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CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S POSITIVE SCHOOL FUNCTIONING: THE MODERATING ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

CLASSROOM COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S POSITIVE SCHOOL FUNCTIONING: THE MODERATING ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL ADJUSTMENT

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There has been relatively little research on the contributions of school context to developmental outcomes for students. The purpose of this study was to examine level of behavioral adjustment as a moderator of the relationship between children's perceived sense of classroom community and their satisfaction with school. Classroom community was considered a social context variable that suggests a role for both affective and academic outcomes and school satisfaction was utilized as an attitudinal indicator of the positive adjustment of students. Data was collected from students, grades three through five, in at-risk, Title I schools in the southeast. Multiple regression analysis procedures specified for the testing of moderation were used. Results suggest that students' perceptions of a caring classroom community contributed positively to the school satisfaction ratings of students. No moderating effect of level of adjustment on the relationship between classroom community and school satisfaction was found for this sample of students. Findings were interpreted by the theoretical orientations that guided the study, namely, the importance of wellness based approaches that emphasize the significance of examining and building strength in students.

To Brad, Will, and my parents!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

If asked what the primary purpose of schooling is, many individuals would indicate the importance of academic learning. Attention to school issues has been primarily devoted to children's intellectual and academic development (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). This focus is evident in many contemporary reform movements (e.g., standards-based reform initiatives, No Child Left Behind) by their central emphasis on academic achievement. There is a growing interest, however, in the social and emotional purposes of schooling and the importance of the nonintellectual and nonacademic factors that contribute to children's school success. These approaches to schooling (e.g., growth of character education initiatives, the development of social emotional learning standards) have highlighted students' social and emotional development.

In addition to a focus on academic achievement, approaches to better student outcomes have traditionally and primarily concentrated on aspects of the individual rather than on environmental strategies that may promote academic and social-emotional growth for students (Fagan & Wise, 2000). It is important, however, that school-based practices be guided by theory that explicitly account for both environmental and individual contributors to positive development (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). As a result of this consideration, researchers have begun to pay more attention to the developmental contexts of schooling in recent years (Baker, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2003). This growing interest in the examination of context variables, particularly those variables concerned with the social purposes of schooling, relates to the belief that the social

aspects of schools affect children's satisfaction as well as their academic and social success in the school setting (Baker, 1998).

One of these social context variables that suggest a role for both affective and academic outcomes is also an important component of the relational approach to school reform. It is the concept of classrooms as caring communities. The social context of classrooms and schools is critically important for children's development (Zins, Elias, Greenberg, & Weissberg, 2000). Those students who find their school experiences to be supportive and caring are more likely to become attached and committed to school and, therefore, will develop the attitudes, motives, and competencies, both academic and social-emotional, valued by the school.

The challenge to think critically about context variables and the positive aspects of students' well being are embraced by the positive psychology movement. Positive psychology represents a shift in thinking from the medical deficits model that has dominated the field (Albee, 2000; Cowen, 2000; Lorin, 2000). It encourages a focus on prevention of negative outcomes through building students' strengths and providing students with environments that support positive adjustment. Since children spend nearly a third of their day in school and because the contexts in which individuals develop play influential roles in promoting their adaptation and adjustment (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), the degree to which schools function as psychologically healthy environments is a key issue within positive psychology as applied to children.

Educational resilience draws attention to the cumulative effect of protective factors rather than the effect of an isolated factor (Rutter, 1979). According to an ecological systems perspective, a child lives and develops within multiple, interacting

contexts. Therefore, protective factors may be internal child characteristics or environmental contexts that increase a child's positive adaptation (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Kumpfer, 1999). Outcomes of educational resilience are frequently measured as social, intellectual, and planning competencies (Benard, 1991; Milstein & Henry, 2000), however, attitudinal indicators of well being can and should also be considered. Grounded in the theoretical and empirical literature on subjective well being (Diener, 1984), school satisfaction is one such marker. School satisfaction has been defined as a cognitve-affective evaluation of overall satisfaction with one's school experiences (Huebner, 1994) and encompasses students' cognitive beliefs about school (Baker, 1998; Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Huebner & McCullough, 2000).

Although both the classroom as caring community and school satisfaction literatures are relatively scanty, such research is crucial in that school dissatisfaction appears to be linked with a variety of negative outcomes, including lower school achievement, increased behavior problems, and dropping out of school (Ainley, Foreman, & Sheret, 1991; Fine, 1986). In this budding literature, only a handful of studies have attempted to identify correlates that may serve as determinants of school satisfaction and past research efforts have largely ignored intrapersonal variables. Additional research is needed to uncover generalizable relationships among school experiences, student variables, and school satisfaction. The overarching aim of this study is to further investigate the relationship among these personal and contextual variables.

An important area of inquiry might involve evaluating individual differences with regard to one's level of adjustment and how these differences may moderate the relationship between a student's perception of their classroom's community and their

satisfaction with school (Baker, Terry, Bridger, & Winsor, 1997). Consideration of this relationship may be especially pertinent for children considered to be "at-risk" due to behavioral, emotional, and learning difficulties. An awareness of the caring community's effectiveness as a contextual variable contributing to students' academic and emotional growth is particularly important to school psychologists as we are often responsible for adapting components of students' educational programming. There is a need for us to address contextual variables, over which schools and school personnel can have some direct control in order to construct school environments to which students can affiliate and achieve success.

As an orientation toward positive psychology and the developmental contexts of schooling becomes increasingly common in the effective school literature, it will be important for school psychologists to become more aware of and involved with this area of research and practice. This perspective challenges us to consider markers of positive adjustment and encourages us to engage in preventative rather than reactive models of investigation and intervention. School psychologists have the opportunity to play an important role in reframing educational practice in order for schools and classrooms to provide the most advantageous developmental supports for students. Professional roles for school psychologists are continuing to expand (Ysseldyke, Dawson, Lehr, Reschly, Reynolds, Telzrow, 1997). Because of our consultation skills and our knowledge of child development and educational practice, we will be uniquely positioned to lead reform efforts that are sensitive to children's developmental needs and can help cultivate a broad conceptualization of schooling (Baker, et al., 1997).

The proposed study will explore the contribution of students' perceptions of their classroom community to their satisfaction with school and the degree to which this relationship is moderated by their level of adjustment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following pages, the evolution of the contextual variable of the classroom as the caring community will be described and evidence will be provided to support its use as an important variable to study as an effective strategy that benefits students' academic and social-emotional growth. The empirical literature examining school satisfaction as a marker of well being will also be shared. A study will be proposed that investigates the relationship between students' perceptions of their classroom community and their satisfaction with school. The potential moderating effects of students' level of adjustment on school outcomes will also be examined.

Guiding theoretical bases: The evolution of psychological sense of community

The idea that we belong to communities and that these communities provide benefits and responsibilities is one that has gained growing appreciation in the last decade (Bess, Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002). As a reaction to the urbanization faced by many people, globalization, cross-national forms of media and their impact on cultures, physical and social isolation from family and friends, and a growing fear of change and the unknown, images of community, belonging, and support have become paramount. However, what is actually meant by community, how a community functions, and what are the benefits and costs of community membership has not necessarily been well explored.

For many, the idea of community evokes images of the small town or close neighborhood. It is an idealization in place and time of feeling part of a place, with those around knowing us and caring about us. In the past, if the ideal was the village with kinship links or the small town in which people may have lived for generations, the ways in which a community may now form and operate are quite different. Rather than consider communities as solely location-related, *relational* communities are those that have been formed because of some common interest, issue, or characteristic that the members share, showing a newer idea of community (Bess, et al., 2002). The concept of "community" or sense of community has been used by many to describe the aspects of social settings that satisfy people's needs for connection and belonging (Gardener, 1992; Goodenow & Grady, 1992; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Dewey (1916/1970) also believed that students would be helped to acquire the skills, habits, and inclinations necessary for effective participation in a democratic society through the experience of collaborative activities and decision making in schools that themselves were structured as democratic communities.

There is a long tradition of theorizing the nature and meaning of community in the social sciences, particularly in sociology. Many theorists have been interested in defining community and understanding the impact of industrialization, urbanization, and other forces on society and community. For example, Hillery (1955) was able to catalogue 94 different definitions of community. Durkheim (cited by Worsley, 1987) argues that solid social ties are essential to one's well being; the absence of ties with family, community, and other networks increases the risk of negative psychological outcomes.

Sarason (1974) argued persuasively for the need to focus on developing a discipline with the concept of psychological sense of community at its core. Sarason believed that sense of community held the key to understanding one of society's most pressing problems, the dark side of individualism, which he say manifested as alienation, selfishness, and despair (Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2001). According to Sarason (1986), one of the goals of his 1974 book was to communicate three interrelated opinions that he had formed as a result of his work in community mental health: (1) the lack of community was extraordinarily frequent; (2) it was a destructive force in living; and (3) dealing with its consequences and its prevention should be the overarching concern of community psychology. Sarason's work on sense of community provided a unifying metaphor or theme and reflected one of the core values of the field – the belief that healthy communities exhibited an extra-individual quality of emotional interconnectedness of individuals played out in their collective lives (Dalton, et al., 2001).

