Listening to what matters most: A participatory action-based exploration of student perspectives with regards to the social aspects of school climate

Jennifer Beaudoin

A Thesis
In the Department of Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Education)
at Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

January, 2025

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Jennifer Beaudoin

Entitled: Listening to what matters most: A participatory action-based exploration of student perspectives with regards to school climate

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor Of Philosophy (Education)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

_____Chair
Dr. Lorrie Blair

_____External Examiner
Dr. Lisa Starr

_____Examiner
Dr. Elsa Lo

_____Examiner
Dr. Diane Pesco

_____Examiner
Dr. Steven Shaw

_____Thesis Supervisor
Dr. Miranda D'Amico

Approved by

_____
Dr. Walcir Cardodo, Graduate Program Director __/__/2025

_____
Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science _ __/__/2025

ABSTRACT

Listening to what matters most: A participatory action-based exploration of student perspectives with regards to school climate

Jennifer Beaudoin
Concordia University, 2025

Regarded as the soul of the school, embedded within community, safety, academics, and institutional environment, robust school climates are correlated with student engagement, achievement, and ultimately retention (National School Climate Center, 2024). Given the multifaceted nature of school climate, educational stakeholders wishing to embark on improvement initiatives benefit from practical direction with regards to the most effective and impactful course of action. By involving all stakeholders, including students, in the investigation of the social aspect of school climate, meaningful and sustainable growth is possible. The three studies included in the dissertation invited youth to interrogate three aspects of school climate: student-staff relationships, student behavior management, and student advocacy and empowerment in classroom and school-based decision-making.

Study 1 examined the link between student-staff staff relationships and healthy school climates. Student participants equated heathy relationships staff as those which: 1) showed an interest in students outside of class; 2) managed their classrooms with equity and discretion; and 3) fostered redemption following infractions or conflict. It was determined that healthy student-staff relationships were the primary factor in creating healthy school climates which encourage student engagement and retention.

Study 2 investigated youth perspectives with regards to how their behavior was managed and how this affected school climate. The findings showed that while the determinants of behavior are complex, engagement and behavior was heavily dependent on the adult students

were interacting with. Practices which prevented infractions and minimized escalation included: 1) staff displaying care and concern for the whole student in and outside the school environment; 2) differentiated pedagogical practices which allow for student voice and choice; and 3) opportunities for redemption following infractions. It was concluded that strong school climates were ones that adopted restorative behavior management measures which addressed wrong-doing while protecting the integrity of all involved.

Study 3 explored the relationship between school climate and the levels of student advocacy and empowerment in classroom and school-based decision-making. Again, it was concurred that strong school climates are ones which implicate students in classroom and school-based decision-making as much as possible. To respond to the severe lack of student advocacy opportunities at the high school level, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices which empower students to select their own learning modalities, pace, and evaluation protocols, was recommended for classrooms. As for implication in school-based decision-making, the creation of a student governance body was seen as a viable step to increase authentic student voice.

Together the studies provide direction to educational stakeholders seeking an effective course of action to maximize student engagement. By prioritizing the social aspect of school climate (holistic student-staff relationships; restorative behavior management practices; and student voice and choice in classroom and school-based decision-making) school communities can, together, build sustainable school climates which address the complex needs of all stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first and foremost acknowledge and give thanks to my advisor, Dr. Miranda D'Amico, who provided me with council and strength throughout my doctorate journey. I strongly believe that people are put into your life for a reason. Dr. D'Amico has been a mentor and inspiration, helping me navigate academia but also life. I am forever indebted.

To my committee members, a heartfelt thanks for your assistance in harnessing my passion for education and students into a coherent piece of academic work. I am grateful for your critical feedback and the freedom to use my voice.

For the past twenty years, I have had the esteemed pleasure of working alongside some formidable *professional human developers*. Regardless of title, your dedication to the students in our care has been an inspiration. The work you do is necessary, it is important, and it is appreciated. I am honored to call you colleagues and friends.

To all my kiddies! My life is largely defined by the role I have had the honor of playing in your lives. I am grateful for the time we shared and hope that my efforts contribute to your growth and happiness. You have given me more than I have ever given you!

When I doubted myself and didn't think I would be able to see this through, my small and powerful circle of girlfriends gave me the strength to persevere. Whether through a morning text or a night out, you gave me a safe space to cry and cheer. I love you girls. "Who's RITA?"

To my parents, thank you for raising a disciplined, head strong girl. This is the last graduation ceremony you need to sit through I promise. Well, actually…..

Lastly, but most importantly, I need to acknowledge my foundation and love of my life, Scott. You have supported every single wacky life project I have thrown at you, even when it required us sacrificing time together. It takes a strong man and husband to anchor me, thank you! I feel blessed to have the life and family we have built together.

Dedication

To my bibbit. Je t'aime plus et plus.
Everything I do, I do for you.
You will always be my greatest accomplishment.
That's what's up!

"For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."
― Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Contributions of Author

The three studies in this dissertation are co-authored with my supervisor, Dr. Miranda D'Amico. Study 1 is published in the *International Journal of Action Research*. Study 2 is published in *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*. Study 3 is under review for publication in *Improving Schools*.

Outlined below are individual contributions:

Research design: J. Beaudoin with feedback from Dr. D'Amico

Development of focus group tasks and structure: J. Beaudoin with feedback from Dr. D'Amico

Recruitment and data collection: J. Beaudoin with feedback from Dr. D'Amico

Data analysis: J. Beaudoin with feedback from Dr. D'Amico

Manuscript writing: J. Beaudoin with feedback and editing by Dr. D'Amico

Table of Contents

Appendix

Definition of Key Terms

School Climate

School climate is generally accepted as the 'quality and character of school life' and has nuances in the definition despite general consensus among researchers in terms of theoretical orientation, the hypothesized interrelationships of variables, unit of measurement choices, as well as the validity of subjective and qualitative data (Anderson 1982; Cohen et al., 2009). In this dissertation, school climate is positioned as a multidimensional construct consisting of a combination of interrelated school characteristics (institutional, academic, and social) shown to determine student learning and behavior, and one that schools could, and should, successfully target for change (National School Climate Center, 2024).

Student Voice

Student voice refers to the expression of values, opinions, beliefs, and perspectives of individuals and groups of students in a school environment. It also refers to the instructional approaches and techniques that are based on student choices, interests, passions, and ambitions. Paying heed to student voice motivates students to engage in their own learning and can ignite passions that will increase their persistence (St. John & Briel, 2017).

Student Engagement

Student engagement encompasses behavioral (participation in social /co-curricular activities), emotional (relationships with staff and peers), and cognitive (investment in learning) dimensions. Student engagement generally speaks to the degree of interest, involvement, attention, curiosity, optimism, connection, and passion that students demonstrate toward their classes, their institution and, each other, which impacts the motivation they have to learn and progress in their

education (Axelman & Flick, 2011). Interest in student engagement is predicated on the belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive and inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise "disengaged."

Student-Staff Relationship

A healthy student-staff relationship can be understood as a caring connection and secure attachment between a school staff member and a student, whether within the context of a classroom or in the greater school community. Characterized by understanding, trust, respect and cooperation, these relationships have been shown to be a protective factor for students, especially those who are vulnerable and at-risk for failure, by helping them to build resilience and self-regulation skills (Leitao & Waugh, 2007).

General Introduction

In the current public educational landscape, there is a continued demand for school systems to account for student academic success and retention amid unprecedented levels of social challenges and diversity (Petruccelli et al., 2019; Starr, 2010; Van Houtte, 2024). In addition to the historic risk factors of poverty and racial discrimination, growing rates of mental health diagnoses amongst youth and widening academic gaps, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have placed even more students at risk of school disengagement and of dropping out (Bell et al., 2023; Liang et al., 2020; Siller & Aydin, 2022). Beyond school-level concerns, scholarship on childhood trauma clearly demonstrates a correlation between neglect and abuse and the propensity for illicit drug use, experiences with child protection and law enforcement agencies, as well as adult poverty and lower life expectancy (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Dubow et al., 2009; Petruccelli et al., 2019).

School leaders are not wanting for possible directions to respond to these complex challenges. The literature on how to improve student engagement and graduation rates is rich with prospects ranging from targeted instructional methods to leadership, staff professional development, and family/community involvement, to name but a few (Johnson, 2008; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Malczyk & Lawson, 2019). Given the complexity of the issue at hand, as well as limited temporal and financial resources, the issue for educational stakeholders thus becomes, which approach might be most effective for their school reality. The current dissertation aims to direct devoted pacesetters to (re)visit a critical feature of all schools, its climate. School climate is a multifaceted phenomenon which consists of institutional, academic and social dimensions. With its evidenced correlation to positive student achievement, retention, and most importantly,

overall student well-being, the current research directs readers to revisit the social dimension of school climate.

How one interacts and connects with the people in an environment, how they feel they are treated by those who have authority over them, and the degree of control they feel they are awarded within that system all speak to the most basic human needs and desires and determine whether one will thrive or wither (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As one's social, historical, and economic positionality affects how they experience an environment, educational leaders wishing to improve their school climate need a holistic investigative lens to identify the multiple ways by which their students' unique lived experiences can be acknowledged and responded to (Bronfenbrenner, 1997; Dubow et al., 2009; Hines-Dateri, 2105; Kendall, 2020; Monroe, 2005; Valdivia, 2002; Wallace et al., 2008). As one cannot know precisely how another experiences their lifeworld, accessing this insight requires a humbled ear, dedicated to active listening, and committed to doing better once one knows better (Sameer & Ali, 2020).

The twin goals of the current research were to actively engage youth in the conversation about the social aspect of school climate, as well as to create space for their voices and perspectives to catalyze change in their immediate learning environment. This was achieved by a participatory action research design whereby youth were invited to contribute and analyze data gathered through three arts-based methods (timeline, relational map, and photovoice) and to initiate a conversation with their school administrators on how to improve the social aspects of their school climate.

With regards to relationships, students voiced that respect and cooperation with staff was fostered by authentic concern for the whole child (academic as well as personal pursuits) in and outside the classroom. Curriculum-delivery focused student-staff relationships hindered positive

interaction and bred hostility and disconnectedness. In relation to student behavior management, youth expressed that differentiated pedagogical practices and discrete academic support bolstered student engagement and task completion. Punitive measures that were perceived to disregard context were considered damaging and conducive to escalating negative student behaviors. Restorative measures, on the other hand, were brought forward as promising alternatives, whereby conflict was regarded as an opportunity to learn, grow, and repair harm all while maintaining the dignity of all those involved. Finally, while inspecting opportunities for student advocacy and empowerment in classroom and school-based decision-making, students were unanimous that the opportunity to voice opinions and preferences at the high school level were very limited. Opportunity for classroom leadership was found in teachers and students co-creating differentiated pedagogical practices which maximized student voice and choice. A suggestion to improve student advocacy in school-based decision-making was the creation of a student governance body for the purpose of facilitating dialogue and negotiation between the study body, staff, and the administration.

Understanding School Climate

Whether through procedures that encompass safety, relationships, teaching and learning, or institutional environment, the goal of a strong and sustainable school culture is to champion the holistic development of its students towards a "productive, contributive, and satisfying life in a democratic society" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 357; Wang & Degol, 2016). With its proven influence on children's cognitive, social, and psychological development, school climate reform is regarded as an evidence-based school improvement strategy that supports students, parents/guardians, and school personnel learning and working together to create safer, more supportive, and engaging schools (Cohen et al., 2009; Engels et al., 2008; Thapa et al., 2013;

Wang & Degol, 2016; Washor & Mojkowski, 2014). Building upon the work of educational reformers such as Perry (1908), Dewey (1916), and Durkheim (1961), current empirical studies focus on how distinctive school cultures affect the life and learning of students and how school-specific processes account for a great deal of variation in student achievement, engagement, and social and emotional well-being (Bear, 2020; Cemalcilar, 2010; Lombardi et al., 2019; Wang & Degol, 2016). Scholarship is joined by efforts from local and foreign governments and international agencies who have conducted their own investigations and have demonstrated that school improvement strategies support student and staff well-being (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010; Shaeffer, 1999; Thapa et al., 2013).

With a lack of consensus on which facet of school climate to focus on, the research reported in the dissertation focuses on the social aspect of school life, comprised of the relationships between students and staff, student behavior management, and the degree of student agency and empowerment in classroom and school-based decision-making, These factors are deemed to be fundamental to the school environment and ones that can and should be targeted for improvement (Anderson, 1982; Beaudoin & D'Amico, 2024).

Understanding Student Engagement

Just as school systems are complex, so are the ways in which students interact and experience the environment. The unique realities and lived experiences of students are interconnected with how they position themselves within, and are externally positioned by, the educational system (McVee, 2011). Human development is determined by one's personal characteristics, proximal processes (reciprocal interactions with one's environment), context, and timeframe (current or extended) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The degree to which a student engages with school, be it behaviorally, emotionally, or cognitively, is influenced by this complex web of

determinants. No conversation about school climate improvement is possible until stakeholders acknowledge the myriad of factors which shape human experience, including their own (Starr, 2010). It is only through a holistic approach that considers the varied ways in which children present themselves at school, and subsequently, the ways they are received and understood by staff, that an ethical, sustainable improvement plan can be conceived.

Vulnerable Populations

The degree to which a student commits to academic tasks, interacts with the wider school community through social and extracurricular activities, and connects with peers and staff can be understood through a social ecology approach to human development and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this dissertation we can investigate the complex factors which contribute to how one interacts and responds to their environment. Through a *Process* (reciprocal relationships), *Person* (personal characteristics), *Context* (situational positionality), *Time* (temporal consideration) model, we peel away at the layers which situate students on a continuum of power and privilege to disadvantage and vulnerability (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fineman, 2017; Hannigan & Wardman, 2019; Petruccelli, 2019). Framing the levels of student engagement within a web of extenuating comorbid circumstances, most of which are beyond the control of children, contributes to the conversation about how to adequately respond to complex student needs rather than simply trying to 'fix the kid' (Craig, 2008).

Poverty

While the ultimate goal of educational institutions is to assist students in achieving the highest possible level of academic success, a student is only available to learn once their physical, emotional, and psychosocial needs are met (Craig, 2008; Maslow, 1943; Hattie & Yates, 2013; Ungar, 2015). One in five children in Canada live in poverty, and as such, may lack

access to safe, affordable and adequate housing, medical and social services, and/or food security (Canada Without Poverty, 2023; Oritz, 2019; WHO, 2019). Beyond physiological needs, complex economic stresses can be a detriment to family relationships and structures. These forces can threaten environmental safety and increase dysfunction within households, contributing to children witnessing or falling victim to a myriad of adverse experiences, ranging from neglect (physical but also psycho-social, like supervision) to domestic violence and abuse (emotional, financial, physical, and sexual) (Banks & Meyer, 2017; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Bethell et al., 2014; Pertucelli et al., 2019). Lastly, with regards to cognitive development, the factors discussed above, coupled with scarce and poor-quality early childhood education and childcare, can disrupt neurological development and results in three-quarters of impoverished children entering school below academic level, and twice as likely to have developmental or social delays (Lacour, 2011; Polacow, 2008; Wallace, 2018). Over time these disadvantages relegate many lower income children to remedial academic streams which exacerbates paucities rather than addressing them (Ansalone, 2003). This lack of academic success, and subsequent labeling, ultimately affects the child's self-worth, experience with the institution of school, as well as their relationships with staff and peers (Shifrer, 2013). This relational maladjustment and the dehumanizing chronic stress of poverty intensifies over time often resulting in socio-economically disadvantaged youth partaking in life-altering high-risk activities such as substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, violence, and ultimately connection with social service agencies and juvenile justice systems (Bolland et al, 2007; Chu, 2018; Leslie et al., 2010; Mallett, 2018; Oritz, 2019).

Academic, Behavioral, Mental Health Challenges

Much of the literature pertaining to children who experience learning, behavioral or

mental health challenges highlight issues surrounding under-identification, misidentification, and underservice (Forness et al., 2012; Losen & Welner, 2001; Wiley et al., 2014). The question of prevalence of learning and behavioral disorder cases in schools remains a critical issue for administrators struggling to establish and maintain a sustainable service model bounded by finite budgets. With academic and social/emotional needs being under-serviced, students with disabilities are at a two- to three-times greater risk than students without disabilities of being involved in offending and delinquent activities and of having higher recidivism rates (Durpre, 2000; Forness et al, 2012; Raj, 2018). A review by Sullivan et al. (2014) found that while students with special education disabilities represent 11-14% of a typical student population, they represent 20-24% of students who are suspended or expelled. Recent estimates indicate that school drop-out rates among adolescents with learning disabilities are higher than drop-out rates among other special education populations and far exceed national averages for students without disabilities (Foreman-Murray et al., 2022). The lack of educational opportunities afforded to this population often transpires into a life of underemployment, low wages, and reliance on social programs (Lee & Sau, 2013; Smith et al., 2024). Research also advances the stark percentages of incarcerated people who have experiences of learning/ behavioral/ mental health difficulties to be double that of non-disabled populations (Crowe & Drew, 2021).

Race

In the past few decades, western academic institutions have crafted charters, mission statements, and policies in adherence with government law to protect racialized and indigenous youth from discrimination (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 2023; Commission des droits de la personne et les droits de la jeunesse, 2019). While this may have resulted in less blatantly racist incidents in schools, studies continue to highlight the pervasive systematic racism

which continues to permeate school environments (Bradbury, 2014; Ezikwelu, 2020; Kohli, et al., 2017). Due to cultural biases and misconceptions, BIPOC populations continue to have a higher propensity of being more vigilantly supervised and are more often perceived by staff as deviant, and accused of rule infractions (Heilbrun et al., 2018; Welch & Payne, 2010). Furthermore, they are more often issued harsher consequences than their Caucasian counterparts for the same transgression and staff are more likely to call upon social service and child protection agencies when managing their cases (Desai et al., 2012). These exclusionary disciplinary measures hinder the academic growth of racial minority youth and contribute to a fifth of disparities in achievement and remedial program placement (Morris & Perry, 2016; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; National Research Council, 2002). Professional practices must be understood as cultural work in which assumptions about competence privilege certain groups (Oritz, 2019). The role of history and power in a Disability Studies (DS) analysis of disproportionate representation argues that views on disability, like other forms of cultural difference, legitimizes technical practices that place ethnic minority groups in segregated specialized programs (Liasidou, 2013).

Whether the factors above are studied independently or collectively, they remain important considerations in how one may experience the school environment. The propensity to witness and live within systems of disadvantage place some students at higher risk of exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which affects their social determinants of health (Jamieson, 2021). Defined as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age”, and shaped by the “distribution of money, power, and resources,” these circumstances ordain the baggage that students carry to school (World Health Organization, 2021). The short-term consequence of often inequitable treatment is student disengagement which, in turn, can

contribute to lower retention rates (Murray & Naranjo, 2008). The longer-term repercussions of school disenfranchisement are clearly demonstrated in the disproportionate rates these cohorts constitute in incarcerated populations, attributing to the compounding discriminatory factors which these students face as the 'school-to-prison pipeline' (Brossard, 2012; Gonzalez, 2012; Jamieson, 2021; Mallett, 2017; Skiba et al., 2014).

To conclude, embarking on a conversation about school climate and student engagement must incorporate the lived experiences of youth and avoid one-size-fits-all models. The realities that constitute a person's life world plays a significant role in their willingness and readiness to engage with their school and with learning. While students remain equal with regards to human dignity and respect, school improvement initiatives need to provide an equitable provision of services to respond to diverse student needs.

Problem Statement

Due to stereotypical and normative assumptions regarding children's lack of competence and life experience, adults proceed to make economic, social, and pedagogical decisions 'in the best interest of the child' with limited substantial dialogue or negotiation (Chen et al., 2017; Egan, 2016; Kellett, 2005). Adolescents, cast by adults as being in the midst of a self-indulgent identity crises, and overzealous use of personal slang and commentary, are often deemed as incapable and "unequipped to deal in any far-reaching manner with the moral, ethical, emotional, and intellectual questions" they encounter (Egan, 2016, p. 50).

In contrast, the current manuscript asserts that youth should be regarded as active social agents who possess the agency to influence, organize, coordinate, and control events taking place in their social worlds (Barab & Roth, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Chen et al., 2017; Ungar, 2015). When investigating student engagement

> opportunities must be given for students to critically reflect on what well-being means to them, to navigate through and negotiate within the communities in which they live, play and learn, with a view to realizing, challenging and enacting their potentials, ambiguities and desires, and to do all this in a constant dialogue with others, in the context of plurality and difference (Hannigan, et al., 2019, p. 759).

Student Voice

Student voice matters. Students who feel they occupy space to advocate for themselves and have an effect on classroom and school policy are seven times more likely to be academically motivated than students who feel silenced and marginalized (Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations, 2016). Educators are advised that when students have choice, control, and opportunities for collaboration, their levels of effort, persistence, motivation (i.e., the most important factors that affect achievement) all increase (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012).

When opening space for students to take their rightful place as agents of change and reform within their school communities, reflection is needed on the inherent power dynamics and systematic bias present in school settings that continue to privilege certain voices while silencing others (Hinde, 2004; Lemov et al., 2023; Rogers, 2019). Without proper consideration, educators run the risk of soliciting and considering the perspectives of only those who have historically had the social capital to do so. Students who occupy spaces in marginalized communities are often silenced and are led to believe through repeated experiences that their opinions don't matter and or won't affect change (Cook-Sather, 2002; Liang et al., 2019; Sarti et al., 2018). School leaders are cautioned that to engage in genuine student voice work, the opinions of minority populations, and even those who are perceived as rude, inarticulate, crass, and oppositional, must be sought out and considered (Cervenak et al., 2013). Likewise, if school leaders wish to amplify student voices within the conversation on school climate reform, a commitment to doing so for the purpose of true transformation and not just window-dressing needs to be made. Jumping on the

bandwagon of what's trending in student 'voice and choice' for the mere sake of public relations would not only be ineffective, but further harm school culture.

General Research Aims

The first goal of this research project was to investigate the context-specific, emic lived experiences of adolescents with regards to the social aspect of school climate. Specifically, this involved an investigation of how students perceived the relationships they had with staff members, how they believed their behavior was managed, and the degree to which they felt they had the space to advocate for themselves with regards to classroom and school-based decision-making. The second objective of this enterprise was to create space for students to be actively engaged with the research process to foster advocacy and empowerment in their current educational environment as well as for the creation and implementation of future aims.

The Dissertation Studies

Following ethical approval from the Office of Research at Concordia University (see Appendix A), and Lester B. Pearson School Board (see Appendix B), students were recruited through grade level assemblies (see Appendix C). Once student assent and parental consent was obtained (see Appendix E, F & G), six weekly focus group sessions were conducted in the pilot school between May and June of 2023 (see Appendix H – L). The study culminated with participants co-authoring a Call to Action which was presented to the school's administration in June 2023 (see Appendix M).

The three elements which constitute the social aspect of school climate (student-staff relationships, student behavior management, and opportunities for student advocacy) were studied and findings were presented in three separate manuscripts for publication.

With attention paid to how students situated themselves in the school environment, the first line of inquiry aimed to determine the connection between how students experienced school and perceived their relationships with staff members. How these relationships played into how students understood, defined, and quantified school climate was also of concern. The second line of inquiry investigated student perception of how their behaviors were managed by school staff. While how students position themselves in the school environment is note-worthy, how they felt staff in turn positioned them was also of interest. Here we pay heed to perceived reputation and opportunities for redemption. Likewise, how students interpreted behavior management procedures in relation to the quality of their school environment was acknowledged. Finally, with a systems focus, we turn our attention to how school policies and procedures are created, implemented, and reviewed. Are students authentically engaged as active stakeholders in this enterprise? The last line of questioning investigated how implicated students felt they were in both their classroom and school-based decision-making. In relation to school climate, would higher engagement translate to the perception of a better-quality school environment?

The overall goal of **Study 1** was to investigate the following questions:

1) What are student perceptions with regards to how fair and equitable student behavior is managed by school staff?
    a. How does the perception of student behavior management affect how school climate is regarded?

A focus group of student participants created three arts-based pieces and, following an intertextual analysis, determined a positive correlation between strong student-staff relationships and healthy school climates. Based on the findings, school stakeholders exploring effective measures for school improvement were advised that paying heed to the quality of relationships

between the staff and students was of paramount importance. Furthermore, this study directs educators to three main target points, highlighting that robust relationships can be fostered by demonstrating genuine interest in students as people with academic as well as personal interests, adopting pedagogical and relational practices which promote equity and discretion, and fostering opportunities for redemption following conflict.

To build upon the first study, in **Study 2** the focus group created and analyzed data from the three arts-based methods to explore the second dimension of the social aspect of school climate, that is, student behavior management.

2) How do students define good quality relationships with school staff?
    a) What are student perceptions with regards to the quality of relationships they have with staff?
    b) How do these relationships affect how school climate is perceived?

In addition to the discovery of a positive correlation between the two variables, school stakeholders are well served by the understanding that student behavior management, and thus school climate, can be ameliorated through: 1) fostering connected, invested staff-student relationships; 2) promoting differentiated pedagogical practices in the classroom which allow for student voice and choice; and, 3) ensuring that behavior management protocols promote prevention of negative behaviors and redemption following infractions. It was concluded that strong school climates were ones which adopted restorative behavior management measures which addressed wrong-doing while protecting the integrity of all involved.

To culminate the investigation of the social aspect of school climate, and to especially lean into the project's action research design, the focus group in **Study 3** employed the arts-

based methods to explore the degree to which they felt they were afforded an audience to voice their opinions and perspectives within classrooms and the wider school community.

3) What are student perceptions with regards to the opportunities they are afforded to advocate for themselves (are empowered to affect) classroom and school-based decisions?
    a) How does the perceived level of student advocacy and empowerment in classroom and school-based decision-making affect how school climate is regarded?

Outlining the grave lack of space for high school students to advocate for themselves, teachers are advised to consider the intentional application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) pedagogical practices. Doing so would facilitate student selection of learning spaces but also accessing curriculum through differentiated modalities, determining pace, and co-selecting how achievement is measured. As for implication in school-based decision-making, school leaders are advised to acknowledge students as active stakeholders in the school community and ensure that governance structures include their genuine consultation. They are further encouraged to facilitate the creation of and be actively implicated in a student governance body, whereby students can collaborate with staff towards sustainable, effective school improvement initiatives.

Original Contribution

Presented separately, the studies included in this dissertation contribute to qualitative educational research in various ways. From a methodological standpoint, **Study 1** demonstrates not only the importance of incorporating student voice in action research scholarship but also the research design implications and limitations in doing so. The published study was commended by reviewers for its strength in demonstrating how arts-based data collection methods can be

used with youth in action research. The article is directed to an audience of school stakeholders in a quest for practical direction on how to lead school improvement initiatives. The study stresses the importance of incorporating youth perspectives into their practice and an ethical and effective path to do so.

Study 2 leads a conversation on a highly contentious issue in educational research and frontline practice, that of student behavior management. By grounding the article in a social ecology theory of human development, scholars and practitioners are (re)introduced to the complex ways in which people (students and staff alike) experience, react, and respond to their environments. By framing student behavior management within an exchange of complex human experiences, school leaders hoping to improve student engagement are counseled to promote reflexivity and humanity in their school climate practices. While restorative measures are suggested, policymakers are cautioned to consider the complicated way covert and overt forces mold biases and misconceptions when addressing a diverse student population. By way of research practice, this article also highlights how action and arts-based research can be utilized to elicit the unique perspectives of student populations to ensure that school leader efforts are authentic and sustainable.

In alignment with the overarching goal of the dissertation project, **Study 3** directly addresses the importance of, and the way, student voices can and should be incorporated in educational research and school improvement projects. In research as well as in frontline practices, youth are often dismissed as passive recipients of services rather than functioning collaborators and authors of their own experience. This manuscript satisfies this gap by giving youth pride of place in the conversation about how student engagement can be improved. By employing an action research approach, educational leaders are given direction on how to

actively engage youth in classroom and school-based decision-making and ultimately their school climate.

Presented collectively, the three studies provide educational leaders and frontline practitioners with an effective starting point when attempting to bolster student engagement. By commencing with the basic tenets of school climate, school community stakeholders can secure a foundation upon which other initiatives can rest. This research sets a clear directional path for frontline educators by advising them to prioritize holistic relationships with their students, differentiated classroom design and pedagogical practices, and restorative behavior management practices. They further current educational research by providing not only an overview of the importance of genuine student consultation when devising school climate improvement but also a model for how to implement consultation through action research and arts-based methods of data collection.

Methodology

Epistemological Framework

The current research adheres to interpretive constructivist ontology and epistemology. Firmly grounded in the position that human experience is subjective, socially constructed, and influenced by context, the research forges a path towards understanding research participants' experiences from their point of view, capturing multiple perspectives and versions of truth along the way (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Fuller & Loogma, 2009; Schwandt, 1998; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The research also reflects a regard for youth as autonomous and intentional social agents who actively construe, construct, and interpret their own behavior and that of their fellow agents (Schwandt, 1998). Unlike a universal truth or rule, interpretivist researchers seek the social meaning of reality for human beings which ultimately affects their behavior. As accounts of the

world take place within shared systems of intelligibility, people's narratives are taken as an expression of relationships among people. "Interpretivism refers to the approaches which emphasize the meaningful nature of people's character and participation in both social and cultural life" (Chowdhury, 2014). To capture the humanness of research and navigate against the tide of "audit culture" and the "politics of evidence," this dissertation project adopted an interactive, flexible research design to discover and understand phenomenon, process, and the worldviews of the people involved (Denzin, 2017, p. 8).

Theoretical Framework

In alignment with interpretivist inquiry a social ecology theoretical model of human development is applied. Inspired by Kurt Lewin's (1935; 1936; 1948; 1951) topological territories, Urie Bronfenbrenner's understanding of human development is presented through the prism of the "environmental interconnections and their impact on the force directly affecting psychological growth" (Crawford, 2020, p. 1). Human experience is thus presented as a dynamic interplay between inextricably linked micro and macro forces which make up one's subjective life space (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Nguyen & Tran, 2015).

Framed within a Process, Person, Context, Time (PPCT) model, human development is put forth as a dynamic, interconnected process shaped by ongoing reciprocal interactions between individuals and their immediate and broader contextual environments across different time periods (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As elaborated below, the reciprocal interactions individuals experience with their environment (proximal processes), their personal characteristics, the micro (familial/educational) and macro (cultural) contexts, and temporal considerations all coincide to actualize a person's life experiences.

Moving away from studying "the strange behavior of children in strange situations by strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time," this theoretical lens advocates for an understanding of human development that requires "examination of multi-personal systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514). The multiple, nested settings where one exists are presented within a systems approach. The first is the *microsystem*, a space created between the developing person and an immediate setting (where they perform tasks and assume specific roles) for a set period of time. When investigating this area, it is the content, that is, the nature and purpose of the task, rather than mere process, that is recognized, so that the substantive aspect is not neglected. While the *mesosystem* considers the interaction between the major settings in which a person finds themselves during a particular time in their life (school with home, for instance), the *exosystem* extends this further to include the formal and informal social structures that influence one's immediate settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Here we are paying heed to major social institutions such as labor, mass media, and government, as well as informal social networks to name a few. Lastly, the *macrosystem* encompasses the general prototypes existing within culture and subcultures. At times seen as obviously constructed blueprints, recorded in law and policy, and other times, implicit in customs and ideology, these overarching institutional patterns form the basis upon which all other systems manifest (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While originally conceived by Bronfenbrenner as a periphery macro-system which affected the personal micro-world, this dissertation agrees with contemporary critics of this theory and positions culture and cultural landscape in which one develops as an intricate part of proximal processes (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). One's culture here is conferred considerable importance in understanding how one

interprets their personal and social world. Composed of fluid daily practices and interpreted through language and modes of communication, culture includes the tools and signs that are part of the historical legacy of a community, contributing to diversity within children's microsystems, and "leads to culturally defined acceptable developmental processes and outcomes" (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

In conclusion, of import for school stakeholders, is that by applying a social ecology approach to the study of student experiences within school climates, this dissertation encourages an appreciation for how micro and macro forces not only set limits on human development but also impose imperatives regarding the environmental conditions and experiences required for the realization of human potential.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In keeping with a constructivist interpretive position and relying on "an epistemology of experiential and participative knowing, informed by critical subjectivity and participatory transaction," a participatory action research (PAR) methodology was employed (Denzin, 2017, p. 9). Regarded as a relatively 'new' paradigm science, a 'practice-changing practice' where we are invited to rethink the relationship between theory and practice and between theorists and practitioners, this social transformation approach to research positions reality as subjective, context-specific, uncertain, ambiguous, idiosyncratic, and open to interpretation (Baum et al., 2006; Chen et al., 2018; Kemmis et al., 2009). Challenging conventional research, which can be extractive, PAR redistributes power so that participant expertise leads a cycle of iterative self-reflection through all aspects of the research process: planning, observing, acting, and replanning (Baum et al., 2006). Researchers act as critical friends who facilitate the process by maintaining rigor and collaborate with participants as partners in a community of practice invested in making

improvements to institutional practices (Aldridge, 2015; Baum et al., 2006; Bland & Atweh, 2004; Kemmis et al., 2014).

Action research supports democratic participation because recognizing peoples' rights cultivates responsibility; that is, inclusion and participation propagate a sense of ownership and responsibility for the outcome (Aldeman, 1993; Freire, 1978). Promoting participant input with regards to structural practices opens space for them to critically analyze policies, determine whether some are untoward, and if so, advocate for changes so that policies may become more rational, productive, sustainable, just, and inclusive (Baum et al., 2006; Kemmis, 2009).

In addition to its ability to democratize the power relationship between researcher and participants, this methodology addresses the critique that, "qualitative research provides little more to the scholarship than anecdotal stories" (Denzin, 2017, p. 10). Mindful of the adage that 'purpose is the controlling force of research,' this project advances that while knowledge production and scholarship are important, for their own sake they are insufficient. With the ambition of not only understanding but improving the world, a PAR approach promotes the principles of inclusion, social justice, capacity building, organizational learning, and action (Baum et al., 2006; Kellett, 2005; Freire, 1978; Swartz & Nyamnjoh, 2018). As such, PAR marries reflection and action as a response to Paulo Freire's sentiment that, "reflection without action is sheer verbalism or armchair revolution and action without reflection is pure activism, or action for action's sake (Freire, 1978, p. 86).

The world and human beings exist in constant interaction, and "just as social reality exists not by chance, but as a product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance" (Freire, 1970, p. 25). With an emphasis on democratic participation and transformative action, PAR is a collaboration between researchers and participants as co-learners to assist in the

chrysalis of student advocacy to bring about organizational change through human flourishing (Ostaszewska, 2018; Quinn Patton, 2015). This is achieved through a cyclical and reflective practice, where youth participants create space to use the research process to engage in a broader social analysis and speak freely about their own experience.

Action research methodology has been shown to be effective in conducting collaborative explorations with youth (Kaluzeviciute et al., 2021). By facilitating an understanding of how one's cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political positionality interacts and is affected by educational practices, allows youth to adopt a systems approach rather than what may be falsely perceived as a personal one. Current thinking for critical participatory action research focuses on how to create new

> possibilities for human forms of social life through the revitalization of the public sphere, and to promote the decolonization of lifeworlds that have become saturated with bureaucratic discourses, routinized practices and institutionalized forms of social relationships; the characteristic of social systems that see the world only through the prism of organization, not the human and humane living of social lives (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 12).

Youth participants are guided to reflect on how practices are reproduced in everyday social interaction in particular settings because of the persistence of these circumstances and their responses to them. By understanding their practices as the product of intentions, conditions, and circumstances, PAR researchers become alert to clues about how it may be possible to transform the practices they are producing and reproducing through their current ways of working. Focusing on practices in a specific and concrete way makes them accessible for reflection, discussion and reconstruction as products of past circumstances that are capable of being modified.

Research Design

Critical Qualitative Inquiry

Aligned with the ontological, epistemological, and theoretical underpinnings of this project, a critical qualitative research design was chosen. In keeping with the key features of the humanness of research, purposive sampling, and the importance of context, this interactive, flexible research design assists in generating information and "discovering and understanding phenomenon, processes, and the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Chowdhury, 2014; Merriam, 1998, p. 30). In an effort to unsettle traditional concepts of what counts as research, evidence, and legitimate inquiry, this dissertation emphasizes a new model of performance, representation, intervention and praxis. The historical neoliberal present demands emancipatory visions that inspire transformative inquiries that provide the moral authority to move people to resist oppressive forces by exposing and critiquing forms of inequality and discrimination (Denzin, 2017; Freire, 1979; Ledwith, 2017). Moving beyond the quest to merely interpret a phenomenon, this critical qualitative research aims to change practices by resisting injustice and celebrating inclusion through an ethically responsible agenda. This is achieved through creating space for the voices of students to be at the center of the research with the goals of assisting all educational stakeholders by revealing sites for change in social policy and practice, as well as the researcher's own life by informing practice and serving as a model for colleagues.

