

THE POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SCHOOL

Gritsopoulou Fotini

Teacher Physical Education/ Theatrical Studies, MSc, PhD Candidate, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

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ABSTRACT

The school climate, as Cohen and Hamilton (2009) suggest, is a tool that schools can use “as a framework that supports healthy individuals and relationships, educator- parent mental health partnerships, and transformational learning for individuals and school communities, teacher-parent relationships, and learning in school communities” (Coyne A. Y., 2012: p. 6). It is a set of interactions that affects both the psychology and the performance of all participants in terms of school goals. When there is a positive climate, each member of the school can realize its value and contribute to the collective creation, as it creates feelings of satisfaction and responsibility, thus contributing substantially to the effectiveness of the school unit. The present study, studies the meaning and dimensions of the school climate, its relationship with school culture, its shaping factors and its essential role in achieving maximum efficiency of the school unit.

Key words: effective school unit, school climate, school culture.

Introduction

The school is one of the fundamental organizations for every society and consists of people who form its climate, as a result of their experiences, their knowledge, their goals and the organizational structures that exist in the school. All the internal characteristics that exist compose the daily life of the school, which is called “organizational climate” and make it stand out from the other schools. This is what Halpin (Kavouri, P., 1998: p. 182) described, observing that "as one moves from school to school, finds that every school has its own personality. This personality is the organizational climate of the school". Many researchers have found that the school climate is the most powerful factor influencing employee attitudes and behavior, school

performance, and student performance.

The concept and dimensions of the school climate

The school is an organization that has as purpose to educate students within the framework of the current social reality. A key factor for the effectiveness of a school team is the school climate, as Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009: p. 75) argue. The study for the systematic investigation of the school climate has started in the 50's without a unanimous definition (Katsarou E., 2016: p. 171). But where most researchers converge, according to Cohen (2006) (Katsarou E., 2016: p. 171), is in the view that "the school climate mainly reflects the subjective experiences at school of all those involved in the life and action of the school unit". For Freiberg and Stein (1999) (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009: p. 75) the school climate is the heart and soul of the school and the feeling that makes teachers and students love school and want to be a part of it. We would say that the school climate is all the internal characteristics that make one school stand out from the other (Pasiardi, 2001: p. 25). Cohen (2009) states that "the school climate is at the nexus of individual and group experience" (Coyne A. Y., 2012: p. 6) as it includes students, teachers, parents, the community and is called to play a role in the vision and direction of the school.

The dimensions that the school climate can take have been researched a lot since the school climate is of great importance in the efficiency of the school unit. Thus, in a research conducted by Tzani, Pamouktsoglou and Stratikopoulos (Matsagouras, 2000: pp. 185-186) it was found that the characteristics of the positive climate that prevails in primary education are a) the relationship of trust between teachers and the principal, b) satisfaction for the skills of the principal, c) participation of teachers in taking decisions about serious school problems, d) warm interpersonal relationships between colleagues. According to Collie, 2010 (Sotiriou, Ap., 2015: pp. 82-83) the school climate is a multidimensional conceptual construction, and its main factors refer to the characteristics: a) of the natural environment, the material and technical equipment of the school, b) the social environment, c) the social relationships and interactions that develop within the school and d) the culture formed by the system of values, beliefs and meanings that prevail in the school context.

Relationship between School Climate and School Culture

The concepts of school climate and school culture are all used synonymously (Coyne A. Y., 2012: p. 2) although in some point they differ. The concept of culture is broader because it includes the values and beliefs of the people who make up the organization and not just how they feel within the organization. The school culture is the context in which the functions of the

school take place and is composed of the stimuli that are born in the members of the school unit, of the natural environment in which the school unit belongs, of the institutional framework, the regulations but also of every socio- cultural element, which surrounds it.

Culture, according to Pasiardis, 2014 (Karatasios, G.: p. 52) is the personality, which is formed "it is the rules of behavior, values, symbols, assumptions that govern the operation of the school unit." If culture is the personality of the organization, then the climate is its behavior. It is easier to change one's behavior (climate) than to change one's personality (culture) (Gruenert, St, 2008: p.58). So, the culture is difficult to change in contrast to the climate which is more flexible in its configuration. The culture is something deeper, in contrast to the climate that one feels when entering a school. So culture is within us while the climate is around us. Culture determines whether the climate can change, while the school climate is the first step to change. Culture determines how one reacts to specific school situations, how we reward students for success or failure (Gruenert, St, 2008: p.58). For Van Houtte (2004) (Hatzipanagiotou, 2008: p. 214) climate is a superficial expression of culture and this justifies the fact that climate is more easily measurable than culture.

