

THE SCHOOL CLIMATE EXPERIENCES

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Abstract: This paper analyses the quality of the school climate. One of its objectives is to define such basic terms as environment, atmosphere, climate, and selected climate variants, above all the school climate. Attention is also paid to the following five areas of school life, which are in my opinion of significance: 1) the overall attitude to school and the motivation to study 2) teachers' qualities and competences 3) school rules and the discipline in class 4) the solidarity of the class as a social group 5) the architectural, aesthetic and hygienic aspects of the school. The thesis also wants to present new practical methods supported by long experience of the school climate gained abroad and even by similar experience lately picked up in the Czech republic.

Keywords: school climate, students, teachers, parents, research, questionnaire.

1 The term school climate specification

In our point of view, it is essential to think about the school climate in the wider context. I.e. not just from the perspective of the contemporary events, but also due to the past and with the perspective to the future. All aspects of the school life exist in mutual relation. The processes going on in the school life are the reflection of the changes realized in the past and together with that, they have the adaptational and anticipational character. The processes and circumstances in the school environment should be observed with respect to the contemporary conditions. At once, it is necessary to confront the contemporary state with the perspective and benefit for the future. While judging the school climate, we should therefore study the whole evolution of the school environment.

The experts cannot agree on the fact what the term school climate includes and what it does not. Obdržálek (2002) states, that the school climate is a social-psychological phenomenon which is very complex and exceptionally challenging for the analysis and exploration. Mareš (2000, p. 242) names the school equipment, processes happening in the school, the leadership style, the public reflection of the school, teachers dedication to school and school work; and students specifics as its variables. There have also appeared some provoking opinions that the term school climate is out of use and therefore we should not take care about it. (Finlayson, 1987 in Mareš, 2000, p. 242). We do not share this opinion. Despite these opinions we concentrate on and try to study these problems in the sense of research and from our theoretical viewpoint.

We know that the school climate (in some sources named as school atmosphere, school world, school life, emotional tone, school ethos, school culture, school spirit) depends on the specific situation of the individual school. It is conditioned by the school environment, where we can observe it, analyse it and evaluate. It does not happen but grows continually. It is the phenomenon which is long-lasting, typical for the individual school.

Some authors describe the term school climate as a school culture, informal perception of the processes which take place at school (Deal a Kennedy, 1985 in Aurin, 1990, p. 58). From our point of view, it is not possible to understand the terms school culture and school climate as the synonyms. There is a mutual relationship between school culture and school climate. This relationship is not one-way but mutual. According to Obdržálek (2002) the school climate influences backwards the school culture after some time, it conditions the satisfaction of the school staff, pupils and teachers. The satisfaction positively influences back the culture of school. In case all individuals feel well and satisfied at school environment, the effectiveness of school increases. Good results of school work serve as a motivation for the other activities and fulfillment of set aims. It

is possible to confirm the satisfaction of school and their school climate experience participants in the same way.

Spanhel (1993, p. 225) describes the school climate as the perceptual reality or basis, which can be observed at school. Every activity has its meaning in the regular school life. We mainly concentrate on the goal for which the teachers and students would share good relationships in an everyday class and school life, would be able to manage the problems or struggles and solve the set tasks together. All these aspects can be positively influenced by the good school climate. This algorithm works also vice versa. Friendly relations and good mood can help the pleasant school climate. School climate enables the similar perception of the school environment to teachers and students, which they share. We also try to answer the question how we can improve the quality of school and school instruction through good school climate. Every school should try to build its own concept of how to optimize school climate in everyday school life.

When judging the school climate we are mostly interested in evaluation of the participating individuals, i.e. students and teachers (compare Eckert, 1988, p. 135; compare Saldern, 1991, p. 190). We also perceive the ideas of headmasters, parents, parent association, school founder or state school authorities. When we study school climate, we can also study the objective data about the school. I.e. the number of students, number and size of classes, school organization, student population, school leadership characteristics, teacher education (Bessoth, 1989). These data do not however speak about the relation among students and teachers, about the student and teacher motivation to instructional activities or cooperation among the students. For us, the more important features are the subjective views of the school actors, their ways of thinking, attitude orientation, opinions, ways of behaviour or acting etc.

2 The school climate researches

2.1 The construction of the research method

For the purpose of school climate research we constructed the questionnaires for three groups of respondents – students, teachers and parents. In the process of research method construction we used some published tools of Freitag (1998). The author realized his research by the end of 20th century at 18 German schools, where he analysed the influence of some school climate aspects on the health of students and teachers.