Arts-based Research

The use of language-based methods privileges a medium for the creation and communication of knowledge (Bagnoli, 2009). As our daily experience is made up of a multiplicity of dimensions, which include the visual and the sensory, its investigation cannot

always be expressed in words (Bagnoli, 2009). Moving away from the privileged status of language, arts-based research approaches and strategies employ multifaceted ways of knowing the world that involve sensory perceptions and emotion as well as intellectual responses. By accessing the parts of self that are captured in non-linguistic representation or images attached to memories, arts-based practices encourage the evocation of both cognition and emotion. Used in various stages of research, the evolving field uses communicative and interpretative tools to bypass the need for verbal expression to explore problems in discursive ways, to capture and express ambiguities, liminalities, and complexities, to collaborate in the refining of ideas, to transform perceptions, and to engage both participants and audiences in cultural analysis and interpretation, emotionally as well as critically (Greenwood, 2019; Starr, 2010).

Arts-based research employs a variety of different methodologies that utilize art to access and represent different levels of experience, understandings, and representations, generating new ways of interrogating human experience (Hill, 2013). Assuming a holistic approach to social research that promotes new and alternative ways of knowing, thinking, recalling and representation, these evocative methods allow access to different parts of human consciousness (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Coholic et al., 2009; Leavy, 2009). Using metaphor, visual methods have the capacity to "enhance empathic understanding, capture the ineffable, and help us pay attention to reality in different ways, making the ordinary become extraordinary" (Bagnoli, 2009, p. 548).

By understanding and incorporating the way children create and inhabit cultures of their own making, arts-based methods are an effective, non-offensive, and safe means of engaging children with varying levels of literacy, maturity and attention span (Mand, 2012; Sarti et al., 2018). Furthermore, in socially based research, arts-based methods can be used with children to

"facilitate exposure to traumatic events in a less direct manner, allowing for desensitization of anxiety and a better understanding of effective states" (Coholic et al., 2009, p. 66). A final strength of the use of arts-based methods with youth is their ability to be fun. The use of play is a powerful combative force against suffering and a powerful antidote that keeps a child emotionally receptive so that intense messages can slip through their defenses (Blom, 2015; Malchiodi, 2014). Arts-based methods can be used as openers and ice breakers to build rapport and comfort between participants and researchers, allowing for the development of a more fluid and natural relationship (Ottemiller & Awais, 2016). Engagement is achieved through the process of allowing participants to express themselves according to their own needs, preferred modality and expressive style (Bagnoli, 2009). To promote and facilitate alternate and engaging modes of knowing, thinking, and representation, as well as contribute to the insurance of validity, three graphic elicitation arts-based methods, described next, were employed and triangulated.

Timeline

Timelines are a subtle and malleable research method which invite participants to share personal biographical data from birth to their current age, as well as projections for their future. While keeping time under consideration, timelining documents, records, extends and deepens understandings of rich temporal narratives (Sheridan et al, 2011). Temporal organization, the inclusion / exclusion of significant relationships juxtaposed by critical developmental stages and socially constructed milestone expectations, all speak to one's connectivity, perspective and point of view (Berends, 2011). In keeping with micro as well as macro considerations, by connecting the individual to the collective, participants can come to see how their lives have been and continue to be affected by systematic institutional as well as even greater socio-

historical elements.

In relation to students' experiences in their educational environment and to the dissertation studies, timelines can indicate how the social aspects of school climate (relationships, behavior management and opportunities for advocacy) contribute to students' sense of self and their expectations for future endeavors. Which people and experiences are missing or are reported as influential or harmful provides participants with a visual representation of the web of relationships they have created within school. Key events included in the elicitation speaks to the opportunities where students felt engaged, included, and empowered in their school environment.

Relational Map

From social ecology theory, we learn that individuals exist within a social structure; they do not exist or develop in a vacuum but are both interdependent and co-dependent on others (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Relational maps elicit the mechanisms which maintain the relational positioning of people and places within social space (Donnelly et al., 2020). Relational maps invite participants to envision themselves as part of a solar system of relationships. As they illustrate their personal constellation, the detail they include, as well as the distance they afford people, highlights not only their perception of self (centered or not), but the emotionality of what is shown and what is missing (Marx, 2022). As, "connectedness has been shown to be fundamental to our psychological and physical well-being," relational mapping supports participants to reflect upon the complexity, subtlety, and intensity of relational experiences at times of continuity and contentment as well as disruption and distress (Boden et al., 2019, p. 223).

When investigating school culture, this social space must be viewed as a complex web occupied by actors according to multiple dimensions that encompass social, cultural, economic, and symbolic elements (Boden et. al., 2019). How students situate the adults within their school environments relative to themselves informs the proximal importance given to these adults and pertains to their connectedness and engagement in the school community. This method is well suited for working with youth, in that,

> it helps overcome silence about some aspects of their lives that young people may not find easy or immediate to talk about. By providing a task that engages participants on another level from verbally answering questions, the map helps thinking differently about issues and may elicit information which would have possibly remained unknown otherwise (Bagnoli, 2009, p. 560).

Photovoice

Photovoice is a participatory data collection strategy in which participants use cameras to document their realities, engage in critical reflection, and advocate for change by using the power of their images and stories to communicate with policy makers (Wang, 2001). This reflexive method has gained momentum in qualitative research for its ability to allow the phenomenon to be discussed at the pace of the participant with little intervention from the researcher.

Using visual methods allows researchers to tackle traditional power relations and encourages participant investment (Hill, 2013). By granting participant control over all aspects of artistic jurisdiction, including content, style, and freedom over what to submit, youth are drawn into a research process that can be "transformative, empowering or therapeutic" for those involved (Hill, 2013, p. 146; Ostaszewska, 2018). Creating a space for the voice of participants to be heard situates them as agents of change in their environments as they attempt to challenge the dominant discourse. Combining the key elements of documentary photography,

methodological assumptions of participatory action research, and the notion of the power of critical consciousness, photovoice empowers people and supports them in life challenges (D'Amico et al., 2016; Ostaszewska, 2018).

Student researchers learn about the use of photography as a research and empowerment tool. Photos, with their associated written narratives, are used to facilitate critical dialogue, community-awareness building, and group discussions. This reflexive method speaks to our PAR methodology in that student empowerment is fostered through the dissemination of the work to the wider community and policy makers through exhibitions (Castleden et al., 2008; D'Amico et al., 2016; Hergenrather & Rhodes, 2009). Through its ability to "alleviate isolation often associated with social marginalization," this method allows for phenomena to be discussed at the pace of the participant and provides an opportunity to use photos of interest as a means to critical discussion contextualized in the school environment (D'Amico et. al., 2016, p. 529; Leung & Flanagan, 2019). Creating a space for the voice of participants to be heard situates them as agents of change in their environments as they attempt to challenge the dominant discourse. Using visual methods allows co-researchers to tackle traditional power relations and encourages participant investment (Castleden et. al., 2008; Hill, 2013; Ostaszewska, 2018).

The specific research areas to be addressed using this method include providing insight into the school spaces that students feel varying levels of safety, belonging, and empowerment. As a visual, tactile method, photovoice allows students to not only tell, but powerfully demonstrate to adult decision-makers what their school experiences are like. Trauma work consists of preventing, mitigating and ultimately healing from perceived and / or actual threats to one's life, bodily integrity and / or sanity. While trauma work is often discussed within the realms of social work and psychology, the current research aimed to situate trauma work in the

school environment. By redefining educators as human developers and the school space as a planned environment, this research explored the theoretical underpinnings of best practices in trauma work, namely, that of social ecological theory in human development.

Participants

Adolescents (aged 12-17) were selected to provide insight and reflection on both elementary and secondary school experiences. An inner-city Montréal high school was chosen as the pilot school due to its culturally diverse student population of approximately 800 students, as well as its varied academic programs. This pilot school was also selected due to its socio-economic derogation as an “école défavorisée” - level 8 (Ministère de l’Éducation et de l’Enseignement supérieur, 2023; Réseau réussite Montréal, 2023). This categorization allocates extra funding and extenuating staffing considerations to respond to its socio-economically disadvantaged, vulnerable, and at-risk student population.

Recruitment and Selection Criteria

Following ethical approval from Concordia University’s institutional review board, Lester B. Pearson School Board, as well as the administration of the pilot school, adolescent participants were recruited through grade level assemblies over the course of one morning in the school’s auditorium. The researcher introduced the goal of the research as well as the time commitment for those interested in participating. Following a question period, interested students were invited to come to the podium and were given an assent form as well as a parental consent form to take home and have signed. Two days following the assemblies, the researcher returned to the school to collect signed forms. To participate, students needed to be English-speaking and be full-time students at the pilot school during the 2023-2024 academic year.

All twenty-five students who returned the signed consent forms (seven grade 7; eight grade 8; two grade 9; three grade 10; and four grade 11) were invited by email to participate in the study's focus group. Subsequently, the group met every Wednesday for six weeks over the two lunch hours. A discreet location was selected for each session to ensure participant privacy. Participants were reminded about confidentiality at every session, as well as their freedom to remove data from analysis and/or cease participation at any time. For security purposes, an administrative assistant was given the attendance record taken by the researcher to verify school attendance.

Data Collection

Focus Group

As an organized assembly of individuals who are purposefully selected by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of research; the key feature of focus groups, as opposed to group interviews, is the diverse insight and data produced by the interaction between participants (Gibbs, 1997). The multiplicity of participant perspectives and emotional processes are revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entail. Used at any stage of the research design to draw upon participant's attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions, focus groups can be used alone or as a complement to other methods, especially for triangulation and validity checking (Nakkeeran & Zodpey, 2012). The main benefit of using focus groups as a data collection method include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation.

By accessing the interaction in a group atmosphere, guided focus groups provide the researcher with efficient entry into the salient worldview and value-laden language of the

phenomenon under study. Interaction also enables participants to ask questions of each other, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences. A third benefit of particular interest to this research project, is the ability of focus groups to afford participants the empowering opportunity to be involved in decision-making processes, to be valued as experts, and to be given the chance to work collaboratively with the researcher. Once youth come into their power / are (em)powered, the momentum to transform the focus group into a vehicle of change is possible.

Focus Group Sessions

A focus group of twenty-five students across grade levels met on Wednesday over the lunch hours for six consecutive weeks from May to June 2023. The first introductory session was spent reviewing the goals of the research project, how the subsequent sessions would be structured, and a review of the ethical requirements of on-going consent and confidentiality. Following an ice-breaker activity, the second session began with a PowerPoint presentation explaining the data collection method of relational map. Given a blank piece of paper and colored markers of their choosing, students in groups of 6-7 rotated every 20 minutes between stations dedicated to each research question and were each asked to create a relational map which depicted positive or negative relationships with school staff in relation to each question. Once the time allocation was up, the students were given an opportunity to share their work within their groups and discuss observations. The whole group then convened for a meaning-making session to discuss any common themes. During the individual work and group discussions, the researcher circulated to observe and write down perceptions of participant engagement and shared comments. Before being dismissed, participants were invited to leave their pieces with the researcher to review and corroborate with observation notes.

Following a collaborative game, the third session began with the researcher sharing observation notes with participants for confirmation and revision. Submitted relational maps were set out on a table to the side, available to any participant who wished to go back and edit their piece. Following a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the data collection method of timeline, participants were divided into new smaller groups and invited to rotate between stations dedicated to the three research questions. With the materials provided they were called upon to create a timeline depicting corresponding positive and negative milestones from elementary to the present grade. Intimate and whole group meaning-making discussions again ensued with the researcher circulating and taking notes about perceptions of student engagement and discussion items. Following a last call request to edit any pieces they wished, the students were dismissed and asked to leave the researcher with the creative pieces they wished to submit.

The fourth session began again with a collaborative game and researcher notes verification by the participants. Once participants were presented with a final PowerPoint presentation on the data collection method of photovoice, time was spent reviewing how one might approach this technique given the three research questions. Before being dismissed for the remainder of the session to take their photographs, the ethical constraint of confidentiality was reviewed, and participants were equipped with consent forms in the eventuality that their images included people not involved in the research project. Lastly, logistical issues surrounding submission of images and whether written captions would be added were discussed and agreed upon.

Over the course of the week, participants submitted their chosen images with written captions to the researcher via email. All submitted pieces (relational maps, timelines, and photographs) were displayed via a vernissage for the fifth session. As students entered, they were

issued sticky notes and markers and invited to take the first 20 minutes of the session, writing comments / ideas / questions on any of the pieces. During a whole group discussion, participants discussed their perceptions with regards to any of the research questions and its impact on school climate. Once common themes were agreed upon by a show of hands, participants then deliberated how to translate their findings into a format that could be shared with their school administration. With a concern for retribution and desire to maintain anonymity, participants agreed to collaborate on the writing of an anonymous *Call to Action* which would be submitted on their behalf to their administration via the researcher's email.

With a week to reflect on the contents of the *Call to Action*, participants met at a final time to draft the document. With their own notes in tow, they sat together and dictated their thoughts to a participant volunteer who typed everyone's contributions up on a Smart TV for all to see and confirm. Once everyone was satisfied with the contents and structure, the document was shared with the researcher, who emailed it to the school's administration on their behalf. Two weeks following this communication, the researcher met with the administration (Principal, and two Vice Principals) to discuss the project's findings.

Observation

Observation is a systematic qualitative data collection approach where researchers use all their senses to examine people in natural settings or naturally occurring situations (Cohen et al, 2017). As a participatory case study, the assumed role of the researcher was that of *participant observer*, whereby the researcher not only observed the research participants, but also engaged in the activities by explaining the activities, clarifying questions, and providing guidance (Banister, 2011; Quinn Patton, 2015). This open-ended, naturalistic, ecologically valid method boasts the ability to produce a rich wealth of data, producing much material that can be related to

previously published literature and can suggest many avenues for further research. This is possible mainly through the accessibility of the data, in that it allows readers to make their own judgements about the findings, and how they can be interpreted. Furthermore, the observational method can illuminate processes, chronologies and examine causality, as well as give access to phenomena that are often obscured, such as non-verbal cues, or not amenable to experimentation (Banister, 2011).

Data Analysis

Validity

While the trustworthiness of any academic endeavor is required, the considerable ongoing debate as to what makes research valid continues to be particularly problematic for qualitative research (Angen, 2000). The path forged by those called upon to pursue investigations into life world ontologies and interpretive human inquiry has resulted in several reconfigurations of ethical and substantive procedures of validation and the meaning of truth. By not bowing to the traditional authority of positivism, interpretive work claims its legitimacy by positioning truth as fluid, contextual, and relational (Jardine, 1990; Lincoln, 1990).

This research aimed to establish credibility of the data by reducing ambiguity through adopting self-corrective techniques that verified the credibility of data and minimized personal bias. As interest-free knowledge is logically impossible, freedom to substitute explicit interests for implicit ones was taken. Positioning this research as ‘openly ideological’ and comfortable in the incertitude surrounding social knowledge, an interactive research paradigm is assumed to reconceptualize validity. In solidarity with feminist, critical, and Freirean empowering research, the current project assumes a transformative agenda which positions research as praxis and

rejects the advancement of ‘objective’ research as nothing more than a continued ploy to legitimate privilege based on class, race, and gender.

Moving beyond positivist structure, the challenge is to formulate an approach to empirical research which advances emancipatory theory-building through the development of interactive and action-inspiring research design, with the goal of changing rather than merely describing the world. With no ready-made formula to guarantee valid social knowledge, this project operates simultaneously at epistemological, theoretical, and empirical levels of self-awareness. To this purpose, a subjective research design must refine traditional research to incorporate an interactive, dialogic logic openly committed to a just social order. Once we move beyond the need to answer to nonexistent neutrality, we are called to simply guard against researcher bias distorting the logic of evidence. This is achieved firstly by triangulation, that is, employing not only multiple measures, but multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes to seek counter patterns and convergences to establish data credibility.

Secondly, construct validity must be approached as an integral part of theory construction. To achieve emancipatory social theory a ceaseless confrontation with people’s lived experiences must be pursued to avoid theoretical imposition which is inherent in theoretically guided work (Grimm & Widaman, 2012). A systemized reflexivity must be applied to give some indication of how *a priori* theory has been adjusted due to the logic of data in establishing construct validity in a manner which will contribute to the birth of change-enhancing social theory.

Thirdly, face validity needs to be regarded as more integral to the process of establishing data credibility. To this end member-checks, that is, recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents, is positioned as the backbone of satisfying the truth-value criterion.

To satisfy the non-alienating aspect of emancipatory social research, the subjects must be presented with tentative results, which is then subject to refinement based on subjects' reactions (Gaber & Baber, 2010).

Lastly, flying in the face of the essential positivist tenet of researcher neutrality, we can reimagine validity by focusing on the degree to which the research process re-orients, focuses, and energizes participants, that is, catalytic validity. This participation action research project can stand to be regarded as valid in that participants are drawn to what Freire would refer to as '*concientizacion*', that is, knowing reality in order to transform it (Freire, 1973). The goal here is to not only respond to the reality-altering impact of the research itself, but more importantly on the need to intentionally channel this impact so that participants gain self-understanding, and ideally, self-determination through their involvement in the research process.

Arts-based Methods

The richness of the opportunities created using arts in conducting and/or reporting research brings accompanying challenges. Firstly, most practically, with regards to training and skills, researchers may need specialized skills in both art creation and analysis, which can necessitate additional training and resources. Moving beyond understanding the role of arts-based research in their field of choice, researchers are best served with a foundation in not only the creative process itself, but the suited methodologies and analysis techniques to interpret work produced. Beyond this, the ethical considerations of consent and representation, as well as ensuring cultural competence, cultivates an understanding of diverse cultural contexts and practices, ensuring that the art produced is respectful and inclusive. Navigating the need to evolve ethical awareness that is consistent with the intentions and power of the arts and of

representation, especially when working with vulnerable populations, can be complex. Ensuring that participants' voices and experiences are accurately and respectfully portrayed is critical.

Secondly, challenges emerge with regards to identifying audiences in research to critically assess the effect of the information in presentations. Working with diverse audiences, resulting in varying levels of access, appreciation or subjective understanding of art (which is inherently ambiguous), can complicate the interpretation and subsequent dissemination and impact of the research findings, thus making it difficult to draw clear conclusions or recommendations.

A third challenge when using arts-based methods in research is the need to develop relevant and useful strategies for peer review of the research as well as the art. Establishing the validity and reliability of findings can be challenging, as artistic expressions might not follow standardized protocols typical of quantitative research. Furthermore, combining arts-based methods with quantitative or qualitative approaches can be difficult, as different paradigms may clash in terms of philosophy and application.

Lastly, on a more practical level, creating and analyzing artistic works can be more time-intensive than conventional research methods, requiring significant investment in both creation and interpretation. Additionally, securing funding for arts-based research can be challenging, as it may not fit traditional grant frameworks that prioritize more conventional methodologies. Despite these challenges, arts-based research methods offer unique insights and can foster deeper understanding of complex issues, making them a valuable addition to the research landscape.

Ethical Considerations

As minors are the targeted population under investigation, established ethical guidelines of minimizing risk, ensuring participant and parental consent, and maintaining participant

privacy and confidentiality, must be respected (Tri-council Panel, 2008). The current research project regards the environment of the child participant within an ecology of interrelated relationships. As such, not only is the child participant subject to ethical review but the multiple stakeholders who are connected, and thus implicated in the research project. These relationships play a vital role in not only obtaining personal and institutional consent, but also in the deliberation as to who possesses a vested interest in data ownership and dissemination. With regards to such research partnerships, the lack of precedent for applying established ethics guidelines, organizational policies within schools, and child protection laws speaks to the complexity of guiding research practices with youth (Jardine & James, 2012).

Working with youth also presents challenges with regards to the ethical requirement to reduce harm. It is of paramount importance that no child is (re)traumatized due to their participation in a study. It is the responsibility of a reflective researcher to ensure that every step of the research process is embedded with safeguards to guard children from being (re)triggered. As such data collection methods must be chosen and conducted with constant reflection on consent, confidentiality and preventing/reducing harm to participants. A final ethical consideration must be given when reporting data. In addition to what was previously mentioned regarding stakeholders and data ownership, child protection laws stipulate very clear reporting obligations where abuse and neglect are expected (Gouvernement de Québec, 2019). It is therefore the responsibility of the researcher to encourage the authentic solicitation of information from children, while ensuring that any indication of maltreatment is reported, regardless of how this may affect the outcome of the research project.

The next section details the resulting manuscripts from the above research.

Look both ways before crossing: Using a triangulation of arts-based methods to explore student - staff relationships as it relates to school climate

Jennifer Beaudoin and Miranda D'Amico

Department of Education, Concordia University

Citation:

Beaudoin, J., D'Amico, M. (2024). Look both ways before crossing: Using a triangulation of art-based methods to transform student – staff relationships as it relates to school climate, *IJAR- International Journal of Action Research*, *20*, (3), 1-28. https://doi.org/10.3224/ijar.vXiX.366359

Abstract

By engaging in an arts-based action-research case study, youth from a Montréal school considered student-staff relationships as they relate to school climate. Three arts-based data collection methods (timeline, relational map and photovoice) were used to gain aware- ness on how relationships with staff constituted the primary determinant of student behavior, student engagement, and a robust school climate. Positive relationships were found to be facilitated by staff who authentically engage with students' lives outside the classroom, demonstrate equity and discretion in classroom management practices, and allow for redemption following rule infractions or conflicts. With the goal of enacting sustainable change in the school environment, participants collaborated in drafting a *Call to Action* addressed to the school's administration, advocating for the creation of a student council as a space to voice their positions, build better communication with staff, and foster a healthy school climate. The paper thus illustrates how arts-based action-research can contribute to transforming school environments.

Keywords: Participatory Action Research; Arts-based methods; Student - staff relationships; School climate; Student council

Resumen: Al participar en un estudio de caso de investigación-acción basado en el arte, los jóvenes de una escuela de Montreal consideraron las relaciones entre estudiantes y personal del centro educativo en relación con el clima escolar. Se utilizaron tres métodos de recopi- lación de datos basados en las artes (línea de tiempo, mapa relacional y fotovoz) para generar conciencia sobre cómo las relaciones con el personal constituían el principal determinante del comportamiento estudiantil, la participación de los estudiantes y un clima escolar sólido. Se descubrió que las relaciones positivas son facilitadas por el personal que se involucra auténticamente con la vida de los estudiantes fuera del aula, demuestra equidad y discreción en las

prácticas de gestión del aula y permite la redención después de infracciones o conflictos. Con el objetivo de implementar un cambio sostenible en el entorno escolar, los participantes colaboraron en la redacción de un *Llamado a la Acción* dirigido a la administración de la escuela, abogando por la creación de un consejo estudiantil como un espacio para expresar sus posiciones, construir una mejor comunicación con el personal y fomentar un clima escolar saludable. Por lo tanto, el artículo ilustra cómo la investigación-acción basada en el arte puede contribuir a transformar los entornos escolares.

1. Introduction

Despite their often-common roots, school climate research is reflected in the diversity of climate typologies that have evolved (Marraccini et al., 2020). “Generally accepted as the quality and character of school life, the discussion around school climate is linked to differences among researchers in theory base, the hypothesized interrelationships of variables, unit of measurement choices, and the validity of subjective and qualitative data often based on participant or observer perception” (Cohen et al, 2009, p. 182). Rather than shy away from the task of situating new research within the existing literature, here we move beyond viewing school climate as an undesirable albatross or an unattainable unicorn, but rather stand with Anderson (1982) in her seminal review of envisioning school climate as a phoenix, born of the ashes of past school effects research. Here, school climate is positioned as a “multidimensional construct consisting of a combination of interrelated school characteristics shown to determine student learning and behavior, and one that schools could [and should] successfully target for change” (Anderson, 1982, p. 372).

While the importance of school climate has been established, discerning the quality of a school climate has remained largely rooted in the data associated with office referrals or student grades (Daily et al., 2019; Gietz & McIntosh, 2014). While academic success and a decrease in office referrals and suspensions merit accolades, how is one to determine the cause(s) of these fluctuations, or if these are even the criteria we should be using as a barometer to a healthy school climate? To address this query, we focus rather on the social dimension of school climate, specifically, student-staff relationships, as this rapport is seen to correlate with academic achievement, preventing behavior problems, and promoting social and emotional well-being (Bear, 2020).

Giving pride of place to students as active stakeholders and experts on their own experiences, this examination propels against traditional research, which can be self-serving, extractive, and where the "passive participation of children have historically been instrumentalized" (Loignon et al, 2020, p. 211). Employing an Action Research methodology, youth are invited to participate in creating a space where, while learning the research process, "they could potentially transform themselves, those they work with, and the systems of which they are an intrinsic part" (Seeley, 2011, p. 84). With the goal of seeking insight beyond the intellectual, but rather through socially constructed experiential knowing, youth participants in this study were immersed in three arts-based data collection methods; relational map, timeline, and photovoice. "Recognized for engaging communities in action research processes that transcend age, education, language, and cultural barriers," arts-based methods lean into children's natural gifts for self-expression to "re-thread relationships, re-encounter themselves, and develop sensitivities to the complex challenges facing their community, in a space of relative security" (Aldridge, 2015; Lykes, 2001, p. 271; Wilson & Flicker, 2004, p. 58). The use of a

triangulation of arts-based methods presents a core contribution to school improvement literature. Addressing issues of validity and ethics, we open a conversation about not only the importance of inviting youth experts into the conversation of school stakeholders, but a possible roadmap of how to do so.

This manuscript begins with a discussion on the importance of investigating student-staff relationships as a measure for school climate health. Following a rationale for employing an Action Research methodology and arts-based data collection methods, the design of the project is outlined. Student-led data analysis revealed that healthy relationships with staff were of paramount importance to positive school climates and were reliant on three factors: how implicated staff were in the personal lives of students outside the classroom; how students perceived the level of fairness and discretion in classroom management practices; and, the opportunities students felt they were given for redemption following an infraction or conflict with staff. Youth culminated the exercise by drafting a *Call to Action*, which was presented to the school administration, requesting the creation of a student council as a shared space for *all* school stakeholders to discuss, collaborate, and work towards sustainable school improvement initiatives.

2. Conceptual Framework for the Case - Student Voice

Educators in the current landscape share an ever-increasing concern as to how to foster a school climate that responds to faltering levels of student engagement, academic achievement, behavior, and well-being (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). While seminal literature exists that points to positive student-staff relationships as being the vital seed in school improvement initiatives, practices still remain adult-centered, and thus, ineffective (Hattie & Yates, 2012). Whether in

teacher preparation or in-service mentoring programs, much time is allocated for advising educators on the importance of predictable, structured classroom procedures and routines to promote learning and deter negative student behaviors (Hagenauer et. al., 2015). Of equal priority in ensuring a safe and caring learning environment is adopting a relational model with students, where time is taken to know students holistically and subsequent interactions are guided by empathy, patience, and understanding (Brownlee, 2004). In accordance with its primary importance, classroom management as it pertains to relationships, remains the biggest area of contention for pre-service and in-practice teachers alike (Emmer & Stough, 2010.). The ability of an educator to orchestrate the structure, procedures, and curriculum delivery in a classroom filled with ever-growing diversity of student profiles are one thing. Expecting that they will simultaneously assume a self-reflective mode, recognizing their own triggers and trauma, while also navigating through and responding to the vast array of student personalities and social-emotional competencies which change every school year, is a monumental, almost superhuman task. Yet, despite the difficulty, educators are reminded that without positive relationships with students, not even the best lesson plan will result in student achievement or engagement, nor in their own mental health or job satisfaction (Hagenauer et. al., 2015; Sammaknejad & Marzban, 2010).

However challenging to master, in order to create a safe learning and working environment conducive to social emotional health for all, staff must concoct their own authentic recipe of skills and tactics to build positive student relationships. Positive staff-student relationships are achieved through a professional commitment on behalf of staff to enter into a collaborative partnership with students, acknowledging that all human behavior is derived from environmental and personal factors which must be addressed and managed (Bronfenbrenner,

1979; Craig, 2008, Ungar, 2015). Building and maintaining genuine relationships with students requires educators to acknowledge and mitigate the obstacles that some students enter the school environment with. The emotional and psychosocial correlates of behavioral challenges, such as discrimination, poverty, learning disabilities and adverse childhood experiences have been widely explored in the literature (American Institute for Research, 2016; Bethnell et. al., 2014). Additionally, educators must also reflect and acknowledge the conscious and unconscious assumptions they adopt and how this affects how student behavior is perceived and managed (Cave et. al., 2020; Desai et. al., 2012; Elam-Snowden, 2020; Hagenauer, 2015).

Guided by a social ecology theoretical framework, the current research project seeks the emic, context-specific lived experiences of social actors as they exist within a web of interconnected historical, economic, and social dimensions. Proximal processes, that is, the reciprocal interaction between a person's attributes, the characteristics of the environment, and the properties of time, are regarded as the primary engines of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Krebs, 2009). The twin goals of the current research is to investigate and understand these interconnected factors from the perspective of students themselves, as well as to co-create a space to amplify student voices to advocate for sustainable school improvement (Swartz & Nyamnjoh, 2018). With these orientations in mind, a qualitative case study, informed by an Action Research methodology, sought to determine subjective and context-specific realities, redistribute and democratize power, and collaborate with youth as participants bearing expert knowledge (Baum et al., 2006). Often marginalized from what is deemed the 'business of adults,' youth are rarely invited into authentic conversations about their hedonistic or eudaemonic well-being in school (Tolstad et al., 2017). Inspired by an amplifier effect persuasion, youth are invited into the fold of activist qualitative research to understand and also

emancipate social actors to create and engage in communities of practice in their quest to act upon and improve the world (Denzin, 2017; Freire, 1978; Tolstad et al., 2017). A key aspect of ownership in a community of practice lies in members' ability to resist the urge to normalize the experiences of group members, and rather pay heed to the marginalized and silenced (Freire, 1978). It is here that the realities of discrimination and exclusion are brought to the forefront, and any subsequent action needs to challenge the traditional one size fits all model. As the world and human beings do not exist apart from each other, but exist in constant interaction, this case study fostered the understanding that, "just as social reality exists not by chance, but as a product of human action, so it is not transformed by chance" (Freire, 1978, p. 25). Here we sought to "co-create spaces of freedom for youth, in which experiences, tools, and opportunities were explored to allow them to learn and apply their potential capabilities and capacities as change makers" (Tolstad, et al., 2017, p. 217). In this capacity, action research is a collaboration between researchers, as critical collaborators who ensure rigor, and participants, as active investigators, who engage in all aspects of the research process to bring about organizational change, linking practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing (Ostaszewska, 2018; Seeley, 2011).

3. Arts-based Methods

Lived experience is made up of a multiplicity of dimensions, all of which are worthy of reflection, investigation and communication. Language, however, remains the privileged medium for the creation and communication of knowledge, relegating the non-linguistic dimensions of knowing, such as the visual and the sensory, to secondary or forgotten status (Bagnoli, 2009). Arts-based research, a "blanket term that refers to the use of arts in various forms as the basis for inquiry, intervention, knowledge production, and/or information sharing,"

includes a variety of different methodologies to access and represent different levels of experience, generating new ways of interrogating and understanding the social (Hill, 2013; Wilson & Flicker, 2014, p. 58). These methods are being increasingly popular as innovative, accessible and exciting approaches for inquiry into the social world. Given the project's social ecology theoretical underpinnings, selected methods needed to facilitate the investigation of the nested, reciprocal structures, environments, and relationships which children participate in as they develop. Secondly, as the participants were minors, arts-based methods were selected due to their effective, non-offensive, safe, and fun way of engaging youth. Projective graphic elicitation techniques were selected to encourage youth to impose their own form of organization, bringing into expression their needs, motives, and emotions, while remaining in tune with their varying levels of engagement, maturity, and literacy levels (Bagnoli, 2009; Catterol & Ibbotson, 2000). Lastly, as the goal of this project is to guide pedagogical practice in fostering agency in youth with regards to enacting change and progress in their school environment, chosen data collection methods needed to foster participant investment, as they retain power over content and meaning of their contributions (Hill, 2013).

4.0 Design

4.1 - A call for participation

The chosen population of the case study were teenage students, aged 12-17, from one inner city school. In grade level assemblies the researcher introduced the project through a PowerPoint presentation and then distributed consent and assent forms to those interested. The researcher collected signed forms at the school two days following the initial presentation and again a week later. Twenty-five youth (seven grade 7; eight grade 8; two grade 9; three grade 10; and four

grade 11) accepted the invitation to participate. Participation in the project included consent to participate in a weekly focus group over the lunch hours (junior and senior) for six consecutive weeks.

4.2 Focus Group Sessions

During the first focus group session the researcher introduced herself and presented her role as an educator and doctoral student. The project's research question (what are youth perceptions of student-staff relationships as they pertain to school climate) and dual intentions (gauge student perspective and create space for youth empowerment) were subsequently discussed. The role of the youth as research participants was explored, and a question period over a pizza lunch ensued. The session culminated in playing a collaborative game to encourage group comfort and cohesion. Through an observation of the game, it was realized that attention would need to be paid to building trust and engagement as some students presented as apprehensive and quiet.

The second session began with a team-building ice-breaker activity that culminated in smaller groups being formed. Sitting in these new groups, the research question was reviewed along with an introduction to arts-based data collection methods. Some time was spent explaining what *data* was and how 'just drawings' could produce it. Following a slide presentation on relational maps, participants were given 30 minutes to use blank paper and colored markers to independently create a relational map depicting all school staff (alive or deceased), from elementary to the current age, they felt had a positive or negative relationship. It was noticed that some students were quick to start, while others had difficulty with the exercise and benefited from additional prompting. This was done by asking them guiding questions that

allowed them to reflect on relationships and how this made them feel in school. Once participants realized that there was no 'right way of doing it' and that mistakes were impossible, they were able to get started. Once the time allocation was over, the youth were brought together to compare and contrast pieces, observe, reflect on how they situated themselves, the colors used, and who was shown in proximity to the student (or excluded altogether), to determine common themes. Throughout the entire session and immediately afterwards, the researcher compiled notes and organized them to be presented to the group for verification the following week.

Following an ice breaker activity, the researcher's note summary was used as the introduction to the third session. Participants were given an opportunity to authenticate the observations and ask questions. Once the research question was reviewed, the arts-based data collection method of timeline was introduced. As students were more familiar with timelines from schoolwork, most were quick to get started once separated and given their supplies. Three youths remained hesitant, but once removed from each other's sightline, they were able to begin their pieces. Once pieces were complete, participants were given time to reflect on their own pieces and those of their peers to make meaning of their work and develop common themes, cross referencing with the themes discovered from the past week. Before departing the researcher individually asked the three students who needed alternate seating how they felt about their participation. The students expressed that they were making each other laugh and felt uncomfortable "talking about personal stuff" and unsure about "how all this matters." These comments, along with session observations were once again noted for summary.

The fourth session began with a conversation around the reassurance of a safe place to express ideas, thoughts, impressions and perspectives. The goals of action research were also reviewed to bolster motivation to participate and engage in the project to enact change and

improvement in their school environment, but also gain a deeper understanding of the self. As change begins with self-awareness, the goal of the conversation was to encourage participants to acknowledge the power they had over themselves and their circumstances, the ability to amplify their voices, and power to assume space in their school environment. After the researcher observation note debrief and ice breaker, participants were introduced to photovoice as an arts-based data collection method. This method was discussed in contrast to school publicity photos or student social media posts and framed within a more critical conversion around the research question. The common themes determined from the two previous data collection methods were used as a loose guide for what types of photographs participants could take. Those concerned with maintaining their confidentiality in participating were reminded that they could take pictures of the school environment, and those who intended on photographing people were reminded about consent and equipped with an authorization sheet. Following a discussion about participants' comfort level and preferences, it was decided that selected images with captions would be submitted digitally throughout the week to the researcher's email and that the time remaining would be used to get started.

For the fifth session, all submitted photographs and captions were printed and, along with the other two sets of data collected, an exhibition was curated. Participants were invited on a gallery walk and were given sticky notes to comment on the pieces according to the agreed upon common themes or research question in general. Following the gallery walk, participants discussed the common themes and brainstormed possible dissemination activities to encourage student activism for the purposes of sustainable school improvement. With no roles assigned, the 'talking/listening stick' method was introduced to promote active listening in a circle discussion (Baesler, 2019). Despite encouragement for sharing, with no obligation to speak, the

conversation was dominated by the more extroverted personalities among the group. To ensure all perspectives were documented, the researcher checked in with the less expressive participants to gauge for agreement or dissent. Ultimately, it was unanimously agreed by a show of hands that the creation of a comprehensive, full grade student council with an administrator-member would prove to be a successful measure in ensuring sustainable improvement in their school. Many felt uncomfortable however speaking directly to the administration or taking personal accountability for the data produced. Some expressed worry of being labeled and didn't want to 'snitch,' even on adults. Without assurance that their forthcoming perspectives would not be regarded as an attack rather than constructive feedback, it was agreed that an anonymous letter from the group, reframed as a *Call to Action* for the purposes of the research study, would be drafted and submitted to the administration. With consensus achieved, the students agreed to each draft a personal copy of what this *Call to Action* might say and bring their contributions to the last session.

