SCHOOL AS A GROUND FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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Every Child Learns
Every School Excels

2022

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SCHOOL AS A GROUND FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Kashyapi Awasthi

Introduction

The current revolution in school education entails rethinking of the school space in terms of the formal and informal opportunities it provides for learning and development, and on the feeling and vibrations that it gives to each of its stakeholders. A school is not just about buildings and infrastructure or physical space; rather it is more about relationships, about culture, about values. If schools are to prepare children for living in a democratic society, the moot questions are: What is the kind of learning environment required? What is the kind of communication pattern to be adopted? What must be the norms for discipline? And, What must be the pathways for evolution of each member of the school? Schools planned with vision of transforming them to learning organisations alone could provide the grounds for learning and development, something beyond the classroom walls, the locked gates and guards, the rigid disciplining measures, the CCTV cameras; all these, put together, would make it more like a prison than a space for learning.

An architect who had been designing prisons in America recently asked a colleague to examine a few of his school designs. There was a distinct similarity. Such architecture fails to encourage the sense of ownership, participation, or responsibility required for a democracy. Students are not prisoners who need surveillance, but children who need freedom to grow. What kind of learning environments will support the education our children need? This module highlights the need for a positive school

culture and climate, the need of developing collaborative learning spaces that develop schools as grounds for learning and development, eventually transforming them to learning organisations.

The present module has three sections. Section 1 deals with developing an understanding on the concept of school culture and climate; Section 2 deals with building research evidence that explains the significance of positive school culture and climate; and Section 3 is on the process of developing positive climate.
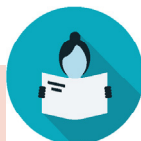
Learning Outcomes

On completion of the module, school leaders

will be able to

- Understand the concept of School Culture and School Climate and its significance
- Understand the role of school leadership in developing a positive School Climate and Culture

| Sections	Topic
Section 1	School Culture and Climate
Section 2	Significance of Positive School Culture and Climate
Section 3	Developing Positive School Climate: Role of School Leadership

SECTION 1
SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Learning Objective: To understand school culture and climate

Key Words: School culture; School climate; School life; Learning

Introduction

Working with so many schools and school principals across the country, I have noticed that every school tells a story. A story which is narrated by its walls, its playground, its ambience, its teachers, its students, its achievements --- both of the institution as a whole and of each individual school, its relationship within and outside schools, and much more. It is this unique narrative that every school develops which makes it different (not labelling it as good or poor) from other schools. The University Community Partnership at the Michigan State University defines this physical, social, psychological and academic environment as the School Climate and the artefacts and symbols, shared values, beliefs, morality, attitude as the School Culture.

Understanding School Culture and Climate
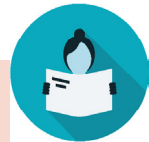
Exercise 1
Self-Reading

Let us do some self-readings through these links to understand the concept of School Culture and School Climate in detail

https://outreach.msu.edu/bpbriefs/issues/brief31.pdf

https://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Table%20A%20Key%20Elements%20of%20a%20Positive%20School%20Culture%20and%20Climate.pdf

http://www.pdst.ie/sites/default/files/Appendix%202%20Practical%20tips%20for%20building%20a%20positive%20school%20culture%20and%20climate.pdf

Please find some notes from the readings and review of literature.

What School Culture is

The Glossary of Educational Reform defines "school culture as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions" but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school embraces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity.

Like the larger social culture, a school culture results from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other staff members all contribute to their school's culture, as do other influences such as the community in which the school is located, the policies that govern how it operates, or the principles upon which the school was founded.

See https://www.edglossary.org/school-culture/

Further, Fullan (2007) understands school culture as a set of beliefs and values that are evident in how a school functions; the term comrehensively covers attitudes, expected behaviours and values that influence school functioing.

What School Climate is

School climate refers to the ethos and character of school; it is ubiquitously based on lived experiences of all stakeholders - students', parents' and school functionaries. The school climate includes norms, goals, values, teaching-learning processes, interpersonal relationships and organisational set-up.

