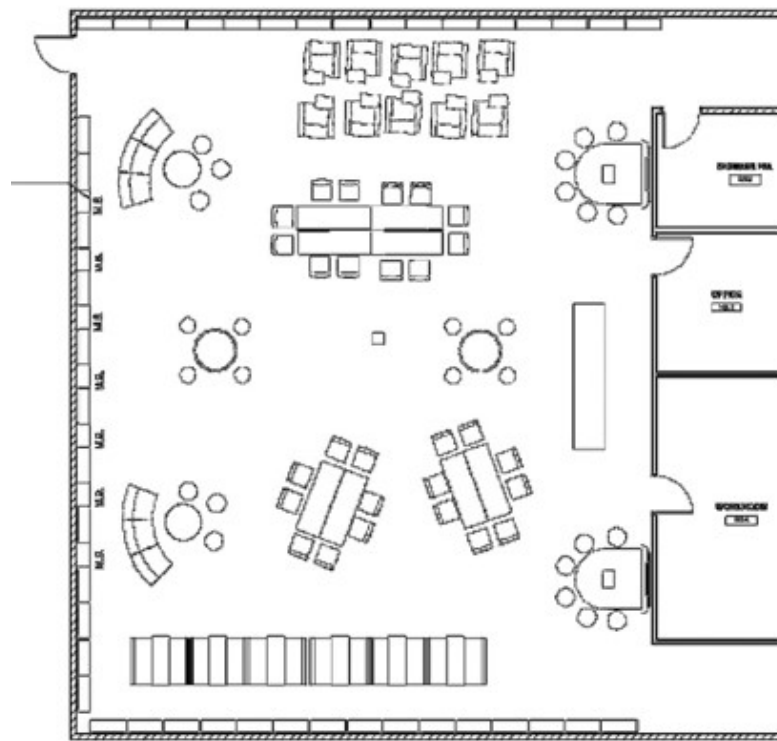*Figure 11.* **Prairie High School: Library location and access.**

Figure 12. **Prairie High School: Furniture arrangements.**

This informal learning environment was also used as an alternative to the regular classrooms. Teachers took their students there for group work or research projects or when they felt the students needed a change of pace. Single students took make-up exams or worked on online AP classes.

"They work individually or in groups. A lot of times they have a project, sometimes they'll stick around and work together. A couple of students have admitted that it is much easier to work here than it is to go home and work." (Librarian)

But it was also an informal work or meeting space for adults. Substitute teachers prepared their lessons, and when the district's administrators initially tried to decide whether

Figure 13. **Prairie High School: Typical library users.**

they wanted to give access to the school, they took me there to have a conversation about the nature of the current study. "It's a little quieter to study or just take a break, or if you need to work on a class…It's a good culture in there" (Counselor).

Equally important, it was a social space for teenagers. "Even if they are not working on anything. They'll talk you know, come in and just visit. Things get too loud out there in the commons for the kids. And some of them want a quiet space" (Prairie High Librarian). The social center at this school was commonly perceived as loud and crowded during some of the non-instructional times. The students we interviewed were not avid readers or regular library users but all of them reported to feel stressed by the social life in the commons, especially during what they called "double lunch" on Fridays. This was a weekly event, a social time and opportunity the principal afforded his students. It was centered around the school's club activities and left the commons area in front of the cafeteria extremely busy.

How Did the Library Space at Prairie High Affect the Local School Climate?

The data collected for the library space at Prairie High belonged to all dimensions of school climate except for evidence that this was a place with respect for diversity. Four of the dimensions (disciplinary environment, physical environment, school safety, and relationships) interacted and informed each other here and promoted a positive library climate.

The librarian was friendly and not overly involved in the enforcement of discipline, but when she thought the students were disrespectful, she did let them know. Her most important rule was "no feet on the furniture." However, she reported to be more flexible about noise levels than she had been in previous years: "The older I get, the more I think it's fine. I am not strict 'quiet, quiet, quiet' like I

used to be in there. It's a flexible learning center." The most prominently displayed messages posted were "Study hard!" and "Respect is rule #1!" followed by "Practice makes proficient" and "Catch the reading bug." Students were perceived to behave to higher standards here than elsewhere.