The sixth and final session was used to read and encapsulate the drafts. A level five student who, "had nothing to lose" due to his stay in the school being over and wanting to "leave a mark," was unanimously nominated by a show of hands to be the curator of the final *Call to Action*. Using the drafts and live feedback, a final draft was typed on a chromebook connected to a Smart TV for all to see and follow, was approved, and submitted to the administration from the researcher's email on behalf of the focus group.

5. Analysis

Student participants were guided to consider an intertextual analysis of their own work and that of others. As this project argues for construing the processes of text construction and

subjectivity as mutually constitutive, participants were counseled to consider both the process of creation as well as the themes behind the work. They were asked to apply a holistic lens upon their review of the pieces produced, to view processes as complicated, but also as historical, intertextual, social, and political (Kamberelis & Scott, 1992). Through this exercise participants came to see that texts hold many stories that integrate and influence each other. By analyzing all the texts created, one comes to understand what they experienced during the research process and learn about themselves (Keats, 2009).

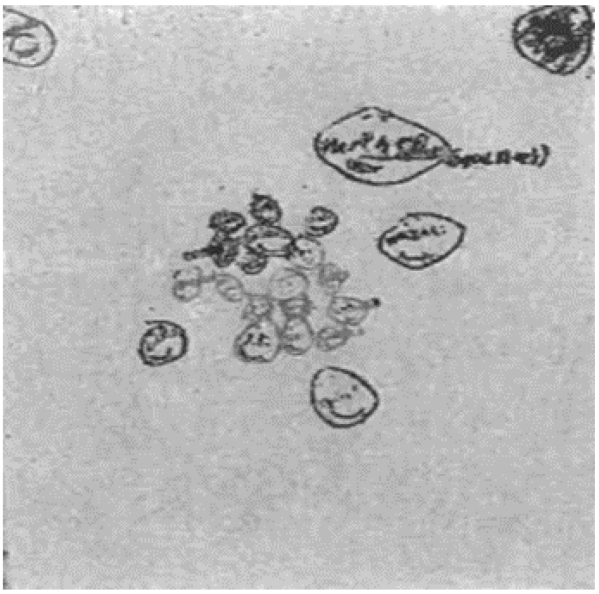
6. Results

Following an analysis of individual pieces as well as the work as a collective, participants determined that positive relationships with staff were of primary importance to a healthy school climate. How healthy relationships were fostered were dependent on three main themes: staff interest in the lives of students in and out of class; practices of equity and discretion in classroom management practices; and, opportunities for redemption following rule infractions or conflict.

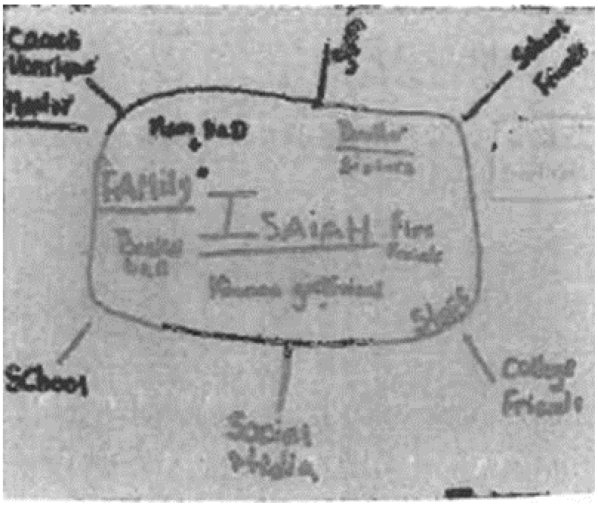
6.1 Theme 1 - Staff interest in student lives - in and out of the classroom

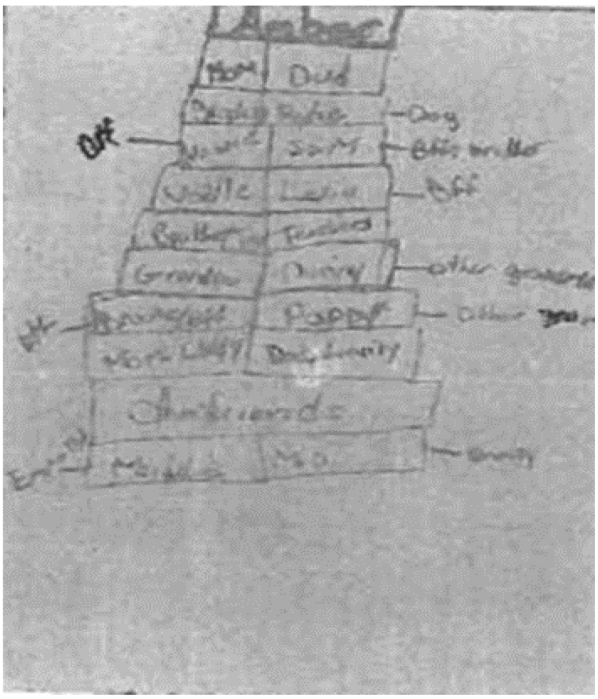
Positive relationships were seen to be created and sustained by staff who demonstrated genuine interest in them as students, but also as people. Authentic attentiveness was seen to be demonstrated by concern for family lives, knowledge of peer circles, and interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies and personal interests. Staff members who took stock of academic achievement, as well as the mental and physical health of students, were regarded as those with whom students had positive, healthy relationships. Those who positioned themselves as the deliverers of curriculum, or conducted themselves solely based on strict job description, were regarded as distant, uncaring, and contributing to a negative school environment.

6.1.A Relational Map



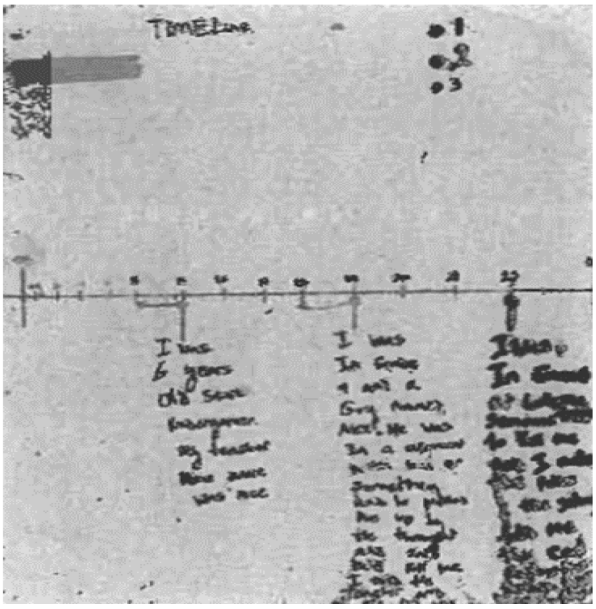
"I put him up there in the corner cause all he cares about is History. I ended up scratching out this guy's name 'cause he doesn't even deserve to be on my paper. Mr. M is closer, 'cause he knows I have anxiety, so when he sees that I'm getting worked up he helps me calm down or gives me a break." (*Student 21*)

	"Coach V. is always there when I need him. He knows I live far from the school and always makes sure I have a lift to and from games and practices." (*Student 20*)

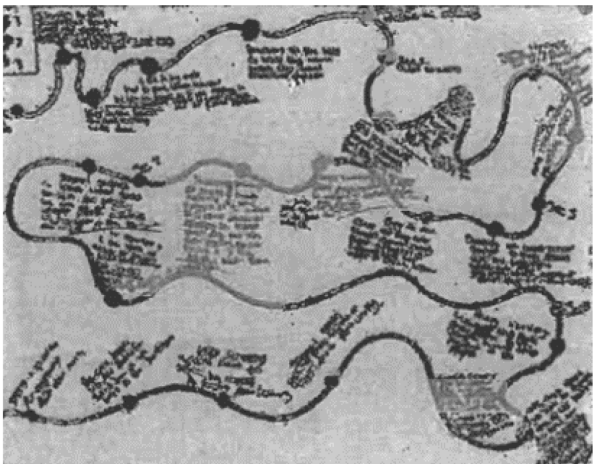
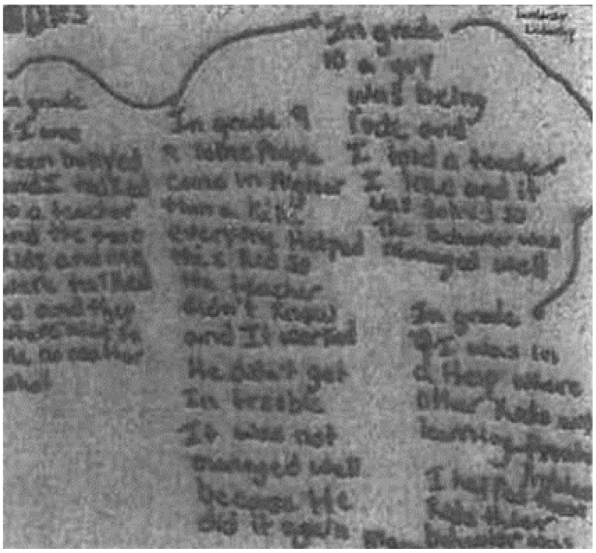


"He knows I live with my grandma, and asks about her health and stuff. He always says, 'guardians' when talking about parents, like not rubbing it in our faces that our parents aren't always around, you know." (Student 3)

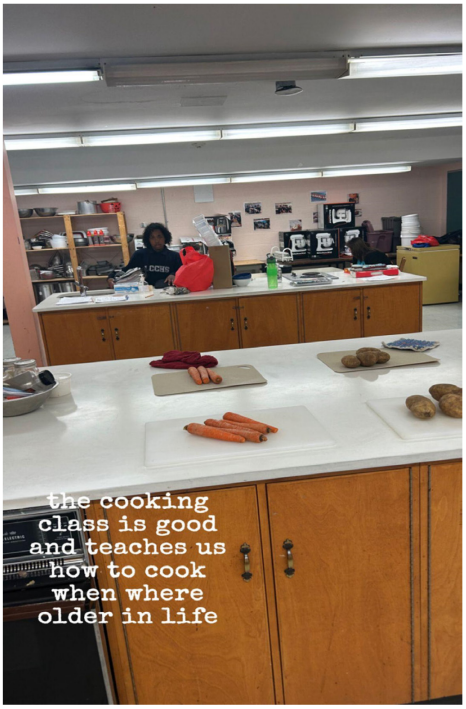
6.1.B Timeline

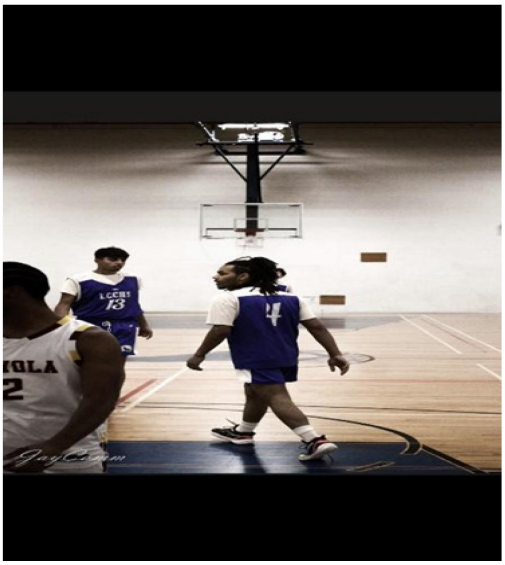


"In grade 8 Ms. G. was in charge of the holiday food baskets and my mom was getting one. She helped me out and never made me feel embarrassed by it, I still remember that." (Student 6)

	*"Sec. 5 I really like my teachers this year, I grew close to a couple because they treated us like people." (Student 23)*
	*"In grade 9, Ms. M. knew that I had to take my kid sister to school in the morning and sometimes I ran late. I was super chill about it when I came in late, I wasn't loud or nothing. She let it slide, I respect that." (Student 14)*

6.1. C Photovoice

	*"Ms. C. is an integration aid in my class. Whenever I need help, she's there. If she sees that I am off, she pulls me out of class and brings me for a walk. I like that. She cares about me. She pays attention to what I like and always comes out to my school basketball games. She cheers really loud!" (Student 24)*
	*"I started cooking after school and really like it. I like to eat and feel like learning how to make things will help me in life. Ms. C. is really nice. She makes jokes. We talked about my little sister who's sick. I haven't told anyone about that. She has a son too." (Student 13)*

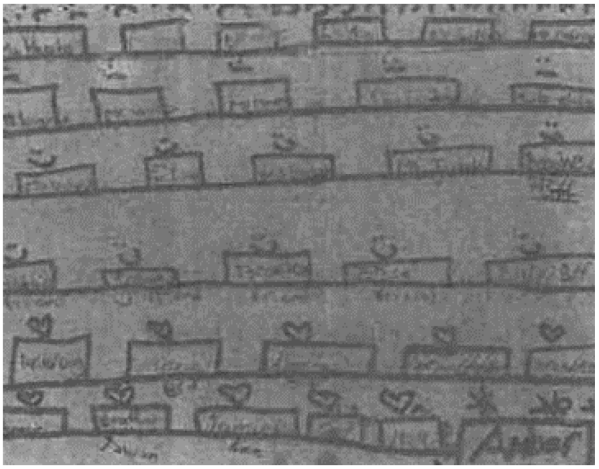
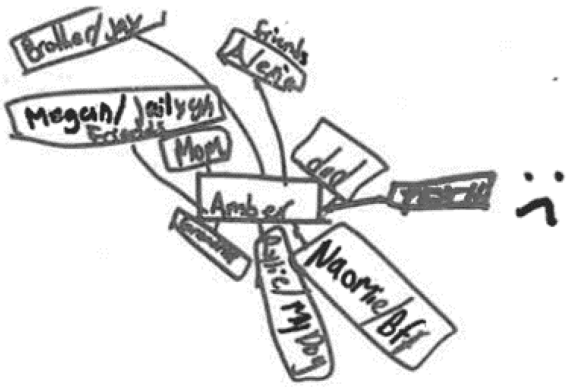
	*"I failed grade 10. If it wasn't for Ms. C. and Ms. J. helping to motivate me and help me study, I never would have it! Ms. Jo helped me a lot with my dad. I had a rough time talking to him and she helped smooth a lot of arguments over. I owe everything to these women!" (Student 23)*
	*"My basketball coach is Mr. A. He used to play D-1 ball. I want that too. He gives good advice about how to improve my game and be a good leader on and off the court. I look forward to seeing him when I'm in school. He always dabs me up. He's like a second dad." (Student 23)*

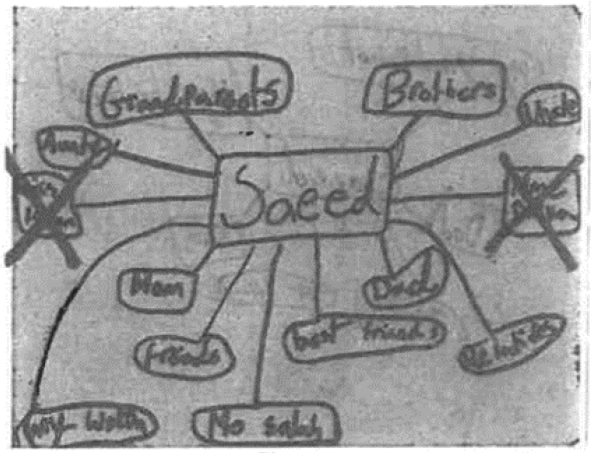
6.2 Theme 2 - Equity and discretion in classroom management practices

Positive relationships which contributed to a positive school climate were also fostered by staff who demonstrated classroom management styles that fostered equity and discretion with academic support. Participants expressed that relationships with staff were dependent on how

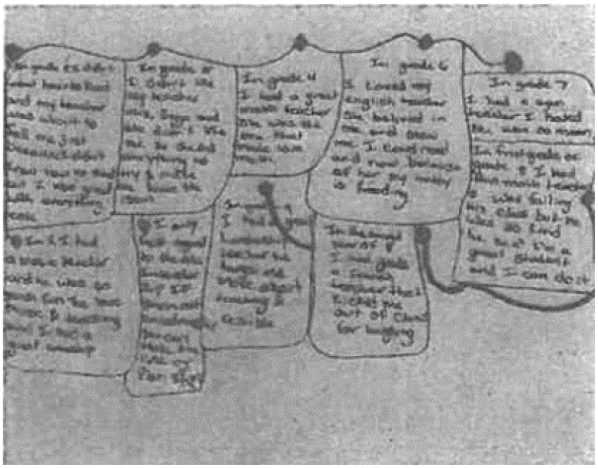
they felt they were treated compared to their peers. Those who felt that rules were applied evenly and fairly, regarded their relationship to be healthier and expressed more willingness to be cooperative and respectful. Those who felt labeled, targeted, or 'picked on' by staff expressed feelings of anger and resentment. A serious area of contention lay in the perception of their behavior being 'called out' while others with the same habits being ignored. Similarly, participants agreed that classroom management practices that addressed student academic needs preemptively and discreetly fostered feelings of safety and trust in students and resulted therefore in improved behavior and relationships. Staff that recognized diverse needs and created structures and procedures to allow students to access assistance without drawing attention to themselves, encouraged students to be engaged and productive and less likely to feel embarrassed or resentful. Conversely, participants expressed that when they felt treated as incapable, unintelligent, or exposed, they were more likely to perceive the relationship with staff as negative and purposely misbehave to be removed from the classroom instead of disclosing their challenges or deficits. Likewise, when staff were unprofessional or insensitive with regard to the academic needs of students, this as well affected the relationship. Staff who were perceived as ignoring or not addressing student needs created the same feelings of disregard thus fracturing the relationship with their students.

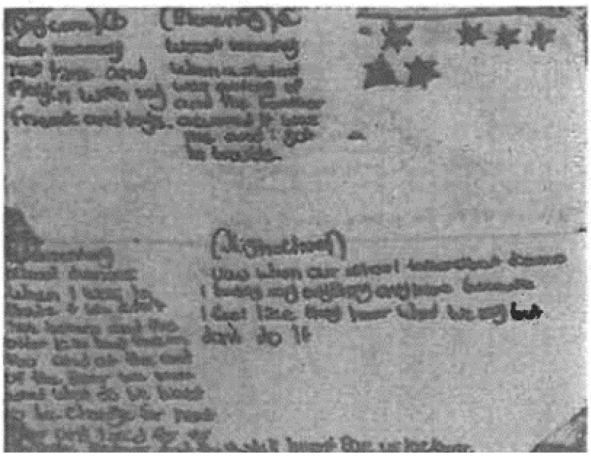
6.2. A Relational Map

	*"The teacher saw the kid throw the eraser, but I got kicked out because I supposedly instigated it, like, %*&^, I was just sitting there!" (Student 3)*
	*"I'm the bad kid. I'm always in trouble. I can be sitting in a group of friends laughing in class and I'll be the one called out and sent to the office." (Student 5)*

	*"She read our grades out loud! WTF!" (Student 8)*

6.2. B Timeline

	*"Mr. W. knows I don't read so well. In grade 7 he never asked me to read in front of the class." (Student 8)*

	*"This year…I'm late, I get a DT, others are late, they get warnings." (Student 15)*

6. 2. c. Photovoice

	*"Whenever I do anything, I get kicked out of class and sent to the office, the teacher is just getting rid of me." (Student 12)*

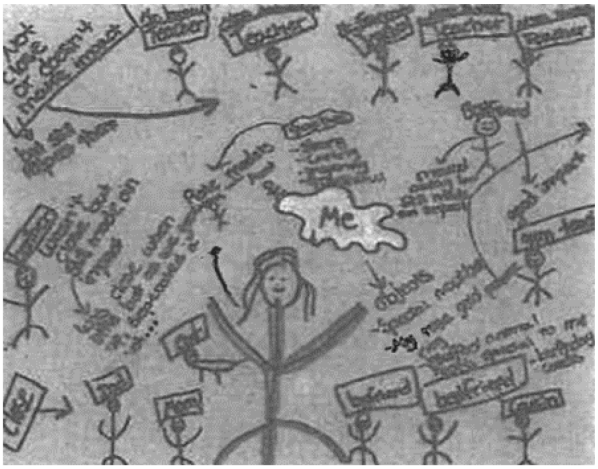
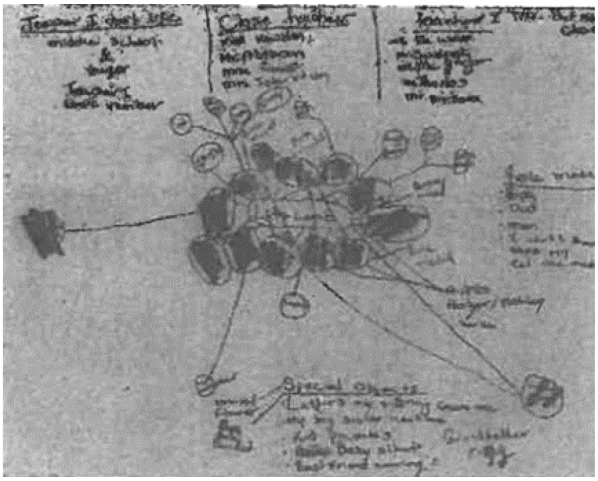
	*"They say 'respect, understanding, and kindness' but it's a two-way street! I have to be these things, but they get to be sarcastic? I was one minute late for class because my locker was stuck and she didn't even care, she just gave me a detention. I actually really tried to get to class one time. Next time I won't bother. Diversity means different, right? I lose focus in class all the time and get yelled at. I'm not doing it on purpose!" (Student 7)*

6.3. Theme 3 - Opportunities for redemption following rule infraction or conflict

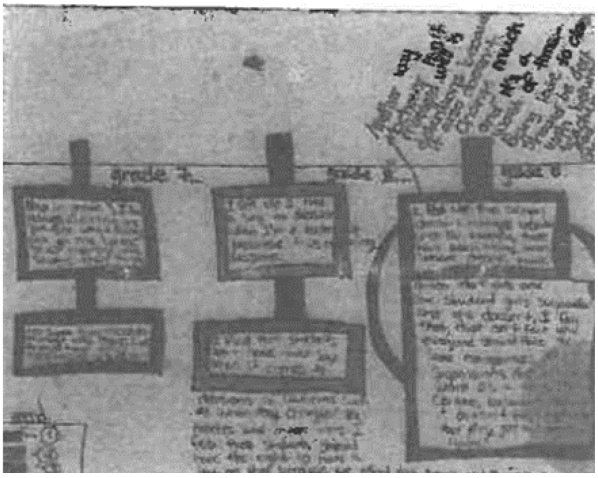
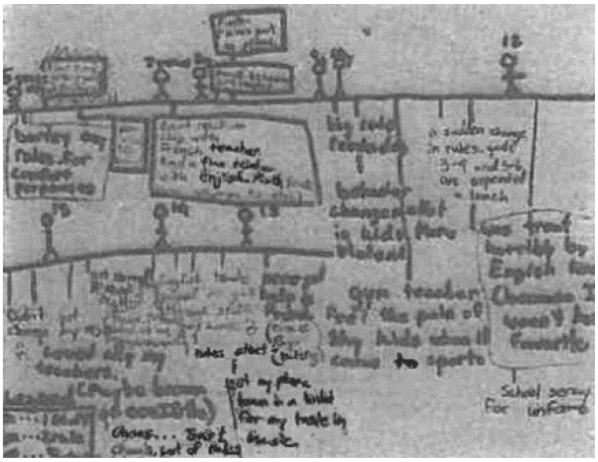
All participants agreed that rules regarding safety and security should be taken very seriously by all school stakeholders. Any rule falling outside this category, however, was seen as being created without any student consultation and administered according to adult interpretation and mood. They agreed that as many rules were seen as lacking relevance or importance, student input should be considered in their formation and administration, both in the classroom and school-wide. It was expressed that staff who had on-going formal and informal conversations with students about rules and expectations inspired deeper connections with students, participating and co-existing in the school environment as a shared space requiring reciprocity. Of equal importance, was how staff responded to students once infractions occurred. Participants felt they had a stronger relationship with staff who allowed for flexibility when addressing infractions, taking into account context and intent. Students expressed a willingness to 'meet energy' with regards to rule infractions and were more willing to 'take the punishment' if they

felt they were being managed with understanding, patience, and respect. Finally, students conveyed an appreciation for staff who allowed for a genuine opportunity for a 'start fresh' following rule infractions, especially those that resulted in the loss of temper or disrespectful sentiments on behalf of the student. Staff who exercised a willingness to discuss conflicts, provide opportunities for repairing harm, healing, and genuinely moving forward, encouraged respect among students.

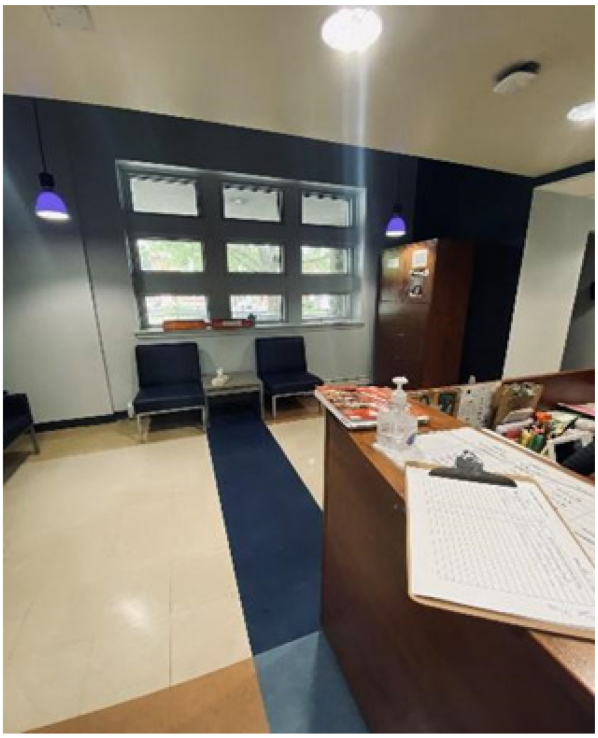
6.3. A Relational Map

	*"They take the time to talk to you, not just yell." (Student 9)*
	*"I got frustrated and yelled at her a while back. I said sorry, but she doesn't care. Now, she's always cold with me. She doesn't like me." (Student 8)*

6. 3. B Timeline

	*"My high school journey was never quite the fairytale story. However, I had some staff who never gave up on me. Because they seen my worth and what I can do without me even knowing it myself." (Student 21)*
	*"This teacher here always took the time to let me cool down and then talk to me. She knew I had anger issues and didn't hold it against me. She made me want to do better, you know." (Student 6).*

6. 3. C Photovoice

	*"I hate this place." (Student 14)*

7. Discussion

This case study demonstrated how action research with youth can be supported by arts-based methods. Before one can be called upon to engage in work for the purposes of emancipatory social justice, one must come to see themselves as entities worthy of taking space and encapsulating a voice that commands attention. Arts-based methods contribute to this end by providing youth with an accessible means of self-discovery as well as insight into how to identify and respond to institutionalized discrimination and bias. A reflection on the positionality of youth provides future researchers with insight into how to optimize arts-based methods for the goals of sustainable change and growth, for both participants and their intended audiences.

Relational maps provide rich qualitative data that speaks to one's proximal and distal experiences with others, present or missing, positive or negative. However, youth participants experienced tension as they explored the centrality of space that they afford themselves, the power they hold over that space, and the role of relationships over how they experience their school environment. Students who feel unseen or marginalized in school may not place themselves as the nexus upon which all relationships flow, or question their power over the shape or reciprocal flow of relationships. Student participants who questioned or undermined the power of their positionality, struggled to imagine themselves as an intricate part of the web of interconnected relationships which form a community. Any future researcher hoping to employ this method with youth would be well advised to front load student participation with an activity to explore the space we occupy and the power dynamics within and among relationships. As part of an action research project, data collection is not enough; participants must be guided towards envisioning themselves as change-makers in their school environment. Without firm self-affirmation as entities of importance and voice, this method cannot fully accomplish its intention of bringing about not only awareness but the capacity to mobilize (Cook-Sather, 2002).

While data collected from the use of timelines provides personal seriatim information and a vivid understanding of wider social contexts, this method requires participants to have a command of recall, situating themselves within a broader social context and envision future events and expectations. Participants struggled to contextualize past events as part of an educational journey shaped by not only one's personal characteristics, but also by a myriad of external contexts. More time was spent than was anticipated discussing the concept of being a passive participant versus an active agent in life. Some students expressed a deep sense of victimization and disempowerment, and felt that things just happened to them over which they

had no control. This became evident when group discussions explored any patterns in events and how they might imagine contributing to changing their experiences and those of their peers in school. Students who had little experience with actively shaping their home and school environments, struggled to envision an alternate path forward. With more time, this case study would have benefitted from allocating an additional session on youth empowerment so as to encourage those who struggled with self-efficacy to believe that they too, even at a young age, had agency over their lives and experiences, as well as to greater societal shifts, transforming systems of oppression and discrimination.

Lastly, while photovoice empowers youth to explore the varied applications of photography for personal and societal growth, it too has considerations that need to be addressed when applied to youth in research projects. Despite students' ease at taking pictures of themselves and their peers, or exposure to images of their school environment on promotional materials, some students benefited from prompting when asked to take pictures for the purpose of research (Lykes, 2001). Knowing they had a brief to respect and the expectation of discussing their choices afterward, some youth struggled with thinking critically about their submissions. Differentiating a casual image from one that spoke to both the research question and how it could be used to evoke action, proved to be a challenge for some participants, resulting in reluctance and delay. Similarly, while youth seem to take pictures of themselves and peers without hesitation, they are often for personal / peer group consumption. As the focus group was composed of youth who had little to no previous association, the intimate nature of photography, as opposed to the other graphic elicitation pieces, had some participants feeling vulnerable and exposed. The access to more confidential aspects of one's inner world, coupled with possible cultural expectations around being photographed, may have placed pressure on participants not

to take certain photographs or omit images from discussion, limiting this method as a data source. To remedy this limitation, future researchers looking to use this method with youth are advised to perhaps hold two photovoice sessions so that participants have the opportunity to share submissions and then have another opportunity to learn, grow, explore additional options, and build their portfolio. That being said, as a data collection method which contributes to action research, participants were more able to discern the impact of photography, as it was expressed as being more intimate and 'telling.' As the intended audience for the images were all those who shared the space, adults as well as youth, this method was regarded as more powerful because it exposed how the same environment was experienced differently.

7.1 Ethical Considerations

In addition to design structure and application, heed must be paid to the ethical constraints of working with children in research, and particularly, in an action research project. With regards to methodological foundations, the democratization of power dynamics needs to remain a priority. Caucasian, of older age, middle class, and known to hold a position of authority within the greater school system, the researcher prioritized conversations regarding positionality, privilege, and perspective. The researcher assumed the role as an inquisitive *student* wanting to learn and grow as a person and educator. Trust was facilitated between participants and the researcher when they acknowledged that findings would be theirs alone and that no details of the conversation, art pieces, or photographs would be communicated or published without consent.

A second, more logistical, ethical consideration when working with students in school settings is confidentiality. Confronting the ethical requirement of confidentiality, due to safety and security requirements, the pilot school's administration was required to have a list of all

students in attendance during the six focus groups. To manage this predicament, a secretary was privy to the attendance, and she alone managed the students' attendance records. Another challenge to respecting confidentiality while encouraging participation, is the necessity to meet with students in their school during working hours. Researchers, as guests, must accept whatever space is afforded to them, and may be disadvantaged, as this researcher did, to last minute room changes. As no attention can be drawn on students reporting to the session, the lack of a consistent, discreet location may pose concerns. To remedy this situation, subsequent researchers are advised to keep participant emails available and communicate changes with them as they occur.

8. Conclusion

The dual commitment of action research is to study a system and simultaneously collaborate with members of the organization in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction (McNiff, 2013). The active collaboration and subsequent co-learning of researcher and participant through the research process aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to, at the same time, further the goals of social science. The current action research case study aspired to investigate student-staff relationships as it relates to school climate. By situating youth as expert stakeholders into the conversation, the goal was to create a space where sustainable school improvement initiatives could be discussed and materialized. By co-creating a democratic space where students could assume a position of equality and insight, this action research case study built capacity for viable personal and institutional growth.

To encourage youth engagement and active participation, a triangulation of arts-based data collection techniques (relational map, timeline, and photovoice) were created and analyzed within a focus group. Through the production and dissection of these modes of understanding, youth participants brought to the fore the complex ways of being and experiencing, and how they and others collectively occupy their school environment and contribute to its health. Following an intertextual analysis of the work created, participants determined that student-staff relationships were the determining factor in the health of school climates. They were resolute in their estimation that stalwart relationships were facilitated by adults who adopted a holistic relational approach, equitable and discreet classroom management procedures, and a restorative behavior management philosophy. With the research question answered, this case study then proceeds to inform a community of school stakeholders about possible avenues towards sustainable school climate amelioration. By investigating one's experiences in school from an early age, youth participants came to recognize that the moments of feeling seen and heard resonated, and that opportunities for contribution to school life culminated in increased engagement. The use of arts-based methods encouraged an accessible conduit for youth to not only participate in the research process, but to explore opportunities to amplify student voices. Through an intertextual analysis of the pieces submitted, it was agreed that a *Call to Action* would be drafted requesting the school administration to support the creation of a student council and actively endorse its importance by participating as a member. This student body was deemed an efficient means to encourage transparent dialogue between all school stakeholders and proliferate student mobilization beyond the focus group.

This case study contributes to action research literature by showcasing the use of three arts-based data collection methods to reach and engage youth. A reflection on the application of

these methods leaves future researchers with some insight into areas in need of further investigation. While arts-based methods prove to be an effective avenue to engage youth in the research process, for those with experiences of disenfranchisement, being vulnerable to exposing yourself on the one hand and positioning yourself as capable of enacting change on the other, can be problematic. While some youth participants were quite happy to 'tell them what's up,' for others, reflecting on their experiences and expressing them to a group of relative strangers was a challenge that required additional time-consuming prompting. Furthermore, having youth understand that the personal growth experienced through the process as well as any incremental institutional change was worth their effort and time. Envisioning oneself as a stakeholder in the greater school community as well as a student leader moving the momentum forward requires participants to see the connection between the research they are pursuing and institutional change. Through the use of arts-based methods, action research is well served to do just that.

References

Aldridge, J. (2015). *Participatory research: Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice*. Policy Press.

American Institute for Research. (2016). *Trauma informed care curriculum*. Retrieved from: https://www.air.org/resource/trauma-informed-care-curriculum.

Anderson, C. S. (1982). The search for school climate: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, *52*(3), 368-420. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543052003368

Baesler, J (2019). From talking stick to listening stick: A variation on an ancient practice. *Communication & Theatre Arts Faculty Publications*, *40*.

https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/communication_fac_pubs/40

Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research*, *9*(5), 547–570. doi:10.1177/1468794109343625

Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 60,* 854-857. doi:10.1136/jech.2004.028662

Bear, G. (2020). Improving school climate: Practical strategies to reduce behavior problems and promote social and emotional learning. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-815-34638

8

Bethnell, C., Newacheck, P., Hawes, E., & Halfton, N. (2014). Adverse childhood experiences: Assessing the impact on health and school engagement and the mitigating role of resilience. *Health Affairs, 33*(12). doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2014.0914

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Harvard University Press.

Brownlee, J. (2004). Teacher education students' epistemological beliefs: Developing a relational model of teaching. *Research in Education, 72*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.7227/RIE.72.1

Castelden, H., Garvin, T., & Huu-ay-aht First Nation. (2008). Modifying photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science & Medicine, 66*(6), 1393-1405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.11.030

Catterall, M., & Ibbotson, P. (2000). Using projective techniques in education research. *British Education Research Journal, 26*(2), 245-256.

https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920050000971open_in_new

Cave, L., Cooper, M. N., Zubrick, S. R., & Shepherd, C. C. J. (2020). Racial discrimination and child and adolescent health in longitudinal studies: A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*, *250*. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112864

Cohen, J., McCabe, E.M., Michelli, N.M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1). 180-213.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, *31*(4), 3–14.

Craig, S. (2008). Reaching and teaching children who hurt: Strategies for your classroom. Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Daily, S., Mann, M., Kristjansson, A., Smith, M., & Zullig. (2019). School climate and academic achievement in middle and high school students. *Journal of School Health, 89*(3), 173-180. doi: 10.1111/josh.12726

D'Amico, M., Denov, M., Khan, F., Linds, W., & Akesson, B. (2018). Research as intervention? Exploring the health and well-being of children and youth facing global adversity through participatory visual methods. In Participatory Visual Methodologies in Global Public Health, 1st Ed. Routledge. ISBN9781315192536.

Denzin, N. (2017). Critical qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry, 23*(1). 8-16. doi: 10.1177/1077800416681864

Desai, R. A., Falzer, P. R., Chapman, J., & Borum, R. (2012). Mental illness, violence risk, and

race in juvenile detention: Implications for disproportionate minority contact. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82*(1), 32–40. doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.2011.01138.x

Donnelly, M. Gamsu, S., & Whewall, S. (2020). Mapping the relational construction of people and places. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 23*(1). 91-108. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2019.1672284

Elam-Snowden, T. (2020). Perspectives of respect, teacher-student relationships, and school climate among boys of color: A multifocus group student. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities, 21*(3), 345-356. doi: 10.1037/men000023

Emmer, E., & Stough, L. (2010). Classroom management: A critical part of educational psychology, with implications for teacher education. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(2). 103-112. doi:10.1207/S15326985EP3602_5

Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Random House.

