Chapter 2:
Establishing a Supportive Climate:
The Basics of Positive Adult-Child Interactions

From: Educating Young Children
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Understanding Supportive Climates

- A supportive interpersonal climate is essential for active learning
  - Active learning is a social, interactive process
- Chapter 2 will:
  - Clarify the meaning of adult support in an active learning classroom
  - Examine contrasting interpersonal climates and their effects on children
  - Focus on the elements of adult support
    - Sharing control
    - Focusing on children’s strengths
    - Forming authentic relationships
    - Supporting children’s play
    - Adopting a problem-solving approach to social conflict
Child’s Sense of Self: Development Through Interaction

- Child’s sense of self develops from experiences beginning in infancy
  - Gradually progressing through stages described by Erikson
    - Trust versus mistrust
    - Autonomy versus shame and doubt
    - Initiative versus guilt
      - Children develop hope, acceptance, will power, and purpose
  - Greenspan’s six emotional milestones
    - Self-regulation and interest in the world
    - Falling in love
    - Developing intentional communication
    - Emergence of an organized sense of self
    - Creating emotional ideas
    - Emotional thinking
Greenspan (cont)

- Two basic tendencies guide children’s development
  - Regulation and harmony
  - Exploration of new experience and practice
- Age-appropriate experiences are essential for building a social and emotional climate for children’s learning
  - In that learning environment, children feel a sense of full emotional engagement, mastery, and control
Building Blocks of Human Relationships

- **Trust**: confident belief in oneself and others
  - Begins at birth
- **Autonomy**: capacity for independence and exploration
  - Toddlers and preschoolers
- **Initiative**: make a plan and do it
  - Preschoolers
- **Empathy**: capacity that allows children to understand the feelings of others by relating them to feelings they have had
  - Begins in infancy
- **Self-confidence**: capacity to believe in one’s own ability to accomplish things and contribute positively to society
  - Core of inner pride that sustains children through difficulties
Who is in Control? Contrasting Social Climates for Children

- Laissez-faire climate
  - Permissive, largely controlled by the children
  - Daily routine and physical environment loosely structured
  - This climate works well for independent-minded children who take leadership roles with peers and ask for help when needed
  - This climate can cause frustration and cause child to become anxious, bored, confused, or out of control
  - Adults highly value children’s play
Who is in Control? Contrasting Social Climates for Children (cont)

- Directive climates
  - Adult-control activities
    - Daily routine and physical setting tightly controlled by adults
  - Adults talk, children listen and follow directions
  - Children drill and practice until they can duplicate the adult model or score adequately on an assessment instrument, adult value drill and practice
  - This climate rewards children who enjoy following directions, they feel successful as they meet adult expectations
  - This climate is challenging for the child who acts outside of the narrow acceptance of behaviors
  - Adults use correction and separation as predominant child management strategies
Who is in Control? Contrasting Social Climates for Children (cont)

• Supportive climates
  – Shared control
  – Adults observe children’s strengths, form authentic partnerships with children, support children’s intentional play
  – Curriculum comes from children’s initiatives and is *designed* with key developmental indicators in mind
  – Adults highly value children’s active learning
  – Adults like a problem-solving approach to social conflict
Children and adults are free to learn
  – Children solve problems and learn through experience, constructing their understanding of the world

Children gain experience in forming positive relationships
  – When adults are kind and caring, children learn those traits through example

Adults see children’s behaviors in terms of development

Children grow in their capacity to trust, be autonomous, take initiative, and feel both empathy and self-confidence
Strategies for Creating Supportive Climates:

- Shared control
- Focus on child’s strengths
- Form authentic relationships with children
- Make commitment to support children’s play
- Adopt problem-solving approach to social conflict

Five Key Elements
Sharing of Control Between Adults and Children

- Take cues from children
- Participate with children on children’s terms
- Learn from children
- Relinquish control, consciously giving control to children
Focusing on Children’s Strengths

• Learning occurs best when children are motivated by personal goals and interests
  – Observe children
• Look for children’s interests
• View situations from the child’s perspective
• Share children’s interests with parents and staff
• Plan around children’s strengths and interests
Forming Authentic Relationships with Children

• Carl Rogers: authenticity is a transparent realness in the facilitator, a willingness to be a person, to be and live the feelings and thoughts of the moment...the student is **trusted** to develop

• Share yourself with children
• Respond attentively to children’s interests
• Give children specific feedback
• Ask honest questions and respond to questions honestly
Making a Commitment to Supporting Children’s Play

• Observe and understand the complexity of children’s play
• Be playful with children
Adopting a Problem-Solving Approach to Social Conflict

- Conflicts arise during play
- Problem-solving approach to social conflict is a long-term strategy supportive adults use
- Approach social conflict calmly and acknowledge children’s feelings
- Gather information and restate the problem
  - Don’t evaluate, don’t judge, don’t take sides
- Ask for ideas to try, choose one together, be prepared to give follow-up support