Difference between School Culture and School Climate

School climate refers to the school's physical and psychosocial aspects

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that are more susceptible to change affecting the teaching practices; diversity; and the relationships among administrators, teachers, parents, and students. School culture refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share. In short, it is the more intangible aspects that make the school culture and develops over a period of time while the more tangible aspects make the school climate. It does not take generations to form school climate, rather it is comparatively short term than school culture; altering school climate would eventually alter the school culture as well. However, it needs to be planned systematically and continuously strived for.
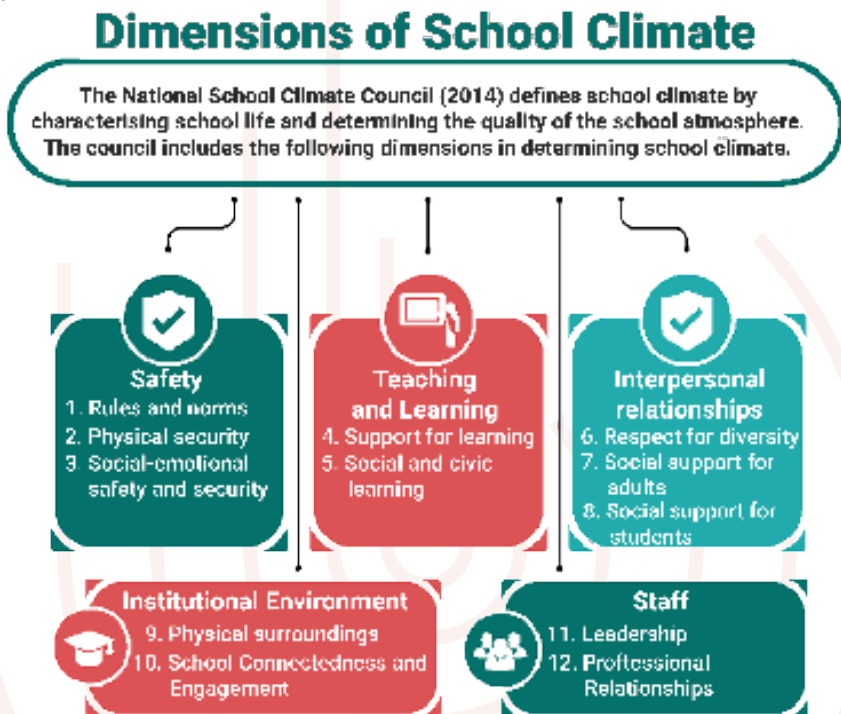
Dimensions of School Climate

The National School Climate Council (2014) defines school climate by characterising school life and determining the quality of the school atmosphere. The council includes the following dimensions in determining school climate.

Safety
1. Rules and norms
2. Physical security
3. Social-emotional safety and security

Teaching and Learning
4. Support for learning
5. Social and civic learning

Interpersonal relationships
6. Respect for diversity
7. Social support for adults
8. Social support for students

Institutional Environment
9. Physical surroundings
10. School Connectedness and Engagement

Staff
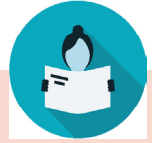11. Leadership
12. Professional Relationships

Figure 1 : Dimensions of School Climate

Source:The National School Climate Council (2014)

Each dimension includes major indicators with which school's climate could be measured (NSCC, 2014).

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Exercise 2
Video Comprehension and Analysis of School Climate

Here is a video on comparing school culture and climate. It also mentions about healthy and toxic cultures and how that helps or harms school.

Watch the video and based on your understanding of school culture and climate

- Evaluate the culture and climate of your own school
- Assess which of the elements in your school are toxic and which are healthy

See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=335ihuLWbVg&t=8s

Let us check our understanding

Every child in my school feels welcomed, loved and safe; this tells more about my school's..............

I can now describe the climate of my school as ....

I can now describe the culture of my school as.................

Let us sum up

Culture is about the written and unwritten rules. It is about shared mental assumptions. It reflects common behaviours based on values and beliefs that characterise the organisation by setting the standards for behaviour (Stolp & Smith, 1995; Gülşen, & Gülenay, 2014) within the school. Culture is historically evolved. It takes an organisational insider to realise what the culture is. Because of the deep-rooted aspect of the

culture, it takes a long period of time to change a school's culture, while school climate is subject to change and modifications as an ongoing process (see Drago-Severson, 2012).

Climate, on the other hand, is the tip of the iceberg and something which is seen outside. It is a set of properties of the work environment; it is shared perceptions of the policies, practices and processes of the organisation. It is recurring patterns of behaviour of the members of the organisation. The climate could also refer to stakeholder's (students, teachers, and parents) perceptions with regard to the nature of organizational leadership and the working environment (Hoy & Miskel, 2010) and is much easier to change compared to culture.