Gietz, C., & McIntosh, K. (2014). Relations between student perceptions of their school environment and academic achievement. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *29*(3), 161–176. doi:10.1177/0829573514540415

Hagenauer, G., Hascher, T., & Volet, S. E. (2015). Teacher emotions in the classroom: Associations with students' engagement, classroom discipline and the interpersonal teacher-students relationship. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 30*, 385 403.

Hattie, J., & Yates, G. (2012). *Visible learning and the science of how we learn*. Routledge

Publishing.

Hergenrather, K., Rhodes, S., Cowan, C., Bardhoshi, G., & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice as community-based participatory research: A qualitative review. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 33*(6). 686-698. https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.33.6.6

Hill, J. (2014). Using participatory and visual methods to address power and identity with young people. *Graduate Journal of Social Science, 10*(2), 132-151. ISSN:1572-3763

Kamberelis, G., & Scott, K. (1992). Other people's voices: The coarticulation of texts and subjectivities. *Linguistics and Education, 4*(3-4), 359-403. https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898(92)90008-K

Keats, P. (2009). Multiple text analysis in narrative research: visual, written, and spoken stories of experience. *Qualitative Research, 9*(2), 181-195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794108099320

Krebs, R. J. (2019). Proximal processes as the primary engines of development. *International Journal of Sports Psychology, 40*(1), 219 - 227. doi:10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2

Leung, E., & Flanagan, T. (2019). Let's do this together: An integration of photovoice and mobile interviewing in empowering and listening to LGBTQ+ youths in context. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 24*(4). 497- 510. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2018.1554499

Loignon, C., Dupéré, S., Bush, P., Truchon, K., Boyer, S., & Hudon, C. (2020). Using photovoice to reflect on poverty and address social inequalities among primary care

teams. *Action Research.* doi:10.1177/1476750320905900

Lykes, B. (2001). Creative arts and photography in participatory action research in Guatemala. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *Handbook of action research* (pp. 361–371). SAGE.

Marraccini, M.E., Fang, Y., Levine, S.P. *et al.* (2020). Measuring student perceptions of school climate: A systematic review and ecological content analysis. *School Mental Health* 12, 195–221. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-019-09348-8

McNiff, J. (2013). *Action research: Principle and practice.* Third Edition. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-415-53525-0

Ostaszewska, A. (2018). Social work and participatory method of empowering - photovoice. *Tiltai, 2*, 75-83. Retrieved from: https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/20092

Parsons, J., Taylor, L. (2011). Improving student engagement. *Current Issues in Education*, 14(1). Retrieved from http://cie.asu.edu/

Sammaknejad, A., & Marzban, A. (2016). An analysis of teachers' self-reflection on classroom management. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 6*(1), 84-89. doi:10.17507/tpls.0601.11

Seeley, C. (2011). Uncharted territory: Imagining a stronger relationship between the arts and action research. *Action Research, 9*(1), 83–99. doi:10.1177/1476750310397061

Swartz, S. S., & Nyamnjoh, A. (2018). Research as freedom: Using a continuum of interactive, participatory and emancipatory methods for addressing youth marginality. *HTS: Theological Studies*, *74*(3), 1–11. doi:10.4102/hts.v74i3.5063

Tolstad, I.M., Hagen, A.L., & Andersen, B. (2017). The amplifier effect: Oslo youth co-creating urban spaces of (be)longing. In: Bastien, S., Holmarsdottir, H. (Eds.), *Youth as architects of social change*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ungar, M. (2015). *Working with children and youth with complex needs: 20 Skills to build resilience*. Routledge Press. ISBN: 978-1-138-80072-4

Wang, C. C., & Redwood-Jones, Y. A. (2001). Photovoice ethics: Perspectives from flint photovoice. *Health Education & Behavior*, *28*(5), 560–572. doi: 10.1177/109019810102800504

Wilson, C., & Flicker, S. (2014). Arts-based action research. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The Sage encyclopedia of action research* (pp. 58–61). SAGE.

If they talk, will you listen? How youth perspectives should inform behavior management practices towards sustainable school climate improvement

Jennifer Beaudoin, MA[1] and Miranda D'Amico, PhD[2]

Department of Education, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec

Citation:

Beaudoin, J., & D'Amico, M. (2025). If they talk, will you listen? How youth perspectives should inform behavior management practices towards sustainable school climate improvement. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas, 97* (1), 1-15. doi:10.1080/00098655.2025.2453456

---

[1] Doctoral student and school administrator, Department of Education, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec. (jbeaudoin@lbpsb.qc.ca).

[2] Professor and Co-director of the Centre for the Arts in Human Development, Department of Education, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec. (miranda.damico@concordia.ca).

ABSTRACT

Student behavior management remains a pivotal area of consideration for pre- and in-service secondary teachers and administrators alike. Hoping to gain deeper insight into the intersection between student behavior and school climate an action research methodology is employed to invite students into the debate as active school stakeholders. A case study from one inner city high school engaged twenty-five youth participants in a six-week long focus group to learn about the research process through the creation and analysis of three arts-based data collection methods: timeline, relational map, and photovoice. Student led analysis of the data demonstrated that student behavior is inextricably linked to the quality of the social aspect of school climate. Healthy school climates which inspire positive student engagement and behavior are ones which: 1) foster positive student-staff relationships; 2) incorporate pedagogical practices which allow for student voice and choice; and 3) encourage the opportunity for redemption following infractions. While restorative measures are presented as effective ways to promote positive student behavior and healthy school climates, stakeholders wishing to authentically transform school systems are cautioned to reflect deeply on power and privilege to dismantle traditional structures for sustainable growth.

Keywords: Action research; Arts-based methods; Student behavior management; School climate; Restorative practices; Student engagement.

INTRODUCTION

There exists a plethora of literature which explores best practices in student behavior and classroom management (Chow et. al., 2024; Franklin & Harrington, 2019; Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Despite this, with the ever-growing pressure to accommodate for diverse student academic and social needs, this relational competency remains a primary concern of pre-service and in-service teachers alike (Emmer & Stough, 2010; Sanford et. al., 2015; Wolff et. al, 2015). To address this issue, more scholars and practitioners are leaning into a systems approach by reflecting on school climate. Entrenched in schools mission statements and framed around the pillars of academics, community, safety, and institutional environment, school climate has a proven association with student academic and social outcomes (National School Climate Council, 2007; Wang & Degol, 2016). Demonstrated through quantitative (test scores, absenteeism records, suspension rates, etc.) and qualitative indicators (surveys and interviews, etc.), improvements to school climate have a positive correlation with student engagement and thus behavior (Cook et. al., 2000; Dulay & Karadag, 2017; Wang & Degol, 2016). It is suggested that the goodness of fit between students and the school environment, embedded in an ecological perspective that accounts for the complex reciprocal interactions of individuals and their environment, should be used to guide school reform efforts (Baker et. al, 2001, Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

To this effect, the current study deepens the scholarly and frontline conversations regarding the relationship between student behavior and school climate by acknowledging the composite web of interconnected factors which determine how one experiences an environment. These context-specific perspectives are brought to the fore employing an action research methodology to create space for students to assume their place as stakeholders and active change

agents in their school community (Crivello et. al., 2009). By authentically consulting students on the research question of *what their perspectives are with regards to the methods employed to manage behavior and how they think this affects school climate*, students are given pride of place to advocate for themselves and affect positive change in their school communities (Bland & Atweh, 2004).

Arts-based data collection methods are seen as a non-abrasive, safe path to work with youth that lean into their expressive nature while respecting their levels of personal and academic development (Chemi & Du, 2018). To explore multiple modalities and promote validity, a triangulation of methods was utilized. Through the creation and analysis of relational maps, timelines, and photovoice submissions, a correlation was found between school climate (framed as 'the vibe' or 'energy' of the class / building) and how students behaved. It was determined that while extenuating factors actuate their overall disposition, levels of cooperation, respect, and engagement in school were heavily influenced by how well the school climate prevented and responded to infractions. Student analysis revealed that school climates which fostered regulated behavior and high engagement were evident through; 1) strong student-staff relationships; 2) differentiated pedagogical practices which allow for student voice and choice; and 3) restorative student behavior management practices.

This study contributes to school improvement research as it solidifies the importance of regarding the social aspect of school climate as an important indicator of student behavior, engagement and ultimately retention. Scholars and frontline practitioners collaborating toward authentic school improvement are also well-served by reflecting on the importance of incorporating students as active stakeholders in their endeavors. This study assists pre- and in-

service educators in demystifying student behavior and understanding it more clearly.

METHODS

To adhere to the project's theoretical and methodological foundations, a qualitative research design was chosen to engage in naturalistic inquiry to generate rich narrative descriptions of youth perspectives. To respond to the student's developmental realities, safeguard against (re)traumatization, and address varying levels of maturity and literacy levels, the arts-based methods of relational map, timeline and photovoice were selected (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000). Using metaphor to depict the constellation of relationships in one's life, relational maps demonstrate, through structure and color, positionality as well as inclusion or exclusion (Bagnoli, 2009). Timelines demonstrate how time can be regarded as a crucial dimension in understanding one's development and temporal experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Action research advances the empowerment to change stemming from one having the opportunity to narrate the past and present and express projections and expectations for the future. Finally, using ethnographic techniques that combine photography, critical dialogue, and experiential knowledge, photovoice allows participants to create personalized data, reflect, and communicate their concerns, to expose social problems, and to ignite social change (Liebenberg, 2018). Showcasing the physical environment and expressing how students navigate and experience the space is a powerful method when working with school policy-makers, as these spaces are shared by both but not experienced in the same way. Lastly, in adherence with action research, this method invites participants to acquire and develop analytic and critical dialogue skills that could be used to advocate for themselves in the present and in the future (D'Amico et. al., 2016; Hergenrather et. al., 2009).

Research Design

An inner-city school in Montréal was selected to conduct a case study due to its diverse population of over 800 students and varied academic programs. With a rise in challenging behaviors and decrease in student engagement over the past few years, anecdotal accounts from staff disclosed a faltering school climate. According to the only piece of student data available, an online school survey conducted in 2023, student engagement was also shown to be low.

After gaining approval for conducting research involving human subjects, the project was explained to students through grade level assemblies. Interested students were provided with assent and parental consent forms, and the twenty-five returned (seven grade 7; eight grade 8; two grade 9; three grade 10; and four grade 11) were selected to take part in a focus group. Over the course of six weekly sessions, student participants created and analyzed pieces that spoke to their lived experiences with regards to behavior management and how they felt these experiences could inform school climate improvement initiatives. In the culminating exercise student researchers collaborated on how to disseminate findings to school administration with the purpose of improving school climate.

Data Analysis

This project employed an interpretive intertextual method of analysis as it positions the mechanisms of understanding self and other as an interrelated process complicated by historical, social, and political elements. “Intertextuality is a primary concept in the study of culture and is particularly suitable for qualitative research, central to which is the subjectivity of the narrator, the story, and the listener/researcher, as well as the relative and indeterminate dimension of knowledge” (Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld, 2011, p. 258). Participants were invited to discover their own positionality in relation to others as they created pieces and investigated how they

influence, reflect, or differ from each other. Participants were asked to question their own beliefs and understandings and seek deeper connections between the pieces presented as they related to the complexity of their school climate.

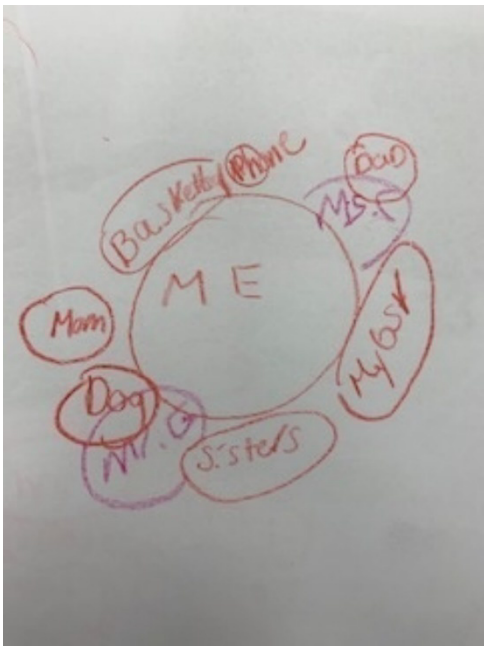
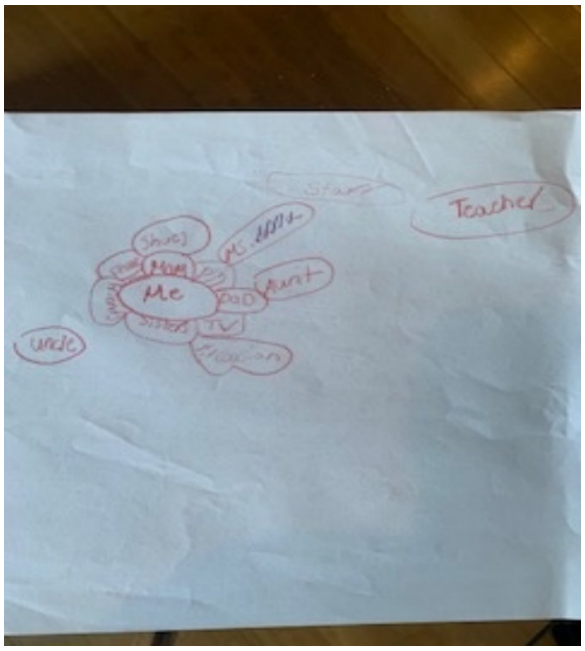
RESULTS

Following an analysis of the three data collection methods, individually and collectively, key words and themes were scribed by a student volunteer and a show of hands was the decided method for expressing agreement. Participants disclosed that inappropriate behaviors ranged from physical violence (classroom fights with peers, throwing furniture and other objects, slamming doors), verbal aggression (swearing, name-calling), to non-compliance (refusing to comply with adult instruction, skipping class/school). After deliberation, it was agreed that three sets of behavior management practices could prevent and mitigate the escalation of negative behaviors (Shukla-Mehta & Albin, 2002). The three themes discovered in the analysis of data collection were felt to foster healthy school climates, defined by students as "calm, secure, and trusting."

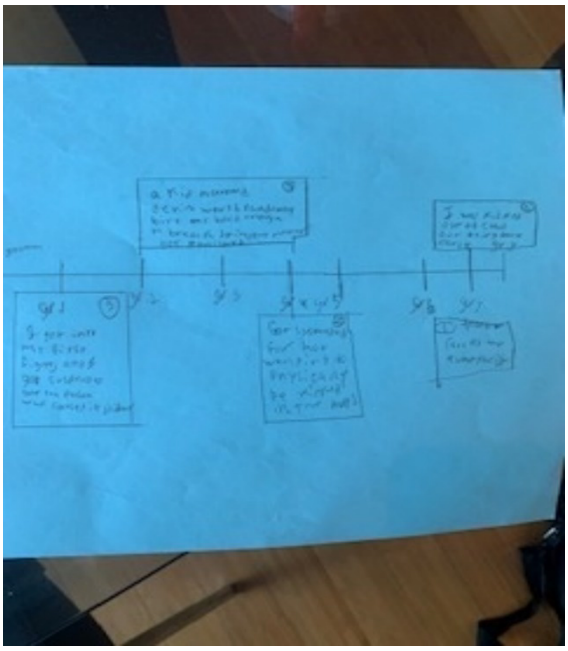
Theme 1: Strong student-staff relationships.

Student participants expressed that their behavior, levels of cooperation, and respect toward staff depended on the adult they are interacting with. Staff who showed an interest in their lives outside school cultivated a relationship based on rapport and connection. By seeing students as people first, students felt that the motives for their behavior were considered within a context of empathy and flexibility. Staff whom they felt were not interested in them as people resulted in transactional relationships void of connection or meaning. With these adults, students felt unseen, unheard, and unmotivated to adhere to instruction or direction.

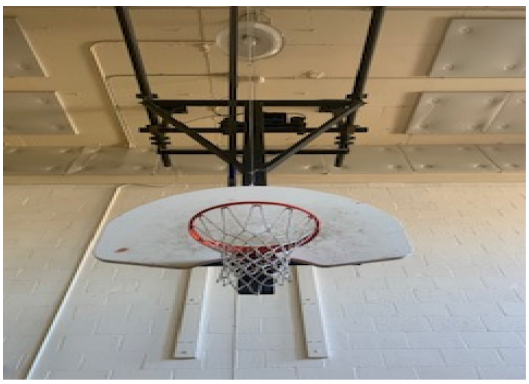
Relational Map

S*tudent 8.* Student is positioned at center of seven relationships. Inclusion of staff was due to the interest they showed in the student's hobbies outside of class. 	"*Ms. C. always comes to my basketball games, she's chill like that. In class, I work for her. I like her."* When asked how relationships with staff affected school climate the student responded, *"they matter, like, I know she cares, right, so I respect her. She cares about me, so I work harder. Her right there* {pointing to another circle}, *she's a b#^ch. She doesn't care about me, so I tell her to leave me alone and not talk to me."*
S*tudent 20.* Student is positioned at center of family, friend, and staff relationships. 	"*Ms. J. calls my mom good or bad. She asks about my kid sisters a lot too. I think she's the only one who knows my grans is sick. I don't mess around in her class. Mad respect!"* When asked how relationships with Ms. J and other staff affected their perception of school climate the response was, *"how am I supposed to care about what you got goin' on when you don't care about me? Ms. J. gave me a quiet space and extra time to finish stuff up when my grans was in the hospital, she got it. I still came to school and held it down, 'cause I knew she had my back."* Pointing to the far exterior teacher, the student adds, *"I put him here, 'cause I don't even go to this guy's class. He's a joke and I tell him that!"*

Timeline

Student 2. The student's timeline documented their experiences from grades 1 -8. 	*"In grade 3, I never messed up with her, like she noticed I had no boots on and brought me like two pairs of her kids' old boots that didn't fit no more. They were like new. I still remember that!* With regards to school climate, the student expressed greater feelings of security and connection in elementary due to how implicated teachers were in their life. *"My elementary experience was chill, like, I behaved and got along with my teachers. They liked me. This year, in high school, they don't know as much, so the relationship isn't as tight. I don't behave right for some of them, 'cause they don't care. Now, I'm the bad kid…. whatever!"*
Student 15. The student's timeline documented their experiences from elementary to high school. 21). 21 	*"Starting high school was rough for me, I was having trouble fitting in and acting out, and had no friends. Ms. P., I LOVED her, she asked about my interests and got me into some cool ECAs* {extracurriculars}. *That was big for me, I didn't feel so lost after, you know. I always worked in her class, no messing around like in some others."* As for school climate, the student continued, *"I feel calm around her 'cause she's fair. She's super patient, but anyone crossed that line, and they'll know. Everyone is given a chance to learn and move on though, you know?"*

Photovoice

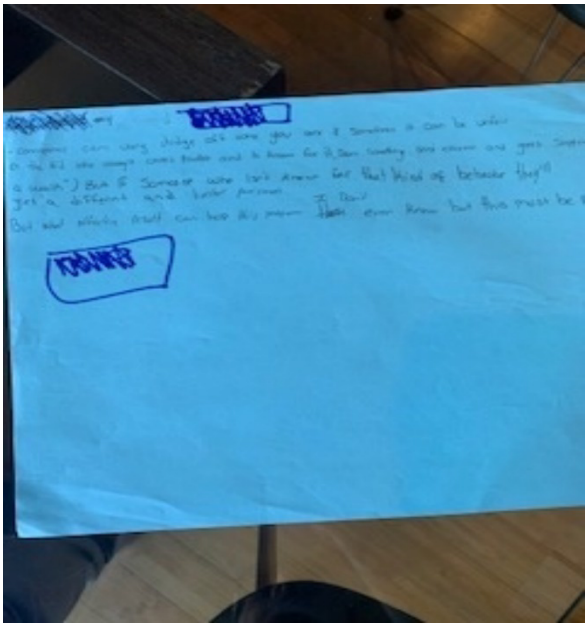
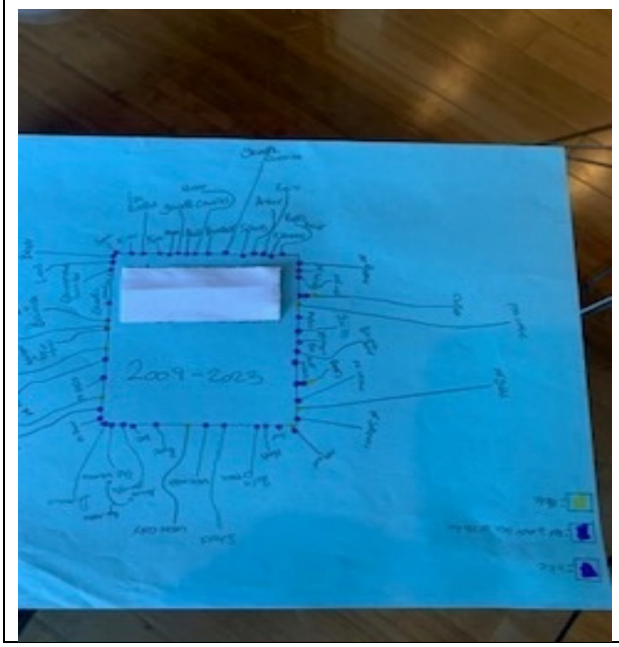
	***Student 21.*** *"Other teachers might not know why sometimes I'm on edge and why I sometimes don't come to school. Ms. C. is one of the only people I have told that I'm gay. My parents don't even know. I can trust her. She knows me."* With regards to school climate, *"I don't always feel like I belong, kids can be mean, and some adults be mad ignorant, but Ms. C. reminds me that I am going to be ok. I'm not a bad kid because I make mistakes."*
	***Student 24.*** "*I don't know what I would have done if not for Coach M. We are tight. He's the only teacher that I ever cared to learn math from. I went from failing to passing because he was patient with my anger. I'd walk out sometimes! I couldn't get out of doing the work, 'cause we rode to games together and I wasn't trying to ride the bench!"*

Theme 2: Differentiated pedagogical practices which allow for student voice and choice.

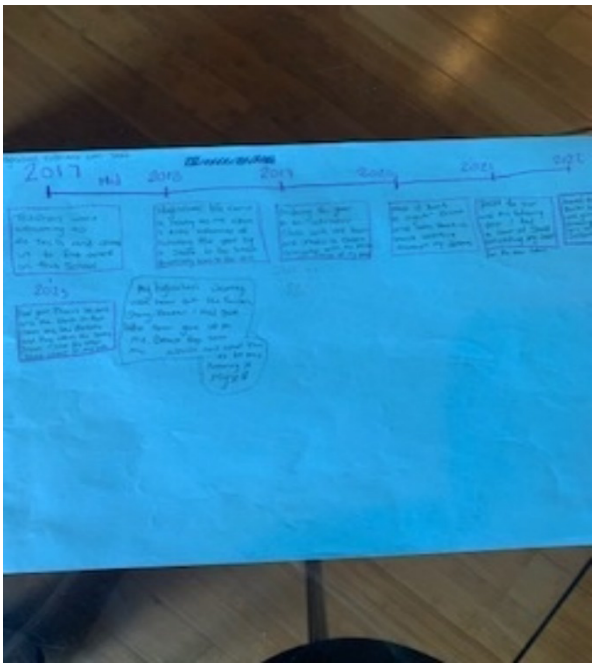
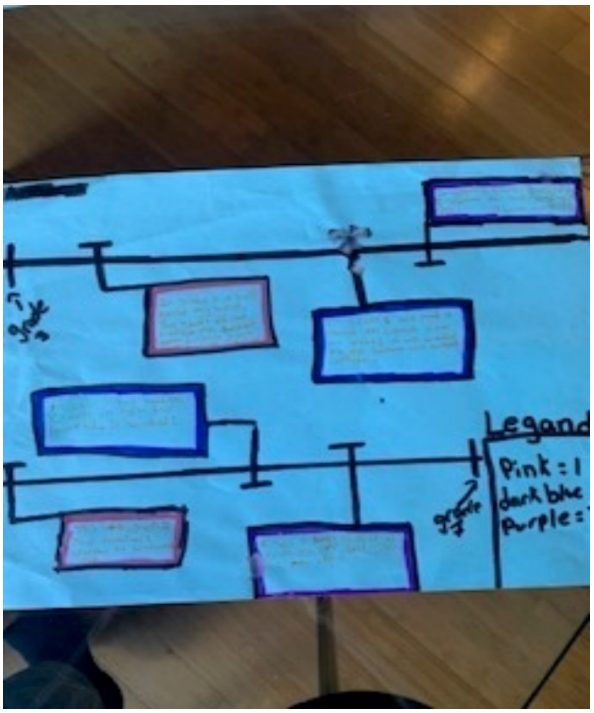
Students highlighted specific pedagogical practices which resulted in them feeling safe, calm, respected, and more inclined to behave. Student participants stated that physical layouts of classrooms that considered their comfort (lighting) as well as learning styles (alternative seating) were conducive to increased engagement. They further agreed that when teachers designed their classroom structure to allow for students to move about and work at stations which tapped into different modalities of learning, they felt more engaged and motivated to complete work (Hattie & Yates, 2013; Rosenberg & Starr, 2020). A last factor which motivated positive student

behavior was when assigned work was individualized to meet the learning needs of the student and administered and evaluated with discrete support.

Relational map

Student 10. Text describes staff relationships, two staff relationships are discussed further. 	*"These are the people who help me out. I don't like school that much, right. But these two teachers right here, I do their work. In this class here, I always know where stuff is if I need extra or forget. There's no stress if you need something. Their class is chill."* In relation to school climate, we learn that, *"teachers that make it easy, fun, help me stay organized, and help me get my work done, win! If you bark, I bark back! You make me feel less that you, or dumb, it's over."*
Student 19. Map is color coded to depict positive and negative relationships with family and staff. 	"*Mr. H. is super awesome with helping me without calling me out or making me feel dumb. He helps me on the down low, you know. No one needs to know my business. He makes sure I get the time and space and need to get my s^#t done."* With regards to school climate, the student continues, *"I don't read good, school is hard. Some days, I don't want to not go, drop-out even. These guys don't make me feel dumb. They help me anyway they can and tell me I can do it. Maybe I can graduate."*

Timeline

Student 15. A list of dates indicates student experiences throughout high school. 	"*In grade 7 we were learning the ropes, right? Ms. I. was super patient with getting me organized, I was a mess! She didn't make me feel like a failure. Once I had my system, I was chill. I continued that into grade 8 and stuff. She lessened my stress and made me feel like I could do it, so I did.* In relationship to school climate, the student goes on to say,*"we're just learning these things for the first time, it takes time. They need to notice the improvement though too, like this one teacher, when my grades went up on a test, accused me of cheating. I was so embarrassed. I stopped working for her after that."*
Student 6. Image depicts student experiences in both elementary and high school. 	"*Last year, Ms. D.'s class was tight. We all had stations that we could move around and class ran like a machine. It didn't even feel like work, 'cause we were having fun!* With regards to school climate, *"high school lets us have more of a say. Like the work needs to get done, but we're part of the conversation."*

Photovoice

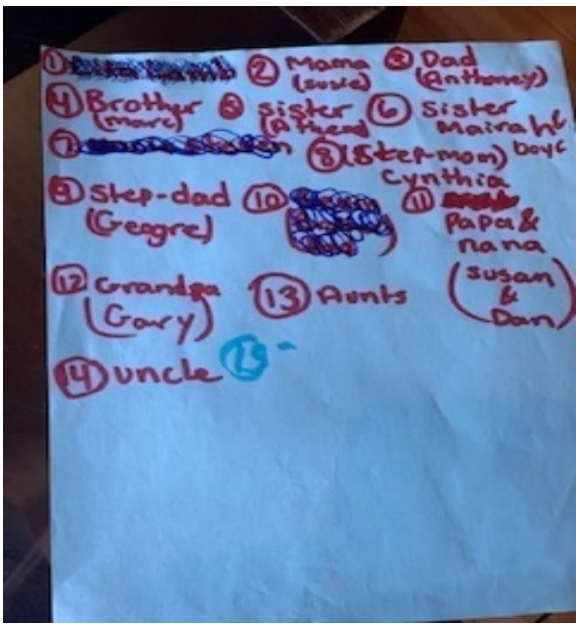
	***Student 17.*** A play on lighting and arrangement can create open spaces where students can work calmly and at their own pace. "*Ya, this is Ms. K.'s room. She always makes it nice and chill in there. And it smells good too! We get to sit where we want and move around. There's a table in the back where I sit sometimes when I need help and she'll come by or Mr. T. will and help me out, low key you know."* When discussing how this affects school climate, the student adds, *"classes where we feel comfortable to work at our own pace, get help when needed, and be comfortable, helps is to come to school."*
	***Student 8.*** Routine and flexibility create a leaving environment for every learner. *"I don't mess around in Mr. O.'s class 'cause he'll call you on it. No one messes around. He has control, you know. I always know how his class is going to roll. I know what is coming next. He even puts a timer on!"* On school climate we learn, *"I like knowing what is going on in my classes, it makes me calm coming to school. My home life is super chaotic, so here I get structure, you know."*

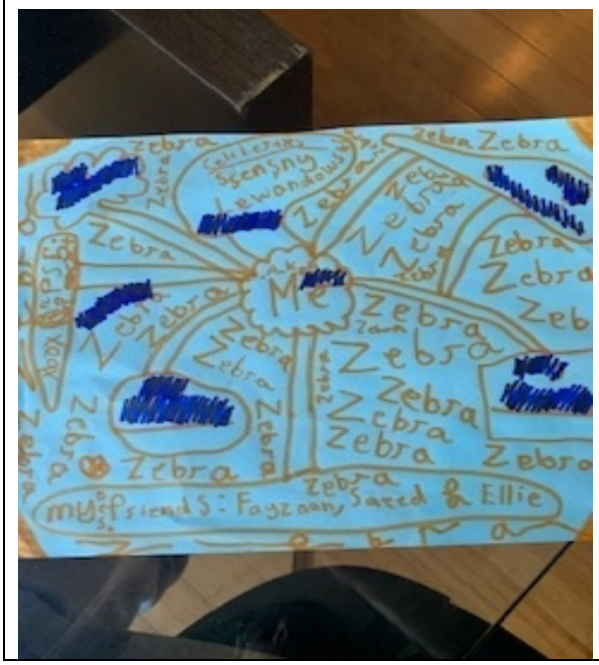
Theme 3: **Restorative student behavior management practices.**

When infractions to rules and expectations occur, participants stated that staff and administrators are better served by adopting a reflective practice that places people and contexts first. By responding rather than reacting, students can be addressed, and even disciplined, in a way that protects human dignity. If rules are broken, and a consequence needs to be issued, how relationships are repaired are tremendously important in how all those involved heal and move forward. If the focus remains only about punishment and not about learning from situations and

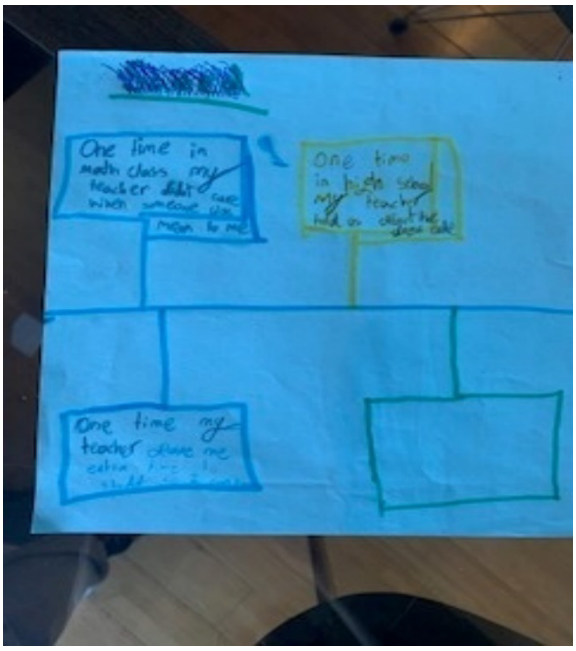
moving forward, no real improvements in behavior are possible. Students were clear that the health of a school climate depends on how people treat each other in moments of conflict and friction and how they recover once harm has been committed.

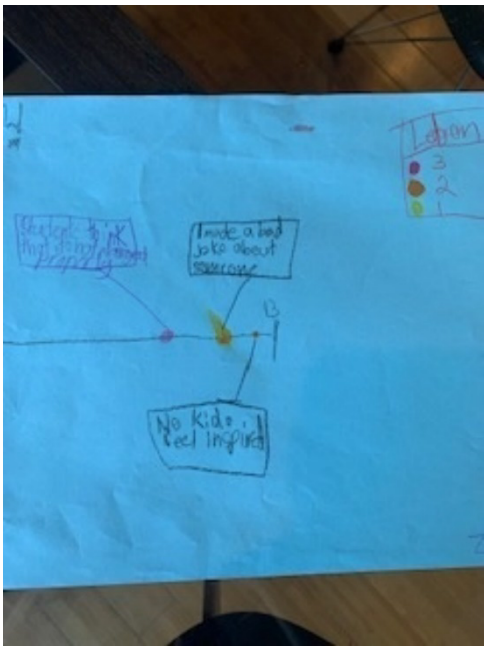
Relational map

Student 4. Numbered map of family and staff relationships.  	"A*ll this teacher does is yell at us. I was late one time and he yelled at me. I was on my period and had an emergency. He didn't ask – he didn't care*." When we explore school climate, the student adds, *"Teachers need to say sorry too. How are we supposed to move on if they can do whatever they like and we just have to take it 'cause we're kids? We don't want to be around you if you're disrespectful."*

Student 9. Student is at the center of staff members all blacked out. 	*"Kids act up, disrupt class. They get kicked out - suspended and then just get to come back like nothing has happened."* On school climate, they add, *"these guys have no control and the kids come back and just do the same thing." How is the school supposed to get better when these kids can do whatever they want?"*

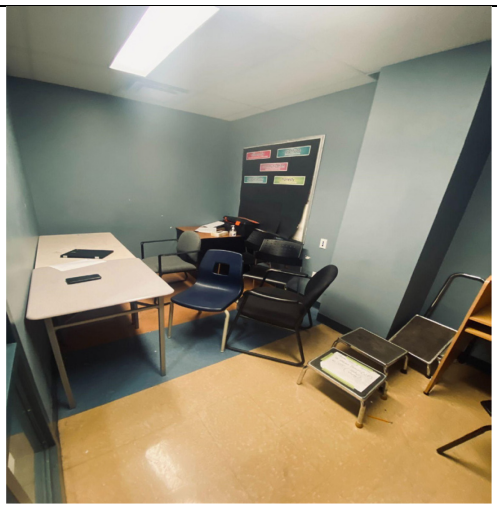
Timeline

Student 11. One line depicts three separate high school experiences. 	*"I hate teachers that yell."* Conversely, "l*ast year, in this teacher's class, if you goofed, she was chill. She wouldn't yell. She'd try to help you learn to do better, you know."* How this affected school climate was clear, *"students need to feel like we're all in this together, you know. It's not us against them."*

Student 4. Line plots three events from high school. 	"*In elementary my teacher had class meetings and we'd talk about how things were going. We don't do that in high school, teachers don't care what we think. If you mess up, you go home. Simple as that."*

Photovoice

	***Student 21***. "*ISS is so dumb. You sit there alone. Is that the punishment? No one comes to talk to you. You just go back to class."* School climate is negatively affected by poorly thought-out behavior management protocols because, *"if you're just left to rot, what do you learn…that you don't matter."*

	***Student 25.*** *"ISS is so lame. You're just stuffed in this cell and no one comes to see you. Half the time, you don't even know why you're in there. What's the lesson?"* What is further expressed is that in order to foster a healthy school climate, students need to have an opportunity to reflect on behavior and be supported with plans to move forward. *"I'm not a bad person because I made a bad choice. Don't know why I'm being treated like a criminal. This is school not prison, right?"*

Conclusion

Student engagement and behavior remain pivotal areas of interest for pre- and in-service educators, as well as for administrators and academics. As the determinants of student behavior are comorbid, interconnected with personal and social factors, stakeholders are reminded to consider holistic solutions to improving the way students are situated in their school systems. As the operating system which determines structures, routines, and ethos, school climate improvement initiatives are considered effective avenues for addressing faltering student engagement and negative behaviors. Adult stakeholders are reminded, however, that it is only through authentic consultation and negotiation with students, that sustainable growth is possible.

The current study, framed within a social ecology theoretical framework, sought to understand the emic, context-specific lived experiences of students. While the primary goal of this study was to investigate student perspectives with regards to how behavior management protocols affected school climate, the second objective was to do so by opening space for youth to come into their power and effect change within their school system. By employing an action research methodology, student participants were invited as expert stakeholders to learn about the

research process, their school system, and themselves. This was done through a six-week case study where student participants created and analyzed three arts-based data sets: relational maps, timelines, and photovoice. It was determined that student behavior is inextricably linked to social aspects of school climate; healthy student-staff relationships, pedagogical practices which allow for student voice and choice; as well as student behavior response systems which protect integrity and prioritize repairing harm.