At the preresearch phase we optimized the research method. After the adaptation we constituted the questionnaires for students, teachers and parents, each of which consists of 50 items. The items are divided into five chosen areas which characterize the school climate.

The areas follow:

- 1) overall relationship and motivation towards the school (items no. 1 – 9),
- 2) teacher's quality and competences (items no. 10 – 21),
- 3) school rules and the classroom discipline (items no. 22 – 29),
- 4) coherence of the class as a social group (items no. 30 – 37),
- 5) architectural, aesthetic and hygienic aspects of the school (items no. 38 – 50).

The respondents reflected on the individual statements by the measure how they agree with the individual item. They circled their response on the scale from 1 to 5 (1 – totally disagree, 2 – more or less disagree, 3 – cannot say, 4 – more or less agree, 5 – absolutely agree).

2.2 Realization and the way of research results proceeding

The research took place at three secondary schools, a grammar school and a pedagogical school in Olomouc region, and a health school in Pardubice region. The sample involved together 960 respondents, as concretely shown in the following table.

Table 1: Schools involved in the research and the number of respondents

School	students	teachers	parents
grammar school	231	27	221
pedagogical school	120	31	0
health school	180	19	131

We examined the evaluation of the school climate areas within the individual groups of respondents. We used one-way factor analysis (ANOVA) with the followed comparison of the mean values through HSD (Tuckey) for unequal sums of comparison within the groups. The gained results were also interpreted through the qualitative approach. In the paper we focus only on quantitative analysis of the gained data.

2.3 Research results and discussion

On the basis of the research results we can assume not just which group of respondents evaluates the studied areas best and which worst. We can also deduce the results in the evaluation of the selected areas.

As the main result common to all involved schools we can say, that the research definitely confirmed the differences in evaluation of the areas of school climate from the students, teachers and parents perspective although the assessment doesn't differ significantly. Teachers give to school climate areas the best marks, student's assessment is the worst and parent's opinions resonate between these two groups.

Also important finding exposes the total assessment of each area. The most positively was viewed by all respondents the first area „overall relationship and motivation to school“. The worst of all areas was evaluated the fourth area „coherence of the class as a social group“. Even so these findings don't show any significant differences in results.

These findings are in a simplified way presented in the following table.

Table 2: Assessment of five school climate areas from the view of different groups

groups of respondents	area 1	area 2	area 3	area 4	area 5	all areas average
grammar school						
Students	3,65	3,42	3,32	3,22	3,6	3,442
Teachers	4,23	3,78	3,87	3,4	3,98	3,852
Parents	3,81	3,56	3,45	3,29	3,62	3,546
health school						
Students	3,27	3,19	2,76	2,81	3,08	3,022
Teachers	3,69	3,65	3,74	3,31	4,09	3,696
Parents	3,49	3,4	3,03	3,02	3,36	3,26
pedagogical school						
Students	3,49	3,42	3,31	3,23	3,03	3,296
Teachers	4,32	4,06	3,82	3,31	3,36	3,774
Average	3,744	3,560	3,413	3,199	3,515	

To compare the findings from the three secondary schools involved in this enquiry, we can say, that all results are close to average and there are no significant differences in assessment of five school climate areas. Anyway, as we can see in the next table, the best results were found at the grammar school and the worst view is obvious at the health school. In total, the assessment of the school climate appears as slightly positive at all schools.

Table 3: Total assessment of five school climate areas at involved schools

groups of respondents	area 1	area 2	area 3	area 4	area 5	all groups average
grammar school	3,897	3,587	3,547	3,303	3,733	3,613
pedagogical school	3,483	3,413	3,177	3,047	3,51	3,326
health school	3,905	3,74	3,565	3,27	3,195	3,535

In our point of view, some circumstances may occur, which can garble the results of the research. We think that some side factors could play a role in the process of questionnaire filling (e.g. personal matters of the respondents) which reflected in the final evaluation of the selected areas of school climate.

However, we do not want to make final conclusion on the basis of these results. We realize that we have to be cautious in the interpretation of the facts. Despite this, we think that evaluation of the selected items of the school climate is more or less optimistic. But we also realize that even the negative aspects of school climate belong to the studied phenomenon. They mean the challenge for improvement and optimalization of the school climate.

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