

- Early childhood centers are vibrant social communities where child and adult emotions are integral to learning. Previous research has focused on teaching practices and curricula that support children's social-emotional learning; fewer studies have attended to relevant center-level factors, such as the emotional leadership practices of the center director.
- With greater attention being paid to the adoption and implementation of SEL programming (e.g., Durlak, et al, 2011), studies that elucidate contextual influences are particularly timely. Specifically, the emotional aspects of early childhood education centers' climates must be further explored and understood to improve not only child SEL, but also teacher emotional well-being, quality, and retention.
- The present study first uses an exploratory qualitative approach to expound how directors influence social-emotional teaching and learning quality by socializing the center's emotional climate. Second, the model is tested in two example Head Start centers.

Study 1 – Devising a Conceptual Model

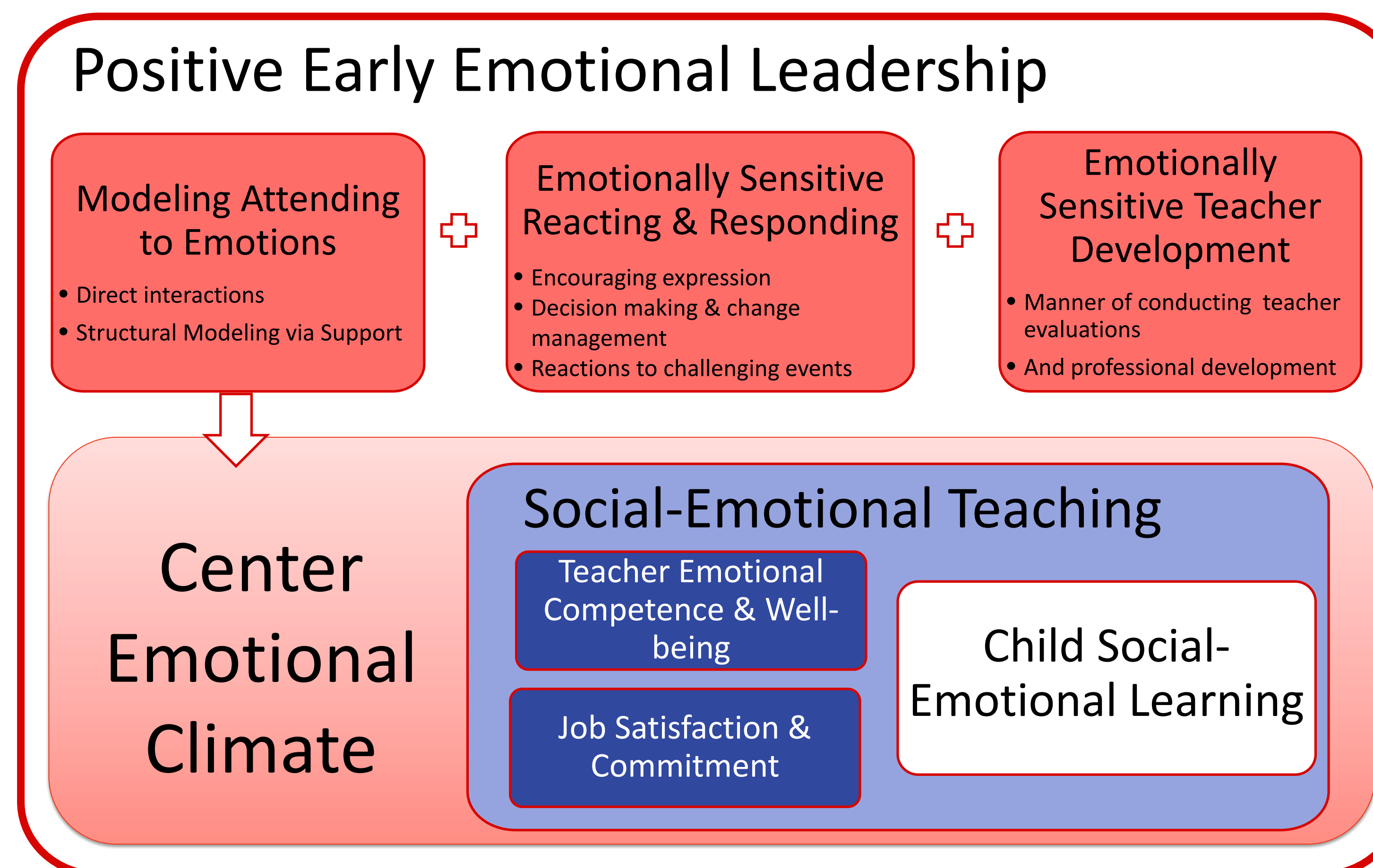
Method. Current and former program administrators ($N=12$, 92% Female) were interviewed to inform a model of Positive Early Emotional Leadership. Interviews were qualitatively coded with more than 75% of respondents contributing to each of five Level-1 codes. Iterative content analysis yielded a conceptual model (Figure 1) describing directors' influences on the emotional climate of the center.