Perhaps the biggest impact in converting Sarason's theoretical call into some form of reality has been from McMillan & Chavis (1986). In order to understand the ways in which sense of community could actually operate, they proposed a model in which four components of sense of community could be seen and understood. The first level provides the component of membership – a series of interacting factors of boundaries (who is in and who is out), shared history, common symbols, emotional safety, and personal investment. Membership confers upon people a set of rights and responsibilities that are always characterized by the belonging to a community. One draws identity by

being a member of the community, has emotional support, and is reinforced for the behaviors that are beneficial to the functioning of the community itself.

The second level is that of influence. In the McMillan & Chavis (1986) model, influence is seen as an internal process that reflects the perceived influence that a person has over the decisions and actions of the community. It also has the counterpoint of the amount of influence the group has over the individual memberships. In a positive sense, the influence component provides a balance that allows the individual to make their contribution to the community, but also has a reasonable level of freedom for their own self-expression. At the negative end of the continuum, there are two possible outcomes. One is that the influence of the group is so strong that it demands high conformity, suppressing self-expression. The other potential negative is that the individual or a small sub-group can dominate the mores and behaviors of the community.

Integration and fulfillment of needs reflects the benefits that people derive from their membership of a community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) refer to the motivation of reinforcement that members receive by having their needs met through their membership. The authors indicate that some of the needs that can be fulfilled through community membership are the status achieved through group membership, demonstration of competence by members, and the shared values that are exhibited by the group. For them, strong communities can provide these opportunities for their members, thus reinforcing the value of membership in the community.

The final component of the model is shared emotional connection. This part of the model of sense of community refers to the sharing of significant events and the amount of contact that members have with each other. Because the community has had

significant events, whether the members have actually taken part in them, there is a bond that can be developed between the members. The number of events, the salience of these events, and the importance of them in granting merit or status to the community and its members all influence the development of a shared emotional connection between community members. Whether the events are positive or negative, they still have significant impacts on the development of emotional connections between members.

Community oriented approaches to schooling

Involvement in a community is a fundamental human experience that meets emotional needs and helps individuals find a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Some contemporary social theorists (e.g., Etzioni, 1993) have applied this idea to the nature of American schools. Though there is noted variation across studies and disciplines in the conceptual and operational definitions of the sense of community, the construct of classroom as a caring community provides a compelling framework for examining educational practice. First, there has been demonstrated consistency in its basic elements and reported associations. For example, classroom community has been related to teacher satisfaction and feelings of efficacy, as well as student achievement, academic motivation, attachment to school and interpersonal concern and behavior (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1992).

Community-oriented classrooms work differently from traditional American classrooms. In the nineteenth century, American schools became increasingly structured, formalized, and standardized (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). From that time, schools have evolved into institutions with hierarchical administrative structures with formal role

expectations (e.g., principal, vice principal, teacher, teacher assistant) and bureaucratic notions regarding the "business" of education (e.g., report cards a designated number of times a year, bells to mark the beginning and end of each day; Baker, Dilly, & Lacey, 2003). An individual's value is based on his or her ability to "produce" or contribute to the success of the school (Sergiovanni, 1994). Traditional education reflects this formal organizational model as seen through the enduring interest in the "science" of education as evidence through the formal study of the discipline and its tenets by scholars (Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, & Hall, 1994), the emphasis on individual achievement and competition among students (Good & Brophy, 2003), the bureaucratic and rule-governed nature of schooling (Cunningham & Corderio, 2000), and the categorical approach to classifying students and their abilities (Kavale & Forness, 1999). Policy initiatives with an emphasis on teacher accountability, standardized testing with high stakes, school choice, and competition illustrate the model of schools as businesses (Baker et al., 2003).

Community-oriented classrooms use a different model to organize the purpose, functions, and tasks of schooling. By valuing personal relationships and shared goals and values, community-oriented classrooms attempt to be more like families or neighborhoods than businesses. They teach students by placing them in a supportive, intentionally constructed web of relationships (Schaps & Solomon, 1990). In a learning community, each individual is valued as an important part of the community and is committed to a shared purpose with others in that environment (Dewey 1916/1970). Children develop a sense of collectiveness that can provide cohesion and motivate them to participate in community activities.

The community-oriented approach addresses the fact that the traditional model of schooling does not work well for all children or for all teachers (Baker, 1998). The formal structures of school ignore the fact that children enter schools with different developmental capacities and move through the curriculum at different rates of progress. The emphasis on academic study as the primary purpose of schooling ignores the historical mission of schools to socialize children for participation in society (Sizer, 1997). Children need their social, ethical, and civic development nurtured in addition to their academic development. Teachers may value similar ideas found in community-oriented classrooms (e.g., the importance of group cohesion, classroom climate, and prosocial norms), but may not believe these ideas are as important to teach as academic learning or are required to move children through the curriculum at a defined rate that may not allow them to utilize their expertise to adapt their classroom to best support their students' development. Community-oriented classrooms are distinguished by their intentional focus on the development of community in order to accomplish these goals and their reliance on authentic, meaningful social relationships among members of the classroom community as an important vehicle through which learning occurs (Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996).

A community-oriented classroom environment may be especially important for children at risk for poor school outcomes (Howes, 2000). Children who come to school without the social and psychological preparation for learning perform worse on indicators of early school adjustment (i.e., grades, retention, social competence) than peers without such disadvantages (Birch & Ladd, 1997). Some children may not know certain cultural assumptions regarding schooling (e.g., raising one's hand) and may require additional

support from teachers and the social organization of the classroom to learn the school behavior and how to best participate in school. Because of the intentional focus on social-emotional development in these classrooms, community-oriented teachers can also help children understand and affiliate with the school environment by providing more instruction or practice with school routines they might not be familiar with (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Thus, community-oriented experiences at school may provide a compensatory function for children at risk for school failure, helping them feel comfortable with the school's culture and to develop competencies to support school success.

What do educational practices, particularly teaching practices, look like in classrooms described as caring communities? A community-oriented classroom approach employs these theories of community and emphasizes personal relationships as a vehicle for teaching and learning. Students and teachers have a shared sense of why they are in the classroom and how the classroom should function. There is a clear sense that that school is important or that kindness is valued as a core commitment in the classroom. In addition, a community activity is meaningful; members are committed to and actively engaged in pursuit of a goal. Stories about common experiences, such as field trips, might be retold or the class might decide on a class name or mascot. Community is essentially a shared social contract that allows individuals to derive a sense of purpose and meaning within a behavior setting. In community-oriented schools, children feel a sense of belonging, commitment, and shared venture in learning.

What does the research say about caring community-oriented classrooms?

Research suggests that many classrooms still exist as highly structured places dominated by authoritarian teachers where students have few choices and limited opportunities to develop relationships with their peers and teachers (Ames, 1987; Good & Brophy, 1994). As a result, opportunities for students to feel like valued and accepted members of their classroom are not always prevalent in schools (Solomon, Schaps, Watson, & Battistich, 1990). Yet, the need to belong and be accepted can be understood as a basic goal of human behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maslow, 1970), and as such, must be considered important in any classroom environment.

Applying this premise to the classroom, one can hypothesize that students will then choose different behaviors in order to attain a sense of belonging. While many students will choose "appropriate" or acceptable patterns of behavior, there are some students, however, who may not feel that they belong, or even that they can belong, through expected or constructive behavior. These students often resort to misbehaving (Jubala, Bishop, & Falvey, 1995). "Improvement" in student behavior and achievement may occur as a result of the provision of opportunities for success and acceptance so that each student can feel significant and achieve a sense of belonging in the classroom community. In doing so, students will be more inclined to uphold the values and norms exemplified in the classroom setting, to feel better about themselves, and to have opportunities for greater school success (Battitstich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997).

Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi (1992) found that caring community-oriented teachers express greater warmth and supportiveness toward students and spend more time speaking with students about traditionally nonacademic issues (e.g.,

personal and social issues) compared to peers in other elementary schools. While these teachers provide structure, direction, and feedback to children, teachers who value a sense of community in their classrooms tend to facilitate rather than direct learning. For example, this practice might include the use of cooperative strategies and student-directed learning activities (Solomon et al., 1992).