SECTION 2
SIGNIFICANCE OF POSITIVE SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Learning Objective: To understand the impact of a positive school culture and climate on school improvement

Key Words: School improvement; Positive school climate; Student learning; Teacher collaborations

Introduction

Research strongly buttresses the central role of climate and culture to school success. Perry (1908), Dewey (1916) and Durkheim (1961), long back, recognised the impact of distinctive cultures on the life and learning of its students. These highlight various ways in which school climate promotes improvement, collaborative decision making, continuous professional development of teachers and student learning. A positive school climate is recognised as an important target for school reform and improving the behavioural, academic, and mental health outcomes for students (Thapa et al, 2012). For instance, school with a positive climate may exhibit less student disciplinary challenges (Thapa et al, 2013) and aggressive and violent behaviour (Gregory et al, 2010), with fewer school suspensions (Lee et al, 2011).

Impact of a Positive School Culture and Climate on School Improvement

When schools provide students with what they need to succeed and expose students to positive experiences, good things happen.

Following is a list of research review that gives evidence of the relation between positive school climate and overall school improvement:

1. Positively affects students' self-esteem (Hoge, Smit, & Hanson, 1990) and mitigates the negative effects of self-criticism (Kuperminic, Leadbeater & Blatt, 2001)

2. Lowers frequency of students' substance abuse and psychiatric problems (Kasen, Johnson & Cohen, 1990; LaRusso, Romer & Selman, 2008; Ruusetal,2007; Shochet etal, 2006)

3. Decrease in student absenteeism (De Jung & Duckworth, 1986; Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1989; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Reid, 1982; Rumberger, 1987; Sommer, 1985)

4. Lowers rates of students' suspension in high school (Wu, Pink, Crain & Moles, 1982; Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011).

5. Research has shown positive correlation between school climate and lower cases of bullying (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2009), and harassment (Attar-Schwartz, 2009)

6. A favourable school climate has been linked with higher student academic motivation and engagement (Eccles et al, 1993).

7. Positive school climate elevates psychological well-being (Ruuset al, 2007; Shochet et al, 2006)

8. A positive school climate also has benefits for teachers and education support professionals (Bradshaw, Waasdorp et al, 2010). Teachers when supported by their administration, reported higher levels of commitment and more collegiality (Singh & Billingsley, 1998).

9. Likewise, schools where teachers openly communicate with one another, feel supported by their peers and administration, and establish strong student-teacher relationship tend to have better student academic and behavioural outcomes (Brown & Medway, 2007).

Exercise 3
Problem-Solving

GSSS, Khetibadi, Navsari, is a double shift school. Broken doors and windows, half open and half closed gates, goats and pigs having a free visit into the school compound, dirty classrooms and shabbily dressed kids --- this was the first impression of the school. Interaction with the teachers revealed that there is lot of student absenteeism, and parental apathy towards their wards as also education. Interaction with children showed a lack of self-esteem, difficulty in reading, writing and listening even in Classes 7 and 8. The headmaster reported that it was a double shift school and children of urban slum dwellers, largely diamond and textile workers attended it. Parents are addicted either to tobacco or to the local wine and, in many cases, children were also caught up in it. Every other day there is a case of bullying which children learn from their surroundings. There is hardly any motivation to study or teach in such a situation. How do I lead?

- If you were posted as the headmaster of such a school, which dimension of school climate would you begin from?

- What would you do to reduce student absenteeism, bullying and substance abuse?

- How would you reduce the number of cases of children with socio-emotional issues?

Exercise 4
Case Analysis

GSSS, Katrain, Kullu has built a strong instructional culture. All the subject teachers come together, analyse the achievement of students across grades in elementary, high school and higher secondary in their subjects, and discuss the gaps in small sub-groups. There is a lot of open communication and support from peers as also from principal and supervisors. This is combined with the student target setting workshops wherein children assess themselves and realistically fix a target for themselves in the subsequent achievement test. This is done in discussion with the concerned subject teacher so that both know the efforts required to achieve the target. Thus, teacher collaborations, data-based discussions, target setting, peer learning all become a part of the regular schedule of the school contributing towards a strong instructional culture.

1. What are the different strategies used by the GSSS, Katrain to develop an instructional culture?

2. How would you develop effective teacher collaborations in your school?

3. What is the role of the head of the school/principal if a strong instructional focus is to be developed?

Exercise 5
Mapping School against the NSCC Dimensions of School Climate

- Read carefully through the findings of each of the researches.
- Relate the researches to practices in your school and its impact.
- Have you ever studied your school culture and climate and its impact?
- Use the five dimensions and 12 characteristics of school climate given by NSCC and assess your school climate.
- Write a small case study or narrative describing your school's climate and its impact.