Results. The resultant Positive Early Emotional Leadership model (Figure 1) describes how directors socialize the emotional climate of their centers through a socialization process resembling that found in the parenting and teaching literature.

- Directors **model attending to emotions** through their interactions with teachers and staff at their centers and by creating structural supports for emotions.
- Directors also socialize emotional climate through their **reactions to emotional situations**, including their encouragement of expression, decision making, and response to adverse events.
- Finally directors socialize the emotional climate of their centers through their **emotionally sensitive evaluation and professional development practices**.

Discussion. The three components identified by the participating administrators are all process-based mechanisms which do not resemble traditional measures of director qualification or management proficiency. This model emphasizes the importance of looking beyond compliance with health and safety standards. directors may benefit from considering how they are socializing the emotional climate of their centers and what impact that climate has on social-emotional teaching and learning.

Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Positive Early Emotional Leadership



Study 2 – Evaluating the Model in Example Centers

Method. Two large example Head Start centers were recruited from an ongoing larger study.

- **Center A** served 150 students in 9 classrooms and employed 25 FT teachers, 30 Non-teaching staff and 3 MH consultants.
- **Center B** served 350 children in 17 classrooms, employed 22 FT teachers, 48 non-teaching staff, and 1 MH consultant. Both centers were run by directors with over 20 years of experience in early childhood education.

Teachers Survey - self-reported on *Supervisor Relations* (9 items, $\alpha=.90$); *Pay and Promotion Opportunities* (10 items, $\alpha=.78$); and *Commitment* (11 items, $\alpha=.89$) (Bloom, 2010), and completed open ended questions about center climate.

Directors Survey - self-reported on *Work Satisfaction* (10 items, $\alpha = .76$; Bloom, 2010); *Commitment* (see above); *SEL Beliefs* (17 items including, $\alpha=.66$; adapted from Brackett et al., 2012); and *Staff Management Skills* (8 items, $\alpha=.89$, NCIECPD, 2009). Additionally, directors ranked 10 common ECE director responsibilities by importance on a forced choice scale (Zinsser et al., 2013).

Director/Assistant Director Interviews & Teacher Focus Groups. Interviews and focus groups were semi-structured and qualitatively analyzed using codes based on the model described in study 1. Transcripts were coded to identify general themes as well as areas of convergence and divergence between participants and centers.

Table 1: Survey Responses by Example Center

Center	Teacher Survey (N=12)					Director Survey (N=2)			
	Supervisor Relationship	Pay & Promotion	Commitment	Pos. Climate	Neg. Climate	Work Satisfaction	Commitment	SEL Beliefs	Staff Mgmt
A	3.63 (.34)	3.10 (.67)	3.95 (.39)	10 ^a	5 ^b	4.89	5	4.18	4.9
B	3.33(.41)	2.73 (.44)	4.12 (.54)	5 ^a	12 ^b	4.1	4.64	4.29	4.25

^{a, b} Two centers differed significantly in their reporting of positive climate (Mann-Whitney $U=2.5$, $p=.017$, 2-tailed) and negative climate (Mann-Whitney $U=2.5$, $p=.011$, 2-tailed).

Table 2: Director Responsibility Rankings

(10 = most important, 1 = least important)

	Center A	Center B
Being available for parents.	5	8
Implementing innovative and research-based curriculum.	10	6
Assessing children's progress and achievement.	6	5
Evaluating teachers.	3	4
Maintaining accurate and complete financial records for my center.	1	9
Monitoring compliance with regional codes and licensing requirements.	2	2
Promoting academic achievement of students.	7	7
Provide a positive social-emotional environment for students.	9	10
Providing a positive work environment for staff.	8	3
Providing professional development to teachers.	4	1

Results. Across both qualitative and quantitative data sources, the director at Center B appeared less sensitive to the emotional experiences of her staff who appeared less able to emotionally engage in their work with children and more overburdened with expectations.

- There were no meaningful differences between the two centers on Likert-style items from previous studies;
- However, the differences found in the qualitative case studies were reiterated in the free response and ranking items created for this study (Table 1).
- Additionally, directors' rankings of responsibilities show underlying differences in approaches to management that have emotional ramifications

Discussion. When directors attended to emotions of their staff through interactions, policies, or resources, teachers reported engaging in important interactions which promote social-emotional competency. However, these differences were not captured by existing measures of climate. Results indicate that the components of the positive early emotional leadership model, their modeling of attention to emotions, emotionally sensitive reacting and responding to emotions, and emotionally sensitive teacher development, are ecologically valid across the case studies presented here.

Conclusions

These two studies suggest that administrators have on teachers' emotional experiences at work and how those feelings influence social-emotional teaching practices.

- Findings reflect a shift from easily quantifiable structural variables to more process-focused determinants of leadership merit akin to recent changes in classroom quality assessments (Pianta et al., 2008).
- When evaluating directors it may be necessary to look beyond structural indicators of management quality (e.g. Talan & Bloom, 2004), considering the interactional quality of leadership practices and its impact on teachers and students.