Developmental models of school reform and educational practice that attempt to establish the school as a caring community of learners have evolved. One example is the Child Development Project (CDP; Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, 1991). CDP participation has shown positive effects on children's academic and interpersonal behaviors, attitudes, and motivation (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). CDP regards teachers' classroom behavior, including their warmth and supportiveness, the degree to which they promote cooperation among students, their elicitation of students' critical thinking and problem-solving, the emphasis on prosocial values, and a low use of extrinsic behavior control as vitally important to overall student development and growth. This teacher behavior, in turn, influences students' classroom behavior, as potentially measured by academic engagement and positive interpersonal behavior. A student's engaged and positive behavior will likely lead to perceptions of a sense of school community which in turn results in positive school-related outcomes, including enjoyment of class, increased learning motivation, concern for others, and conflict resolution skills (Solomon, et al., 1992).

To illustrate their local findings, CDP researchers conducted an extensive examination was conducted in schools from six districts across the United States – three on the West Coast, one in the South, one in the Southeast, and one in the Northeast –

(Solomon, Battistich, Watson, Schaps, & Lewis, 2000). They tested the effect of program participation by estimating a path from a dichotomous indicator of program status to teacher practices (with baseline scores controlled), and tested the effect on student outcome variables by estimating a path from sense of community to the thirteen measured outcomes (with outcome scores at baseline controlled as well). Their findings clearly indicate that participation in CDP has positive effects on teachers' classroom practices, that these practices in turn influenced students' sense of community, and that these changes in sense of community brought about desirable changes in a range of student outcomes including academic attitudes (e.g., liking for school ($p < .01$), enjoyment of class ($p < .001$), enjoyment of reading ($p < .01$)), academic motivation (e.g., task orientation ($p < .01$), engagement in school ($p < .01$)), and academic behaviors (e.g., reading in school ($p < .01$), reading outside of school ($p < .01$)).

More recently, CDP researchers examined the effects of their elementary school program by following up with CDP students in middle school and assessing their social adjustment and connectedness to school (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004). Six program and six matched comparison elementary schools were studied and 1,246 students participated in this follow-up study. Three of the program elementary schools were in the "high implementation" group and three were in the "low implementation" group during the study. Findings indicated that, study wide, 40% of the outcome variables examined during middle school showed differences favoring program students and no statistical reliable differences favoring comparison students. Among the "high implementation" group, 65% of the outcome variables showed differences favoring

program students, including higher academic performance and more prosocial abilities than their matched comparison students.

While the CDP's investigators did not explicitly illustrate the concept of "community" as an organizing principle for the project at its inception, they assert it was implicitly present as the program's initial, general aim. By their later definition, a classroom or school is experienced as a community when its members (a) know, care about, and support one another, and (b) have the opportunity to participate actively in classroom decision making, planning, and goal setting. This definition shares with others (e.g., Noddings, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1994) an emphasis on interpersonal concern and shared norms, however, it is fairly distinctive among researchers focusing on schools as communities in its emphasis on the role of students and their participation in setting the group's norms and directions and participating actively in school life (Solomon et al., 1996). This view of community advocated by the CDP for students is that of a democratic community, similar to that definition espoused by Dewey (1970/1916). Additionally, because of this broadened sense of community and its civic responsibilities, students will come to understand through direct experience the importance of the values of fairness, caring, and responsibility to life in a democratic society. As a result, Schaps and Solomon (1990) indicate that building community increases schools' effectiveness in fostering students' intellectual, social, and moral development.

In other reports (Battistich, Schaps, Watson, & Solomon, 1996; Battistich & Hom, 1997) CDP has described cross-sectional findings showing elementary school students' sense of community to be related to a broad range of positive student outcomes including

liking for school, academic attitudes and motivation, sense of self-efficacy, conflict resolution skills, prosocial motivation, and reduced drug use and delinquent behavior.

Psychological theories related to classroom as community

Theoretical and empirical support for community approaches to schooling can be provided by many psychological theories of human development and learning. Theories and evidence that inform the connection between learning environments and students' psychological and academic experience will be elaborated on briefly. Although conceptualized differently by various research traditions, there is a growing convergence in the literature about the importance of social and relational constructs such as a child's sense of relatedness (Connell, 1990), belongingness (Goodenow, 1993), perceived pedagogical caring (Wentzel, 1998), or positive teacher-child relationships (Pianta, 1999) as contributors to school success (Baker, 2006).

Behavior and learning result from the child's integration of skills across various domains of functioning (i.e., social, emotional, cognitive) within the context of and in response to the social environment (Rogoff, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, development cannot be viewed in isolation but rather exists as a result of the child's interaction with the social world. Understanding of the importance of school and classroom contexts is shaped by ecological systems theory. Systems theory has a long history in the understanding of biological, ecological, and other complex living systems (Pianta, 1999). The principles of ecological systems theory emphasize that developmental outcomes are influenced by progressively complex, reciprocal, and dynamic interactions between individuals and their environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In other words,

understanding the social and academic behavior of a child is improved by knowing how that child relates to his or her teacher and his or her peers in the context of what the teacher is trying to accomplish in the classroom and the norms established within the setting. High levels of support and nurturance from contextual variables (e.g., classroom community) in the social environment will foster academic and social-emotional development and may protect students from potential difficulty (Masten, 1994).

Many studies of relational constructs have their roots in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982). From an attachment theory perspective, children require caring relationships to develop the complex behavioral, emotional, and social cognitive competencies that foster adaptation to schooling and academic and emotional growth (Bowlby, 1982). Studies have clearly delineated that at all stages of development, the presence of key attachments to influential individuals underlie the development of competence and personal adjustment (Carslon & Stroufe, 1995; Masten, 1994). Children without secure relationship experiences also face a number of potential mental health and school adjustment problems (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). The importance of personal connections with others and having safety needs met is evident not only in attachment theory, but also other theories of child development as well (i.e., Erickson, 1963; Maslow, 1970).

The importance of personal connections has been illusrtared in current school research as well. For example, Hamre & Pianta (2001) found that the teacher child-relationship was able to predict student school performance, as measured by grades and standardized test scores. This relationship also appeared to predict behavioral adjustment (e.g., work habits, disciplinary actions) through middle school. Additionally, feelings of

relatedness to teachers are associated with a variety of positive school attitudes among adolescents, (Baker, 2006; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996; Wentzel, 1998), including motivation, expectations for success, school satisfaction and interest, as well as students' sense of academic self-efficacy. Therefore, the acknowledged and supported importance of these connections to one's teacher and peers supports the examination of the classroom as a community.

Vygotskian perspectives on learning also note the critical importance of the responsiveness of the student's environment toward the acquisition of complex thinking and problem solving skills (Vygotsky, 1978). That is, learning and cognitive development are promoted through interaction with the environment and the individuals in that environment. Teachers that organize their instructional practices to include and highlight interaction with others promote the development of relationships. These relationships likely permit a meaningful commitment to academic work and should allow students a greater chance to reach their academic and affective potential. Although different in their emphases, social and contextual theories maintain that children acquire increasingly complex cognitive and social competencies through shared or mediated experiences with significant others. An environment supports individual development when it provides interesting and challenging experiences in the presence of a competent guide who can nurture the child's involvement and help sustain the acquisition and consolidation of skills. Community-oriented classrooms enhance development by constructing the social context of the classroom so that it adequately builds on children's emerging personal and social abilities. For example, teachers might teach specific skills each day or include a class meeting in which social concerns are addressed. An

important goal of community-oriented classrooms is to provide optimal support for the consolidation of key cognitive, social, and civic skills early in schooling to enhance adaptation to school and successful school learning.

Lastly, self-determination theory guides understandings of children's developmental needs as well. This theory hypothesizes that individuals have three fundamental psychological needs: to be meaningfully connected to and engaged with others, to have developmentally appropriate choice and self-direction, and to perceive themselves as competent in their endeavors (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Students are intrinsically motivated to engage in activities that optimally challenge and fulfill these fundamental needs according to self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Schools and classrooms then, that afford opportunities for students to satisfy these needs are likely to be perceived as positive psychological environments (Baker, Davis, Dilly, Aupperlee, & Patil, 2002) and, as a result, more caring communities. The development of caring communities should facilitate student engagement, persistence, and eventual academic outcomes.

Using the existing theoretical and research literature, it would seem that school practices that try to enhance children's meaningful connections to others within the school environment, those methods that enhance children's sense of competence as learners, and the promotion of a sense of autonomy and self-direction are associated with positive school attitudes. Classrooms in which authentic communities are developed promote children's interest in school and their academic attainment. They also provide a place for students to practice decision-making and self-autonomous behavior and the potential to increase their intrinsic motivation. Classrooms that have established a caring

community foster academic and personal development by attending to this broader social context of learning. The degree to which schools structure the classroom environment to both meet and enhance psychological and social needs has a critical effect on children's development and adaptation to schooling.

