

School Culture and School Climate: Who is impacting whom?

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Abstract

During the last few decades the large body of researches devoted to the study of school climate and school culture that has accrued within the educational community. Often the terms are used interchangeably, and there appears to be no unanimity as to the precise meaning of either school culture or school climate. Both terms are used by researchers to describe the social atmosphere of a school. Generally, the concepts of both school climate and school culture are described, rather than defined, in terms of their impacts on the educational and behavioral successes of students. The present paper aims to identify the core differences as well as latent relations between school culture and school climate. This study also emphasizes how school climate and school culture can be changed appropriately and effectively to make the environment of the school more positive that can flourish overall development of students. It may also enhance the knowledge of school educators to improve the school climate.

Keywords: school culture, school climate.

Introduction

Schools are the place where students spend half of their life. Needless to say that it is the school and its learning environment which has played a significant role in the development of human civilization extensively. Several researches have confirmed that the behaviors of human beings are influenced by their social environments (Hutchison, 2015; Rogers, 2016). Previous researches suggest that individuals act accordingly what they observe and learn from their social surroundings. It can be said that school is the prime social environment of children after their family; thus, the school environment inevitably influences the behaviors of children to a large extent. The primary influences of school atmosphere on students' behaviors are found to be peers, teachers, school administrators, and teacher and parent interaction. A school environment in which students feel safe and teachers are supportive, it has a positive impact on a students' sense of solidity within the school. Other factors such as the size of the school and the interpersonal relationships of school members, might serve to revolutionize certain other factors that placed students at risk for school performance (Richman et al., 1998; Stevenson, 2001). While talking about the school environment, two most frequent concepts have been used often: school culture and school climate. Several studies have been emphasized the notion that the climate or the culture of a school impacts both the personality as well as the social behaviors of students. Most of the researchers used both variables as overlapping concepts (Miner, 1995). But over the period of time, as more researches have conducted in the field of the school environment, the core differences between school climate and school culture have been found. Therefore, some practitioners have attempted to distinguish between school climate and school culture but a clear distinction between the two variables still need to investigate.

School climate

The concept of climate used in this paper as a psychosocial construct. It is defined as the quality and nature of school life. It is based on the patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life that reflect social norms, goals, values, interpersonal interactions, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. School climate has the potential to pervade into the holistic development of the students. For a student, school climate enters into his psychological mind through teacher-student interactions, peer interactions, classroom experiences, parent-teacher communications, etc. Many researchers suggest that climate is "what people see and report happening to them in an organizational situation" (Ostroff, Kinicki & Tamkins, 2003). It refers to the tone of

the workspace; it's physical and psychological characteristics such as the physical appearance of workspace, sense of safety, and how people interact with each other. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environment of the U.S. Department of Education (2001) has classified a school climate into four dimensions that are widely acceptable and cover most of the areas of concerns. These dimensions are:

1- Safety: Feeling safe and secure in the school influences students' learning and development. It is the first key priority to feel safe socially, physically and mentally. If students do not feel safe at school, do not feel welcomed at school, they will not meet their potential and will not learn positive social lessons.

- **Physical safety:** It refers to students' safety from violence, hostile behavior and physical bullying in school. Feeling safe is directly linked with students' justification about their school as nurturing and positive.
- **Emotional safety:** It includes school-based mental health services (counseling, supportive staffs). And school administrators should also encourage students and staff to ignore any behavior based on caste, gender, SES, etc. It would promote a sense of safety as well as a positive attitude towards school.
- **Order and discipline:** Schools with clear communicated rules and regulations also have less bullying and misbehavior issues. It is found that if students and parents perceive a school has low rates of delinquency and everyone follow its norms properly than it develops a sense of trust towards the school.

2-Academic climate: It includes all the activities related to teaching and learning. Academic climate poses two basic factors:

- **Leadership:** It refers to the character of principal and school administrators. It is influenced by 'how well the higher authorities communicate and implement their vision for the school and how supportive and easily reached their visions are'.
- **Teaching and learning:** It refers to the methods and instructional practices used by the teacher in their classroom. It entails everything from the curriculum selection, evaluation methods to how teacher communicate their expectations and give feedback to students. If teacher assumes that his information can enhance others knowledge than he uses variety of approaches in this teaching but when his major concern

is only on students academic success than it will tend to be less experimentation with his modes of teaching for fear that achievement might be lowered and that would adversely affect students motivation and engagement in classroom.

3- Environmental Climate: Physical structure, classroom size, and academic resources also affect school climate. Physical characteristics of the school such as light, cleanliness, temperature and sound control, which all affect academic as well as students' and teachers' motivation in academic engagement. Well equipped laboratory, tools, and other teaching aids enhance the positive attitude towards school in students. Students of high facility schools have a significantly higher level of academic self-concept and academic performance as compared to the students of low facility schools (Srivastava & Joshi, 2011).