Factors shaping the school climate

The school climate is shaped by the way factors, that belong to the internal context of the school, operate and are connected. The factors shaping the school climate are the following (Saitis, 2002: pp.135-138):

- The structure: when the structure of an organization is not suffocating and the work assigned to the individual is not strictly standardized then the working climate becomes better. Providing autonomy and freedom of will to the teacher creates a positive atmosphere.
- The size of the school unit is also an important factor shaping climate. Small schools have a more open climate compared to large schools.
- The interaction with the external environment
- The individual differences of the people who coexist in the school unit, both students and teachers. The differences concern gender, age, education, years of work, ambitions, interests, learning difficulties or skills. Even the mood of these people influence and shape the climate.

At this point it should be mentioned that there are other factors that shape the school climate.

Daar (2010) (Katsarou, E, 2016: p.175) presents in detail and classifies, depending on their importance, eleven factors: teacher-student relationships, students' sense of security, effective administration, expectations of academic achievement, student behavior, teacher-student guidance, student-to-family, school-family, professionalism and teachers' effectiveness, students' activities beyond the school curriculum and finally the learning environment, which must be careful and positively affect all members of the school. According to Pasiardi (2001), there are four main factors that contribute to the creation and development of a "positive" school climate. These are the communication, collaboration, organization and administration of the school and the students themselves. Particular importance in shaping the school climate is attached to the individual and service characteristics of the principal. Research, MacNeil, Prater & Busch, (2009) states that the most important action of the school team leader is to pay attention to the school climate of the organization and to develop a positive climate in it (Coyne AY, 2012: p. 4). The principal is the one who by his example will inspire and encourage teachers for personal and professional development and will leave space for initiative to teachers. The goals he sets, are achievable and clear, and teachers are committed to provide equal educational opportunities to students. The principals who create a positive school climate are those who show respect and are supportive of the overall learning environment. According to Glickman, Gordon & Rosso-Gordon (2007), school climates and cultures, academic achievement, and school capacity, and effectiveness are connected to one another (Coyne A. Y., 2012: p. 6).

Another key factor that contributes to the formation of a positive climate is communication, which ensures both regular feedback from society and constant communication between school team members (Pasiardi, G., 2001: p. 44). Upward communication has to do with communication with the Ministry of Education, and its agencies on issues such as targeting, evaluation, implementation of innovative programs (Pasiardi, 2001: 45). The principal plays an important role in the communication that concerns the members of the school unit, and his main concern is the formation of a climate of honesty and transparency that promotes free communication and cooperation with the school staff (Pasiardi, C, 2001: p. 49). Effective communication, means that the principal respects the personality of teachers and students, shows understanding of their individual problems, and is sensitive to personal relationships (Saitis, 2002: 141). The school principal must clearly convey the attitudes and expectations he / she expects from the school staff in order to achieve effective commitment and successful implementation. When, stakeholders work together and are engaged, they are, according to Koyzes and Posner, (2007) much more likely to win together and achieve (Coyne AY, 2012: p. 7).

A particularly important factor in shaping a positive climate, is the principal's communication

with the students' parents. He could establish communication time for parents' visits to school and telephone communication, arrange discussing issues that concern their children, express interest in any need that affects the performance and mental health of each student. It is important for parents to be informed about the issues that concern the school unit and the various problems it faces. Finally, the meetings with educational issues are very useful for shaping a positive atmosphere. Communication between teachers and students is also important. Teachers take care of creating a positive atmosphere, with continuous feedback which moves in both directions by alternating the roles of transmitter and receiver between teacher and student (Pasiardi, 2001: 45).

School Climate and school unit achievement

The ultimate goal of each school unit is to maximize learning and development whether it concerns students or teaching staff. This in turn leads to the overall improvement of the school unit. Freiberg 1999 and Sergiovanni 2001 (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009: p. 76) emphasize the importance of the principal's role in improving the school achievement, achieved when he promotes and encourages learning. But in addition to learning, when the school, according to Andreou (2001) (Karatasios, G.: p.49) provides a positive climate, which is attractive to all, equips participants "with mechanisms for dealing with specific problems, such as underperformance, school dropout or juvenile delinquency ". Student's performance, the quality of relationships and generally the overall experiences of school members will improve if there is a focus on creating a positive climate. According to Hoffman, Hutchinson & Reiss, 2009 (Coyne A. Y., 2012: p. 7), school climate and the enhancement of it will assist in developing students, their ability to be taught, and the overall satisfaction of the educators who are involved in the process. The school has an atmosphere of optimism and high expectations.

Teachers and students feel that they have value and ability to progress while at the same time they are given the motivation and opportunities to try and achieve more. The school climate that promotes the effectiveness of the school unit is distinguished by the following characteristics (Karatasios, G.: p.51): "Principals take the lead, leaving a degree of freedom to teachers, while teachers agree to participate in systematic efforts to be evaluated and trained. Also, the school unit is accepted by the wider community, by participating in events and collaborating with other agencies ".