School satisfaction research

Positive school adjustment has been predominantly measured by successful achievement outcomes. However, students' attitudes and beliefs are more proximal outcomes of their interactions with school structures and may be better able to predict eventual school-related behaviors such as achievement. One such measure of positive school attitudes is school satisfaction. School satisfaction is defined as the subjective cognitive appraisal of the quality of school life (Huebner, 1994). It is grounded in the theoretical work on children's life satisfaction (i.e., Huebner, 1991a), as one aspect of subjective well being.

Individual's positive experience of their lives constitutes their subjective well being. Consistent with positive psychology, subjective well being does not only refer to the absence of psychopathological symptoms, but also to positive indicators, such as happiness and life satisfaction (Huebner, 1997). The subjective well being construct contains both affective and cognitive components (Diener, 1984). Life satisfaction is a cognitive assessment of quality of life according to an individual's own standards (Shin & Johnson, 1978). While life satisfaction is correlated with affect, it is not a direct measure of emotion and focuses on the cognitive aspect of subjective well being. Huebner (1994) presents a five domain-based components of life satisfaction for

children: school, family, friends, living environment, and self. Children are able to distinguish between the multiple domains that contribute to their global life satisfaction, including a dimension that considers a child's school satisfaction. While multidimensional assessment measures may prove most useful in applied contexts, the majority of life satisfaction research to date has focused on global life satisfaction measures. In this study, school satisfaction will be used as it may allow for greater sensitivity to differences in the specific domain of school that may be masked by global reports.

Research has shown that this subjective appraisal of satisfaction has an influence on the students' acceptance of educational values, motivation, and commitment to school (Goodenow & Grady, 1992). On the other hand, dissatisfaction with school is associated with many poor outcomes for students. Negative school experiences for students may result in their unhappiness, alienation, and disengagement from their education (Fine, 1986). Most students who drop out of school vehemently dislike school and have the belief that their school has actively rejected them (Baker, Derrer, Davis, Dinklage-Travis, Linder, & Nicholson, 2001). Most of this research has been conducted with high school students, and as a result, relatively little is know about school satisfaction among groups of younger, elementary school aged students. Overall, the evidence suggests that several child and adolescent self-report measures of life satisfaction display substantial validity for research purposes with children over the age of eight (Bender, 1997; Gilman & Huebner, 2000).

Additionally, there is little research that considers students' level of school satisfaction as a positive attitudinal indicator of adjustment. Existing studies tend to

focus on students who are not satisfied with school. Low school satisfaction is associated with multiple negative outcomes and behaviors in students. Low school satisfaction is positively correlated with disruptive behavior and absenteeism (Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Wright & Jesness, 1981). Students' school satisfaction also influences students educational plans to continue in school or dropout before graduating from high school (Ainley, et al., 1991). Further, students' satisfaction with school appears to decline as a student progresses through school (Epstein & McPartland, 1976; Okun, Braver, & Weir, 1990). Okun et al., (1990) noted that school satisfaction declines between kindergarten and eighth grade before leveling off in grades nine through twelve. Understanding the individual influences of these factors in contributing to school satisfaction could prove informative in promoting and encouraging children's well being.

Life events and experiences. Positive and negative experiences, including those both chronic and acute in nature, influence life satisfaction reports. McCullough, Huebner, & Laughlin (2000) found that positive daily experiences were the most crucial among these contributors ($r = .40$) to adolescent positive global life satisfaction. Further, the cumulative effects of daily experiences were more influential than major life events, positive or negative. Support for the influence of multiple life contexts was provided by Ash & Huebner (2001), who reported that adolescent life satisfaction was uniquely related to a variety of ongoing life experiences in the family, peer, and school environments. The relationship between life satisfaction and positive environmental experiences has also been demonstrated. For example, Gilman (2001) reported that school satisfaction was associated positively with participation in structured

extracurricular activities (SEAs). SEAs were defined as discretionary activities that are physically and/or mentally stimulating that contain structural parameters (e.g., peer tutoring, athletic teams, volunteering). These activities were differentiated from those containing little structure, in which the individual is passive or a nonparticipant (i.e., television viewing). Adolescents who participated in greater numbers of SEAs also reported higher school satisfaction than students who participated in very few or no activities. Also, Maton (1990) reported a positive relationship between SEA participation and global life satisfaction among a group of adolescents at risk for school dropout.

Personal Characteristics. Personal characteristics appear to relate to students' ratings of life satisfaction. One of the most significant correlates of global life satisfaction is an individual's global self-esteem, with correlations in the .40-.60 range among U.S. students (Adelman, Taylor, & Nelson, 1989; Dew & Huebner, 1994; Gilman, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000; Huebner, 1991a, Huebner & Alderman, 1993; Terry & Huebner, 1995). The relationship is lower among children from some other countries (Leung & Zhang, 2000; Neto, 1993), suggesting that cultural influences may moderate this relationship. Similar constructs, such as self-reliance and self-efficacy, have also consistently been associated with life satisfaction (Gilman et al., 2000; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001; McCullough et al., 2000; Neto, 1993). Another strong correlate of global life satisfaction is internal locus of control (Adelman et al., 1989; Ash & Huebner, 2001; Dew & Huebner, 1994; Gilman et al., 2000; Huebner & Alderman, 1993; Greespoon & Saklofske, 1997; Smith, Adelman, Nelson, Taylor, & Phares, 1987). With respect to temperament, life satisfaction relates positively to extraversion and negatively

to neuroticism (Fogle, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2002; Heaven, 1989; Huebner, 1991b). Although the correlational data preclude causal inferences, one study suggested that extraverted students develop greater social self-efficacy, thus mediating their life satisfaction. Further, low neuroticism may afford students protection against adverse situations (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001). Levels of social interest (i.e. prosocial disposition) have also been related to global satisfaction. Although motivational factors have been neglected in youth life satisfaction research, Gilman (2001) reported that students with higher social interest also reported significantly higher life satisfaction than students with little or no social interest. Additionally, grades were not correlated with school satisfaction for adolescents (Dew & Huebner, 1994).

Health and risk behaviors. Life satisfaction can be related to various health and risk behaviors as well. Studies have shown that nicotine, marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol use were significantly associated with reduced life satisfaction among adolescents (Newcomb, Bentler, & Collins, 1986; Raphael, Rukholm, Brown, Hill-Bailey, & Donato, 1996; Zullig, Valios, Huebner, & Drane, 2001). In addition, average age of initial use of these substances (i.e., thirteen years or younger) was significantly related to lower life satisfaction (Zullig et al., 2001). Lower life satisfaction has also been associated with higher rates of weapon carrying, drinking and driving, being injured or threatened with a weapon and physical fighting (Valios, Zullig, Huebner, & Drane, 2001). Global life satisfaction has also been shown to be associated negatively with a number of mood related disorders. Depression shares a robust relationship with life satisfaction, with correlations ranging between the .50-.60 range across various age ranges (Adelman et al.,

1989; Gilman, et al., 2000; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997; Neto, 1993). Relatedly, negative relationships between global life satisfaction and measures of anxiety (Gilman et al., 2000; Greenspoon & Saklofske, 1997; Huebner, 1991a, 1991b; Neto, 1993) and social stress have been reported (Gilman et al., 2000; Huebner, Drane, & Valios, 2000; Neto, 1993).

Demographic variables. Consistent with research on adults' life satisfaction, demographic variables do not account for much variance in school satisfaction in child samples. Variables such as age, gender, parent occupational status, and parent marital status are not significantly correlated with children's life satisfaction in children (Diener, 1984; Huebner, 1991a; Okun et al., 1990). However, children's socioeconomic status and race show moderate correlations with children's life satisfaction (Dew & Huebner, 1994; Terry & Huebner, 1995). African-American children tend to report lower levels of life satisfaction than Caucasian children (Dew & Huebner, 1994; Terry & Huebner, 1995). Children with higher socioeconomic status also tend to show higher global life satisfaction (Dew & Huebner, 1994), however, the researchers note that there may have been interactions between race and socioeconomic status within the sample that contributed to these findings.

Support variables. Although there is little research on the relationship between school satisfaction and students' assessment of personal support in school, students' perceptions of support is related to other outcome indicators of positive adjustment. For

example, Baker (1998) considered teacher-student relationships as related to school satisfaction and found children's school satisfaction was positively correlated with caring, supportive relationships with their teachers. Children who have more friends and higher quality friendships score higher on measures of life satisfaction, possibly because an increase in friendship provides more opportunities for social support (Huebner & Alderman, 1993). However, children's friends are weak contributors to life satisfaction in general (Ash & Huebner, 1998; Huebner, 1991). Huebner (1994) also found a small negative correlation between a child's school satisfaction and their satisfaction with friends. In addition, students whose peers have positive attitudes toward school have more positive attitudes toward themselves (Epstein, 1981). Isherwood & Hammah (1981) found that the effect of peers' attitudes on a student's school satisfaction may change if they are peers of the student inside and outside of school.