Source: http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/sc-brief-v3

Let us sum up

School is not just about a building, a library, a playground or norms and rules set by few adults for disciplining kids. Rather, schools are formalised institutions for educational endeavour. In other words, schools are lungs of the respiratory process of the society (Awasthi, 2009). Therefore, what and how the school would be depends on how healthy is the school environment. It is the culture and climate of the school that breathes life into the otherwise skeletal structure which as an organ cannot, but interact, inspire, integrate and involve with its different components for mutual semblance as well as for reciprocal advantage ensuring growth and development.

SECTION 3

DEVELOPING POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE: ROLE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Learning Objective: To understand the process and practices in developing positive school climate and the role of school leadership

Key Words: Positive school climate; School leadership; School improvement

Introduction

Literature on positive school climate mentions multiple ways in which a positive school climate could be developed. While some have emphasised on building healthy relationships, others stressed on developing shared vision and on setting the rules and norms correctly. A few others have spoken about developing a growth mindset as against a fixed mindset and about collaborative leadership and learning. The six factors identified as a necessity for a positive climate most often include (Drago-Severson, 2012; Gruenert, 2005; Georgia School Boards Association & Georgia Superintendents Association, 2010):

1. Distributive and/or Collaborative leadership,
2. Teacher collaboration,
3. Continuous learning and professional development,
4. Unity of purpose,
5. Collegial support, and
6. Learning partnerships

For the purpose of discussion, these six factors would be elaborated in the following section, although there could be many other factors that contribute to a positive school culture and climate.

What are the Indicators of Positive School Culture and Climate?

Inclusion and Equity

The school ...

» Acknowledges the right of each member of the school community to enjoy in a safe and secure environment without any fear or favour.

» Respects the uniqueness of each individual and his/her worth as a human being.

» Promotes positive habits of self-respect, self-discipline and

responsibility among all its members.

» Has a clear commitment to promoting equity and inclusion at all levels.

Focus on Learning

The school ...

» Has a culture of reflection and continuously builds capacity to change in response to the needs of the time

» Identifies aspects of curriculum through which positive and lasting influence could be exerted towards forming pupils' attitudes and values

» Continuously promotes the learning of its staff and students and creates opportunities for their professional and personal development.

Collegiality and Support

The school ...

» Promotes habits of mutual respect, courtesy and an awareness of the interdependence of people in groups and communities

» Promotes qualities of social responsibility, tolerance and understanding among all its members both in and outside the school.

» Shares collegiate responsibility under the direction of the SMC and Principal to prevent any kind of aggressive behaviours by any member of the school community.

Collaboration and Team work

The school ...

» Recognises the importance of working in partnerships and keeps

parents and the extended community informed and works towards developing healthy relationships.

» Creates platform for parents to actively engage in equipping pupils with range of life skills and positive life habits.

» Creates platform for teachers to work in teams with peers, pupils and parents to improve learning for all.

Arts, Aesthetics, Cleanliness and Hygiene

The school ...

» Engages staff and students in improving the arts and aesthetics at school

» Promotes the participation of pupils in creating a clean and hygienic environment

» Encourages self-responsibility, ownership and belongingness in developing an appealing environment.

Positive School Culture: How We Make It Happen

"Designate time to what you consider to be the most important." Consider this to be a professional advice or a personal but has worked both ways for me and so does it go for school improvement. If healthy body is important to you, you will have to make it a part of your daily schedule. Similarly, if you want a strong collaborative culture, allot time for planned and formal collaborations in your school's master schedule. If as a leader you are looking at improving learning and teaching-learning process, develop a strong instructional culture.

Knowing that a positive school climate improves student learning, enhances quality in teaching-learning processes, builds strong relationships; what is the roadmap you would want to put together as school leaders?
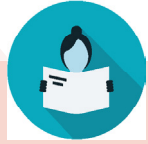
Exercise 6
Setting up a Focus

Following are the five dimensions of school climate as given by NSCC:

1. School safety and security

2. Teaching-learning processes

3. Inter-personal relationships

4. Institutional environment

5. Staff

- List out the change that you want to see in each of the dimensions so as to improve your school climate

- How do you plan to designate time in your school calendar to improve on each of the dimensions?