This study contributes to research on school health policy, practice, and equity as it enlightens practitioners on the determinants of student behavior and how by moving beyond didactic delivery-model pedagogical practices and punitive behavior management protocols, restorative practices could improve school culture. It serves as an invitation for school staff and administrators to work collaboratively with their student populations to cultivate an empowering and healthy school climate for all stakeholders. To do so, staff are called upon to reflect on how they position themselves in the classroom, as this is the heart of where healthy school climates begin. As such, all staff are called upon to propagate learning environments where *humanity* flourishes. In our technological age, much debate surrounds the purpose of traditional brick and mortar schools and the role of educators (Gentile et. al., 2023). It has become an antiquated position that academic institutions hold a monopoly over knowledge acquisition. Rather than become despondent, educators here are asked to reflect on their practice and vocation and be reminded that their role has never been more necessary and important. More than conduits of information, educators must come to regard themselves as *professional human developers*, that is, experts in understanding and responding to the complex determinants of student behavior and development (Sanford et. al, 2015).

Teachers are privileged with the responsibility to be not only the architect of the foundational structures of healthy learning environments, but also the designers of the creature comforts that transform the house into a home. The results of this study direct educators to reflect on their practice and authentically engage with their students, investing in them as learners but also, and perhaps sometimes more importantly, as people. To do so, teachers are invited to make efforts to get acquainted with their lives of their students outside of class. Asking questions and showing interest in their lives and interests, attending school / personal events when appropriate, and volunteering to participate in activities that give more informal access to students, all for healthy bonds to form. Should conscious efforts be unfruitful with certain students, staff should remain professional, patient and consistent while paying heed to other adults who may be better positioned to establish a deeper connection with the child and support that relationship. School community is generated through assuming a village mentality where every child is connected to at least one adult as it is this greater sense of belonging which inspires students to be more engaged and better behaved.

Secondly, democratic classroom structures and routines need to foster student voice and choice, “where each citizen's autonomy and dignity are honored in an open, just, respectful, and pluralistic community, a community that values and encourages a critical approach in the intellectual search for truth and meaning in each individual's life” (Morrison, 2008, p. 51). To do so, high school educators are firstly asked to consider a multisensory experience when designing classroom environments as well as instructional materials (Ponticorvo et. al., 2018). Students, whose senses (sound, light, smell, touch, even taste) are activated and can experiment with course content through multiple access points, are more likely to be engaged and invested.

Furthermore, teachers who differentiate learning environments and apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices create structures and routines that allow students to select modalities of learning and options for how knowledge is transmitted (Rosenberg & Starr, 2020).

Lastly, the results of this study call on high school educators to enter into a community of practice with students to cultivate a school climate which recognizes the contributions and interconnection of *all* stakeholders. This study has brought to the fore the importance of the restorative structures, procedures, and routines that foster systematic change and position school communities to better address and recover from infractions. Moving beyond punitive frameworks, holistic measures which prioritize the person over the deed, allow for repair, which in turn decreases recidivism and encourages sustainable school climate improvement (Vaandering, 2014). To do so, teachers are called upon consult with their students regularly about classroom management, instructional materials and delivery, and the effectiveness of feedback with regards to academic progress. With regards to disciplinary procedures, teachers are reminded to move beyond punishment and incorporate measures that allow for reflection, communication, and restorative measures which promote healing for all involved.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the teachers and administrators dedicated to reflective practice for student success. We also thank the student participants…you are seen and heard.

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research*, *9*(5), 547- 570. 570. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109343625

Baker, J. A., Derrer, R. D., Davis, S. M., Dinklage-Travis, H. E., Linder, D. S., & Nicholson, M.D. (2001). The flip side of the coin: Understanding the school's contribution to dropout and completion. *School Psychology Quarterly, 16*(4), 406 – 426. 426. https://doi.org/10.1521/scpq.16.4.406.19901

Bland, D. & Atweh, B. (2004). A critical approach to collaborating with students as researchers. In Danby, S, Knight, J, & McWilliam, E (Eds.), *Performing educational research: Theories, methods and practices.* Post Pressed. 331-344.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by design.* Harvard University Press.

Carello, J., & Butler, L. (2015). Practicing what we teach: Trauma-informed educational practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35*(3), 262-278. doi: 10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059

Carter, P., Skiba, R., & Pollock, M. (2016). You can't fix what you don't look at: Acknowledging race in addressing racial discipline disparities. *Urban Education, 52*(2), 207-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916660350

Catterall M. & Ibbotson P. (2000). Using projective techniques in education research. *British Educational Research Journal*, 26(2), 245-256.

Chemi, T., & Du, X. (Eds.). (2018). *Arts-based methods in education around the world*. River Publishers.

Chow, J. C., Sayers, R., Fu, Y., Granger, K. L., McCullough, S., Kingsbery, C., & Morse, A. (2024). A systematic meta-review of measures of classroom management in school settings. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, *49*(2), 60-74. https://doi.org/10.1177/15345084231208671

Cook, T. D., Murphy, R. F., & Hunt, H. D. (2000). Comer's school development program in Chicago: a theory-based evaluation. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*, 535 597.

Crivello, G., Camfeild, L., & Woodhead, M. (2009). How can children tell us about their wellbeing? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within young lives. *Social Indicators Research, 90,* 51–72. doi:10.1007/s11205-008-9312-x

D'Amico, M., Denov, M., Khan, F., Linds, W., & Akesson, B. (2016). Research as intervention? Exploring the health and well-being of children and youth facing global adversity through participatory visual methods. *Global Public Health, 11*(5-6), 528-545, doi:10.1080/17441692.2016.1165719

Dulay, S., Karadağ, E. (2017). The effect of school climate on student achievement. In: Karadag, E. (eds) The factors effecting student achievement. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56083-0_12

Elkad-Lehman, I. & Greensfeld, H. (2011). Intertextuality as an interpretative method in qualitative research. *Narrative Inquiry, 21*(2), 258-275. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21.2.05elk

Emmer, E. & Stough, L. (2010). Classroom management: A critical part of educational psychology, with implications for teacher education. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(2). 103-112. doi:10.1207/S15326985EP3602_5

Franklin, H. & Harrington, I. (2019). A review into effective classroom management and strategies for student engagement: Teacher and student roles in today's classrooms. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 7*(12), 1-12. ISSN 2324-805X.

Gentile, M., Citta, G., Perna, S., & Allegra, M. (2023). Do we still need teachers? Navigating the paradigm shift of the teacher's role in the AI era. *Frontiers in Education, 8*. doi:10.3389/feduc.2023.1161777

Gutierrez, K. & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher, 32*(5). 19-25.

Hattie, J. & Yates, G. (2013). Visible learning and a science of how we learn. Routledge. New York. ISBN: 978-0-415-70498-4

Hergenrather, K., Rhodes, S., Cowan, C., Bardhoshi, G, & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice a community-based participatory research: A qualitative review. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 33*(6). 686-698. https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.33.6.6

Knight, D. & Wadhwa, A. (2014). Expanding opportunity through critical restorative justice: Portraits of resilience at the individual and school level. *Schools: Studies in Education, 11*(1). 11-33. https://doi.org/10.1086/675745

Liebenberg, L. (2018). Thinking critically about photovoice: Achieving empowerment and social change. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1), 1609406918757631

Lustick, H. (2017). Administering discipline differently: A Foucauldian lens on restorative school discipline. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *20*(3), 297–311. doi:10.1080/13603124.2015.1100755

Mansfield, K. C., Fowler, B., & Rainbolt, S. (2018). The potential of restorative practices to ameliorate discipline gaps: The story of one high school's leadership team. *Educational*

Administration Quarterly, *54*(2), 303-323.

Marzano, R. & Marzano, J. (2003). The key to classroom management. *Educational Leadership, 61*(1), 6-13. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert-Marzano/publication/283749466_The_Key_o_Classroom_Management/links/56f26c0908aed354e57293d3/The-Key-to-Classroom-anagement.pdf.

McDonough, K. (2009). Pathways to critical consciousness: A first-year teacher's engagement with issues of race and equity. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *60*(5), 528-537.

Meehan, B. T., Hughes, J. N., & Cavell, T. A. (2003). Teacher–student relationships as compensatory resources for aggressive children. *Child Development*, *74*(4), 1145-1157.

Morrison, K. (2008). Democratic classrooms: Promises and challenges of student voice and choice, Part One. *Educational Horizons, 87*(1), 50-60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42923743

National School Climate Council. (2007). The school climate challenge: narrowing the gap between school climate research and school climate policy, practice guidelines and teacher education policy. Retrieved from: http://www.ecs.org/school-climate.

Ponticorvo, M., Di Fuccio, R., Ferrara, F., Rega, A., & Miglino, O. (2019). Multisensory educational materials: Five senses to learn. In: Di Mascio, T., *et al.* Methodologies and Intelligent Systems for Technology Enhanced Learning, 8th International Conference. MIS4TEL 2018. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, vol 804. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98872-6_6

Reimer, K. (2011). An exploration of the implementation of restorative justice in an Ontario public school. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, *119*, 1–42.

Rosenberg, A., & Starr, L.J. (2020). Educational change and rethinking disciplinarity: A concept analysis. *McGill Journal of Education, 55*(1), 151-175. Retrieved from https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/9666

Sanford, K., Hopper, T., Starr, L. (2015). Transforming teacher education thinking: Complexity and relational ways of knowing. *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education, 12*(2), 26-48. doi:https://doi.org/10.29173/cmplct23817

Shukla-Mehta, S. & Albin, R. W. (2002). Understanding behavioral escalation: From theory to practice. *Behavioral Development Bulletin, 11*(1), 19–26. doi:10.1037/h0100487

Spencer, S. (2011). Universal Design for Learning: Assistance for teachers in today's inclusive classrooms. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 1(1), 10-22.

Swartz, S. & Nyamnjoh, A. (2018). Research as freedom: Using a continuum of interactive participatory and emancipatory methods for addressing youth marginality. *Theological Studies, 74*(3). https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i3.5063

Vaandering, D. (2014). Implementing restorative justice practice in schools: What pedagogy reveals. *Journal of Peace Education*, *11*(1) 64. doi:10.1080/17400201.2013.794335

Wang, M. T. & Degol, J. L. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review*, *28*(2), 315-352.

Wolff, C. E., van den Bogert, N., Jarodzka, H., & Boshuizen, H. P. A. (2015). Keeping an eyeon learning: Differences between expert and novice teachers' representations of classroom management events. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *66*(1), 68-85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487114549810

Look who's talking: Youth perspectives with regards to student advocacy and empowerment in school-based decision-making and its effects on school climate

Jennifer Beaudoin, MA and Miranda D'Amico, PhD

Department of Education, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec

Citation:

Beaudoin, J., D'Amico, M. (under review). Look who's talking: Youth perspectives with regards to student advocacy and empowerment in school-based decision-making and its effects on school climate. *Improving Schools*.

Abstract

This study investigates youth perspectives with regards to how levels of student advocacy and empowerment in classroom and school decision-making contribute to healthy school climates. Wishing to position students as expert stakeholders in their school community capable of enacting change, an action research methodology was employed. A focus group of twenty-five student participants representing all grade levels from one inner-city high school collaborated in six weekly workshops to create, and with the facilitation of the researcher, analyzed a triangulation of arts-based data collection methods (relational map, timeline and photovoice). It was determined that the absence of opportunities for systematic student advocacy and empowerment within classroom and school level decision-making was a contributing factor to student disengagement and negatively affected school climate. As an act of student empowerment, the study culminated with participants drafting a *Call to Action* addressed to their school administration, requesting the creation of a student governance body. By amplifying student voice on matters of inclusive, differentiated pedagogical design and equitable school-based policies grounded in social justice, a student body would contribute to sustainable school climate improvement initiatives. This study contributes to school improvement scholarship as it demonstrates the importance of positioning students as expert stakeholders and assisting in their building of capacity in school communities.

Keywords

Student voice; student advocacy; school climate; student council; empowerment

Introduction

In the current high stakes educational environment school climate improvement initiatives are widespread (Lipman, 2004). Generally accepted as the quality and character of school life, school climate has a proven association with student academic and social outcomes (Cohen et. al, 2009). Given the elusive nature surrounding the multidimensional physical, academic, and social constructs of school climate, however, improvement initiatives continue to be varied in both focus and success (Thapa et. al., 2013). Within the cornucopia of avenues school leaders can venture in search of effective direction, the current study, grounded in a theoretical base of social ecology and critical pedagogy, focused on a social aspect of school climate shown to correlate with positive impact; student engagement, advocacy and empowerment in school decision-making (Martinez et al., 2020).

As all human behavior and development is derived from a complex web of interrelated personal characteristics and environmental (social, historical, economic) factors, how one experiences the world, and interacts and impacts their environment, is unique (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Craig, 2008, Ungar, 2015). While gaining insight into students' emic experiences is the first goal of this project, the second is to advocate for justice, critical knowledge, and for social change (Shor, 1992). Resisting traditional research practices, which can be self-serving and extractive, this study acknowledges students as active stakeholders in school communities and as experts on their own experiences. Moving beyond the "passive participation of children who have historically been instrumentalized," here, students are given pride of place as not only the subjects of the study but the drivers of it as well (Loignon et. al, 2020, p. 211). Much school improvement research remains adult-centered in both focus and purpose and is thus limited in scope. In contrast, this study asks, what are student perceptions with regards to how their level of

empowerment and advocacy in classroom and school-based decision-making affects school climate.

The research is based on a "conviction that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; that their insights warrant not only attention but also the response of adults, and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 359). An action research methodology was employed, inviting youth to participate in creating a space where, while learning the research process, they could potentially transform themselves, those they learn with, and the systems of which they are an intrinsic part. Where little space currently exists in many schools where staff and students meet as genuine equals and partners, efforts to amplify student voice must be approached as a work in progress to overview and overhaul organizational structures and cultures (Fielding, 2004). As such, student engagement is concerned with the interaction between the time, effort and other relevant resources invested by both students and their institutions in a pluralistic sharing of decision-making power intended to optimize the student experience, that is, enhance the learning outcomes, development, and liberation of students, not their domestication (Freire, 1971; Martinez et al., 2020; Trowler, 2010; Wong et al., 2010).

In order to determine subjective and context-specific realities, while redistributing and democratizing power, this study invites youth into a community of practice to explore both themselves and the systems in which they operate. Seeking insight beyond the intellectual, and through socially constructed experiential knowing, youth participants were immersed in three arts-based data collection methods: relational map, timeline, and photovoice. "Recognized for engaging communities in action research processes that transcend age, education, language, and cultural barriers," arts-based methods lean into children's natural gifts for self-expression to re-

thread relationships, re-encounter themselves, and develop sensitivities to the complex challenges facing their community, in a space of relative security (Bagnoli, 2009).

Through an intertextual analysis of all arts-based pieces created the study participants found that student advocacy and empowerment with regards to high school classroom structures and procedures were either non-existent or severely lacking at best. This lack of consultation and involvement was expressed by participants to result in lower levels of overall student engagement and negatively affect school climate. When describing how they envisioned greater advocacy, participants described procedures, structures and pedagogical design choices that allowed for student voice and choice, indicative of differentiated instruction (Subban, 2006). With regards to school level decision-making, participants were even more dissatisfied with the levels at which they felt consulted or implicated in the creation of the structures and procedures which framed their high school experiences. Notably, not one participant was able to present a single example of when they were involved in any capacity to contribute to organizational decisions.

Echoing Fullan (1991), this study pursues the line of inquiry of *what would happen if we treated the student as though their opinion mattered*? It was designed to engage youth as active change-making agents in the quest to amplify their voices and inspire adult school decision-makers to listen. Guided by the premise that the social world exists and is transformed as the result of constant human interaction and action, and not by chance, the dissemination of the results yielded from data analysis was intended as a catalyst for change (Freire, 1978). As such, this study culminated in student participants agreeing to collaborate on a shared *Call to Action*, where study findings would be disseminated to school administration with the intention of opening a conversation as to how to move forward as a shared community of practice composed

of equally respected stakeholders. A suggested starting point towards amelioration was the creation of a student council, where students from every grade level, staff, and the administration could discuss and negotiate classroom and school based procedures and protocols.

Student Voice

The contemporary commitment to student voice and involvement is an idea whose time has seemed to have arrived, with scholarship focusing heavily on stakeholder interests and the high profiling of issues of rights and entitlements (Robinson & Taylor, 2007; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Due to the differentiation in age categories the values that inform student voice work need to be explored as well as the range of theoretical considerations, each of which have differing and distinctive concepts of personhood, notions of social action, and the potential for communication and participation.

This study recognizes the caution made by Ruddick and Fielding (2006) to be wary of the present climate where young people may be consulted about their learning only to raise standards and increase attainment rather than for reasons of personal and social development or any sense of active membership of their school community. As student work advances values and beliefs surrounding the purpose of the educational process and the human hierarchical relationships which drive it, scholars must assume a chosen ethical and moral stance. To begin, student voice work must question the bourgeois myth of neutrality and make a distinction between process (transfer) and exchange (generator of meaning) models of communication (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). By acknowledging the potential of communication to develop joint understandings and recast the traditional hierarchical relationship within educational institutions, student-led dialogue (the gold standard typology of student engagement), can lead to open and exploratory

exchanges founded on active listening in a joint inquiry committed to positive change (Feilding, 2004; Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Only through this deeper reciprocity can the contexts of space, time, skills, and systems interact to achieve sustainable learning communities working towards school improvement.

Secondly, moving away from mere tokenism or only listening to those who have social capital, student voice work must focus on who is listened to, how, and for what purpose. Despite perhaps not possessing the appropriate linguistic code, student participation must be sought for the sake of democratic inclusivity, and not as a further mechanism of control or window-dressing. Rather, institutional conditions need to strive to embody the lived experience of empowerment of students as the defining feature of schooling.

The third assertion advanced by this study is that if transformation remains a goal of student voice work, the possibilities for its achievement and the obstacles that stand in its way need to be recognized. An obstacle that needs to be acknowledged and worked through is that power relations are unequal and problematic. The power relations (both subtle and durable) that underlie the schooling process must be interrogated in recognition that social groups do not possess equal access (some having privileged access) to the mechanisms of social communication and institutional power. Educators wishing to engage in student voice work need to adopt a pedagogy that centralizes the relationship between authority, ethics, and power, and that inflates rather than exhausts the possibilities of a genuine democratic society (Giroux, 1994).

By moving away from a banking model of education, we can develop a communicative environment (forged *with* not *for* students) rooted in social praxis, reflection, and political action, where they are afforded the rightful space to be active agents, free to transform their world

(Freire, 1978). Moving beyond this, by adopting postmodern and feminist positions, power is not regarded as binary, as a thing you have or not, but rather as diverse, complex, and gendered (Ellsworth, 1997; hooks, 2000). By privileging diversity over uniformity, the "cacophony of competing voices brings students to participate, criticize and come to power, rather than being empowered by an external force" (Reay, 2006, p. 179).

Lastly, while the goal of student voice work is to listen to the varied lived experiences of youth, what is done with it remains of vital importance. If schools only want to hear what they already know or agree with, and student consultation for the purposes of policy implementation is underplayed or ignored, it remains unlikely that voice work will lead to changes which will enhance student experiences of schooling. It is only through the cooperative act of respectful dialogue that schools can build their community and the social capital within.

Method

To curate a space where youth drive both the research process and outcome, an action research methodology was employed. This narrative, context-sensitive, naturalistic approach to research as a process of inquiry bridges the gap between traditional academic research and relevant practical applications. Beyond seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake it "prioritizes the value of experiential knowledge for tackling problems caused by unequal and harmful social systems, and for envisioning and implementing alternatives" (Cornish et al., 2013, p. 1). Underpinned by democratic values, action researchers (those who are directly concerned with the social situation that is being researched) are endowed with the right to take control of the research process, with assistance from outsiders as 'critical friends' who ensure rigor. In communion with social ecology theory, action research is concerned with exploring the multiple

determinants of actions, interactions and interpersonal relationships in unique contexts. Furthermore, in tandem with critical pedagogy, it aims to deepen practitioners' understanding of the complex situations in which they live and work, so that their actions to bring about improvements in the social situation are better informed.

Pragmatically, action research must respond to the limitations of opening the floor to practitioner-led research. The time constraints and lack of specialist knowledge, in both data analysis and dissemination, hinder the goals of soliciting wider peer involvement and enacting collaborative, sustainable change. The validity of action research, therefore, is tested by evaluating the impact of these action steps in a continuous process of data collection, reflection and analysis, interpretation, action and evaluation; and later through the process of communicating outcomes to other practitioners who will make implicit comparisons with their own repertoire of experience and judge the work to be worthwhile or not.

Instrumentation

Arts-based methods

Three arts-based data collection methods were utilized with youth participants to investigate evocative layers of experience while responding to developmental realities, safeguard against (re)traumatization, and address varying levels of engagement, maturity, and literacy levels (Bagnoli, 2009; Catterall & Ibbotson, 2013). Furthermore, with its participatory agenda, data collection methods were required to also encourage participants to take part in the research process according to their own preferred modalities of expression (Bagnoli, 2009). With this in mind, as well as to address the insurance for validity, a triangulation of three arts-based graphic

elicitation data collection methods enhanced participants' reflexivity to gather a holistic picture of the topic under investigation.

Relational maps use metaphor to depict how one sees themselves and others in a constellation of relationships. Personal positionality, inclusion or exclusion of others, structure, and color use all speak to how one demonstrates their own and others importance (Bagnoli, 2009). This arts-based method is helpful when working with youth because, "the text assists in the recording of emotions, impressions, or aspects that are difficult to put into words (Keats, 2009, pp. 187). It allows youth to document and witness their experiences in a non-intrusive manner, untangling reality from perception, and noticing patterns while envisioning a way forward. Timelines were utilized as time is a crucial dimension in understanding one's development and temporal experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Action research advances the empowerment to change stems from one having the opportunity to narrate the past and present and express projections and expectations for the future (Liebenberg, 2018). The details a participant includes and excludes juxtaposed by critical developmental stages and socially constructed milestone expectations is very telling (Crivello et al., 2009). Moments of inclusion and exclusion reported in timelines offer participants an opportunity to investigate these events on a continuum and unpack the effect this may have in their perceptions of the social dimension of school climate.

Using ethnographic techniques that combine photography, critical dialogue, and experiential knowledge, photovoice allows participants to reflect on and communicate their concerns, to expose social problems, and to ignite social change (Sutton-Brown, 2015). This method invited students to create personalized data, while acquiring and developing analytic and critical dialogue skills that could be used to advocate for themselves in the present and in the

future (D'Amico et. al., 2016; Hergenrather et. al., 2009). Showcasing the physical environment and expressing how students navigate and experience the space is a powerful method when working with school policymakers, as these spaces are shared by both but not experienced in the same way.

Procedure

A Call for Participation

To adhere to the project's theoretical and methodological foundations, a qualitative research design was chosen to engage in naturalistic inquiry to generate rich narrative descriptions and construct a case study of twenty-five adolescent students, from one inner city high school in Montréal, Québec. Students were invited to participate through grade level assemblies and following the collection of parental consent and student assent forms, six weekly focus group sessions over the lunch hours commenced.

Focus Group Sessions

The first session began with a discussion and dissection of the research question, *what are youth perspectives with regards to how levels of advocacy and empowerment in classroom and school decision-making affect school climate*? With the question in mind, we then reviewed the project goals to elicit student perspectives as well expose them to the research processes so that they may use these skills for current school improvement initiatives and for future research aims. The roles of the group members, the adult researcher as a partner and student rather than an authority figure and students as a community of investigators and important contributors to the school community were then explored. Time was reserved to review ethical expectations,

specifically around continuous consent, respect, and confidentiality. To foster a collaborative environment, the session culminated with a collaborative game to encourage team building and trust.

The second and third sessions were structured so that participants began with a collaborative game followed by a review of the research question and an introduction to arts-based data collection methods (first relational map, then timeline). Following an opportunity to discuss the research question as it related to the particular method, a thirty-minute block was allocated for participants to use blank paper and colored markers to independently create their piece depicting all school staff from elementary to the current age, they felt fostered space for student voice and engagement in classroom and/or school decision-making. While participants worked, the researcher circulated around the space and took observation notes of impressions and discussions. Once the time was up, participants were given the opportunity to volunteer their pieces to be seen by others and discussed uniquely and collectively to determine common themes.

During the fourth session participants were introduced to photovoice as the third arts-based data collection method. In contrast to images students may have seen as school publicity, the photographs participants were called upon to capture were framed around the research question and the common themes determined from the two previous data collection methods. With questions answered, the group was reminded about confidentiality requirements and equipped with consent forms to be signed by anyone captured in their images. The group decided that selected images with written captions would be submitted digitally throughout the week to the researcher's email and that the time remaining would be used to get started.

The fifth session was reserved for participants to do a gallery walk through a curated exhibit of all three sets of data created by participants, establish common themes, and determine how the findings were going to be disseminated. After the time allotted, participants solidified the common themes and brainstormed possible dissemination activities to encourage student activism for the purposes of sustainable school improvement. Ultimately, it was unanimously agreed by a show of hands that the creation of a comprehensive, full grade student council with an administrator-member would prove to be a successful measure in ensuring sustainable improvement student advocacy and school culture. Without assurance that student perspectives would be accepted as constructive feedback, it was agreed that an anonymous letter from the group, reframed as a *Call to Action* for the purposes of the research study, would be drafted and submitted to the administration.

The sixth and final session was used to consolidate all prepared drafts submitted by each participant. Using the drafts and live feedback, a final draft was typed, by a level 5 student volunteer, on a Chromebook connected to a Smart TV for all to see and follow. Following approval, it was submitted to the administration from the researcher's email on behalf of the focus group.

Data Analysis

"Intertextuality is a primary concept in the study of culture and is particularly suitable for qualitative research, central to which is the subjectivity of the narrator, the story, and the listener/researcher, as well as the relative and indeterminate dimension of knowledge" (Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld, 2011, p. 258). This project employed an interpretive intertextual method of analysis as it positions the mechanisms of understanding as a process complicated by

historical, intertextual, social, and political elements. The intertextual reading to be demonstrated detects the combination of various types of cultural components in the narrative as a means of representing the world of the narrator; it takes into account a possible macro context in the narrator's story, its style and structure, the narrator's implicit personal interpretation, and the researcher-interpreter's option to reread the narrative (Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld, 2011). As knowing is determined by one's positionality, the elicitations created by participants are given meaning through their interrelationship with other texts, that is, the way that similar or related texts influence, reflect, or differ from each other. In order to analyze their own pieces, as well as the pieces of their peers, participants were brought to investigate the shaping of a one text's meaning through the interconnection with the others. These references are sometimes made deliberately and depend on a reader's prior knowledge and understanding of the referent, but the effect of intertextuality is not always intentional and is sometimes inadvertent. As such, participants were asked to question their own beliefs and understandings and seek deeper connections between the pieces presented as they related to the complexity of their school culture and how they experience it.

Results

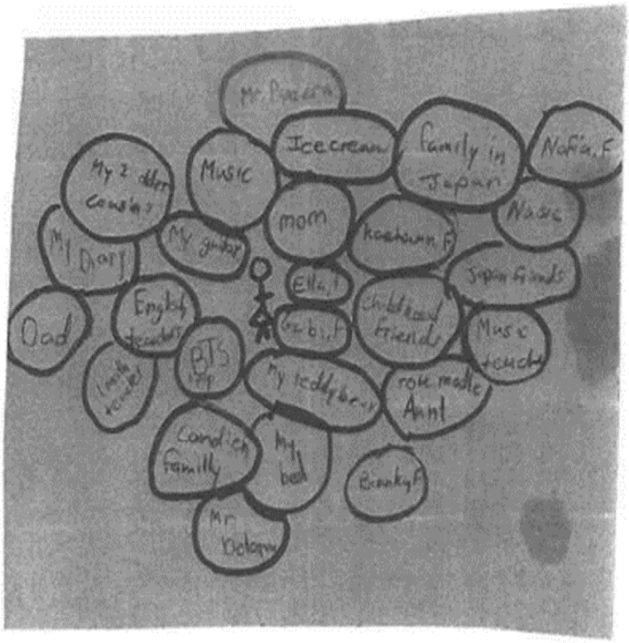
Following an analysis of individual pieces as well as the work as a collective, participants determined that consultation with students with regards to the creation of *classroom* behavior expectations were more prevalent in elementary school. The enhanced application of classroom meetings and peer mediation in primary school was seen to be advantageous and empowering to students. Participants found that applications for Universal Design for learning (UDL) in pedagogical design would greatly improve opportunities for student voice and choice in the classroom. The absence of authentic student voice with regards to *school* level decision-making

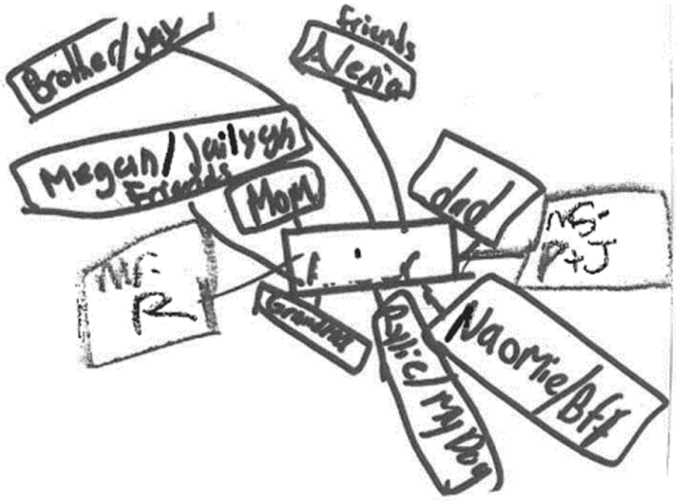
was marked at both the elementary and secondary levels. The lack of consultation and implication in school decision-making was seen as contributing to student detachment and disengagement and negatively affecting school climate. They likewise found that the creation of a student governance body, such as a student council, would contribute to the amplification of student voice in school level decision making and would contribute to sustainable school climate improvement.

Theme 1: Practices which foster student advocacy and empowerment in classroom-based decision-making.

With regards to classroom-based decision-making, youth participants agreed that opportunities for student voice and choice were severely lacking. It was determined that this deficit of genuine consultation and collaboration with students resulted in poor student engagement and negatively affected school climate. Conversely, students who were able to provide examples of positive classroom environments were clear on the strategies which encouraged their buy-in and engagement. While they were unable to identify the correct categorization for these practices, once the adult researcher inquired as to whether Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was what they were referring to, they were unanimous that this method encapsulated what they were expressing and promoting (Al-Azawei et al., 2016). Participants explained UDL as opportunities to select pedagogical activities, determine the pace at which they worked, select the manner in which they demonstrated knowledge, and being given the choice of which location in the classroom / school which they felt most comfortable and productive. They stipulated that employing UDL to promote content accessibility and fill the gap between learner abilities and individual differences inspired positive student feedback with regard to how empowered they felt in class and school.

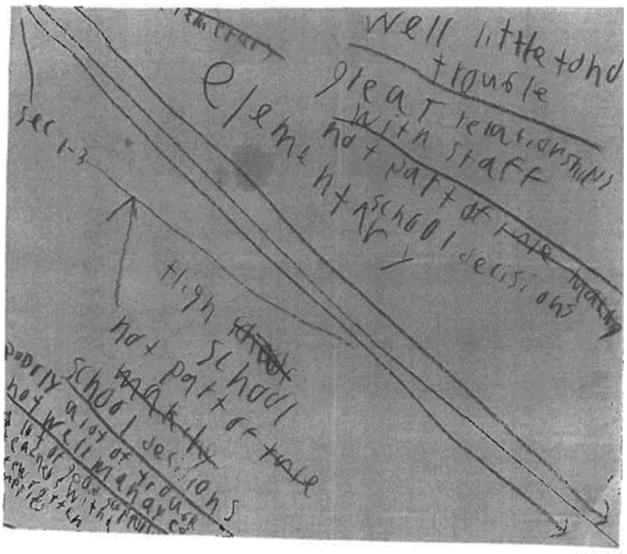
Relational Map

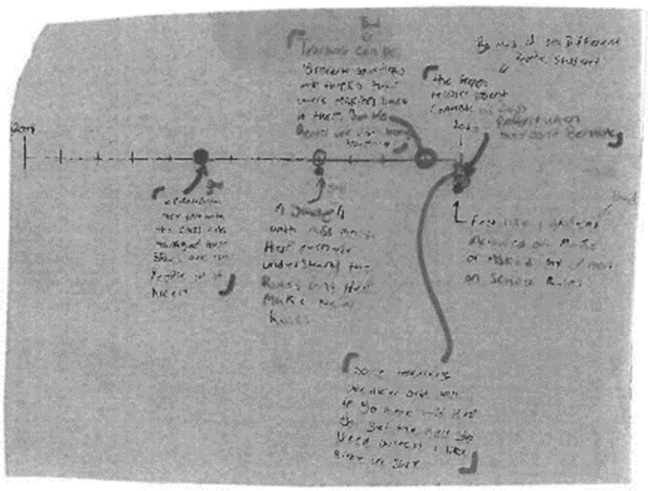
	*"Ms. J. always lets us start with whatever we want. She sets up this timer and we rotate between the stuff we have to do. I always feel like I'm in control, you know. I even go to the library to work sometimes. We can move around." (Student 7)*



"I put his teacher on my map 'cause he doesn't care how we show our work. We have a book where we keep all our samples. I have written stuff in there, pictures, it's like a scrapbook you know, and we talk a lot about what we know. It's not like always about tests and stuff." (Student 17)

Timeline

	*"In elementary we used to be able to do so much fun stuff in class. We moved around and we were always doing something different. In high school we just sit there for 6 hours a day. It's SO BORING" (Student 11)*

	*"I remember in grade 6 we had a portfolio of all the work we were most proud of. We wrote reflections on our mistakes and made plans to fix them. Now, all I have is tests. I don't know how to fix my mistakes" (Student 14)*

Photovoice

	*"This teacher always has different places set up to work. I can move around. She even has another room set up so that I can go and get stuff done alone. I have choice" (Student 25)*

Theme 2 - Practices which foster student advocacy and empowerment in school-based decision making.

Following an analysis of the data, participants unanimously agreed that student advocacy and empowerment in school-based decision-making was non-existent in their school. While some participants mentioned the administration of an annual student survey, no one was able to articulate the purpose of the survey (what type of information it was trying to capture) or how results translated into clear changes in the school environment. Some students expressed that after years in the building, the reputation of the survey was that students did not take it seriously, with some joking about how they would purposely make up answers, knowing, “no one reads the results or cares.”

When asked if any of the participants were aware of the decision-making structures in the school, no one was able to answer. When asked how they felt about how school procedures and regulations come to be, participants began to jokingly hypothesize situations that saw the principal as all powerful or “the puppet of the school board.” The strong sentiment, shared by all, was that the opinions or contributions of students did not play into the decision-making process and that rules and regulations were created for the purpose of student control and not collaboration.

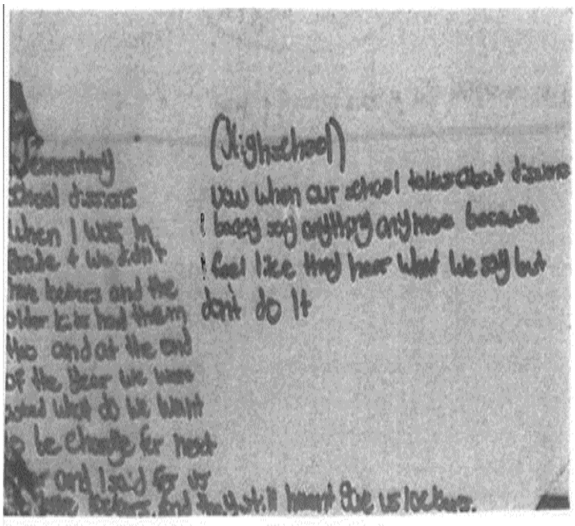
A solution to this perceived reality was the creation of a student governance body. The proposed student council would be composed of students from every grade level, as well as staff and at least one administrator. The role of the student council would be to serve as a liaison between the student population and school administration and governing bodies. As a consultative body, the student council would collaborate with administration on the creation and

implementation of school policy and procedures, voicing the position(s) of the students they represent.