Individual differences: Diversity in the classroom

In addition to the changing landscape of American schools and their purposes and practices, classroom and school diversity is increasing (Baker, Kamphaus, Horne, & Winsor, 2006). While racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences are more often noted, students are also distinguished by their degree of behavioral variability within the classroom setting. The wide spectrum of students served in the general education setting and their varying degrees of behavioral performance creates great challenges for schools and teachers as they attempt to meet the needs of their students.

Children whose emotional and social development is not progressing typically or favorably may manifest internalizing (e.g., depressive-like or anxious behavior, crying,

clinginess) and externalizing (e.g., aggression, temper outbursts, hyperactivity) disorders which exhibit specific patterns and set these children apart from their peers. It is well documented that children with behavior and/or learning problems are at considerable risk for poor school adjustment (Mash & Dozois, 1996). These students tend to have more than their share of negative experiences in school, and are often deprived of the self-esteem that accrues from the successful mastery of learning and relationships. As a result, they can become embroiled in negative spirals of school failure and dissatisfaction.

In contrast to the medical model inherent in the categorical approaches used to currently identify and service children in schools, Baker et al. (2006) note that population-based models developed within the public health arena provide alternatives for service provision in schools (Albee & Gullotta, 1997; Steinberg & Silverman, 1987). Kamphaus and his colleagues (Kamphaus, Huberty, Distefano, & Petosky, 1997) demonstrated that seven distinctive patterns of behavioral adjustment, characterized by unique configurations of behavioral assets and deficits are typically demonstrated in American classrooms (the development of these behavioral clusters will be described in more detail in the Methods section). More recently, this typology of normal behavioral variability was tested against markers of school success (Baker et al., 2006). These data suggest that students' behavioral profiles are associated with predictable patterns of educational attainment and adjustment in the school community. These findings provide some validation that a population-based, person-oriented approach can be used within schools to represent children's adjustment. Additionally, the academic performance of the seven behavioral clusters can be categorized by three levels of educational risk – those showing very low levels of educational risk due to typical or above average

performance on school achievement and adjustment variables, those at moderate risk due to mild learning or behavior related problems, and children at high risk of school failure due to significant academic deficits, poor school performance, and pervasive and severe behavior problems.

Approaches that facilitate the restructuring of classrooms in order to help schools identify the broad range of variability in classrooms and that array services in appropriate and timely ways will assist teachers to adequately address heterogeneous student needs (Baker et al., 2006). Studies that acknowledge this diversity and attempt to consider the continuum of student functioning in classrooms will provide useful and meaningful information, for research and practice purposes, on student well being and development. Conceptualizing problems along this type of continuum may provide more efficient ways for schools and researchers to improve the social, emotional, and academic competence of all children.

This type of "restructured" classroom would seem to be of particular importance for children at-risk for school difficulty. By the time children get to third grade, we assume they have acquired an acceptable set of social competencies that foster adaptation to and success in school. These skills include valuing social exchange, trusting adults, willingness to take risks, and age-appropriate self-regulatory skills. Children with behavioral difficulties, particularly externalizing behavioral difficulties, often perceive environmental events as more threatening and lack social-cognitive and behavioral skills to mediate conflict (Lochman, White, & Wayland, 1991).

The establishment of a caring community in one's classroom may be differentially important for children with varying behavioral profiles, as suggested by the

extant literature. For example, Baker (2006) notes the Hughes, Cavell, & Jackson (1999) study that states that a positive relationship with one's teacher is related to decreases in externalizing problems among highly aggressive children. Additionally, caring relationships with teachers strongly predict school satisfaction among low-income, African-American children who express alienation from school (Baker, 1998). Considering this research, it is likely that the nature of children's developmental problems affects their ability to negotiate and benefit from supportive and warm classroom environments. Behavioral difficulties, whether they be internalizing or externalizing, often reflect difficulties with self-regulation and organization and can deeply affect children's abilities to negotiate social relationships (Lezak, 1995). Children with learning disabilities also show poorer academic and social emotional outcomes than their peers (Lyon, 1996).

Proposed study

While the findings of the research examining classrooms as caring communities as a predictor variable have yielded interesting findings and have been associated with positive outcomes for students, there are a number of reasons for continued research in this area. First, this is still a relatively new area of investigation – the existing literature referring to classrooms as caring communities dates back to the 1990s. Or, as is the case of the Child Development Project studies, it is the program's developers and implementers who are examining the concept of classroom as caring community. Further research is needed to systematically identify aspects of educational practice and other

attitudinal indicators of school adjustment that contribute to students' sense of classroom community.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the degree to which classroom community predicts the level of satisfaction a student has with school. Further, the potentially moderating effects of student level of adjustment on this relationship between caring community and school satisfaction were examined. This investigation focused on third, fourth, and fifth grade students. Clarifying the role of adjustment in this relationship has practical and theoretical importance because the role that one's level of adjustment plays has implications for the design of individual and classroom level interventions.

The sense of belonging to or alienation from school as measured by the student's sense of classroom community may be the psychological manifestation of a goodness of fit between the school's social environment and individual differences in social-emotional development. Adherence to norms at school likely depends on a child's ability to derive shared meaning from and to value the social context of school. It was hypothesized that children with significant behavior and/or learning problems would show poorer school adjustment that typically developing peers, and that those individuals experiencing their classroom as caring would show improved school functioning. That is, it is expected that the contribution of a supportive classroom community to students' appraisal of the quality of their school life would be more advantageous for student with behavioral and/or academic problems.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants

The sample was drawn from a longitudinal study of elementary aged students and their teachers from three schools in a southern city in the United States (Project Act Early; Baker, Horne, & Kamphaus, 1999). The current sample included 689 students in the third through fifth grades. Within this sample, there were 322 boys and 367 girls. The ethnic composition of the study sample was representative of the participating schools (57% African American, 31% Caucasian, 4% Other, and 8% Hispanic).

All participants were students at Title I schools. Therefore, this population of students is considered to be "at-risk." Over 90% of the potential participants in the three schools were involved in the Act Early project. All participating students had active parental consent and were informed they could withdraw support at any time. It is notable that within this sample, race and SES were crossed with an overrepresentation of low-income and African American students. Because of the longitudinal nature of this study, some children possessed multiple years of data. When this occurred, one year of data was selected at random for each child after blocking by grade.

Procedure

All student participants had active parental consent. Students completed self-report measures in the fall and spring of the school year. Students were administered

confidential questionnaires by trained research assistants in their classrooms. The voluntary nature of their participation was discussed with students prior to the questionnaire administration; all participating students elected to complete the measures. Non-participating students were provided with an activity sheet to complete during the questionnaire administration. The questionnaires were projected via an overhead projector and read aloud to control for reading differences among the students. The measures were administered in a counter-balanced order between classes to control for possible testing effects.

Teachers completed a standardized behavior rating scale for each participating child in their classroom during the mid to late fall. Teacher participants provided informed consent and received a small stipend for their participation. Student subgroups were determined from this data.

Measures

Classroom community. Children's perceptions of their classroom as a supportive, caring community were measured using the Vessels Classroom Climate Survey (Vessels, 1998). The survey consists of thirty-two items that were answered according to a four point Likert scale.

School satisfaction. This measure was a modified version of the school subscale of the Multidimensional Student Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994), a scale that assesses one aspect of positive subject well being in children. The MSLSS measures five discrete domains of life satisfaction in children in grades three through

eight using a four-point Likert type scale. The eight-item school subscale measures children's cognitive appraisal of satisfaction with school.

Standardized behavior rating scales. The Behavior Assessment System for Children Teacher Rating Scales for Children (BASC TRS-C, Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992), a standardized measure on which teachers rated the frequency of both problem and adaptive behaviors on a four-point scale, was used to measure the students' problem and adaptive behaviors. The BASC is a nationally standardized, reliable, and valid measure that yields nine problem behavior scales (Aggression, Conduct problems, Hyperactivity, Anxiety, Depression, Somatization, Attention problems, Learning problems, and Atypicality) and four adaptive behavior scales (Adaptability, Leadership, Social skills, and Study skills) as well as composite scores. Standard scores with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10 are generated and describe children's level of adjustment.

Empirically derived student profiles of behavioral adjustment can be obtained from the BASC-TRS (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). Kamphaus et al., (1997) conducted cluster analyses of BASC data and their work resulted in the creation of seven typologies of child behavior characterized by intensity and type of behavior problems and competencies. In these previous analyses, a two-step clustering method consisting of a Ward's hierarchical agglomerative method followed by an iterative K means procedure was used to derive possible cluster solutions. The seven cluster solution was selected based on an examination of the discreteness and parsimony of the solution and internal validation analyses. The seven clusters were interpreted based on research and theory from developmental psychopathology and normal behavioral development. Initial external validity was assessed using a subsample for which BASC parent ratings of

behavior were available (i.e., the "yoked" sample from the norming sample, please see Huberty, DiStefano, & Kamphaus, 1997 and Kamphaus et al., 1997 for a detailed description of cluster analytic procedures, internal validation, and assignment to clusters).