Exercise 7

Case Study Analysis

GSS, Campbell Bay, Andaman and Nicobar Islands

A visit to Government Secondary School, Campbell Bay, A&N Islands, tells you about a story of passion, perseverance and team work. A welcoming principal introduced me to the staff and took me to the morning assembly. Here I find students taking charge of conducting the assembly, establishing discipline, organising classes from primary to higher secondary and something that I was told, a recent addition – extempore where in random children from different classes are encouraged to pick up chits and speak for 2 minutes in front of the entire school. All this demonstrated self-confidence amomg students, a feeling of mutual trust which gave me a feeling "I could take risk of speaking wrong and still not be judged."

Researcher: I spoke to the principal. Is it that all children speak so confidently and always? My mental models made me question; what is the socio-economic background of the kids? Are their parents educated? You seem to be posted to a good school.

Principal: (Smiled) this is our focus in the School Development Plan; providing equal learning opportunities to all children. I have therefore made this a part of all activities in the school whether inside the classrooms or outside.

Researcher: How have you ensured this in classrooms?

Principal: The classroom infrastructure, especially the seating arrangement, has been altered. Instead of rows and columns, we now have benches facing each other where children sit in groups.

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It supports peer group learning. It is done for all classes except for higher secondary where due to increase in strength, this may not be possible. The cafeteria arrangement made the teacher movement easy. It now expected the teacher to focus on a group rather than an individual which once again permitted more time and saved energy. Small groups gave comfort to the child, removed hesitation in asking questions to the teacher. This provided them equal opportunities for learning, and enabled a shift from traditional lecture methods to collaborative learning techniques.

The notice boards, display boards and all student committees are on rotational basis, so that every child gets a chance to take up the responsibility and develop his/her potential.

- What does the analysis of case study on GSS, Campbell Bay, tell about its climate?
- On what dimension did the school principal focus?
- Which dimension would you want to focus for improving your school?

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Additional Resources

Watch the Video on School Culture:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnfQxGQJ5oY

School Culture and Climate:

https://k12engagement.unl.edu/strategy-briefs/School%20 Climate%20&%20Culture%202-6-16%20.pdf

National School Climate Centre:

http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate/documents/policy/sc-brief-v3. pdf

Deal and Peterson on Shaping School Culture'

https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/15584_Bully_Free_Research_Brief-4pg.pdf

http://inservice.ascd.org/the-steps-to-creating-a-positive-school-culture/

Online Resources

Apart from the above, one may also consult the following.

On School Culture:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242721155_School_culture

https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/resources/2/Principal/2008/M-Ap56.pdf

On School Culture, Teachers' Beliefs, Behaviours, and Instructional Practices:

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1017655.pdf

On School Climate:

https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2007/LC2007v5n1a4.pdf

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302020284_School_Climate_Teachers'_Efficiency_and_Learning_Outcomes_in_Koronadal_City_Schools_Division_Philippines

On the Importance of School Climate:

https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/15584_Bully_Free_Research_Brief-4pg.pdf

On Review of School Climate Research:

http://education.ucdavis.edu/sites/main/files/file-attachments/thapa_cohen_guffey_and_higgins-dallesandro_2013.pdf

On School Culture and School Climate:

https://k12engagement.unl.edu/strategy-briefs/School%20Climate%20&%20Culture%202-6-16_1.pdf

On the Effect of School Culture and Climate on Student Achievement:

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13603120701576241?needAccess=true

On Difference between Culture and Climate:

https://higherlogicdownload.s3-external-1.amazonaws.com/KASA/1Climate%20vs%20Culture%20-%20for%20module%20MC.

Leadership Pathways for Continuous Professional Development: A Package of
Self-Instructional Modules for School Leaders

Modules in this Series

Series Editors: Rashmi Diwan and Charu Smita Malik
List of Contributors

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Key Area – Transforming Teaching-Learning Processes		
Module 7	Education for Critical thinking	Subitha G.V.
Module 8	National Level Inclusive Education Policies w.r.t. CwDs	Veera Gupta
Module 9	How do I create Inclusive Classrooms?	Veera Gupta and Bharti
Module 10	Establishing and Sustaining Professional Learning Communities for Academic Excellence in School Education	Sunita Chugh
Module 11	Vocationalisation of Education: Leading Learning for Employability skills	Puja Singhal and Sunita Chugh
Key Area – Building and Leading Teams		
Module 12	Building and Leading Teams: Professional Dialogue among Team Members	Puja Singhal and Monika Bajaj
Key Area – Leading Partnerships		
Module 13	Partnership for School Improvement with Stakeholders	Mona Sedwal
Key Area – Leading School Administration		
Module 14	Leadership Succession for School-based Transformation	Rashmi Diwan