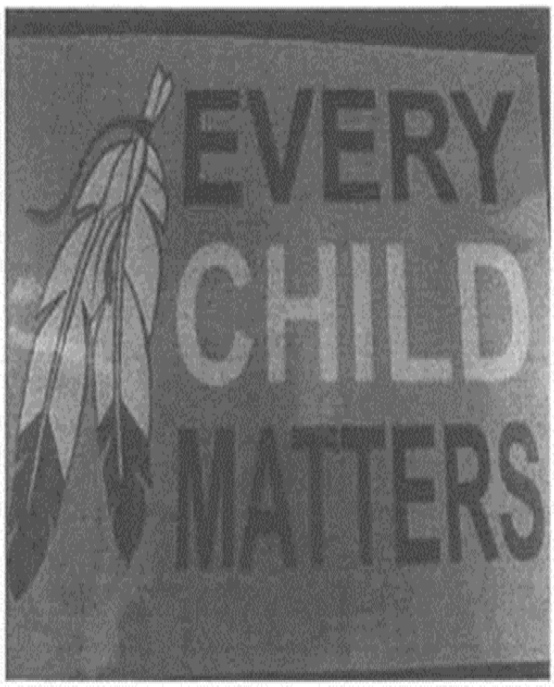
Relational Map

	*"School rules are made without us. We're never asked what we think. No one speaks for us." (Student 19)*

Timeline

	*"In elementary we had a student council. It wasn't much, but it was something. At least they pretended to care." (Student 4)*

Photovoice

	*"Do we though?" (Student 12)*

Discussion

While 'student voice and choice' is seen by many as a popular orientation in the contemporary educational landscape, advocating its purpose beyond promotional soundbites remains a challenge. Critical educational theorists continue to campaign for schools to be spaces that promote citizen (both young and old) autonomy and dignity in the shared intellectual search for truth and meaning (Morrison, 2008). This study demonstrates that despite this esteemed objective, in reality, schools continue to struggle to break the mold of traditional academic institutions where children are perhaps seen but not heard. Within classrooms, this study provides teachers with guidance on the importance of co-creating learning environments with the students that respond to learner needs, strengths, and challenges. Classrooms, as ecosystems, are called upon to be spaces where all students can maximize every modality to capture knowledge and demonstrate competency, uniquely.

Within the greater school system, school leaders are guided through the results of this study to investigate ways in which traditional power dynamics are dismantled with the goal of defining school success according to standards of student engagement and inclusion in school decision-making. While not an easy task given the political landscape of power and privilege, by approaching the feat as a process and not 'une affaire conclude' allows administrators the breadth to investigate possibilities of broadening democratic school structures for all stakeholders. A suggested possible place to begin is to focus on building trust through active listening to the varied perspectives of the traditionally disenfranchised members of the school community. By adopting a reflexive mode, school administrators can open to channels of communication and authentic dialogue to better inform school climate improvement initiatives within their schools.

Conclusion

By regarding schools and the people who occupy them as an interconnected ecosystem, we move away from an institutional model and rest in a framework where people come before systems. Wishing to access the authentic lived experience of the traditionally disenfranchised members of the school community and co-create a space for inviting them into their power, a participatory action research methodology was introduced. Through this approach, students were exposed to how using the research process can assist in the investigation of issues of importance to them and their communities and how to appropriately use tools to engage in the change-making process. No longer silent customers of an unwanted product or by-standers of their own experiences, student participants were welcomed into a community of advocates for redefining school success.

Through the use of graphic elicitation and photovoice techniques, youth were acquainted with how accessing parts of themselves through activities that transcend the literal, they could be vulnerable yet safe. Furthermore, art-based data collection methods remind all involved that research can be fun. When fully immersed in art participants can expose all of who they are, capturing deep insight within child's play. Relational maps highlight the interconnected web of human relationships, and how regardless of positive or negative impact, the significance on one's life is meaningful and worthy of reflection. Timelines invite us to understand the trajectory of our lives and the patterns within our experiences. By highlighting the transition from elementary to high school, we were able to unmask how as one ages their need for increased agency and freedom needs to be acknowledged and responded to. The research method of photovoice allows us to literally capture our emic lived experience with a photograph. These images remind us that while the spaces captured in the images are shared by the school community, they are not equally experienced. Photographs, along with their written captions, invite us to see these spaces as political, where power and privilege determine how people occupy spaces and influence their boundaries.

Following an intertextual analysis of the data collection methods created, student participants determined two areas for school leaders to consider when addressing school climate improvement. Within classrooms, staff need to be encouraged and challenged to co-create spaces with their students that differentiate curriculum delivery (opening space for student voice and choice with regards to all modalities of learning and knowing) and foster environments that actively respond to the cultural, social and economic diversity within their classrooms. Within the greater school system, this study positions successful, sustainable school climates as those that actively incorporate the varied perspectives of all stakeholders. Here, power and privilege

are continuously challenged, and communication and reporting systems are enshrined to ensure that the voices of even the most traditionally disenfranchised are considered and respected.

References

Al-Azawei, A., Serenelli, F., & Lundqvist, K. (2016). Universal Design for Learning (UDL): A content analysis of peer reviewed journals from 2012 to 2015. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 16*(3), 39-56. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v16i3.19295

Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research, 9*(5), 547-570. doi:10.1177/1468794109343625.

Bell, H (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Pluto Press.

Bland, D. & Atweh, B. (2003) A critical approach to collaborating with students as researchers. In Danby, S, Knight, J, & McWilliam, E. (Eds.), *Performing Educational Research: Theories, Methods and Practices.* Post Pressed, Flaxton, QLD, pp. 331-344.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiment by nature and design.* Harvard University Press.

Catterall, M., & Ibbotson, P. (2013). Using projective techniques in education research. *British Education Research Journal,* 26(2), 245-256.

Cohen, J., McCabe, E.M., Michelli, N.M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1). 180-213.

Cornish, F., Breton, N., & Moreno-Tabarez, U. (2013). Participatory action research. *Nature Review Methods Primers, 3*(34). 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Towards trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher, 31*(4), 3-14.

Craig, S. (2008). *Reaching and teaching children who hurt: Strategies for your classroom.*

Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Crivello, G., Camfeild, L., & Woodshed, M. (2009). How can children tell us about their well-being? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within young lives. *Social Indicators Research, 90*, 51-72. doi:10.1007/s11205-008-9312x

D'Amico, M., Denov, M., Khan, F., Linds, W., & Akesson, B. (2016). Research as intervention? Exploring the health and well-being of children and youth facing global adversity through participatory visual methods. *Global Public Health, 11*(5-6), 528-545, doi:10.1080/17441692.2016.1165719

Elkad-Lehman, I., & Greensfeld, H. (2011). Intertextuality as an interpretative method in qualitative research. *Narrative Inquiry, 21*(2), 258-275. doi: https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.21.2.05elk

Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy and the power of address.* Teachers College Press.

Feilding, M. (2004). "New wave" student voice and the renewal of civic society. *London Review of Education, 2*(3), 197-217. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1474846042000302834

Fielding, M. (2004b) Transformative approaches to student voice: Theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal, 30(*2), 295–311.

Freire, P. (1971). To the coordinator of a culture circle. *Convergence 4*(1), 61– 2.

Freire, P. (1978). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* Penguin Random House.

Fullan, M. (1991). *The true meaning of educational change.* Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2002). Michael Fullan: Leading through change in 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-uUL0UPe8Y

Giroux, H. (1994) Doing cultural studies: Youth and the challenge of pedagogy. *Harvard*

Educational Review,64(3), 278–308.

Hergenrather, C., Rhodes, S., Cowan, C., Bardhosi, G. & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice as community-based participatory research: A qualitative review. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 33*(6), 686-698. doi:10.5993/AJHB.33.6.6

Keats, P. (2009). Multiple text analysis in narrative research: Visual, written, and spoken stories of experience. *Qualitative Research, 9*(2), 181-195. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794108099320

Liebenberg, L. (2018). Thinking critically about photovoice: Achieving empowerment and social change. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 17*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918757631

Lipman, P. (2004). *High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform*. Routledge. ISBN: 0-414- 93507-5

Loignon, C., Dupéré, S., Bush, P., Truchon, K., Boyer, S. & Hudon, C. (2020). Using photovoice to reflect poverty and address social inequalities among primary care teams. *Action Research, 21*(2), 211-229. doi:10.1177/1476750320905900

Martinez, L., Jones, E., & Connolly, N. (2020). From consultation to shared decision-making: Youth engagement strategies for promoting school and community wellbeing. *Journal of School Health, 90*(12), 976-984. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12960

Morrison, K. (2008). Democratic classrooms: Promises and challenges of student voice and choice, part one. *Educational Horizons, 87*(1), 50-60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42923743

Reay, D. (2006). 'I'm not seen as one of the clever children': Consulting primary school pupils about the social conditions of learning. *Educational Review, 58(*2), 171–81.

Robinson, C., & Taylor, C. (2007). Theorizing student voice: Values and perspectives. *Improving Schools, 10*(1), 5-17. doi:10.1177/1365480207073702

Rudduck, J. & Fielding, M. (2006). Student voice and the perils of popularity. *Educational Review, 58*(2), 219–31.

Shor, I. (1992). Education is Politics: Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. In: Paulo Freire: *A critical encounter*. Edited By Peter Leonard, Peter McLaren. Routledge. doi:https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.4324/9780203420263

Subban, P. (2006). Differentiated instruction: A research basis. *International Education Journal, 7*(7), 935-947. ISSN 1443-1475

Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. *The Higher Education Academy*, *11*(1), 1-15.

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, *83*(3), 357–385. doi: 10.3102/0034654313483907

United Nations (1989). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/25. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_44_25.pdf

Ungar, M. (2015). *Working with children and youth with complex needs: 20 skills to build resilience.* Routledge Press. ISBN: 978-1-138-80072-4

Wong, N., Zimmerman, M., & Parker, E. (2010). A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 46*(1–2), 100–114. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9330-0

General Discussion

The goals of this dissertation were to elicit student perspectives on the social aspect of school climate and to create space for participants to actively engage with the research process to contribute to improving their current environment. Of particular interest was the context-specific manner in which students experience school and how this understanding could inform more holistic and culturally-informed school-based practices. This research is of scholarly value and practical use to frontline school stakeholders and is presented as a guide to evidence-based research practices as well as concrete direction on where to focus towards effective, sustainable school climate improvement initiatives.

Key Findings

The three studies presented in this dissertation contribute to a growing body of literature examining the benefits of incorporating student voice within school improvement initiatives. Through the use of an action research design and arts-based data collection methods, scholars and practitioners are guided as to best practices in soliciting student perspectives while safeguarding against harm.

The initial key finding was that to foster a positive school climate that bolsters student engagement, school practitioners must focus first and foremost on the relationships between students and staff. Relationships are fostered first and foremost by adults who acknowledge their power and privilege in the classroom and adopt a reflective mode committed to dismantling conscious and unconscious bias and discrimination. Secondly, classroom environments and pedagogical practices should be designed to accommodate and respond to the various ways in which students learn and demonstrate competency. Lastly, staff are advised to position themselves as *professional human developers* and as such concern themselves with every aspect

of a child's life, encouraging passions, guiding pathways to success, and correcting inappropriate or undesired behaviors with compassion and humanity.

The second key finding reinforced in this research was that human behavior is determined by complex and interconnected personal and environmental factors. To prevent negative behaviors, encourage student cooperation and engagement, and impede the escalation or recidivism of undesired behaviors, educators are directed to foster respectful relationships; design welcoming learning environments where structured, individualized, differentiated, and discrete academic support is offered; and collaborate with students to create restorative measures to respond to conflict.

The last key finding was that intentional and authentic opportunities for student advocacy in classroom and school-based decision-making is lacking in the high school setting. Due to its negative impact on student engagement, school stakeholders are invited to collaborate with their student population to determine the most effective means of encouraging genuine and consistent consultation. To access the plethora of student perspectives, even the most oppositional and defiant, measures must be taken to prioritize creating an atmosphere of open dialogue that welcomes dissent and disagreement as a platform to grow and learn.

Overall, the findings across these three studies provided strong support for the value in evaluating the social aspect of school climate as a means of improving student engagement. Through reflection and active collaboration among *all* stakeholders, school committees can pursue initiatives that address their unique needs and challenges. Leaders forging this path with its student population are advised, however, to proceed with caution when working against the traditional institutional custom of patronizing students or using student voice efforts as a mere trending public relations ploy. Without deep rumination and dedication to deconstruct

unconscious and conscious biases that hinder authentic engagement with students, efforts to improve school climate, and thus student engagement, will be unsuccessful, even harmful.

Theoretical Implications

Although action research with youth is not novel, this collection of studies contributes to the scholarship in three unique ways. Firstly, through a qualitative research design which employed a dynamic focus group, reflective observation techniques, and the triangulation of arts-based data collection methods, researchers and practitioners are guided on effective and ethical procedures when working with children in research.

Secondly, by injecting Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecology theory of human development into the conversation about student engagement and behavior, a more holistic lens is applied to how school climate initiatives should respond to the complex, interconnected, and bidirectional nature between people and their environment. As all school stakeholders are affected by the culture of the school, so too do they shape and mold the environment. When investigating the nature of schools and how people experience them, a social ecology perspective directs us to pay heed to not only student participation but to the overall level of job satisfaction and well-being of staff as well. As such, improving school culture addresses two contemporary concerns in the educational landscape: student and staff retention.

Through an introspection on how one interacts with their environment we see that how one experiences the world is unique and complex, incorporating factors which present an inequitable topography of privileges and vulnerabilities. By aligning with critical pedagogy and feminist thought (Freire, 1978, hooks, 2000) we delve deeper into a more substantial dialogue about how school systems must brave through the discomfort of confronting and dismantling the unconscious and conscious biases that relegate unassailable populations to the margins**.** School

systems must confront the discomfort of addressing both unconscious and conscious biases that systematically marginalize vulnerable populations. Dismantling these biases is crucial to creating an equitable environment where all students can thrive and feel valued. By acknowledging and addressing these inequalities head-on, schools can begin to build a more inclusive and just education system for everyone. Critical feminist pedagogy encourages educators and students to critically examine societal structures of power, including how systemic racism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression manifest in the classroom and beyond. For vulnerable populations—such as low-income students, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities—this perspective becomes essential in understanding how these power imbalances affect their access to education and opportunities. By promoting a shift away from traditional teacher-centered models of education toward more student-centered approaches, we can foster an environment where students' lived experiences, perspectives, and identities are acknowledged and valued, giving them a voice in their own learning process and creating a more inclusive curriculum. Students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, are encouraged to question and challenge the dominant narratives they are often subjected to, helping them develop the skills to analyze how these narratives shape their lives and society, empowering them to advocate for change and use their education as a tool for social and political empowerment and act against oppression and injustice, both in their own lives and in the larger society.

The following dissertation moves beyond the theoretical and directs school communities toward practical school culture improvement initiatives in addressing deeper structural inequalities. Firstly, collaboration toward decolonizing the curriculum and ensuring that it reflects the histories, cultures, and perspectives of marginalized groups. Secondly, by adopting

pedagogical strategies that incorporate dialogue, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning and other methods that allow students to express their ideas, challenge assumptions, and collaborate in meaningful ways. Lastly, by repositioning the teacher role as co-learners rather than authoritative figures, they are called to work alongside students to explore issues of justice, identity, and power.

The outcomes observable in the three studies are consistent with these theories. Through the creation and analytical discussions, participants were able to access and retrieve valuable insights into how they perceive their school environment. In Study 1, participants expressed how the health of the relationships they had with staff were determined by the genuine concern staff demonstrated for them as complex human beings with unique histories, as well as current and future interests and concerns both inside and outside of school life. By investing consistent mindfulness into the contexts which determined how present students were to learn, and meeting kids where they were rather than boxing them into where they should be, staff fostered the healthy relationships necessary for student engagement. The results in Study 2 further substantiated these theories by bringing the complex determinants of student behavior to the fore and highlighting how negative life experiences have a detrimental impact on how students experience school. By acknowledging the inequitable conditions that constitute one's life world, school communities are better served to co-create restorative policies and procedures that expunge the traditional punitive one size fits all model. Moving to Study 3, we once again identify the institutional mechanisms which contribute to cultures of silence and disenfranchisement. By paying lip service to student perspectives or only listening to those who have the social capital to do so, school systems are not capitalizing on its full human capacity to

evoke sustainable change. Only through the full investment of the entire school community can authentic improvement be accomplished.

Implications for School-Based Practice

One of the goals of this dissertation research was to create space for students to participate in the research process and to (re)discover their roles as active stakeholders in their school environment. As student participants come into their voice, they are better positioned to enter a collaborative relationship with school administration to work towards a healthier school climate. This research, written purposely into three palatable installments, provides students as well as staff with guidance on not only the importance of pursuing this line of inquiry and growth, but the methodology and examples of data collection methods to do so. By positioning school stakeholders within a community of practice, this research moves beyond armchair rhetoric by providing frontline practitioners with direction on how to best move forward.

Beyond the pivotal importance of prioritizing authentically implicated relationships between students and staff, school leaders are directed by this research to pay heed to three specific enterprises toward school improvement. The first is to invest human and financial capital into the creation and maintenance of differentiated pedagogical practices that respond to student academic as well as socio-emotional needs. School leaders are advised to educate themselves and provide pedagogical development and on-going support to their staff with regards to the best data-driven practices in designing learning environments that foster authentic student voice and choice. In order to bolster student engagement, and thus academic achievement, relevant 21st Century Learning pedagogical practices must be co-created with students that relate to the complex and interconnected global landscape they are being prepared to enter (Bernhardt, 2015;

Kereluik et al., 2013). Structures, routines, curriculum development, as well as evaluation criteria must utilize the multiple styles in which kids learn and develop.

The second area of school improvement this dissertation research highlights, one of continuous contention among school-based practitioners, is that of student behavior management protocols. School stakeholders benefit from guidance on the benefits and way they should move towards adopting systematic restorative measures not only for the benefit of their students but for themselves as well. As the relationships formed within the environment are bidirectional, the paradigm shift from a punitive to curative position requires a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approach towards all human interactions and experiences. Consistent, intentional effort needs to be made towards understanding the interconnected compounded determinants of behavior and working as a community to repair harm for all involved. To this effect, systemic discrimination and violence, down to microaggressions, needs to be directly addressed as a reality to mitigate collectively.

The final implication this research dissertation has on educational practitioners is the importance of maximizing the opportunities for students to be actively and genuinely implicated in classroom and school-based decision-making. As student engagement was shown to be positively affected by opportunities to express themselves in class, school leaders are advised to assist teachers in structuring classroom management procedures that foster student voice and choice. Furthermore, this research is clear on the positive implications of ensuring school governance structures include students as active stakeholders. By incorporating student voice into school decision-making, the subsequent policies and procedures are relevant to all stakeholders and are more likely to be followed and respected by the community they aim to serve. Of importance, this manuscript cautions school stakeholders to pursue this endeavor with

reflection and authenticity while it seeks the perspectives of all students, especially the historically silenced. To do otherwise would result in mere window-dressing, perhaps causing even more harm to a faltering student engagement and ultimately school climate.

Limitations

Although this dissertation was successful in eliciting the perspectives of youth with regards to the social aspect of school climate and culminated in a student-led action towards improvement, it is important to acknowledge the limitations that ensued and should be considered for future research. The first constraint was the relatively small sample size. Due to the timing of the project and school-based restrictions, student recruitment competed with warmer weather and aligned with end of year examination review, school trips, and graduation. School-based constraints insisted that recruitment be done through grade level assemblies (which school administration attended), instead of more intimate, less intimidating class-based presentations. A second cause of low enrollment was due the organizational skills and motivation necessary to sign and return assent and parent consent forms. Furthermore, beyond focus group participation, attendance was sporadic due to students forgetting the date or location (which changed often due to school requests), detentions, and school absenteeism (illness, school trips, or suspensions). A larger sample size would have ensured that even when students were absent from the focus group, all grade levels would be amply represented.

The second limitation lies within the research design considerations. In order to create a safe space for participants to share their authentic selves, focus groups need to be structured around tasks and expectations, while fostering free thought and flexibility that lean into children's insights. The positionality of both the researchers and participants needs to be consistently (re)negotiated to ensure security and trust. With regards to using observation, it is

difficult to disconnect preconceived notions from what one thinks they are hearing and seeing. By adopting a reflexive loop, verifying all documented information with participants themselves, researchers can ensure that it is the voices of students that are being advanced and amplified, not their own.

A third limitation is present in the chosen data collection methods. The more students experienced fragmentation and marginalization in school, the more difficult it was for them to distance themselves from a victim mentality and adopt a more comprehensive systems approach that frames their experiences as a composite of many extenuating factors. It was equally challenging for some to acknowledge that the school space was even theirs to occupy, making assuming a position of power as an active change agent, unbelievable. Lacking both confidence and exposure to the research process, some students struggled to see how 'just drawings and pictures' speak to the complex manner in which students experience the school system and how they might be used as entry points to open a larger conversation with school administrators. Due to the above limitations, the students were not involved in the data analysis to the extent that a 'gold standard' PAR design would entail. This was mitigated by their ongoing consultation and member checking procedures which were systemically applied throughout the data analysis process.

Lastly, ethical considerations around confidentiality may have hindered the content that some students produced or discussed within the focus group. Even though participants were reminded to not share information learned in the focus group to outside parties, the creation of data collection pieces and subsequent analytical discussions required students to be vulnerable to a group of relative strangers and an unknown adult.

Future researchers are advised to modify the project design to incorporate more time, both within each focus group session as well as duration of the whole research project, as well as activities which allow for response anonymity. More time within focus group sessions should be used to provide participants with more collaboration, leadership, and empowerment exercises. This in turn can lend itself to activities which more intimately introduces them to the research process and how it can be used to advocate for themselves in their school environment.

Future Directions

The findings reported in this dissertation have opened avenues which I am currently developing through a project aimed at developing student governance structures both within my high school and the pilot school. Due to this research, both high schools now have student councils composed of student representatives, staff, and administrators. The current project for the 2024-2025 academic year is to collaborate with both councils in drafting their own unique mission statement and constitution to solidify the structure and role of these new school governance bodies. More than event planners, the purpose of student governance bodies is to serve as a part of the consultative community with regards to classroom and school-based decision-making, especially the protocols and initiatives which affect students most directly. To this effect, measures will be taken to ensure that members of the student council are present (at least partially) and can contribute to monthly Staff Council and Governing Board meetings.

To facilitate networking and team building beyond the confines of one school, a meeting will be organized in the Fall of 2024 for various student councils to discuss priorities and best practices for the 2024-2025 academic year. Moving beyond these first steps, a goal for the 2025-2026 academic year is to better integrate student governance within the existing school board

Central Students' Committee (CSC) to ensure that student voices and perspectives are being shared and considered on a more systematic level.

Future directions for the research include expanding an understanding of and providing practical direction for school leaders with regards to the concrete and sustainable restorative measures that can augment and perhaps replace punitive practices. With diminishing financial and human resources, an expectation to apply a stringent anti-violence and anti-bully protocol which include mandated punitive measures, as well as a new provincial parent complaints procedure, administrators are increasingly resigned to enforce antiquated and ineffective policy (Gouvernement du Québec, 2024). While school leaders may wish to transform their practices, more research and practical direction is needed to assist administrators with limited time, support, resources, and training.

Conclusion

Faltering student engagement continues to be an area of contention and concern in the current public educational landscape. Amidst a growing tide of academic and socio-emotional challenges, frontline practitioners continue to search for effective and practical solutions to assist the youth in their care. Educational communities of practice, which include all stakeholders including youth, are well served to investigate the social aspect of their unique school climate. This collection of studies which focuses on relationships, behavior management, and student advocacy offer a valuable contribution to this conversation and serves as a roadmap for those emboldened to try.

References

Adelman, C. (1993). Kurt Lewin and the origins of action research. *Educational Action Research, 1*(1), 7-24. doi:10.1080/0965079930010102

Agee, J. (2008). Developing qualitative research questions: A reflective process. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 22*(4), 431-447. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390902736512

Al-Azawei, A., Serenelli, F., & Lundqvist, K. (2016). Universal Design for Learning (UDL): A content analysis of peer reviewed journals from 2012 to 2015. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 16*(3), 39-56. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v16i3.19295

Aldridge, J. (2015). *Participatory research: Working with vulnerable groups in research and practice*. Policy Press.

Aldridge, J., Fraser, B. J., Fozdar, F., Ala'i, K., Earnest, J., & Afari, E. (2016). Students' perceptions of school climate as determinants of wellbeing, resilience and identity. *Improving Schools*, *19*(1), 5–26. doi:10.1177/1365480215612616

Alharahsheh, H., & Pius, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism vs. interpretivism *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2*(3), 39-43. doi: 10.36348/gajhss.2020.v02i03.001

Allman, K., & Slate, J. (2011). School discipline in public education: A brief review of current practices. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 6*(2), 1-8.

American Institute for Research (2016). Trauma informed care curriculum. Retrieved from: https://www.air.org/resource/trauma-informed-care-curriculum

American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in the schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American*

Psychological Review, 63(9), 852-62. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.63.9.852

Anderson, C. S. (1982). The search for school climate: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research, 52*, 368–420. doi:10.3102/00346543052003368

Angen, M. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*(3), 378-395. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973230001000308

Ansalone, G. (2003). Poverty, tracking, and the social construction of failure: International perspectives on tracking. *Journal of Children and Poverty*, *9*(1), 3-20.

Attia, M., & Edge, J. (2014). Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: A developmental approach to research methodology. *Open Review of Educational Research, 4*(1), 33-45. doi:10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068

Axelson, R. D., & Flick, A. (2010). Defining student engagement. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *43*(1), 38–43. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.2011.533096

Bagnoli, A. (2009). Beyond the standard interview: The use of graphic elicitation and arts-based methods. *Qualitative Research*, *9*(5), 547–570. doi:10.1177/1468794109343625

Balwant, P. (2015). The meaning of student engagement and disengagement in the classroom context: lessons from organizational behavior. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 42*(3). 389-401 doi:10.1080/0309877X.2017.1281887

Banks, Y., & Meyer, J. R. (2017). Childhood trauma in today's urban classroom: Moving beyond the therapist's office. *Educational Foundations*, *30*(1–4), 63–75. Retrieved from: https://search-ebscohost-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue AN=128614756&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Barab, S., & Roth, W. (2006). Curriculum-based ecosystems: Supporting knowing from an ecological perspective. *Educational Researcher*, *35*(5), 3-13.

Barone, T., & Eisner, E. (2006). Handbook of complementary methods in educational research. 3rd Edition. Routledge Publishing. ISBN: 9780203874769

Barton, Calabrese Barton, A., Drake, C., Gustavo Perez, J., St. Louis, K., & George, M. (2004). Ecologies of parental engagement in urban education. *Educational Researcher, 33*(4). 3-12.

Bauer, L., & Schanzenbach, D. (2016). The long-term impact of the Head Start Program. The Hamilton Project. Retrieved from: https://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/files/long_term_impact_of_head_start_program.pdf

Baum, F., MacDougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health, 60,* 854-857. doi:10.1136/jech.2004.028662

Bear, G. (2020). Improving school climate: Practical strategies to reduce behavior problems and promote social and emotional learning. Routledge. New York. ISBN: 978-0-815-34638 8

Bell, I., Nicholas, J., Broomhall, A., Bailey, E., Bendall, S., Boland, S., Robinson, J., Adams, S., McGorry, P., & Thompson, A. (2023). The impact of COVID-19 on youth mental health: A mixed methods survey. *Psychiatric Research, 321*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2023.115082

Bennett, N. (2015). Teaching and learning in the primary classroom. In *Handbook of Educational ideas and practices. Routledge Revivals.* 715-723. Routledge.

Berends, L. (2011). Embracing the visual: Using timelines with in-depth interviews on

substance use and treatment. *Qualitative Report, 16*(1), 1-9. doi: 10.46743/2160-3715/2011.1036

Bernard, L. (1925). A classification of environments. *American Journal of Sociology. 31*(3) 318-332. doi:10.1086/213879

Bernhardt, P. E. (2015). 21st Century learning: Professional development in practice. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(1), 1-19. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss1/1

Bethnell, C., Newacheck, P., Hawes, E., & Halfton, N. (2014). Adverse childhood experiences: Assessing the impact on health and school engagement and the mitigating role of resilience. *Health Affairs, 33*(12). doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2014.0914

Bevir, M. (1999). Foucault, power, and institutions. *Political Studies*, *47*(2), 345-359. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00204

Biesta, G. (2010). Good education in an age of measurement: Ethics, politics and democracy. Colorado. Paradigm. ISBN:13:9781 594551 7907

Bland, D., & Atweh, B. (2004). A Critical approach to collaborating with students as researchers. In Danby, S, Knight, J, McWilliam, E (Eds.) *Performing educational research: Theories, methods and practices.* Post Pressed, Flaxton, QLD, 331-344.

Blom, M. (2015). *Reflections on learning and teaching through play: Faculty voices within early childhood teacher education in Canada*. Concordia University.

Boden, Z., Larkin, M., Iyer, M. (2019). Picturing ourselves in the world: Drawings, interpretive phenomenological analysis and the relational mapping interview. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 16*(2). 218-236. doi:10.1080/14780887.2018.1540679

Bolland, J. M., Bryant, C. M., Lian, B. E., McCallum, D. M., Vazsonyi, A. T., & Barth, J. M. (2007). Development and risk behavior among African American, Caucasian, and

mixed-race adolescents living in high poverty inner-city neighborhoods. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *40*, 230-249.

Böse, S., & Brauckmann-Sajkiewicz, S. (2021). (In)effective leadership? Exploring the interplay of challenges, goals and measures in the context of school improvement. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *59*(4), 454–471. doi:10.1108/JEA-07-2020-0162

Bowen, G. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal, 9*(2), 27-40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Bradbury, A. (2014). Identity performance and race: The use of critical race theory in understanding institutional racism and discrimination in schools. In *Advancing Race and Ethnicity in Education*, 17-31. Palgrave Macmillan.

Breton, J., Bergeron, L., Valla, J., Berthiaume, C., Gaudet, N., Lambert, J., St-Georges - Houde, L., & Lépine. S. (1999). Quebec Child Mental Health Survey: Prevalence of DSM-III-R Mental Health Disorders. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-7610.00455

Mental Health Disorders. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 40*(3). Bronfenbrenner,

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist, 32*(7), 513-531. doi:10.1037//0003-066x.32.7.513

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1989). *The developing ecology of human development: paradigm lost or paradigm regained.* Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City, Missouri.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.). *Six theories of Child Development: Revised Formulations and Current Issues*, 187–249. Jessica

Kingsley.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. In T. Husen & T. N. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of education: 2nd ed.* 1643–1647. Elsevier Sciences.

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Morris, P. (2006). The bioecological model of human development. In Richard M. Lerner *Handbook of child psychology 6th Edition. Volume 1: Theoretical models of human development,* 793-828.

Brossard, L. (2012). Racial profiling and systematic discrimination of racialized youth. Report of the consultation on racial profiling and its consequences one year later: Taking stock. Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse. Gouvernement du Québec.

Brownlee, J. (2004). Teacher education student's epistemological beliefs: Developing a relational model of teaching. *Research in Education, 72*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.7227/RIE.72.1

Bruce, B. (2018). Community as curriculum: Nurturing the ecosystem of education. *Schools: Studies in Education, 15*(1), 122-138. doi:10.1086/697097

Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds.* Harvard University Press.

Bruner, J. (2006). *In search of pedagogy: The selected works of Jerome Bruner*. Volume 1. Routledge Press.

Bubolz, M.M., & Sontag, M.S. (2009) Human ecology theory. In: Boss P., Doherty W.J., LaRossa R., Schumm W.R., Steinmetz S.K. (eds). *Sourcebook of family theories and methods*. doi:10.1007/978-0-387-85764-0_17

Canada Without Poverty. Just the Facts. Retrieved from: https://cwp-csp.ca/about-us/.

Castleden, H., Gavin, T., & First Nation, H. (2008). Modifying photovoice for community-based participatory Indigenous research. *Social Science and Medicine, 66*(6), 1393-1392. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.11.030

Catterol, M., & Ibbotson, P. (2000). Using projective techniques in education research. *British Education Research Journal, 26*(2), 245-256. doi:10.1080/014119200550000971

Carello, J., & Butler, L. (2015). Practicing what we teach: Trauma-informed educational practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35*(3), 262-278. doi:10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059

Carter, P., Skiba, R., & Pollock, M. (2016). You can't fix what you don't look at: Acknowledging race in addressing racial discipline disparities. *Urban Education, 52*(2), 207-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916660350

Casey, K. (2009). The new narrative research in education. *Review of Research in Education, 21*(2), p. 211-253. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X021001

Cave, L., Cooper, M. N., Zubrick, S. R., & Shepherd, C. C. J. (2020). Racial discrimination and child and adolescent health in longitudinal studies: A systematic review. *Social Science & Medicine*, *250*. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112864

Cemalcilar, Z. (2010). Schools as socialisation contexts: Understanding the impact of school climate factors on students' sense of school belonging. *Applied Psychology, 59*(2), 243-272. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.2009.00389.x

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2000). About the CDC-Kaiser ACE study. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2010). Youth risk behavior surveillance United States, 2009. Surveillance summaries. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 59

(SS–5)

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2014). Appendix C of treatment improvement protocol series, No. 57: Trauma-informed care in behavioral health services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK207202/

Cervenak, S. J., Cespedes, K. L., Souza, C., & Straub, A. (2013). Imagining differently: The politics of listening in a feminist classroom. In *This bridge we call home* (pp. 341-356). Routledge.

Chase, S. E. (2007). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (p. 651–679). Sage Publications.

Chen, X., Raby, R., & Albanese, P. (2017). *The sociology of childhood and youth in Canada*. Canadian Scholars. ISBN: 978-1-77338-018-6

Chin, J.K., Dondy, E., Jimerson, S.R., & Rime, J. (2012). Alternatives to suspensions: Rationale and recommendations. *Journal of School Violence*, *11,* 156-173

Chowdhury, M. (2014). Interpretivism in aiding our understanding of the contemporary social world. *Open Journal of Philosophy, 4*, 432-438. doi:10.4236/ojpp.2014.43047

Chu, E. M., & Ready, D. D. (2018). Exclusion and urban public high schools: Short- and long-term consequences of school suspensions. *American Journal of Education*, *124*(4), 479–509. doi:10.1086/698454

Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry: A methodology for studying lived experience. *Research Studies in Music Education*, *27*(1), 44-54.

Clandinin, D. J., & Caine, V. (2013). Narrative inquiry. In *Reviewing qualitative research in the*

social sciences. 166-179. Routledge.

Cohen, J., McCabe, E.M., Michelli, N.M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. *Teachers College Record, 111*(1). 180-213

Cohen, J., Pickeral, T., & McCloskey, M. (2009). Assessing school climate. *The Education Digest, 74*(8). 45-48. Retrieved from: https://lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fagazines%2Fassessing-school-climate%2Fdocview%2F218196384%2Fse-2%3Faccountd%3D10246

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). Observation. *Research methods in education*, 542-562. Routledge.

Coholic, D., Lougheed, S., & Cadell, S. (2009). Exploring the helpfulness of arts-based methods with children living in foster care. *Traumatology*, *15*(3), 64–71. doi: 10.1177/1534765609341590

Cole, A., & Knowles, G. (2008). *Handbook of the arts in qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Cornish, F., Breton, N., & Moreno-Tabarez, U. (2013). Participatory action research. *Nature Review Methods Primers, 3*(34). 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-023-00214-1

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, *31*(4), 3–14. doi: 10.3102/0013189X031004003

Copeland, A. J., & Agosto, D. E. (2012). Diagrams and relational maps: The use of graphic elicitation techniques with interviewing for data collection, analysis, and display. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *11*(5), 513-533

Crilly, N., Blackwell, A., & Clarkson, J. (2006). Graphic elicitation: using research diagrams as

interview stimuli. *Qualitative Research, 6*(3), 341-366. doi: 10.1177/1468794106065007

Craig, S. (2008). *Reaching and teaching children who hurt: Strategies for your classroom.* Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

Crawford, M. (2020). Ecological Systems theory: Exploring the development of the theoretical framework as conceived by Bronfenbrenner. *Journal of Public Health Issues and Practices*, *4*(2), 170. https://doi.org/10.33790/jphip1100170

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement.* The New Press.

Crivello, G., Camfeild, L., & Woodhead, M. (2009). How can children tell us about there well-being? Exploring the potential of participatory research approaches within young lives. *Social Indicators Research, 90*, 51-72. doi:10.1007/s11205-008-9312x

Crosby, S., Day, A. G., Somers, C. L., & Baroni, B. A. (2018). Avoiding school suspension: Assessment of a trauma-informed intervention with court-involved, female students. *Preventing School Failure*, *62*(3), 229–237. doi:10.1080/1045988X.2018.1431873

Crowe, B., & Drew, C. (2021). Orange is the new asylum: Incarceration of individuals with disabilities. *Behavior Analysis in Practice*, *14*(2), 387-395.

Daily, S., Mann, M., Kristjansson, A., Smith, M., & Zullig, ___. (2019). School climate and academic achievement in middle and high school students. *Journal of School Health, 89*(3), 173-180. doi: 10.1111/josh.12726

D'Amico, M., Denov, M., Khan, F., Linds, W., & Akesson, B. (2016). Research as intervention? Exploring the health and well-being of children and youth facing global adversity through participatory visual methods. *Global Public Health, 11*(5-6), 528-545,

doi:10.1080/17441692.2016.1165719

Daniels, A. C., & Whitener, B. (2003). *Bringing out the best in people*. McGraw-Hill Audio.

De Castella, K., Byrne, D., & Covington, M. (2013). Unmotivated or motivated to fail? A cross-cultural study of achievement motivation, fear of failure, and student disengagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 105*(3), 861–880. doi: 10.1037/a0032464

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2013). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. 3rd Ed. Temple University Press.