In order to describe patterns of normal variability within this general education sample, each child was assigned to one of the seven empirically derived types using the algorithms from previous cluster analyses of the normative BASC-TRS data. The seven clusters of child behavior are characterized by differences in the level and type of behavior problems and behavioral competencies. These clusters are: Well Adapted, Average, Disruptive Behavior Problem, Learning Problems, Physical Complaints/Worry, General Problems Severe, and Mildly Disruptive. Percentages of students categorized into each of the seven clusters for this sample and for the nationally normed BASC-TRS sample from the Kamphaus et al. (1997) study is included (Figure One).

Students in the Well Adapted cluster show strong behavioral competencies that promote school adjustment (i.e., high T scores on the adaptive scales of the BASC-TRS). This profile of strong behavioral assets is coupled with low to average levels of problem behaviors (i.e., low to expected T scores on the problem behavior scales). Average cluster students possess "typical" profiles; they exhibit few behavioral problems, but lack the behavioral strengths seen in the Well Adapted cluster. Students within the Disruptive Behavior Problem cluster demonstrate significant and pervasive externalizing behavior problems such as aggression and conduct problems, learning related problems, and significant deficits in adaptive skills such as social skills and adaptability. The Learning Problems cluster contains students who possess significant deficits in the areas of achievement, inattention, and study skills; they also exhibit behavioral competency

deficits. Students with mild internalizing problems, such as slightly elevated anxiety T-scores, and complaints about bodily aches and pains are categorized in the Physical Complaints/Worry cluster. Students described as Mildly Disruptive demonstrate slight elevations on the Hyperactivity and Aggression subscales of the BASC. Lastly, students within the General Problems Severe cluster were rated as having the most significant problems by their teacher. Their behavioral deficits are pervasive across all areas of adjustment.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to further describe the sample and measures. Correlations were used to describe the bivariate relationships between classroom community and the other variables. Regression analyses were used to estimate the amount of variance that each of the independent variables (Classroom Community, Level of adjustment) contributed to student perception of classroom community. Visual inspection of the data and regression diagnostics were evaluated to assure that there were no violations of assumptions or problems with multicollinearity among the independent variables in the model. Additionally, the ample sample size of this study (689 students) provided an adequate number of subjects and sufficient power to conduct multiple regression analyses (Green, 1991).

The research questions regarding the moderation of the relationship between classroom community and student school outcomes (school satisfaction) were tested via regression analyses using generalized linear modeling (GLM). In the current study, teachers rated multiple children within their classrooms. GLM allows for the control of

the possible correlations among the residuals in the analyses caused by the nested nature of the data (i.e., child nested within the classroom). Moderation effects were tested and examined using the procedures recommended by Baron & Kenny (1986). The classroom community scale was mean centered and interactions between it and each level of behavioral risk were created.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

For these analyses, regressions were computed for the outcome variable (school satisfaction) with level of risk utilized as a moderator variable. As described in the Methods section, because teachers rated multiple children within their classrooms with the BASC-TRS, general linear modeling (GLM) was used to correct for possible correlations among the residuals attributable to the nested nature of the data (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). For that reason, the child's teacher was entered as a random factor in the model. Additionally, all of the main and interaction effects in the regression equations were entered simultaneously. The continuous independent variable (classroom community) was mean centered (Aiken & West, 1991). Centering requires one to subtract the mean from a variable, leaving deviation scores for the statistical analyses. Centered variables allow for slopes to be calculated when evaluating interactions. For the regression equation involving the three levels of risk, students at the low level of risk (i.e., students in the well-adapted and average clusters) served as the reference group. The regression analyses were then examined to evaluate the relative contribution of each predictor and to interpret the simple slopes if moderator effects were found. Visual inspection of the data and tests of univariate normality suggested no significant violations of assumptions. Skewness and kurtosis ranges were acceptable. No problems with multicollinearity were detected.

The assignment of students to both behavioral cluster and level of risk are available in Table One and Figure One. In the table, the national sampling provided by Kamphaus et al. (1997) is also included. As described earlier, Kamphaus and colleagues

Table 1

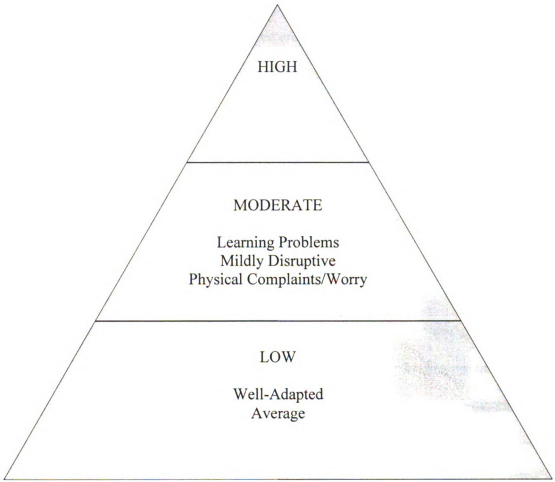
Percentage of students in behavioral clusters in the current sample

Cluster Name and Number	**Current Sample**	**National Sample***
1. Well-adapted	23	34
2. Average	20	19
3. Disruptive behavior problems	16	8
4. Learning problems	11	12
5. Physical complaints/Worry	8	11
6. General problems-severe	3	4
7. Mildly disruptive	17	12

*From Kamphaus, et al. (1997)

Figure 1

Level of Educational Risk



Low Level – Students with good school adjustment (296 students)

Moderate Level – Students with some adjustment problems (251 students)

High Level – Students with many and severe adjustment problems (133 students)

derived these behavioral clusters that were recently validated (i.e., Baker et al., 2006) as able to appropriately capture the range of behavioral variability with the population of schools serving children considered at risk. Visual inspection of this table shows that this study's current sample differed in a couple of important ways from the Kamphaus et al. (1997) national sample in terms of cluster assignment. First, there was an overrepresentation in this current investigation of mild and severe externalizing problems relative to the national study (Clusters Three and Seven). Additionally, there was an under-representation of students with strong behavioral assets (Cluster One).

The first hypothesis was that classroom community would affect the attitudinal indicator of school satisfaction for third through fifth grade students. A correlation matrix for these two study variables is presented in Table Two. A statistically significant correlation was found between classroom community and school satisfaction and was in the expected direction. Table Three displays the means and standard deviations for the classroom community and school satisfaction variables.

To test for moderation, a series of regression analysis procedures specified by Baron and Kenny (1986) were performed. School satisfaction, the dependent variable, was regressed on classroom community, the independent variable, which determined the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. School satisfaction was also regressed on level of adjustment, the moderator variable, which determined the effect of the moderator variable on the dependent variable. School satisfaction was regressed on the product of classroom community and level of adjustment as well. This analysis determined the interaction effect of the independent and moderator variables on the dependent variable. Moderator effects are indicated by a statistically significant

Table 2

Correlations for study variables

	Classroom Community	**School Satisfaction**
Vessels (Classroom Community)	1	.517**
MSLSS (School Satisfaction)	.517**	1

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for classroom community and school satisfaction variables

	Classroom Community	**School Satisfaction**
N	526	568
Mean	49.84	11.97
Standard Deviation	14.631	4.629

interaction effect of the independent and moderator variables on the dependent variable, whereas their independent effects are controlled.

Results of the regression procedures and the testing for moderation are presented in Table Four. Regression analyses indicated that there was a statistically significant main effect of classroom community on school satisfaction, that level of adjustment did not have statistically significant effect on level of school satisfaction, and that there was no statistically significant interaction effect of perceived classroom community and level of adjustment on the school satisfaction ratings of third through fifth grade students. That is, there was no moderating effect of level of adjustment on the relationship between classroom community and school satisfaction for this sample of students. Thus, the findings did not support the hypothesis that level of behavioral adjustment would serve as a moderator of the relationship between classroom community and a student's satisfaction with school.

Regarding the first hypothesis, student ratings of classroom community accounted for a significant, but small amount of variance in the regression predicting students' school satisfaction with a η^2 of .111 [e.g., effect sizes of .15 are considered medium, whereas effect sizes of at least .35 are deemed large (Cohen, 1988, p. 413)]. One's level of behavioral adjustment or risk, however, did not contribute to positive school adjustment, as measured by school satisfaction. As noted, interaction effects or a moderating effect on the relationship were not found.