4- Engagement: It refers to emotional, physical engagement in the school. The quality of relationship within the members of the school (Teacher, administrators, students) and with parents influences students' behavior and academic achievement. Schools which do not establish a higher level of relationship have a drawback related to students' feeling of emotional attachment with the school members and school environment, often called *school connectedness* leads to higher students' presentation, less delinquency and positive perception of school climate.

The usual way to operationalize the concept of school climate is that the perception of the school members (i.e. students, teachers, principal, parents and other staff of the school) is collected with the help of paper-pencil test consisting of items which are conceptualized to be representative of the school climate at its several dimensions. The items should be phrased in a generalized and local language rather than particular and intricate way so that the respondents can make sense of the patterns regarding the school and those in its relation with the dimensions. It is important to keep in mind that the responses are taken to refer to the institutional climate instead of individual students' attitudes. That means school climate must operationalize in terms of the perception of all the school members rather than student only.

The formation of School culture:

The concept of Culture has been receiving increasing attention in recent times in the studies of schooling. Culture is an alive, enduring, and formless entity. In the context of school, its ultimate goal is how to make the school culture

positive so that students and staff feel safe and learning is at the core. Schein (2004) confirmed that culture can be learned, passed on, and changed. Schools have beliefs, and traditions, and are guided by its members' attitudes and relationships; these elements shape the culture. He defined culture as having levels and interactions. While talking about its levels and interactions, it can be better understood in terms of Raymond Williams (1989a). For Williams, Culture reflects meaning and values (structure of feelings) and through the Cultural Analysis Method, it is possible to clarify them. He categorized three basic notions in his cultural analysis. First, the 'ideal' in which culture is a state of human belief and excellence, in terms of certain supreme or universal values. Then, second, there is the 'documentary' in which culture is the reflection of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experiences are variously recorded. The last is the 'social' definition of culture in which culture is the depiction of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and regular behavior.

Williams emphasized the 'social' definition of culture as a 'way of life', thus there can be the possibility to form a variety of culture in any institution so that it is found that culture conceives complexity and heterogeneity. Culture varies widely concerning its ecological and socio-economic requirements. It also differs in their legitimated social rules, which takes the form of customs and laws and dominant religious beliefs (Kornadt, 2002). Culture is shaped from a collection of knowledge, beliefs, customs, norms, values, and sanctions of particular human groups (Kendall, 2007). Development of school culture is a group process; People within the schools have certain beliefs, values, traditions, attitudes, and relationships that shape the culture of the school. The ability to create culture can be done through artifacts and creations, values, and basic assumptions. Understanding the construction of culture is essential in building a positive school culture (Schein, 1984a). And then the 'established school culture' impacts the school members as their psychological and behavioral level. Positive influences of school culture on student behaviors are identified as teacher and administrator's attitudes and behaviors in terms of appropriate and impartial treatment with all students. It also recognizes as increased attention to supporting academic achievement and a sense of belongingness for all students. **Effects of school culture and climate on students and teachers:**

A safe and orderly environment contributing to learning has been addressed as essential to academic achievement. Ron Edmonds (1983) referred to the need for a "safe and orderly atmosphere conducive to learning". Daniel Levine and Lawrence Lezotte also defined effective schools in terms of its productive climate and culture" (Marzano,

2003). It has been found that school culture and climate, influenced student academic achievement (Wang et al., 1997; Delisio, 2006; Brand, 2008; Collins & Parson, 2010). According to Hoy and Tarter (1997), unhealthy schools are deviated from their mission and goals by parental and public demands. Unhealthy schools lack effective leadership quality and the teachers are generally dissatisfied with their jobs and colleagues. Supportive teachers (i.e., show care and concern for their students' well being and learning) and emotionally well regulated can provide students a safe and caring learning environment that is conducive to students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic development. When teachers exhibit a negative effect and have poor relationships with their students' feelings of disaffection and disengagement are likely to occur. When students experience these negative feelings and disengagement, they are at greater risk of developing antisocial behaviors, delinquency, and academic failure. Also, neither teachers nor students are academically motivated in a poor school environment consequently they cannot highly cherish by academic achievement. Productive schools that promote high academic standards, powerful leadership and collegiality provide a climate more conducive to student success and academic achievement (Hoy et al. 1990). As stated by Fairman and Clark (1982) in more precise and descriptive language, healthy schools are those who exhibit the following types of cultures, also known as dimensions of organizational health: goal orientation, healthy communication, optimal power distribution, resource utilization, cohesiveness, morale, innovativeness, self-sufficiency, adaptation and problem-solving capability. Also, there are specific aspects or dimensions of the climate that significantly influence student achievement in schools (McLean et al., 2006). Comparisons between school climate and students' records can help school principals to focus their attention to improve student achievement. The overwhelming majority of studies on school climate in the past researches have focused on teachers and student-teacher relations and subsequent issues of academic satisfaction. Teachers often report greater stress when they have troublesome with few students in their classroom (Yoon, 2002) and tend to express negative emotions in response to students' misconducts (Carson & Templin, 2007; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta et al., 2003; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

So, it is important to construct the school environment more positive that can flourish the overall development, satisfaction and higher achievement among the school members, especially among the school teachers and students.