Denzin, N. (2017). Critical qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry, 23*(1). 8-16. doi: 10.1177/1077800416681864

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-4129-74172

Derksen, T. (2011). *The influence of ecological theory in child and youth care: A review of the literature*. Retrieved from: https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ijcyfs/article/viewFile/2091/736

Desai, R. A., Falzer, P. R., Chapman, J., & Borum, R. (2012). Mental illness, violence risk, and race in juvenile detention: Implications for disproportionate minority contact. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82*(1), 32–40. doi: 10.1111/j.1939-0025.2011.01138.x

Dewey J. (1916). *Democracy and education. An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Free Press.

Donnelly, M., Gamsu, S., & Whewall, S. (2020). Mapping the relational construction of people and places. *International Journal of Social Science Research Methodology, 23*(1).

91-108. doi:10.1080/13645579.2019.1672284

Dubow, E., Boxer, P., & Huesmann, L. (2009). *Long-term effects of parents' education on children's educational and occupational success: Mediation by family interactions, child aggression, and teenage aspirations*. Wayne State University Press. doi: 10.1353/mpq.0.0030

Dunn, W., Brown, C., & Mcguigan, A. (1994). The ecology of human performance: A framework for considering the effect of context. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*. *48*(7), 595-607.

Dupre, A. P. (2000). A study in double standards, discipline, and the disabled student. *Washington Law Review Association*, *75*, 1.

Durkheim E. (1961). *Moral education: A study in the theory and application of the sociology of education*. Free Press.

Elam-Snowden, T. (2020). Perspectives of respect, teacher-student relationships, and school climate among boys of color: A multifocus group student. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities, 21*(3), 345-356. doi:10.1037/men000023

Elkad-Lehman, I., & Greensfeld, H. (2011). Intertextuality as an interpretative method in qualitative research. *Narrative Inquiry*, 21(2), 258-275. doi:10.1075/ni.21.2.05elk.

Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 12*(1)

Ellsworth, E. (1997) *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy and the power of address*. Teachers College Press

Emmer, E., & Stough, L. (2010). Classroom management: A critical part of educational psychology, with implications for teacher education. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(2).

103-112. doi:10.1207/S15326985EP3602_5

Engels, N., Hotton, G., Devos, G., Bouckenooge, D., & Elterman, A. (2008). Principals in school with a positive school culture. *Educational Studies, 34*(3), 159-174. doi:10. 1080/03055690701811263

Etherington, K. (2004). Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using ourselves in research. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN: 1-84310-259-5

Exenberger, S., Banzer, R., Christy, J., Hofer, S., & Juen, B. (2019). Eastern and western children's voices on their well-being. Child Ind Res, *12,* 747-768. doi: 10.1007/s12187-018-9541-8

Ezikwelu, E. U. (2020). Institutional racism and campus racial climate: Struggles for sense of belonging and academic success among Black students in the K-12 public schools. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, *10*(1).

Fabelo, T., Thompson, M.D., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D., Marchbanks, M.P, & Booth, E.A. (2011). *Breaking schools' rules: A statewide study on how school discipline relates to student success and juvenile justice involvement*. New York, NY: Council of State Governments Justice Center, and College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, Public Policy Research Institute

Feilding, M. (2004). "New wave" student voice and the renewal of civic society. *London Review of Education, 2*(3), 197-217. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/1474846042000302834

Fetters, M. D., Curry, L. A., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving integration in mixed methods designs—principles and practices. *Health Services Research*, *48*(6), 2134-2156.

Fielding, M. (2004b) Transformative approaches to student voice: theoretical underpinnings, recalcitrant realities. *British Educational Research Journal, 30(*2), 295–311

Fineman, M. (2017). Vulnerability and inevitable inequality. *Oslo Law Review, 4*(3), 133-149. https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2387-3299-2017-03-02

Forness, S., Freeman, S., Paparella, T., Kauffman, J., & Walker, H. (2012). Special education implications of point and cumulative prevalence for children with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioural Disorders, 20(1)*, 4-18

Foreman-Murray, L., Krowka, S., & Majeika, C. E. (2022). A systematic review of the literature related to dropout for students with disabilities. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, *66*(3), 228-237.

Franklin, H., & Harrington, I. (2019). A review into effective classroom management and strategies for student engagement: Teacher and student roles in today's classrooms. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 7*(12), 1-12. ISSN 2324-805X

Fredriksson, P., Öckert, B., & Oosterbeek, H. (2013). Long-term effects of class size. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *128*(1). 249–285, doi:10.1093/qje/qjs048.

Freire, P. (1971) To the coordinator of a culture circle. *Convergence 4*(1), 61– 2

Freire, P. (1978). Pedagogy of the oppressed. Penguin Random House

Fullan, M. (1991). The true meaning of educational change. Teachers College Press

Fullan, M. (2002). Michael Fullan: Leading through change in 2022. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-uUL0UPe8Y

Fryxell, D., & Smith, D. (2000). Personal, social, and family characteristics of angry students. *Professional School Counseling, 4*(2), 86-94. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/42732173

Fuller, T., & Loogma, K. (2009). Constructing futures: A social constructionist perspective on foresight methodology. *Futures, 41*(2), 71-79. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2008.07.039

Gergen, K. J., Gergen, M. M. (1991). Toward reflexive methodologies. In F. Steier (Ed.), *Research and reflexivity*, 76–95. Sage Publications.

Gaber, J., & Gaber, S. L. (2010). Using face validity to recognize empirical community observations. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, *33*(2), 138-146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2009.08.001

Galman, S. (2009). The truthful messenger: visual methods and representation in qualitative research in education. *Qualitative Research*, *9*(2), 197–217. doi:10.1177/1468794108099321

Gentile, M., Citta, G., Perna, S., & & Allegra, M. *Do we still need teachers? Navigating the paradigm shift of the teacher's role in the AI era. Frontiers in Education, 8*. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2023.1161777

Gibbs, A (1997). Focus groups. *Social Research Update, 19,* Retrieved from: http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU19.html

Gietz, C., & McIntosh, K. (2014). Relations between student perceptions of their school environment and academic achievement. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *29*(3), 161–176. doi:10.1177/0829573514540415

Giroux, H. (1994) Doing cultural studies: youth and the challenge of pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review,64*(3), 278–308

González, M. J. (2005). Access to mental health services: The struggle of poverty affected urban children of color. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *22*, 245-256.

Gonzalez, T. (2012). Keeping kids in schools: Restorative justice, punitive discipline, and the school-to-prison pipeline. *Journal of Law and Education, 41*(2), 281-335

Goodhart, F., Hsu, J., Baek, J., Coleman, A., Maresaca, F., & Miller, M. (2010). A view through

a different lens: Photovoice as a tool for student advocacy. *Journal of American College Health, 55*(1), 53-56. doi:10.3200/JACH.55.1.53-56

Gouvernement de Québec (2019). Commission des droits de la personne et les droits de la jeunesse. Retrieved from: http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/P-34.1

Government of Canada, (2024). The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Retrieved from: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/rfc-dlc/ccrf-ccdl/

Gouvernement de Québec (2024). Ministère du l 'education et l'enseignment superieur (MEES). Protecteur national de l'élève. Retrieved from: https://www.quebec.ca/en/government/ministere/education/contact-information-for-the ministry/complaints

Grad, R. I., & Zeligman, M. (2017). Predictors of post-traumatic growth: The role of social interest and meaning in life. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, *73*(3), 190–207

Greenwood, J. (2019). Arts-based Research. Oxford Research Encyclopedia. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.29

Gregory, A. (2016). The promise of restorative practices to transform teacher-student relationships and achieve equity in school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 26*(4), 325-353

Gregory, A., & Cornell, D. "Tolerating" adolescent needs: Moving beyond zero tolerance policies in high school. *Theory Into Practice, 48*(2), 106–113. doi: 10.1080/00405840902776327

Greflund, S., McIntosh, K., Mercer, S. H., & May, S. L., (2014). Examining disproportionality in school discipline for Aboriginal students in schools using PBIS. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 29*(3), 213-235

Grimm, K. J., & Widaman, K. F. (2012). Construct validity. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 1. Foundations, planning, measures, and psychometrics* (pp. 621–642). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/13619-033

Grondin, J. (2015). The hermeneutical circle. *A Companion to Hermeneutics*, 299-305.

Gutierrez, K., & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher, 32*(5), 19-25

Hagenauer, G., Hascher, T., & Volet, S. E. (2015). Teacher emotions in the classroom: associations with students' engagement, classroom discipline and the interpersonal teacher-students relationship. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 30*, 385-403

Hannigan, S., Grima-Farrell, C., & Wardman, N. (2019). Drawing on creative arts therapy approaches to enhance inclusive school cultures and student well-being. *Issues in Educational Research, 29*(3). 756-773. ISSN:1837-6290

Harlep, N. (2009). Critical race theory: An examination of its past, present, and future implications. University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

Harris, A. (2010). Building the capacity for school improvement. *School Leadership and Management, 21*(3), 261-270. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430120074419

Hattie, J., & Yates, G. (2013). Visible learning and the science of how we learn. Routledge Publishing. New York. doi:10.4324/9780203181522

Heilbrun, A., Cornell, D., & Konold, T. (2018). Authoritative school climate and suspension rates in middle schools: Implications for reducing the racial disparity in school Discipline. *Journal of School Violence, 17*(3), 324-338. doi:

10.1080/15388220.2017.1368395

Hergenrather, K., Rhodes, S., Cowan, C., Bardhoshi, G., & Pula, S. (2009). Photovoice as community-based participatory research: A qualitative review. *American Journal of Health Behavior, 33*(6), 686-698. doi:10.5993/AJHB.33.6.6

High, A. (2017). Using restorative practices to teach and uphold dignity in an American school district. *McGill Journal of Education, 2*(52), 265-556. doi:10.7202/1044479ar

Hill, J. (2014). Using participatory and visual methods to address power and identity with young people. *Graduate Journal of Social Science, 10*(2), 132-151. ISSN: 1572-3763

Hines-Datiri, D. (2015). When police intervene: Race, gender, and discipline of Black male students at an urban high school. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 18*, 122-133. doi:10.1177/1555458915584676

Hinde, E. R. (2004). School culture and change: An examination of the effects of school culture on the process of change. *Essays in Education*, *12*(3), 1-12

hooks, b. (2000). Feminist theory: From margin to center. Pluto Press

Huff, J., Preston, C., Goldring, E., & Guthries, J. E. (2018). Learning-centered leadership practices for effective high schools serving at-risk students. *Teachers College Record*, *120*(9), 1–38. Retrieved from: https://search-ebscohost-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h AN=131723260&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Humble, A., & Radina, M. (2019). How qualitative data analysis happens: Moving beyond "themes emerged." Routledge Press

Imich, A., Bayley, S., & Farley, K. (2001). Equalities and gay and lesbian young people: Implications for educational psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 17(4)*,

375-384

International Institute for Restorative Practices. (2021). Retrieved from: https://www.iirp.edu/defining-restorative/history

Jackson, A., & Mazzei, L. (2009). Voice in qualitative inquiry: Challenging conventional, interpretative, and critical conceptions of qualitative research. Routledge. ISBN:10: 0–415–44220–6

Jamieson, K. (2021). ACEs and minorities. Center for Child Counseling. Retrieved from: https://www.centerforchildcounseling.org/aces-and-minorities/

Jardine, D. (1990). Awakening from Decartes' nightmare: On the love of ambiguity in phenomenological approaches to education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education, 10*, 211-232.

Jardine, C. G., & James, A. (2012). Youth researching youth: Benefits, limitations and ethical considerations within a participatory research process. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, *71*(1), https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v71i0.18415@zich20.2012.71.issue-S1

Johnson, L. (2008). Relationship of instructional methods to student engagement in two public high schools. *American Secondary Education, 36*(2), 69-87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41406110

John-Steiner, V., & Mahn. H. (1996). Sociocultural approaches to learning and development: A Vygotskian framework. *Educational Psychologist*, 31(3-4). 191-206. doi: 10.1080/00461520.1996.9653266

Kaluzeviciute, G., Jessiman, T., Burn, A., Ford, T., Geijer– Simpson, E., Kidger, J., Limmer, M., Ramsay, S., & Spencer, L. (2021). Participatory action research on school culture and

student mental health: A study protocol. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20*. 1-13. doi:10.1177/16094069211047753

Kambrelis, G., & Scott, K. (1992). Other people's voices: The coarticulation of texts and subjectivities. *Linguistics in Education, 4*(3-4), 359-403. https://doi.org/10.1016/0898-5898(92)90008-K

Karp, D., & Breslin, B. (2001). Restorative Justice in School Communities. *Youth & Society, 33*(2), 249-272. doi:10.1177/0044118X010330020

Keats, P. (2009). Multiple text analysis in narrative research: Visual, written, and spoken stories of experience. *Qualitative Research, 9(2)*, 181-195

Kendall, M. (2020). Hood feminism: Notes from the women that a movement forgot. Penguin. ISBN: 9780525560548

Kellett, M. (2005). How to develop children as researchers: A step-by-step guide to teaching the research process. Paul Chapman. ISBN 1412908302

Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research. Springer

Kereluik, K., Mishra, P., Fahnoe, C., & Terry, L. (2013). What knowledge is of most worth: Teacher knowledge for 21st Century Learning. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, *29*(4), 127–140. https://doi.org/10.1080/21532974.2013.10784716

Kida, P. (2018). The role of space, activities and skills in outdoor education - Using visual methods to explore experience in qualitative research. *Journal of Education, Culture & Society*, (1), 67–81. Retrieved from: https://search-ebscohost-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h AN=130874745&site=ehost-live&scope=site

Kilmer, R.P. (2006). Resilience and posttraumatic growth in children. In. L.G. Calhoun & R.G. Tedeschi (Eds.), Handbook of posttraumatic growth: Research and practice. 264-288. Lawrence Erlbaum

Kinsler, J. (2011). Understanding the black-white school discipline gap. *Economics of Education Review, 30*(6), 1370-1383. DOI:10.1016/j.econedurev.2011.07.004

Kirmayer, L., Gone, J., & Moses, J. (2014). Rethinking historical trauma. *Transcultural Psychiatry, 51*(3), 299-319. doi:10.1177/1363461514536358

Knight, D., & Wadhwa, A. (2014). Expanding opportunity through critical restorative justice: Portraits of resilience at the individual and school level. *Schools: Studies in Education, 11*(1), 11-33. doi:132.205.120.182

Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevárez, A. (2017). The "new racism" of K–12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education*, *41*(1), 182-202.

Krebs, R. J. (2019). Proximal processes as the primary engines of development. *International Journal of Sports Psychology, 40*(1), 219 - 227.

Kvernbekk, T. (2017). Evidence-based educational practice. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education.* Retrieved 25 Sep. 2020, from: https://oxfordre.com/education/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.001.0001/acrefor-9780190264093-e-187

Lacour, M., & Tissington, L. D. (2011). The effects of poverty on academic achievement. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *6*(7), 522-527.

Langer, E. J., Blank, A., & Chanowitz, B. (1978). The mindlessness of ostensibly thoughtful action: The role of" placebic" information in interpersonal interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *36*(6), 635.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, *17*(4), 63–84. doi:10.1007/BF01807017

Latimer, J., Dowden, C. and & Muise, D. (2005). The effectiveness of restorative justice practices: A meta-analysis. *The Prison Journal, 85*(2): 127–144. doi:10.1177/0032885505276969

Leadbeater, B., Banister, E., Benoit, C., Jansen, M., Marshall, A., Rieken, T. (2006). Ethical issues in community-based research with children and youth. University of Toronto Press.

Ledwith, M. (2017). Emancipatory action research as a critical living praxis: From dominant narratives to counternarrative. In: Rowell, L., Bruce, C., Shosh, J., Riel, M. (eds) The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-40523-4_4

Lee, S. S., & Sau, S. (2013). *Disability, underemployment and social change* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto). OCLC: 1032963512

Leithwood, K. & Jantzi, D. (2000). The effects of different sources of leadership on student engagement in school. Leadership for Change and School Reform. Routledge. ISBN: 9780203465882

Lemov, D., Lewis, H., Williams, D., & Frazier, D. (2023). Reconnect: building school culture for meaning, purpose, and belonging. Jossey-Bass

Leitão, N., & Waugh, R. F. (2007). Students' views of teacher-student relationships in the primary school. *Annual International Educational Research*. A paper presented at the 37th Annual International Educational Research Conference, Australian Association for Research in Education

Leslie, L. K., James, S., Monn, A., Kauten, M. C., Zhang, J., & Aarons, G. (2010). Health-risk behaviors in young adolescents in the child welfare system. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *47*(1), 26-34.

Lesneskie, E., & Block, S. (2017). School violence: the role of parent and community involvement. *Journal of School Violence, 16*(4), 426-444. doi: 10.1080/15388220.2016.1168744

Leung, E., & Flanagan, T. (2019). Let's do this together: an integration of photovoice and mobile interviewing in empowering and listening to LGBTQ+ youths in context. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 24*(4), 497-510. doi: 10.1080/02673843.2018.1554499

Liang, C. T. H., Rocchino, G. H., Gutekunst, M. H. C., Paulvin, C., Melo Li, K., & Elam-Snowden, T. (2020). Perspectives of respect, teacher–student relationships, and school climate among boys of color: A multifocus group study. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities, 21*(3), 345–356. doi:10.1037/men0000239

Liasidou, A. (2016). The cross-fertilization of critical race theory and Disability Studies: Points of convergence/ divergence and some education policy implications. *Disability & Society*, *29*(5), 724–737. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.844104

Leilei L., Hui R., Ruilin C., Yueyang H., Zeying Q., Chuanen L., & Songli M. (2020). The effect of COVID 19 on youth mental health. *Psychiatric Quarterly, 91*, 841-852. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-020-09744-3

Liebenberg, L. (2018). Thinking critically about photovoice: Achieving empowerment and social change. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 17*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918757631

Lincoln, Y. S., (1990). The making of a constructivist: A remembrance of transformations past. In E. G. Guba (Ed.), *The Paradigm Dialogue*, 67-87. Sage Publishing.

Linklater, R. (2014). Decolonizing trauma work: Indigenous stories and strategies. Fernwood Publishing

Lipman, P. (2004). High stakes education: Inequality, globalization, and urban school reform. Routledge. ISBN: 0-414- 93507-5

Lipsitz, G. (1998). The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics. Temple University Press

Loignon, C., Dupéré, S., Bush, P., Truchon, K., Boyer, S. & Hudon, C. (2020). Using photovoice to reflect poverty and address social inequalities among primary care teams. *Action Research, 21*(2), 211-229. doi:10.1177/1476750320905900

Lombardi, E., Traficante, D., Bettoni, R., Offredi, I., Giorgetti, M., & Vernice, M. (2019). The impact of school climate on well-being experience and school engagement: A study with high-school students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 2482.

Losen, D. J. (2015). Closing the school discipline gap: Equitable remedies for excessive exclusion. Teachers College Press. ISBN: 978-0-8077-5613-3

Losen, D. J., & Welner, K. G. (2001). Disabling discrimination in our public schools: Comprehensive legal challenges to inappropriate and inadequate special education services for minority children. *Harv. CR-CLL Rev.*, *36*, 407.

Loukas, A. (2007). What is school climate? High-quality school climate is advantageous for all students and may be particularly beneficial for at-risk students. *Leadership Compass, 5*(1). Retrieved from: https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2007/LC200

5n1a4.pdf

Lustick, H. (2017). Administering discipline differently: a Foucauldian lens on restorative school discipline. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *20*(3), 297–311. doi: 10.1080/13603124.2015.1100755

Mackenzie, N., & Knipe, S. (2006). Research dilemmas: Paradigms, methods and methodology. *Issues In Educational Research, 16,* 193-205

Magola, M., & King, P. (2009). Developmentally effective experiences for promoting self-authorship. *Mind Brain and Education, 3*(2). 108 - 118. doi:10.1111/j.1751-228X.2009.01061.x

Malchiodi, C. (2014). *Breaking the silence: Art therapy with children from violent homes*. Routledge.

Malczyk, B. & Lawson, H. (2019). Family-focused strategies for student engagement. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 63*(3), 211-219. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2019.1565752

Mallett, C. (2017). The school-to-prison pipeline: Disproportionate impact on vulnerable children and adolescents. *Education and Urban Society, 49*(6), 563-592. doi: 10.1177/00131124516644053

Mand, K. (2012). Giving children a 'voice': Arts-based participatory research activities and representation. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 15*(2), 149-160. doi:10.1080/13645579.2012.649409

Martinez, L., Jones, E., & Connolly, N. (2020). From consultation to shared decision-making: Youth engagement strategies for promoting school and community wellbeing. *Journal of School Health, 90*(12), 976-984. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.12960

Marraccini, M.E., Fang, Y., Levine, S.P., Chin, A., & Pittleman, C. (2020). Measuring student perceptions of school climate: A systematic review and ecological content analysis. *School Mental Health*, *12*, 195–221. doi:10.1007/s12310-019-09348-8

Marzano, R., & Marzano, J. (2003). The key to classroom management. *Educational Leadership, 61*(1), 6-13. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert-Marzano/publication/283749466_The_Key_o_Classroom_Management/links/56f26c0908aed354e57293d3/The-Key-to-Classroom-anagement.pdf

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–396. https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1037/h0054346

Marx, S. (2022). Mapping as critical qualitative research methodology. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *46*(3), 285–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2022.2110231

McCluskey, G., Lloyd, G., Kane, J., Riddell, S., Stead, J., & Weedon E. (2008) Can restorative practices in schools make a difference. *Educational Review*, *60*(4), 405-417, doi: 10.1080/00131910802393456

McDonough, K. (2009). Pathways to critical consciousness: A first -year teachers' engagement with issues of race and equity. *Journal of Teacher Education, 60*(5), 528.537. doi: 10.1177/0022487109348594

McKeran, C., Gleddie, D., & Sortey, K. (2020). Student-centered photovoice as a mechanism for home-school interaction: Teacher perceptions of efficacy. *Health Education Journal, 79*(1), 82-93.

McVee, M. B., (2011) Positioning theory and sociocultural perspectives: Affordances for

educational researchers. In. McVee, M. B., Brock, C. & Glazier, J. Sociocultural Positioning in Literacy: Exploring Culture, Discourse, Narrative, & Power in Diverse Educational Contexts. Hampton Press.

Merriam, S. B., (1998). Qualitative research and case study applications in education. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meehan, B. T., Hughes, J. N., & Cavell, T. A. (2003). Teacher-student relationships as compensatory resources for aggressive children. *Child Development, 74*(4), 1145-1157

Milner, R., & McGee, E. (2013). Critical race theory, interest convergence, and teacher education. In Marvin Lynn and Adrienne Dixon's: Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education. Routledge Press.

Le ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES). Rapport Annuel 2018-2019. Retrieved from: https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/education/publications-adm/rapport annuel-de-gestion/MEES_RAG_2018-2019.PDF

Mischenko, P. P. (2019). The mindful school: Transforming school culture through mindfulness and compassion. P. A. Jennings & A. A. DeMauro, Eds. Guilford Press.

Mittleman, J. (2018). Sexual orientation and school discipline: new evidence from a population-based sample. *Educational Researcher, 47*(3), 181-190. doi: 10.3102/0013189X17753123

Monroe, C. (2005) Why are "bad boys" always black?: Causes of disproportionality in school discipline and recommendations for change. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 79*(1), 45-50. doi:10.3200/TCHS.79.1.45-50.

Morris, E., & Perry, B. (2016). The punishment gap: School suspension and racial disparities in

achievement, *Social Problems*, 63(1), 68–86. https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spv026

Morrison, K. (2008). Democratic classrooms: Promises and challenges of student voice and choice, part one. *Educational Horizons, 87*(1), 50-60. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/42923743

Morrison, B., Blood, P., Thorsborne, M. (2005). Practicing restorative justice in school communities: Addressing the challenge of culture change. *Public Organization Review,* 5, 335–357 (2005). doi:10.1007/s11115-005-5095-6

Murray, C., & Naranjo, J. (2008). Poor, black, learned disabled, and graduating: an investigation of factors and processes associated with school completion among high-risk urban youth. *Remedial and Special Education, 29*(3), 145-153. doi:10.1177/0741932508315052.

Murray, C., & Pianta, R. (2007). The importance of teacher-student relationships for adolescents with high incidence disabilities. *Theory into Practice, 46*(2), 105-112. doi: 10.1080/00405840701232943

Nakkeeran, N., & Zodpey, S. P. (2012). Qualitative research in applied situations: Strategies to ensure rigor and validity. *Indian Journal of Public Health*, *56*(1), 4-11.

National Council of Welfare Reports (2004). Poverty profile: Special edition. Retrieved from: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/migration/documents/eng/communities/reorts/poverty_profile/snapshot.pdf

National School Climate Center. (2024). Retrieved from: https://schoolclimate.org/contact-us/

Noon, E. J. (2018). Interpretive phenomenological analysis: An appropriate methodology for educational research? *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, *6*(1), 75-83.

Nguyen, C., & Tran, T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and

qualitative methods in education. *American Journal of Educational Science, 1(2)* 24-27. Retrieved from: http://www.aiscience.org/journal/ajes

Netolicky, D. M., & Barnes, N. (2018). Method as a journey: a narrative dialogic partnership illuminating decision-making in qualitative educational research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *41*(5), 500–513 https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1080/1743727X.2017.1295938.

O'Connor, C., & Fernandez, S. (2006). Race, class, and disproportionality: Reevaluating the relationship between poverty and special education placement. *Educational Researcher, 35*(6), 6-11. doi:10.3102/0013189X035006006

O'Donoghue, T. (2019). Planning your qualitative research thesis: An introduction to interpretivist research in education and the social sciences. (2nd Ed.). Routledge Press.

Oehlberg, B. (2008). Why schools need to be trauma-informed. *Trauma and Loss: Research and Interventions, 8*(2), 1–4. Retrieved from: http://www.traumainformedcareproject.org/resources/WhySchoolsNeedToBeTraumaInfomed(2).pdf

Oksala, J. (2017). Feminism and power. In: The Routledge companion to feminist philosophy, 1st Edition. Routledge. ISBN: 9781315758152

Ortiz, A. (2018). Nancy E. Dowd: reimagining equality: A new deal for children of color. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 48*, 174-176. doi:10.1007/s10964-018-0975-6

Ostaszewska, A. (2018). Social work and participatory method of empowering - photovoice. *Tiltai, 2*, 75-83. Retrieved from: https://depot.ceon.pl/handle/123456789/20092

Ottemiller, D. D., & Awais, Y. J. (2016). A model for art therapists in community-based practice. *Art Therapy*, *33*(3), 144-150.

Owusu-Bempah, A, & Wortley, S. (2014). Race, crime justice in Canada. Oxford Handbook on Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199859016.013.020.

Pain, R., Whitman, G., & Milledge, D. (2011). Participatory action research toolkit: An introduction to using PAR as an approach to learning, research and action *Durham, UK: Durham University & Lune Rivers Trust*

Papanastasiou, F. (2017). The psychological implication of learning disabilities. *Acta Psychopatholy, 4*(1). doi: 10.4172/2469-6676.100157.

Pantas, S., Miller, S., & Kulkarni, S. (2017). P.S. I survived: An activism project to increase student and community trauma awareness. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 37(2)*, 185-198. doi:10.1080/08841233.2017.1290012.

Paxton, M. (2006). Intertextual analysis: A research tool for uncovering a writer's emerging meanings. In Lucia Thesen and Ermien van Pletzen, Academic Literacy and the Languages of Change. Continuum Publishing. London. ISBN: 0-8264-8775-0.

Payne, A. A., & Welch, K. (2013). Restorative justice in schools: The influence of race on restorative discipline. *Youth and Society, 47*(4), 539-564.

Pepper, K., & Hamilton T. (2002). Making a change: The effects of the leadership role on school climate. *Learning Environments Research* 5, 155–166. doi:10.1023/A:1020326829745.

Perry A. (1908). *The management of a city school*. New York, NY: Macmillan

Petruccelli, K., Davis, J., & Berman, T. (2019). Adverse childhood experiences and associated health outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 97*, 1-13. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2019.104127.

Phillips, D. C. (1997). Telling the truth about stories. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 13*(1),

101-110. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(96)00030-3

Piggott, E., & Wood, W. (2018). Does restorative justice reduce recidivism? Assessing evidence and claims about restorative justice and reoffending. Routledge International Handbook of Restorative Justice. Chapter 24. Routledge Publishing.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (2017). Validity issues in qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *13*(4), 471-486. doi:10.1177/1077800406297670

Ponticorvo, M., Di Fuccio, R., Ferrara, F., Rega, A., & Miglino, O. (2019). Multisensory educational materials: Five senses to learn. In: Di Mascio, T., *et al.* Methodologies and Intelligent Systems for Technology Enhanced Learning, 8th International Conference. Advances in Intelligent Systems and Computing, vol 804. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98872-6_6

Puchta, C., & Potter, J. (2004). Focus Group Practice. Sage Publishing.

Purkey S., & Smith M. (1983). Effective schools: A review. *The Elementary School Journal*, 83, 427–452.

Raj, C. (2018). Disability, discipline, and illusory student rights. *UCLA Law Review*, *65*, 860.

Reay, D. (2006) 'I'm not seen as one of the clever children': Consulting primary school pupils about the social conditions of learning. *Educational Review, 58(*2), 171–81.

Reed, L. (2010). Troubling boys and disturbing discourses on masculinity and schooling: A feminist exploration of current debates and interventions concerning boys in school. *Gender and Education, 11*(1), 93-110. doi:10.1080/09540259920780

Reimer, K. (2011). An exploration of the implementation of restorative justice in an Ontario public school. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 119*, 1-41. Réseau Réussite Montréal. Retrieved from:

https://www.reseaureussitemontreal.ca/dans-les-quartiers/verdun/

Robinson, C., & Taylor, C. (2007). Theorizing student voice: Values and perspectives. *Improving Schools, 10*(1), 5-17. doi:10.1177/1365480207073702

Rogers, J. E. (2019). Leading for change through whole-school social-emotional learning: strategies to build a positive school culture. Corwin, A SAGE Company.

Rosenberg, A., & Starr, L.J. (2020). Educational change and rethinking disciplinarity: A concept analysis. *McGill Journal of Education, 55*(1), 151-175. Retrieved from https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/9666

Rowley, J. (2014). Designing and using research questionnaires. *Management Research Review, 37*(3), 308-330. doi:10.1108/MRR-02-2013-0027

Rudasill, K.M., Snyder, K.E., & Levinson, H. (2018). Systems view of school climate: A theoretical framework for research. *Educational Psychology Review, 30,* 35–60. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-017-9401-y

Rudduck, J. & Fielding, M. (2006). Student voice and the perils of popularity. *Educational Review, 58*(2), 219–31.

Salmona, M., Leiber, E., & Kaczynski, D. (2019). Qualitative and mixed methods data analysis using Dedoose: A practical approach for research across the social sciences. Sage Publications.

Sameer, A. & Ali, H. (2020). The voice of African-American women: Feminist voice in Maya Angelou's selected poems. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity, and Change, 11*(11).

Sammaknejad, A., & Marzban, A. (2016). An analysis of teachers' self-reflection on classroom management. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 6*(1), 84-89.

doi:10.17507/tpls.0601.11

Sarti, A., Schalkers, I., Bunders, J., & Dedding, C. (2018). Around the table with policymakers: Giving voice to children in contexts of poverty and deprivation. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(4). 396-413. doi:10.1177/1476750317695412

Shaeffer S. (1999). *UN Children' Fund child friendly schools*. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7260.html

Schiera, A. J. (2019). Justice, practice and the "Real World": pre-service teachers' critically conscious visions for teaching amid the complexities and challenges of learning to teach. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *32*(7), 929–946. https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.1080/09518398.2019.1609125

Schwandt, T. (1998). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln: The Landscape of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications. 229-251. ISBN: 10-1412957583

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2002). Improving student behavior and school discipline with family and community involvement. *Education and Urban Society*, *35*(1), 4–26. doi: 10.1177/001312402237212

Shifrer, D. (2013). Stigma of a label: Educational expectations for high school students labeled with learning disabilities. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *54*(4), 462-480. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146513503346

Shor, I. (1992). Education is Politics: Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. In: Paulo Freire: A critical encounter. Edited By Peter Leonard, Peter McLaren. Routledge. doi: https://doi-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/10.4324/9780203420263

Shukla-Mehta, S., & Albin, R. W. (2002). Understanding behavioral escalation: From theory to

Practice. *Behavioral Development Bulletin, 11*(1), 19–26. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100487

Siller, H. & Aydin, N. (2022). Using an intersectional lens on vulnerability and resilience in minority and/or marginalized groups during the COVID-19 pandemic: A narrative review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.894103

Skiba, R. J., Arredondo, M. I., & Williams, N. T. (2014). More than a metaphor: The contribution of exclusionary discipline to a school-to-prison pipeline. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 47*, 546-564. doi: 10.1080/10665684.2014.958965

Skiba, R. J., Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension, and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In Evertson, C. M., Weinstein, C. S. (Eds.), Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues, 1063-1089. Routledge.

Smith, D. (1990). The conceptual practices of power: A feminist sociology of knowledge. University of Toronto Press. ISBN:0-80020-6796-4

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. Sage Publishing.

Smith, T. J., Hugh, C., & Fontechia, S. (2024). Unemployment and underemployment of people with disabilities: An untapped resource within the global economy. *Unemployment-Nature, Challenges and Policy Responses: Nature, Challenges and Policy Responses*, 95.

Spencer, S. (2011). Universal Design for Learning: Assistance for teachers in today's inclusive classrooms. Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning, 1(1), 10-22.

St. John, K., & Briel, L. (2017). Student voice: A growing movement within education that

benefits students and teachers. Centre on Transition Innovations. Retrieved from: https://centerontransition.org/publications/download.cfm?id=61

Stack, M., & Wang, F. (2018). Students' perceptions of belonging: A photovoice participatory action research project. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, *19*(1), 48–66.

Strand, S., & Winston, J. (2008). Educational aspirations in inner city schools. *Educational Studies, 34*(4), 249-267. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690802034021

Starr, L.J. (2010). The use of autoethnography in educational research*:* Locating who we are in what we do. *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, *3*(1).

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, National Center for Trauma-Informed Care. (2015). Trauma-informed approach. Retrieved from: http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions

Subban, P. (2006). Differentiated instruction: A research basis. *International Educational Journal, 7*(7), 935-947. ISSN: 1443-1475

Sullivan, A. L., Van Norman, E. R., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2014). Exclusionary discipline of students with disabilities: Student and school characteristics predicting suspension. *Remedial and Special Education*, *35*(4), 199-210.

Svahn, J., & Karlsson, M. (2017). Challenge the bounds of tellablity: The interactional management of bullying narrative within a girl group discussion. *Narrative Inquiry, 27*(2), 334-365. doi:10.1075/ni.27.2.07sva

Swartz, S. S., & Nyamnjoh, A. (2018). Research as freedom: using a continuum of interactive, participatory and emancipatory methods for addressing youth marginality. *Theological Studies*, *74*(3), 1–11. doi:10.4102/hts.v74i3.5063

Teasley, M. (2014). Shifting from zero tolerance to restorative justice in schools. *Children &*

Schools, *36*(3), 131–133. doi:10.1093/cs/cdu016

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research*, *83*(3), 357–385. doi: 10.3102/0034654313483907

The glossary of education reform. (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.edglossary.org/student-engagement/

Thomas, S., Crosby, S., & Vanerhaar, J. (2019). Trauma-informed practices in schools across two decades: An interdisciplinary review of research. *Review of Research in Education, 43*. 422- 452. doi:10.3102/0091732X18821123

Thomas, N., & O'Kane, C. (2006). The ethics of participatory research with children. *Children & Society: The International Journal and Childhood and Children's Services, 12*(5). 336-348. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.1998.tb00090.x

Thomson, P. (2009). Doing visual research with children and young people. Routledge.

Tri-council Working Group. (1998). *Tri-council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans* (with 2000, 2002 updates). Retrieved from: www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/english/policystatement/policystatement.cfm

Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. *The Higher Education Academ*y. Lancaster University.

United Nations (1989). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 44/25. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_44_25.pdf

Van Houtte, M. (2024). Understanding gender gaps in education: The role of stereotypes and the

intersection with social class. The Routledge International Handbook of Equity and Inclusion in Education. Edited by Paul Downes, Guofang Li, Lore Van Pragg, and Stephan Lamb. Routledge. ISBN: 9781032253893

Ungar, M. (2015). Working with children and youth with complex needs: 20 skills to build resilience. Routledge Press. ISBN: 978-1-138-80072-4.

Ungar, M., Ghazinor, M., & Richter, J. (2012). Annual Research Review: What is resilience within the social ecology of human development? *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry. 54*(4). 348-366. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12025

Umoquit, M., Lemieux-Charles, L., Ritvo, P., Urbach, D., & Wodchis, W. (2008). The efficiency and effectiveness of utilizing diagrams in interviews: an assessment of participatory diagramming and graphic elicitation. *Medical Research Methodology 8*, 53. doi: 10.1186/1471-2288-8-53

United Nations (2003). Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. New York.