> *"It really surprises us when we hear of a student that was in a fight somewhere because we don't see that. Or if a teacher had problems with the student's attitude. Yeah, we don't see that in the library. They're very, very polite." (Librarian)*

Unlike at Country High, the disciplinary culture of the library at Prairie High was not in perfect alignment with the school's overall disciplinary environment. The student peer culture in the rest of the school building was not facilitated by a few simple and clearly communicated rules. The principal explained that for him the most important expectation guiding students' behavior was "self-advocacy," and he encouraged self-advocacy for both teenagers and adults. He provided students with opportunities for positive social encounters and expected teachers to use their individual core values and enforce classroom rules that reflected them. He reported to struggle with teachers' requests for the development of a set of institutional behavior-guiding rules that could be consistently enforced by all adults.

Outside the school environment, stakeholders at Prairie High did not belong to the same community. Everyone had to commute to school since it served a large and decentralized district. Teachers and administrators considered this a challenge which they addressed with strong community engagement and a lively culture seen at sporting events. The casual supervision style and the strong physical boundaries of the old institutional school building were not a good fit. It resulted, at times, in non-classroom environments that were perceived by students as too loud, too crowded, too rowdy, and full of environmental stressors (Ahrentzen et al., 1984; Boman & Enmarker, 2004).

The library was an exception. The rules of conduct in this informal learning environment were a little more conventional. Unlike in the commons, the ownership of the library was almost as clearly regulated as the ownership of the classrooms (R. A. Astor et al., 1999), and the open nature of its physical environment allowed for noninvasive supervision. The librarian office was connected to the library by large interior windows, and the bookshelves were high but arranged around the parameter of the space. While well used and lively, it was less crowded than other non-classroom spaces. The library was equipped with adaptable furniture settings. It lacked additional spatial definition, but it was quiet and comfortable compared to all other spaces available to students.

It was perceived as a pleasant and safe place at school by readers, non-readers, adults, and teenagers. "It's good. It's a positive place" (Lizzie). "It's pretty welcoming" (Renee).

It was a space in which relationships between students were maintained and deepened. We also observed and heard about regular interactions between students and adults here. The librarians were perceived as "strict" but in the same breath also described as "super helpful." Interestingly, the library users were an inhomogeneous group made up of teenagers and adults that harmoniously co-inhabited the space.

The school library at Prairie High was a place where the disciplinary environment and the physical environment together were experienced by students as the most comfortable, pleasant, and safe space available to them. It allowed for a variety of social interactions between students and adults, offering a more defined set of expectations for appropriate behavior that were consistently reinforced. While students did socialize here, the reason they were in the library officially was to get some work done. "They have been very, very good about trying to make sure it is not just a place for people to go slack off" (Mark). It was both an alternative classroom environment and an alternative social environment.

Conclusion

This research suggests that carefully designed school libraries are spaces prone to promote positive social climates at school. This is especially relevant in schools that do not have a variety of non-classroom spaces created to foster a range of social and informal learning activities which most conventional classroom or break spaces are not well suited to support. Here, the libraries can become important niches for students and adults who do not feel comfortable in the other non-classroom environments available to them.

School libraries in prominent and accessible locations, with visual connections to other spaces of social encounter, containing flexible and comfortable furniture arrangements,

and with evidence of a diverse learning community can help to attract and sustain diverse user groups. But, the social affordances of the physical environment can only play a supporting role. Desired behavioral effects of spatial qualities rely on foundations provided through trustful social relationships between students and adults and a positive disciplinary culture. Librarians' stance on discipline and appropriate student behavior, and the policies and procedures they use to facilitate the social life in their libraries, are at the core of the quality of social climates in these spaces. When the social affordances of the school building, the disciplinary culture of the library, and the institutional order overall inform and support each other consequently and positively, the effects on school climate can be optimized to foster the wellbeing of students.

Recently designed or renovated library spaces and the quality of the disciplinary library culture together can create a positive school climate. If adult stakeholders understand the transformational power of these socio-physical library environments, they can successfully serve as models for future renovations of other spaces at schools. Non-classroom spaces, such as the commons area in old institutional school buildings like in Prairie High, could be re-envisioned using similar design strategies and adjusted supervision models including clearer ownership to help further support positive school climates. Additional areas of similar accessibility and social affordances, gently but consistently facilitated to maintain institutional control, could help foster respectful student behavior and a relaxed peer culture.

At Country High, the school library was the most self-governed place for trusted and high-performing students. The other non-classroom spaces offered different levels of student independence and were regulated with different levels of supervision for different subsets of students who were perceived as in need of more structured environmental contexts. What all non-classroom spaces had in common was a similar comfort level and a shared set of goals, values, and proceedings to facilitate them. At Country High, the contributions of the school building to a positive school climate were optimized by a shared relaxed and consistent disciplinary school culture.

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