The coexistence of all the above elements contributes essentially in the creation of a pleasant and comfortable school climate since the factors of communication, cooperation between all those involved in a school unit are considered important for creating a pleasant school climate.

According to Gruenert, 2005, the more cooperative the school staff, the more positive the school climate and therefore the higher the student performance (Spicer, F.V, 2016: p.16).

The importance of the School Climate in student performance

The role of the positive school climate is particularly important for the development of cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills in students. Hallinger and Heck (1998) (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009: p. 77) report that students' school performance is indirectly influenced by the principal when he creates the appropriate school climate (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009: p. 76). According to Blasé, J & Blasé J (2000) (Vardiabasi, 2017: p. 225), the better the human relationships that leadership cultivates with all stakeholders, the better the learning outcomes. Maintaining healthy, warm human relationships, which leadership cultivates with everyone, improves students' learning achievements. All this climate of optimism and cooperation constantly contributes to the progress of students who "are convinced that the school classroom is a place of challenge where progress and development are constantly enhanced" (Katsarou, E., 2016: p. 178). According to Manthey (2006), when teachers believe that they can positively influence student performance then schools can achieve what was previously considered impossible.

At the same time, students are taught by teachers who, in a climate of cooperation and support with their colleagues, are constantly enriching their knowledge and teaching by providing their students with a rich educational environment. According to Socrates and Angelidis (2009) (Giakoumi S., 2012: p. 476) the teacher, in such a climate of cooperation, "dares to innovate, leading his students to new and more creative discoveries of knowledge and experience." In addition, members' cooperation and effective communication according to Mortimore, 1992 (Katsarou, E., 2016: p. 178) is constructive also "for the improvement of interpersonal relationships and students' mental health".

The importance of the School Climate in upgrading the work of teachers

The relationship between school climate and job satisfaction is well documented. Many studies (Collie et al., 2012; Schyns et al., 2009) have shown that "school climate is one of the most important factors that have a significant effect on teachers' job satisfaction" (Sotiriou, Ap., 2015: 84). The climate of optimism is a feature of effective schools that help teachers improve the quality of teaching and students in accepting the learning process. The result is the creation of a sense of efficiency in both teachers and students and the achievement of goals (Pasiardi, G., 2001: p. 37). The cultivation of high expectations for all, the commitment to a vision, the participation in decision-making and the harmonization of individual goals with the broader ones with specific

success criteria, activate teachers to upgrade their educational work (Vardiambasi, Z., 2017: p. 225).

The climate of cooperation is an essential factor for the upgrading of the educational project. Teachers' development is not a personal matter but a result of collaboration. The collaborative climate according to Day (2003) (Giakoumi, S., 2012: p. 476) "contributes to the realization of their professional obligation for continuous development of their theoretical and practical knowledge. This will make them more effective both in teaching as well as in their contribution to the improvement of the school unit ". Ensuring better conditions and means for the cultivation of a creative, quality pedagogical climate with emphasis on learning needs, and achievements, is a feature of the positive climate that enhances the effectiveness of the teacher's work (Vardiambasi, Z., 2017: p. 225). Thus, teachers use a variety of teaching materials, teaching methods and use differentiated teaching so that each student is actively involved in learning. Teachers consider it their duty and responsibility to teach all students successfully, regardless of their socio-economic background and the learning difficulties they may have because they believe that all students are capable of learning. Collectivity is created in the school when principals encourage teachers' learning and teaching improvement (Hill & And, 2011) and according to Sahin, 2011, "The atmosphere of a school is positive when the principal is a strong leader and expresses faith in the ability of teachers to succeed" (Spicer, F.V, 2016: p.25). The creation of a climate of of friendship and cooperation between teachers and students is imperative. Also it's important to create a relationship of trust which contributes greatly to the school success of each student (Pasiardi, G., 2001: p. 39).

Finally, the cultivation of leadership skills in the members of the teachers' association, is a characteristic of the healthy school climate that contributes to the upgrading of the educational project as it contributes to the "building and promotion of selected leaders who will lead the subgroups" (Vardiampasi, Z., 2017: p. 225). So every teacher has his own talent which is highlighted and used for the benefit of all.

Conclusion

The path to improving every school and achieving school effectiveness is not the same. Each school has its own structure, number of students, different human resources, and belongs in different culture. However, today, as never before, the need is urgent, "for a school that is flexible to local educational needs, open to the challenges of the modern age with a long-term vision and autonomy in planning, budgeting and developing improvement plans" (Koutouzis, M, 2012). An essential factor in this direction is the creation of a positive school climate. The role of

the school principal is essential, with the vision and the work system he has, to create a climate that improves the efficiency of the school, promoting and upgrading the educational work and therefore the school performance of the students.

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