Vaandering, D. (2014). Implementing restorative justice practice in schools: What pedagogy reveals. *Journal of Peace Education*, *11*(1) 64. doi:10.1080/17400201.2013.794335.

Valdivia, A. (2002). bell hooks: Ethics from the margins. Qualitative Inquiry, 8(4), 429-447. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040080040

Valois, R. (2018). A preliminary study measuring social self-efficacy among early adolescents and its association with aggressive behavior. *Journal of School Violence*. doi:10.1080/15388220.2018.1553718

Van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. SUNY Press.

Velasco, I., Edmonson, S., & Slate, J. (2012). Principal leadership behaviors and school climate: A conceptual analysis. *The Journal of Educational Research, 6*(3). 315 - 336. ISSN:1935-052X.

Walcot-Gayda, E. (2017). Understanding learning disabilities. Learning Disabilities Association of Canada. Retrieved at: https://www.ldac-acta.ca/understanding-learning-disabilities.

Wald, J., & Losen, D.J. (2003). Defining and redirecting the school-to-prison pipeline. *New Directions for Youth Development, 99*(9), 9-15.

Wallace, J., Goodkind, S., Wallace, C., & Bachman, J. (2008). Racial, ethnic, and gender differences in school discipline among U.S. high school students: 1991-2005. *Negro Educational Review, 59*(1- 2), 47–62.

Wang, Q., Coemans, S., Siegesmund, R., & Hannes, K. (2017). Arts-based methods in socially engaged research practice: A classification framework. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal*, *2*(2), 5-39.

Wang, M., & Degol, J. (2016). School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review, 28*, 315–352. doi:10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1

Wang, C. C., & Redwood-Jones, Y. A. (2001). Photovoice ethics: Perspectives from flint photovoice. *Health Education & Behavior*, *28*(5), 560–572. doi: 10.1177/109019810102800504

Wang, Q., Coemans, S. Siegesmund, R., & Hannes, K. (2017). Arts-based methods in socially engaged research practice: A classification framework. *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal, 2*(2). doi:10.18432/R26G8P. Retrieved from: https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ari/index.php/ari/article/view/27370

Washor, E., & Mojkowski, C. (2014). Student disengagement: It's deeper than you think. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *95*(8), 8–10. doi:10.1177/003172171409500803

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to using critical event narrative. Routledge.

Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems, 57*(1), 25-48. doi:10.1525/sp.2010.57.1.2

Wiley, A. L., Kauffman, J. M., & Plageman, K. (2014). Conservatism and the underidentification of students with emotional and behavioral disorders in special education. *Exceptionality*, *22*(4), 237-251.

Williams, E. N., & Fauth, J. (2005). A psychotherapy process study of therapist in session self-awareness. *Psychotherapy Research, 15*(4), 374–381. doi: 10.1080/10503300500091355

Williams, J., Greenleaf, A., Barnes, E., & Owens, T. (2016). Photovoice as a teaching tool for client/student advocacy. *Journal of Counselor Leadership and Advocacy, 3*(2), 111-123. doi:10.1080/2326716X.2015.1124816

Wong, N., Zimmerman, M., & Parker, E. (2010). A typology of youth participation and empowerment for child and adolescent health promotion. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 46*(1–2), 100–114. doi:10.1007/s10464-010-9330-0

Yang, T., Chen, C., Cho, S., & Kurtulus, A. (2019). Linking perceived discrimination during adolescence to health during mid-adulthood: Self-esteem and risk-behavior mechanisms. *Social Science & Medicine, 232,* 434-443. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.06.012

Yeager, D., & Dweck, C. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational Psychologist. 47*(4). 302-314.

doi:10.1080/00461520.2012.722805

Zito Guerriero, I. C., & Magalhães Bosi, M. L. (2015). Research ethics in the dynamic of scientific field: challenges in the building of guidelines for social sciences and humanities. *Revista Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, *20*(9), 2015. doi:10.1590/1413-81232015209.06022015

Zogla, I. (2018). Science of pedagogy: Theory of education discipline and practice. *Journal of Teacher Education and Sustainability, 20*(2), 31-43. doi:10.2478/jtes-2018-0013

Appendix

Appendix A - Concordia University Ethics Board Approval

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Jennifer Beaudoin
Department:	Faculty of Arts and Science\Education
Agency:	N/A
Title of Project:	Listening to What Matters Most: An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate
Certification Number:	30017772

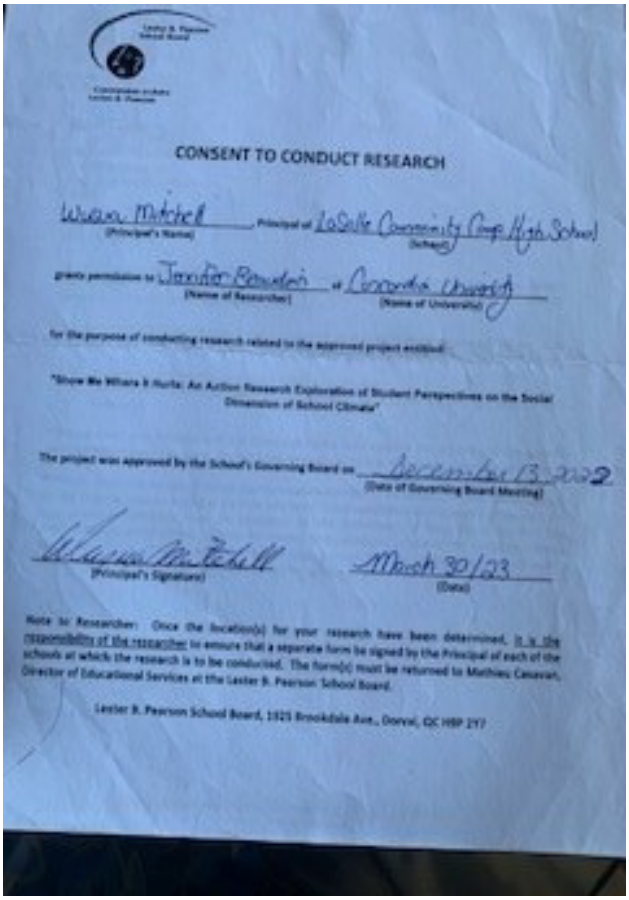
Valid From: March 25, 2024 To: March 24, 2025

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Richard DeMont

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix B - Lester B. Pearson School Board Research Project Consent Form



CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Wayne Mitchell (Principal's Name), Principal of LaSalle Community Comp. High School (School), grants permission to Jennifer Beaudoin (Name of Researcher) of Concordia University (Name of University) for the purpose of conducting research related to the approved project entitled:

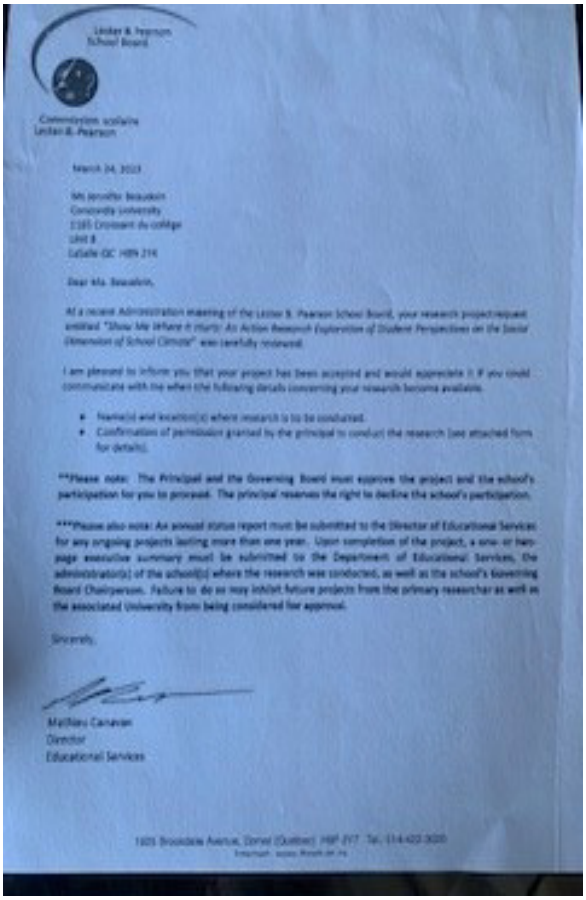
"Show Me Where It Hurts: An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate"

The project was approved by the School's Governing Board on December 13, 2022 (Date of Governing Board Meeting)

Wayne Mitchell (Principal's Signature) March 30/23 (Date)

Note to Researcher: Once the location(s) for your research have been determined, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that a separate form be signed by the Principal of each of the schools at which the research is to be conducted. The form(s) must be returned to Mathieu Canavan, Director of Educational Services at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Lester B. Pearson School Board, 1925 Brookdale Ave., Dorval, QC H9P 2Y7



Lester B. Pearson School Board

Commission scolaire Lester-B.-Pearson

March 24, 2023

Ms Jennifer Beaudoin
Concordia University
7141 Croissant du collège
Unit 8
LaSalle QC H8N 2Y4

Dear Ms. Beaudoin,

At a recent Administration meeting of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, your research project request entitled *"Show Me Where It Hurts: An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate"* was carefully reviewed.

I am pleased to inform you that your project has been accepted and would appreciate it if you could communicate with me when the following details concerning your research become available:

- Name(s) and location(s) where research is to be conducted.
- Confirmation of permission granted by the principal to conduct the research (see attached form for details).

**Please note: The Principal and the Governing Board must approve the project and the school's participation for you to proceed. The principal reserves the right to decline the school's participation.

***Please also note: An annual status report must be submitted to the Director of Educational Services for any ongoing projects lasting more than one year. Upon completion of the project, a one- or two-page executive summary must be submitted to the Department of Educational Services, the administrator(s) of the school(s) where the research was conducted, as well as the school's Governing Board Chairperson. Failure to do so may inhibit future projects from the primary researcher as well as the associated University from being considered for approval.

Sincerely,

Mathieu Canavan
Director
Educational Services

1925 Brookdale Avenue, Dorval (Québec) H9P 2Y7 Tel.: 514-422-3020

Appendix C - Recruitment - Student Assembly Presentation

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jvd5IVjlclhP7V1sXgldVGF-4d4jK9HbowYHOdT2k-U/edit#slide=id.p

Appendix D - Recruitment Poster

Let's Hear it From Them!

STUDY TITLE

Listening to What Matters Most:
An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate

WE ARE SEEKING:

Students between the ages of 12 and 17, in any academic program.

Participants must:

1. Being attending the pilot school
2. Be comfortable speaking English
3. Have access to a computer

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

Investigate youth perspectives with regards to **school climate**:

- quality of their relationships with staff,
- perceived opportunities for advocacy and empowerment in their school decision-making,
- opinions with regards to the interventions aimed to manage student behavior.

COMMITMENT:

One 15 minute questionnaire OR
One 15 minute questionnaire & participation in a focus group

The focus group will meet over lunch,

five times over four months (February - June)
and a sixth time to host a vernissage of student work (June).

Sessions will take place from

12:20 pm - 1:20 pm
Students in grades 7 & 8 will miss the first half of period 5.
Students in grades 9, 10 & 11 will miss the second half of period 4.

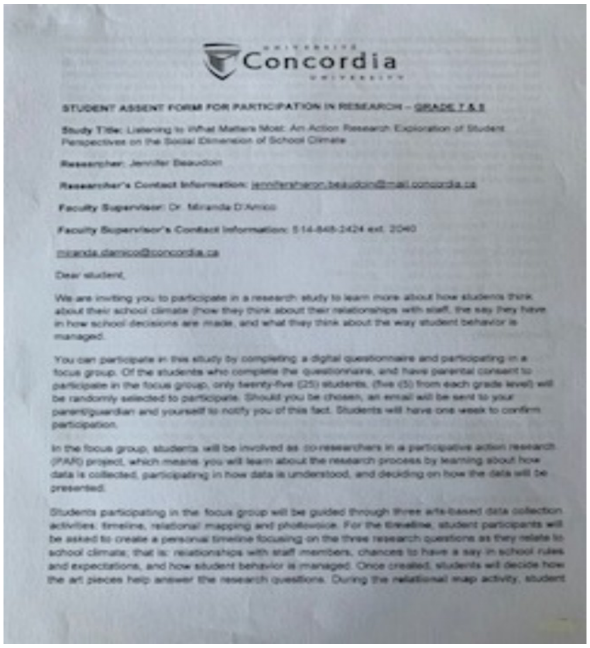
INTERESTED ?

For more information you (and your parents)
can attend a virtual information session on (insert date).
You can also always contact the researcher at:
jennifersharon.beaudoin@mail.concordia.ca

A Doctoral Project approved by the
Concordia University Ethics Review Committee
FACULTY SUPERVISOR: Dr. Miranda D'Amico

UNIVERSITÉ Concordia UNIVERSITY

Appendix E - Participant Assent Form Grade 7 & 8



Concordia University

STUDENT ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH – GRADE 7 & 8

Study Title: Listening to What Matters Most: An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate

Researcher: Jennifer Beaudoin

Researcher's Contact Information: jennifersharon.beaudoin@mail.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miranda D'Amico

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: 514-848-2424 ext. 2040

miranda.damico@concordia.ca

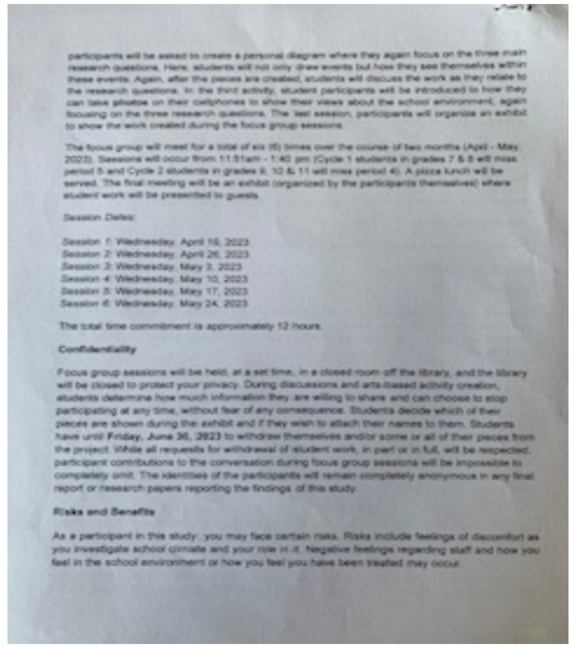
Dear student,

We are inviting you to participate in a research study to learn more about how students think about their school climate (how they think about their relationships with staff, the say they have in how school decisions are made, and what they think about the way student behavior is managed.

You can participate in this study by completing a digital questionnaire and participating in a focus group. Of the students who complete the questionnaire, and have parental consent to participate in the focus group, only twenty-five (25) students, (five (5) from each grade level) will be randomly selected to participate. Should you be chosen, an email will be sent to your parent/guardian and yourself to notify you of this fact. Students will have one week to confirm participation.

In the focus group, students will be involved as co-researchers in a participative action research (PAR) project, which means you will learn about the research process by learning about how data is collected, participating in how data is understood, and deciding on how the data will be presented.

Students participating in the focus group will be guided through three arts-based data collection activities: timeline, relational mapping and photovoice. For the **timeline**, student participants will be asked to create a personal timeline focusing on the three research questions as they relate to school climate; that is: relationships with staff members, chances to have a say in school rules and expectations, and how student behavior is managed. Once created, students will decide how the art pieces help answer the research questions. During the **relational map** activity, student



participants will be asked to create a personal diagram where they again focus on the three main research questions. Here, students will not only draw events but how they see themselves within these events. Again, after the pieces are created, students will discuss the work as they relate to the research questions. In the third activity, student participants will be introduced to how they can take **photos** on their cellphones to show their views about the school environment, again focusing on the three research questions. The last session, participants will organize an exhibit to show the work created during the focus group sessions.

The focus group will meet for a total of six (6) times over the course of two months (April - May 2023). Sessions will occur from 11:51am - 1:40 pm (Cycle 1 students in grades 7 & 8 will miss period 5 and Cycle 2 students in grades 9, 10 & 11 will miss period 4). A pizza lunch will be served. The final meeting will be an exhibit (organized by the participants themselves) where student work will be presented to guests.

Session *Dates*:

Session 1: Wednesday, April 19, 2023
Session 2: Wednesday, April 26, 2023
Session 3: Wednesday, May 3, 2023
Session 4: Wednesday, May 10, 2023
Session 5: Wednesday, May 17, 2023
Session 6: Wednesday, May 24, 2023

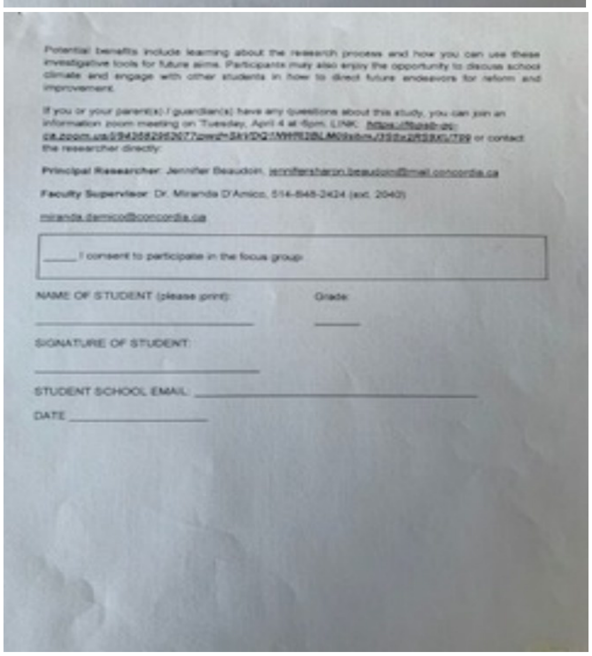
The total time commitment is approximately 12 hours.

Confidentiality

Focus group sessions will be held, at a set time, in a closed room off the library, and the library will be closed to protect your privacy. During discussions and arts-based activity creation, students determine how much information they are willing to share and can choose to stop participating at any time, without fear of any consequence. Students decide which of their pieces are shown during the exhibit and if they wish to attach their names to them. Students have until **Friday, June 30, 2023** to withdraw themselves and/or some or all of their pieces from the project. While all requests for withdrawal of student work, in part or in full, will be respected, participant contributions to the conversation during focus group sessions will be impossible to completely omit. The identities of the participants will remain completely anonymous in any final report or research papers reporting the findings of this study.

Risks and Benefits

As a participant in this study, you may face certain risks. Risks include feelings of discomfort as you investigate school climate and your role in it. Negative feelings regarding staff and how you feel in the school environment or how you feel you have been treated may occur.



Potential benefits include learning about the research process and how you can use these investigative tools for future aims. Participants may also enjoy the opportunity to discuss school climate and engage with other students in how to direct future endeavors for reform and improvement.

If you or your parent(s) / guardian(s) have any questions about this study, you can join an information zoom meeting on Tuesday, April 4 at 6pm. LINK: https://[illegible] or contact the researcher directly:

Principal Researcher: Jennifer Beaudoin, jennifersharon.beaudoin@mail.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miranda D'Amico, 514-848-2424 (ext. 2040)

miranda.damico@concordia.ca

_____ I consent to participate in the focus group

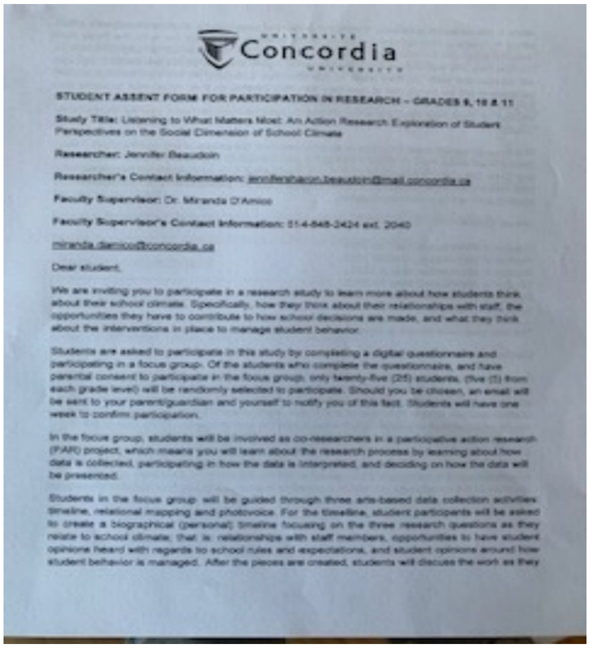
NAME OF STUDENT (please print): __________________ Grade: _____

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: __________________

STUDENT SCHOOL EMAIL: __________________

DATE ____________

Appendix F - Participant Assent Form Grade 9, 10, 11



UNIVERSITÉ Concordia UNIVERSITY

STUDENT ASSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH – GRADES 9, 10 & 11

Study Title: Listening to What Matters Most: An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate

Researcher: Jennifer Beaudoin

Researcher's Contact Information: jennifersharon.beaudoin@mail.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miranda D'Amico

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: 514-848-2424 ext. 2040

miranda.damico@concordia.ca

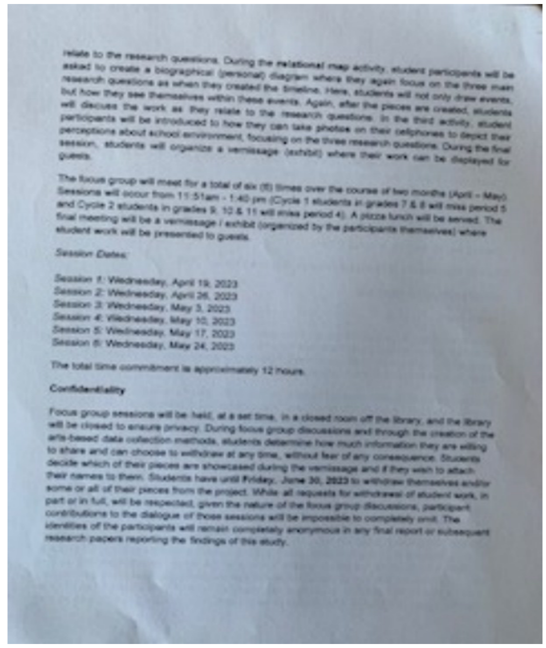
Dear student,

We are inviting you to participate in a research study to learn more about how students think about their school climate. Specifically, how they think about their relationships with staff, the opportunities they have to contribute to how school decisions are made, and what they think about the interventions in place to manage student behavior.

Students are asked to participate in this study by completing a digital questionnaire and participating in a focus group. Of the students who complete the questionnaire, and have parental consent to participate in the focus group, only twenty-five (25) students, (five (5) from each grade level) will be randomly selected to participate. Should you be chosen, an email will be sent to your parent/guardian and yourself to notify you of this fact. Students will have one week to confirm participation.

In the focus group, students will be involved as co-researchers in a participative action research (PAR) project, which means you will learn about the research process by learning about how data is collected, participating in how the data is interpreted, and deciding on how the data will be presented.

Students in the focus group will be guided through three arts-based data collection activities: timeline, relational mapping and photovoice. For the timeline, student participants will be asked to create a biographical (personal) timeline focusing on the three research questions as they relate to school climate, that is: relationships with staff members, opportunities to have student opinions heard with regards to school rules and expectations, and student opinions around how student behavior is managed. After the pieces are created, students will discuss the work as they



relate to the research questions. During the **relational map** activity, student participants will be asked to create a biographical (personal) diagram where they again focus on the three main research questions as when they created the timeline. Here, students will not only draw events, but how they see themselves within these events. Again, after the pieces are created, students will discuss the work as they relate to the research questions. In the third activity, student participants will be introduced to how they can take **photos** on their cellphones to depict their perceptions about school environment, focusing on the three research questions. During the final session, students will organize a vernissage (exhibit) where their work can be displayed for guests.

The focus group will meet for a total of six (6) times over the course of two months (April – May). Sessions will occur from 11:51am - 1:40 pm (Cycle 1 students in grades 7 & 8 will miss period 5 and Cycle 2 students in grades 9, 10 & 11 will miss period 4). A pizza lunch will be served. The final meeting will be a vernissage / exhibit (organized by the participants themselves) where student work will be presented to guests.

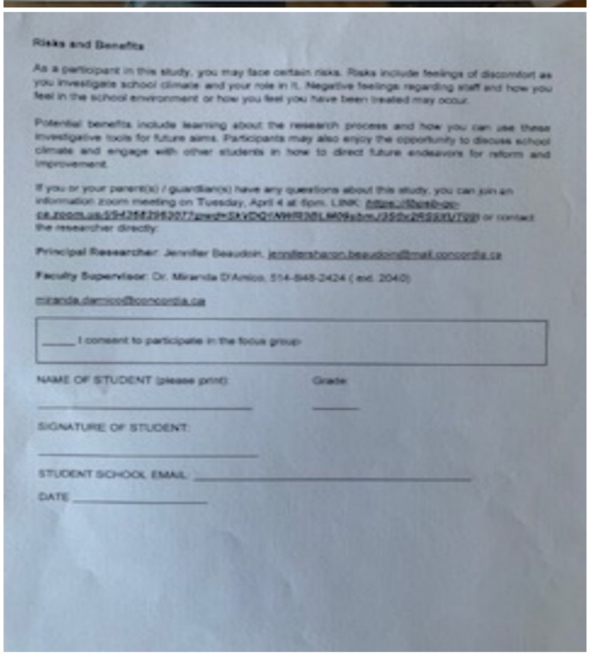
Session Dates:

Session 1: Wednesday, April 19, 2023
Session 2: Wednesday, April 26, 2023
Session 3: Wednesday, May 3, 2023
Session 4: Wednesday, May 10, 2023
Session 5: Wednesday, May 17, 2023
Session 6: Wednesday, May 24, 2023

The total time commitment is approximately 12 hours.

Confidentiality

Focus group sessions will be held, at a set time, in a closed room off the library, and the library will be closed to ensure privacy. During focus group discussions and through the creation of the arts-based data collection methods, students determine how much information they are willing to share and can choose to withdraw at any time, without fear of any consequence. Students decide which of their pieces are showcased during the vernissage and if they wish to attach their names to them. Students have until **Friday, June 30, 2023** to withdraw themselves and/or some or all of their pieces from the project. While all requests for withdrawal of student work, in part or in full, will be respected, given the nature of the focus group discussions, participant contributions to the dialogue of those sessions will be impossible to completely omit. The identities of the participants will remain completely anonymous in any final report or subsequent research papers reporting the findings of this study.



Risks and Benefits

As a participant in this study, you may face certain risks. Risks include feelings of discomfort as you investigate school climate and your role in it. Negative feelings regarding staff and how you feel in the school environment or how you feel you have been treated may occur.

Potential benefits include learning about the research process and how you can use these investigative tools for future aims. Participants may also enjoy the opportunity to discuss school climate and engage with other students in how to direct future endeavors for reform and improvement.

If you or your parent(s) / guardian(s) have any questions about this study, you can join an information zoom meeting on Tuesday, April 4 at 6pm. LINK: [illegible] or contact the researcher directly:

Principal Researcher: Jennifer Beaudoin, jennifersharon.beaudoin@mail.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miranda D'Amico, 514-848-2424 (ext. 2040)

miranda.damico@concordia.ca

_____ I consent to participate in the focus group

NAME OF STUDENT (please print): ________________ Grade: _____

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT: ________________

STUDENT SCHOOL EMAIL ________________

DATE ________________

Appendix G - Parent Consent Form

Concordia University

PARENT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title: Listening to What Matters Most: An Action Research Exploration of Student Perspectives on the Social Dimension of School Climate

Researcher: Jennifer Beaudoin

Researcher's Contact Information: jennifersharon.beaudoin@mail.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Miranda D'Amico

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: (514) 848-2424 ext. 2040
miranda.damico@concordia.ca

Your child is being invited to participate in a participative action research (PAR) project. This form provides information about what their involvement would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to give consent.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the research is to investigate student perspectives with regards to the social aspect of school climate; that is, their relationships with staff, opportunities for advocacy and empowerment in school decision-making, as well as their opinions with regards to the interventions aimed to manage student behavior.

B. PROCEDURES

Parents are being asked to consent to their child completing an online questionnaire.
Parents can also consent for their child to participate in a focus group.

Please note: of all the students who complete a questionnaire and have consent to participate in the focus group, only twenty-five students (five from each level) will be randomly selected to participate in a focus group. Should your child be selected to participate in the focus group, an email will be sent to you and your child to notify you of this fact.

The focus group will meet over the school's **two** lunch hours 6 times over two months (April to May). The sessions will run from **11:51 pm - 1:48 pm**. Therefore, students in grades 7 and 8 will miss period 5, and students in grades 9, 10 & 11 will miss period 4. *Pizza lunch will be served.*

Session Dates:

Session 1: Wednesday, April 19, 2023
Session 2: Wednesday, April 26, 2023
Session 3: Wednesday, May 3, 2023
Session 4: Wednesday, May 10, 2023
Session 5: Wednesday, May 17, 2023
Session 6: Wednesday, May 24, 2023

In the focus group, students will be involved as *co-researchers* in a participative action (PAR) project, which means they will learn about the research process by learning about how data is collected, participating in how the data is interpreted, and deciding on how the data will be presented.

During the focus group sessions your child will participate in three arts-based activities: timeline, relational mapping and photovoice. For the **timeline**, student participants will be asked to create a biographical timeline focusing on the three research questions as they relate to school climate; that is: relationships with staff members, opportunities for self-advocacy, and events where they felt equitably or inequitably treated with regards to discipline. After the pieces are created, students will engage in a meaning-making session where they will discuss the work as they relate to school climate. During the **relational map** activity, student participants will be asked to create a biographical diagram where they depict events in relational to school climate and how they situate themselves within these events. Again, after the pieces are created, students will engage in a meaning-making session where they will discuss the work as they relate to school climate. In the final activity, student participants will be introduced to how they can take photos on their cellphones, along with written annotations, to depict their perceptions about school environment, focusing on the three research questions. Procedures and deadline for submission will be provided. While photos will focus on the physical space of the school, should students or staff be in an image, written consent will need to be acquired prior to the image being shot. All students and staff can also request that their identities be blurred in images prior to public viewing. If the school's media release form has not been signed by a parent, faces in the photographs of students concerned used in the final vernissage will automatically be blurred.

When student participants meet for the final time, they will not only engage in a meaning-making session about their work, but also to discuss and decide on how they want their work to be disseminated in a public vernissage for invited guests. The role of the researcher is to facilitate this event and assist with the logistics. The vernissage will be student driven and provide participants with an opportunity to showcase their work and open a discussion on the implications of their involvement in this research study. Following the vernissage, student participants will be asked to complete a culminating questionnaire, and guests will be asked to voluntarily complete one as well, to gauge their perceptions on what they witnessed.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately 12 hours.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

Your child might face certain risks by participating in this research. Risks include feelings of discomfort as they investigate school climate and their role in it. Negative feelings regarding staff and how they feel in the school environment or how they feel they have been treated may occur.

Potential benefits include learning about the research process and how they can use these investigative tools for future aims. They may also enjoy the opportunity to discuss school climate and engage with other students in how to direct future endeavors for reform and improvement.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

A link to a digital questionnaire will be emailed to students (school email address) who have submitted their parental consent and student assent forms. Participant confidentiality will be respected in that responses will be anonymous.

The identities of the participants who take part in the focus group PAR activities will be protected in that they will know ahead of time the dates, times and location of meetings. They will not be paged by school personnel. Meeting times will be held over two lunch hours, so participants will not need to leave during class. The meeting room is located in a closed adjacent room to the school library and the library will be closed during the sessions so no students will see participants entering or leaving the sessions. With regards to the PAR pieces, participants can choose to not write their names on their work.

The following student data collection information will be gathered as part of this research: student questionnaire responses, focus group members' timelines, relational maps and photovoice submissions, researcher notes during focus group discussions, and vernissage debrief questionnaire responses.

During the photovoice activity, participants must get consent from all people in a photograph. People consenting to have their photo taken can also ask to have their face blurred. If the school's media release form has not been signed by a parent, faces of students in the photographs displayed during the vernissage will be blurred.

Access to all information will be reserved exclusively to the researcher. All information will be safeguarded in a locked document folder and stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Only the researcher will have access to the information. The researcher will only use the information for the purposes of the research project described in this form.

With regards to the researcher's final published report, student identities will remain anonymous. That means that it will not be possible to make a link between your child and the data provided.

The researcher will destroy the information once the researcher's dissertation has been defended.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Students do not have to participate in this research project. Students who do participate are free to end their involvement at any time. Students have the right to remove any of their data from the study, as long as the researcher is informed of this by **Friday, June 30, 2023.**

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking for data to not be used.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

_____ I consent for my child to participate in the questionnaire ONLY

_____ I consent for my child to participate in the questionnaire AND the focus group

NAME OF CHILD (please print): ______________________ Grade ______

SCHOOL EMAIL OF CHILD (please print clearly): ______________________

NAME OF PARENT / GUARDIAN (please print): ______________________

SIGNATURE OF PARENT / GUARDIAN ______________________

EMAIL OF PARENT / GUARDIAN (please print clearly): ______________________

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, you can join the researcher for an information zoom meeting on Tuesday, April 4 at 6pm. LINK: [illegible]
You may also contact the faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, (514) 848-2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca

Appendix H – Focus Group Session 1 – Goal-Setting Session

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1z9zkNKXNKX5qdH-taelAyKuF8P9yCXAxZesJ89GGRRs/edit#slide=id.g1f88252dc4_0_162

Appendix I – Focus Group Session 2 – Timeline Instructions

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1G9vH39Tr9dgLKykn72aNDoRxP5vgnG3qThx6NcOomDo/edit

Appendix J - Session 3 - Relational Map Instructions

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wZ7inJryo6kZvPsDqOcFEEOEqeqYYYCv76aLVialz7c/edit

Appendix K - Session 4 – Photovoice PowerPoint Instructions

https://docs.google.com/document/d/12Z0WlCFgwSCPPHAnaqD5bLhWDNusnEbiBCgQfn35UL8/edit

Appendix L - Session 5 - Meaning-Making Instructions

https://docs.google.com/document/d/11F2q8bzcpQmPJdm5eJs6mUy7QetsM4Bd7ncqalhtj3E/edit

Appendix M - Session 6 - Call to Action

Wednesday, May 24, 2023
To the administration of LCCHS,

For the past six weeks we have been thinking about three areas of school - our relationships with staff, the amount of say we have in rules, and how our behavior is handled by staff and administration.

As for relationships with staff, we feel that they are pretty good. We talked a lot about respect, and how we think most staff members show respect by treating us like people, being patient, and taking the time to hear us out. We appreciate the time some teachers and aids take to help us learn without making us feel dumb, and don't let everyone know that we are struggling. We like when we are around staff outside of class and are able to talk to them

about stuff not related to school. We feel seen and heard. When we talked about the bad relationships, we talked a lot about staff who yell, talk down to us, and are unfair. We don't like teachers who judge us, and always blame us even if we aren't doing anything. They say 'fresh start', but we don't get one.

As for having a say in class and school rules, we don't have one. Other than that one survey we do every year, the one no one actually takes seriously, we are never asked about what we think or how we feel. In class we agreed that we like when teachers give us options on what to work on. Having choice makes it less boring and makes us feel more in control. Teachers that let us move around in class is so much better than making us just sit there listening to them talk for an hour. It would be nice if they talked with us every now and then to ask us how the class is going. As for school rules, we have no say.

When it comes to how we think our behavior is managed, we had a lot to say! We like when teachers are flexible and cut us a break. We like being treated like a person that makes mistakes and let us move past it and move on. The best staff ask us what is wrong when we're off and don't bark at us without knowing why we are not doing what they are asking us to do. They talk to us and help us find solutions to our problems, not just kick us out of class. When it comes to punishments we all agreed that the way detentions are run don't work. Kids don't go and don't take them seriously. Getting detention does not stop anyone from repeating the same behavior, it's a waste of everyone's time. As for in-school suspensions or time in the planning room or with Ms. J., we think this is ok, but needs some fixing. We think more time to talk and reflect and not just sit around and rot would be better. As for at-home suspensions, they are vacations! Parents work and kids spend the day sleeping and playing video games, how is this a punishment? Some kids will screw up so that they are purposely sent home. All it does is irritate parents because now their kid is not in school and at home.

With all this said, our act to encourage change and progress is a ***Call to Action*** to the administration of *****.

1 - *We, the students of the focus group, ask that the administration of ***** create a student council for the 2023-2024 school year.*

The student council should be elected by students in September and have at least four (4) students per grade in it

The student council should be supervised by a teacher and a Vice Principal

The student council should meet at least every two weeks

The student council should have grade 10 or 11 students who sit on school decision-making committees

The student council should be consulted on all student related matters

2 - *We, the students of the focus group, ask that the administration of ***** work with the student council to create a peer mentoring program*

This mentoring program should be made up of senior students who can help Ms. J. and Ms. J. with minor peer conflicts / student needs

3 - *We, the students of the focus group, ask that the administration of ***** work with the student council and senior mentors to create an improved in-school / alternative suspension program*

Thank you

2023 Focus Group Participants