It was originally determined not to run regression analyses by behavioral cluster. It was thought that the use of level of educational risk as a moderator variable would provide a simple and efficient way to consider and conceptualize the social and emotional

Table 4

Regression analyses predicting school satisfaction from classroom community and level of risk (as moderator variable)

	F	**p value**	η^2
Classroom Community	57.41	.000	.111
Level Two	1.538	.215	.003
Level Three	.334	.563	.001
Classroom Community x Level Two	.028	.866	.000
Classroom Community x Level Three	.078	.780	.000

Level One (Reference Group) = Well-adapted, Average clusters

Adjusted R squared = .279

competence of all children and would eliminate concerns about the specificity of behavioral cluster [i.e., the probability that girls are more likely to experience internalizing behavioral difficulties and that boys tend to be over-represented in the conduct problem groups (Mash & Barkley, 1996)]. Moreover, because of the number of teachers involved, analyses by behavioral cluster would mean the loss of valuable degrees of freedom. When no moderating effect was found at risk level, however, regression analyses were subsequently run at the behavioral profile level in addition to level of risk. For the regression using behavioral clusters, the average group (Cluster Two) served as the reference group for the analysis.

Results of the regression procedures and the testing for moderation utilizing behavioral cluster are presented in Table Five. Regression analyses indicated that there was still a fairly strong, statistically significant main effect of classroom community on school satisfaction. None of the behavioral clusters, however, had a statistically significant effect on a student's level of school satisfaction. Additionally, there were no statistically significant interaction effects of perceived classroom community and behavioral cluster on the students' judgment of their satisfaction with school. Again, no moderating effect of behavioral typology on the relationship between classroom community and school satisfaction exists for this sample of students.

Lastly, Table Six presents the regression analysis predicting school satisfaction from classroom community and behavioral cluster with no interaction effect entered into the model. Classroom community accounted for a significant amount of variance in the regression predicting students' school satisfaction with a η^2 of .231, a moderate effect size. None of the behavioral clusters, however, contributed to the variance in this model.

Table 5

Regression analyses predicting school satisfaction from classroom community and behavioral cluster (as moderator variable)

	F	**p value**	η^2
Classroom Community	35.224	.000	.072
Cluster One	.103	.748	.000
Cluster Three	.097	.756	.000
Cluster Four	2.659	.104	.006
Cluster Five	.006	.937	.000
Cluster Six	.070	.792	.000
Cluster Seven	.987	.321	.002
Classroom Community x Cluster One	.160	.689	.000
Classroom Community x Cluster Three	.359	.550	.001
Classroom Community x Cluster Four	.640	.424	.001
Classroom Community x Cluster Five	.228	.633	.001
Classroom Community x Cluster Six	.051	.822	.000
Classroom Community x Cluster Seven	.668	.414	.001

Cluster Two (Reference Group) = Average cluster

Adjusted R squared = .275

Table 6

Regression analyses predicting school satisfaction from classroom community and behavioral cluster

	F	**p value**	η^2
Classroom Community	137.844	.000	.231
Cluster One	.084	.772	.000
Cluster Three	.041	.839	.000
Cluster Four	2.735	.099	.006
Cluster Five	.001	.975	.000
Cluster Six	.180	.671	.000
Cluster Seven	.970	.325	.002

Cluster Two (Reference Group) = Average cluster

Adjusted R squared = .279

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the degree to which classroom community predicted the level of satisfaction a student has with school. Further, it was to test potentially moderating effects of level of behavioral adjustment on the association between classroom community and school satisfaction. As expected, classroom community contributed positively to the school satisfaction ratings of students in the present study. The more likely students were to express feeling their classroom was community-oriented, the more likely they were to report being satisfied with school. This finding echoes the modest to moderate relationships that were found in previous studies examining the relationship between environmental variables and school satisfaction outcomes in children and adolescents (e.g., Baker, 1998). In the present study, the positive relationship was quite robust. It would seem then, that the classroom community variable holds promise as a developmental context that may affect positive school adaptation for urban, elementary aged school children. Of course, the relatively modest effect sizes generated for each model suggest that classroom community is only one of many factors that contribute to students' school satisfaction and that other variables should be included in the utilization and measurement of school satisfaction as an attitudinal indicator.

But, why does community appear to be an important factor in promoting students' educational resiliency? Students' experiences of fulfillment or frustration of their needs for belonging, autonomy, and competence in school and classroom settings may result in

patterns of engagement or disengagement in those settings. This view is consistent with the motivational theory of self-system processes (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The classroom as a caring community not only provides students with a sense of belonging or support, but also can provide a focus for identification and commitment. Autonomy in a community means not just that one has choices about personal goals, but also that one has influence on choices about the group's directions and goals. Similarly, competence means that one can make effective and meaningful contributions to the group as well as to the attainment of their own personal goals. When a school or classroom functions as a community, a social context is created in which the processes that fulfill children's needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging are linked by their common focus on the group and on the individual's place within the group.

With this theoretical support for community-oriented classrooms in mind, it would seem that when a sense of classroom community is established, students are likely to become affectively bonded with and committed to school. Therefore, they would not only be more inclined to identify with and behave in accordance with expressed classroom goals and values, but feel more satisfied with their classroom and school experiences.

The classroom community-school satisfaction rating relationship served as the basis for clarifying the role of level of behavioral adjustment as a moderator in the relationship. In testing for moderation, the regression analyses conducted indicated that level of behavioral adjustment, whether examined by level of risk or more specific behavioral cluster, does not interact with students' ratings of classroom community to determine the level of school satisfaction experienced by third through fifth graders. The

method of testing for moderation was influenced by Baron and Kenny (1986), who provide a useful framework for examining the conceptual issues underlying the moderation of a one-to-one relationship by a third variable.

They have argued that moderation implies that the causal relation between the independent and dependent variables changes as a function of the moderator variable, which is a third variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the causal relation. A moderator variable always functions as an independent variable that interacts with the focal independent variable to influence the dependent variable, specifying when and under what conditions certain effects will hold.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), moderation is best detected when the association between the independent and dependent variables is weak or inconsistent and when the independent and moderator variables are uncorrelated. In the present study, classroom community (independent variable) and school satisfaction (dependent variable) were strongly correlated with one another. Classroom community (independent variable) and level of adjustment (moderator variable), however, were not related to one another (see Tables Two, Four, and Five). While this research investigation provided further support for the importance of environmental experiences and their contribution to students' evaluations of their school life, the role of behavioral adjustment variable in school satisfaction judgments appears to be nonexistent.

Researchers have argued cogently that demonstrations of relationships between environmental events and quality of life evaluations provide only a first step in theory development (Gilman & Huebner, 2003). A next step requires the illumination of the processes that are responsible for the relationships. This study attempted to extend

beyond previous research by examining one potential model of students' school satisfaction by incorporating an intrapersonal variable that might moderate the association between experiences of classroom community and students' subjective school satisfaction. Though support for this model was not provided, in that level of adjustment was not seen as a crucial mechanism through which classroom community experiences influence school satisfaction, research that examines intrapersonal variables along with acute and chronic environmental, contextual variables should continue to be pursued.

So why in this case, did student's level of behavioral adjustment not interact with the contextual variable of classroom community as hypothesized? First, it is important to note that there is no reason to expect or suspect a "teacher effect" in these analyses. That is, there was no systematically biased way of assigning students to classrooms. Additionally, in looking closely at the analyses conducted at both the level of risk and cluster level, there were no differences between teachers in the outcome variable (as measured by the significance values produced by each analysis). Perhaps classroom community is not a powerful enough construct to affect changes within the classroom by behavioral level. Because of the infancy of this area of research, while this hypothesis is a definite possibility, this claim cannot be made with any sort of certainty. It is possible that further study with students at different grade levels and schools of varying economic means (as opposed to the Title I schools utilized in this investigation) would provide a more clear, substantial picture of the potential impact of the classroom community variable on all students' school success.

Another explanation for the lack of a significant moderating effect of behavioral adjustment could lie in the nature of the classroom community variable itself. A school-

based approach to effecting internal change within a child likely has two major components: teacher expectations and student capacities, attitudes, and ideals. The first component would be the teacher's consistent expectations, support, and encouragement. A student at increased behavioral risk is often seen as potentially disruptive and the classroom is usually highly structured to minimize stimulation and emotional situations. Success may be enhanced when the child can learn from the experience of rewards, effect internal change within her or himself, and no longer be merely dependent on a supply of rewards to maintain desired classroom behavior. Thus, classroom routines and orientations that function through structuring and a caring, scaffolded response have the potential benefit of effecting change within the student.