Climate or culture: As a changing agent of the school environment

In the era of modernization, the change in education and schooling is a necessity. Improvement needs to be made in line with current needs and accordance with social demands and cultural change. Every school institution needs to have constant efforts towards organizational change and change of practice to teachers to improve school performance (Wynder Ii, 2013). If we want to change and improve the outcomes of schooling for both students and teachers, there are few features of the school culture as well as school climate that must be changed. It is found that change in both school culture, as well as school climate, can impact to each other, as they have interactive relationship, but before doing any change or improvement, it is necessary to understand that, in both school culture and school climate, which one can be changed or improve more directly and effectively. The reform efforts in the school of the last several years have failed to improve student achievement, school dropout rates, bullying in schools because they failed to adequately understand the nature of culture and climate and thus poor to implement any effective intervention to the target school environment.

School Culture is an enduring, slow to change. It includes the core values and consensual interpretations about how things are; Climate refers to more transitory attitudes, feelings, and perceptions of individuals (Schneider & Somers, 2006). Culture refers to implicit, often hardly noticeable aspects of any organizations; climate refers to more overt, observable attributes of organizations. School or organizational climate being viewed from a psychological perspective and school culture viewed from an anthropological perspective.

We would better understand the relationship between climate and culture through the Cultural Framework developed by Schneider and Reichers (1983). They have portrayed an 'onion skin model' of culture in which each layer (level) is shared by those within the cultural group. The central and deepest layer is the *belief system*. Outwards from this is the *value system*, then the *norms and standards* and the outermost layer are known as the *patterns of behavior*. Belief system influences the value system since it is the belief system which braces the value systems. Similarly, the value system, those things considered important and held in high regard by the groups, will influence the norms and standards which in turn influence patterns of behavior. Norms are concerned with ought, dos and don'ts in a context and standards are renowned by what is rewarded and punished while behaviors refer to the actions of participants. In this model 'time' is an important facet that affects the different levels, that means, the socio-political and economic trends of that particular period in which the institution exists, would also influence the

different levels of the culture. Belief, values, norms, and standards are covert in nature but we can see it in the patterns of behavior in its context, for example, we can only perceive the pattern of behavior of the school members in terms of their healthy communication, academic achievement, rate of bullying, cooperation, leadership quality, etc. if we perceive all these issues as good or bad, then we define the climate of the school as positive or negative respectively. Another thing that has found that behavior influences values.

The idea leads that modification in the outer layer (patterns of behavior) necessitates changes in the inner layer. So it is important to change the climate if it needs to change the belief and culture of the schools. Climate includes an individualistic perspective that can change frequently as situations change.

Conclusion

The first major purpose of a school is to create and provide a psychosocial environment that is hospitable to human learning (Barth 2001). So it should always be monitored to remain positive. What is certain is that the school community should have the enthusiasm to spend more time if they want to develop effective school culture. This means that before making any changes to the school environment, the school-administrators need to plan wisely and carefully so that the cultures formed later will be of good quality, acceptable to all members and can last for a long time. School principals who think about their school environment and focus on the specific aspects of the dimensions of school climate that affect the culture of the school promote student achievement (Pellicer 2003).

The participation of teachers in decision-making when planning school changes should also be taken into account to foster a sense of collegiality and create a sense of belongingness among the school community. Continuous professional development is necessary and teachers should be empowered and responsible to help principals to manage the transformational strategies to transform existing negative cultures as well as inspire and motivate other teachers. In this regard, the school leadership should review the details of the target school, including its history, achievements and the contemporary aspects of its culture before the improvement being implemented (Peterson, 2002). If good interpersonal relationships within the school are created, it can provide cooperation and assistance if needed. School management needs to take appropriate actions to counteract all forms of improvement challenges that exist to generate student's performance excellence as well as enhance the school culture to create a favorable school environment.

This paper provides the insight that the school environment and its relation to student behaviors must be carefully examined and that, if further any education policy is made, action should be taken to effect change in school environment. Those changes should include the expansion of efforts to provide equitable and respectful treatment and opportunities for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds as well as the entrance for changes in district and state regulations that have promoted a lack of student accountability for behaviors. This, in turn, allows the teaching and learning process to be conducted smoothly.

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