The second component of an approach that optimally effects change within the student involves direct attention to the internal world of the child, including his or her abilities, attitudes, and ideals. The attention to internal capacities is grounded in the assumption that as children develop and awareness of emotion, they will begin to understand and describe their own emotions, but also be able to recognize, describe, and understand the emotions of others. These principles apply equally to children who follow more favorable developmental trajectories, but for students at behavioral risk, this internalization illustrates and embodies the values of classroom community. So perhaps the reason for a lack of interaction or relationship with teacher-rated behavior profiles for students is the strength of the classroom community construct. That is, part of the nature of what creates a "classroom community" is the acceptance and support of all students and their diversity; their strengths and deficits, whether they are academic or behavioral.

The relationship between sense of community and academic success or satisfaction with school is quite complex and surely involves other factors. For instance, Schaps et al. (1997) uncover in their survey study that schools serving low-income students typically show lower levels of classroom community than schools serving more affluent ones. They then suggest that creating a high sense of community may help level the playing field for poor children. Presumably, sense of community is highly associated with motivation to learning. As stated, once the children feel they are part of the learning community, they are motivated and able to learn more effectively. Caldwell & Ginther (1996) posit in their empirical study that "for low SES elementary students, motivational (internal) rather than environmental (external) factors predict achievement" (p.141). Perhaps this is not only true for children from low SES families, but also may be true for all children; students with high sense of community should do better academically because they are motivated and perhaps their level of anxiety is minimized.

The development of classrooms and schools that are caring should be pursued in ways that promote academic development (Solomon et al., 2000), but social and emotional learning efforts may also be practiced in ways that undermine academic growth. For example, some teachers may try to create a supportive environment for students by lowering their academic standards or not embracing empirically supported instruction or intervention in their classrooms. This type of "accommodation" is certainly not beneficial for students, nor does it represent what it means to have a community-oriented classroom. A singular focus on community building will not be sufficient for promoting academic achievement and it must be combined and integrated with high expectations and challenging engaging opportunities to learn. In fact, others

have taken a critical view of the relative importance of a sense of community, arguing that high expectations play a greater role in boosting academic achievement (e.g., Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Shouse, 1996). Most recently, Lee & Smith (1999) found that without an emphasis on academic press, fostering community in school is inadequate for producing achievement gains among low-income, urban students. They concluded, "Only in schools with an organizational thrust toward serious academics does social support (i.e., sense of community) actually influence learning" (p. 937).

Though classroom community practices are often compared to constructivist, invention learning type of environments, perhaps a more appropriate way to think about classroom practices that support the classroom as a caring community is to consider the learning in these settings as problem-based. For example, it is well documented and researched that students who struggle learning to read benefit greatly from direct instruction and scripted interventions (Shippen, Houchins, Steventon, & Sartor, 2005). Common "constructivist" notions often imply that direct instruction imposes limitations on the acquisition of transferable thinking skills and student and teacher creativity. It is important to note that caring community classrooms strive to support their diverse students and individualize their instruction rather than adhere strictly to a particular pedagogy (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 1997). Any classroom setting that does not embrace established best practices risk doing a genuine disservice to students who benefit from differing types of instruction.

It will be important to help classrooms and schools become a "caring community of learners." Along with other researchers (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988, Elias et al., 1997; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Osterman, 2000), I believe this priority on community

building in classrooms and schools provides a powerful focus for improving educational practice, and especially for practice aimed at helping children to become a caring, principled, and intrapersonally and interpersonally effective.

Caution should be exercised in deriving inferences from the study. Although the current study incorporated a heterogeneous sample and provides some direction for future research, it was cross-sectional and correlational in nature. The study of causal determinants of school satisfaction and the process of classroom as a caring community will require more rigorous research, such as the utilization of longitudinal and experimental designs. Additionally, although all the measures employed in this study appear reliable and valid, the use of multiple informants (e.g., teachers, parents, and students) should provide a more complete picture and assessment of a community-oriented classroom. Student and parent perception of child behavior might also be assessed in future studies. Perhaps third through fifth grade children do not feel they are as behaviorally or academically different as the adults in their lives may deem them to be. Another avenue for further study might be analyzing student perceptions of community at the school level, particularly measuring possible differences between schools that embrace positive behavior support programs and those schools that do not. The positive behavior support initiative affects change in the culture of the school and it would be interesting to note the nested nature of classrooms within these types of schools.

Implications for practice

This study holds several implications for practice. Students' sense of their classroom as a caring community and their satisfaction with school are likely influenced

by a variety of variables that interact in complex ways across development. Thus, perhaps the major implication for school personnel and policymakers is the need to consider multiple sources of information in attempting to understand and promote students' social and emotional learning and growth. School personnel need to consider *positive* as well as negative experiences, both acute and chronic, in the lives of their students. The importance of non-school as well as school events must also be considered, particularly the important influence of social (e.g., family) resources in promoting the social and emotional purposes of schooling. This is consistent with recommendations of many educators (e.g., see Christenson & Buerkle, 1999) regarding the importance of positive home-school partnerships in enhancing cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes in students.

Conclusions

For the past two decades, numerous efforts have been made to reform America's schools. The efforts have focused largely on academic goals and concerns and have largely neglected affective matters. For example, Epstein & McPartland (1976) argued that the measurement of school outcomes should extend beyond academic variables to include quality of school life variables. Phillips (1993, p.10) lamented that "instead of looking at students in breadth and depth, we have pursued a narrow vision of schooling, one in which cognitive outcomes have become more important that adaptional outcomes."

Schools will be most successful in their educational mission when they integrate efforts to promote children's academic, social, and emotional learning. There is general

agreement that it is important for schools to foster children's social-emotional development, but all too often educators think about this focus in a fragmented manner. Intrinsically, schools and classrooms are social places and learning is a social process. Students do not learn alone but in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers, and with the support of their families. Additionally, separating the cognitive and emotional development of students creates a false dualism (Roth & Lee, 2007). Researchers should encourage the use of theoretical orientations, like cultural-historical activity theory, to embrace all aspects of student progress.

I believe that various experiences associated with participating in a caring classroom community help students not only to satisfy their basic psychological needs, but also to develop their intellectual and moral capacities, including their knowledge of academic subject matter, their reasoning and thinking skills, their conceptual understanding, their empathy with others, their social skills and social understanding, and their understanding of the values of the community. The development of these intellectual and moral capabilities, also, in turn, contributes to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, particularly students' sense of efficacy.

Overall, the small body of research that has been conducted to date on classrooms as communities indicates that a focus on this variable provides a powerful way of looking at educational practice. This attention seems to have a great deal of practical utility in that it provides a direction for classroom and school improvements aimed at effectively meeting the needs of both students and society. With regard to this study, specifically, though the effect sizes are modest, the findings suggest that the classroom community is one developmental context that contributes to students' school success.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

STUDY MEASURES

MSLSS – School Subscale (Huebner, 1994)

1. I look forward to going to school.
2. I like being in school.
3. School is interesting.
4. I wish I didn't have to go to school.
5. There are many things about school that I like.
6. I enjoy school activities.

Classroom Climate Survey (Vessels, 1998)

1. The students in my class help each other without being asked by our teacher.
2. When two kids argue in my room, the teacher listens to both and tries to help them work it out.
3. The kids in my class make fun of me when I make a mistake.
4. Many of the students in my class are selfish and don't seem to care about others.
5. I always get help from the teacher when I need it in my classroom.
6. There are a lot of mean kids in my class.
7. When I do well in class, my classmates are happy for me.
8. Early in the year, we went over and over class rules and routines until everyone knew them.
9. I sometimes get to help the teacher or get to help other students with their work.
10. Students say "excuse me," "I'm sorry," "thank you," and "please" all the time in my room.
11. The kids in my room care about each other and like to be together just like family members.
12. My teacher talks so mean sometimes that it scares all of us.
13. I know my teacher really cares what I think and how I feel about things because she asks.
14. Students in my class call each other names and try to make each other mad.
15. I feel important in my room because I sometimes get to choose what to do.
16. Our teacher wants us to work cooperatively in small groups and often lets us work in groups.
17. We have worked together in my class to help others who really need help like the homeless.
18. Our teacher is always joking with us and having fun with us.
19. I can talk to my classmates and teacher about my family and my feelings.
20. It is easy to make friends in my classroom, and everyone seems to have friends.
21. It is easy to stay out of trouble in my classroom.
22. Our teacher sometimes gets very loud when students break the rules or don't do as she asks.
23. When someone in my class makes fun of someone else, others join in.

24. When I do something wrong, my teacher talks to my privately so my classmates can't hear us.
25. We sometimes sit in a circle in my room and talk about real important things.
26. Our classroom is clean and colorful and always has lots of student work on the walls.
27. In my room students share and take turns.
28. The students and adults come to our class to work with us sometimes.
29. Older students and adults come to our class to work with us sometimes.
30. When someone says or does something dumb or silly in my room, everyone laughs.
31. My teacher would like it if parents visited the classroom every day.
32. The teacher always decides what we will do and never asks us what we would like to do.

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