

Vlatka Družinec, classroom teacher, doctoral student
Josip Broz Kumrovec Primary School
vlatka.druzinec@gmail.com

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH OF SCHOOL CULTURE

***Abstract:** School culture is one of the indicators of quality and organizational effectiveness of the school, which includes values, norms, beliefs, rituals and school traditions. The quality of school culture affects the quality of the overall way of life in school.*

The aim of this paper is to present the results of the author's available empirical research in Croatia and in the world in the domain of school culture. The paper analyzes the conclusions of scientific papers that determine the correlation between school culture and some factors of educational work at school: educational achievement of students, violence in schools and deviant behavior of students, wellbeing for teachers, interpersonal relationships in school and the role of director.

Given that school culture is a initiator of positive changes within the institution and has a significant impact on all participants in the educational process, the basic purpose of this paper is to consider school culture as an important factor in achieving the quality of the overall life and work in school. By the results of research it can be concluded that only a small number of researches of the school culture were conducted in Croatia, it is necessary to systematically explore the cultures of Croatian schools and to encourage positive changes in the school culture.

***Keywords:** negative school culture; positive school culture; school; student; teacher*

INTRODUCTION

School is a social institution which provide organized education for members of certain society (Vrcelj, 2000). In general, it is a community of students, teachers, experts, administrators and other staff members whose main purpose is education of students. Every school has a different and unique organisation of school life, attitudes and specific culture³² different from other schools. School culture is an indicator of quality and efficiency which include three mutually connected factors: attitudes, cultural norms and relations among members of that institution (Vrcelj, 2003).

Culture vary from school to school considering that it is shaped by people (Eger, 2010), social environment, historical context and political and economic conditions. Being a part of social system, school culture has its cultural characteristics and they together make society as a whole. According to that, social culture is a „living organism“ which people in and out of school enrich or improve (Fullan, 1999). School culture has an impact on life and work in school and it is considered to be one of the

³² Culture is the way of life of a group of people which combines the language, attitudes, beliefs, customs, behaviours, taste in music and clothes and likewise (Petz, 1992).

most important psychosocial factors (Sušanj, 2005) for a successful school development and progress of its members.

Elements of school culture (attitudes, beliefs, cultural norms, relationships, rituals and ceremonies, leadership, cooperation with parents and local community, curriculum, organizational conditions, school design...) with their positive or negative characteristics can stimulate or disrupt the realization of goals and impact interpersonal relationships in school. Cooperative relationships, mutual goals, commitment to work, professional training, sharing of responsibilities, innovations, communication with parents and local community and mutual decision making are characteristics of positive school culture. On the other hand, damaged interpersonal relationships, alienation of teachers, non-involvement of parents and local community, vague goals, lack of innovativity and indifference of students are characteristics of negative school culture.

School culture has a great influence on school life: education (achievements, discipline), themes in teachers' room, relationships in and out of school (informal annual meetings, acceptance of changes, interaction with parents...), the way teachers and other staff members dress, acceptance of changes and school design (Hinde, 2004). The aim of this paper is to consider the school culture as an important factor of school quality (Kolak, 2013) which can improve or disrupt the school goals. Further more, the paper will define the term school culture, overview the studies on school culture and correlation with other factors so far. It will also try to consider strategies for improving school culture.

THE TERM SCHOOL CULTURE

There is no same definition of school culture in literature, but authors agree that school culture is a complex term which characterizes school as an educational institution (MasGilchrist, 1999 according to Vujičić, 2008). We can single out several syntagms describing school culture as unseen force (Prosser, 1999), historically transmitted pattern (Stolp, 1994), what goes on in school day after day (Stoll, 1998), relatively permanent school quality (Domović, 2004), school life (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015), school climate (Previšić, 2010) or a unique entity (Jurčić, 2014).

Prosser (1999) thinks that school culture gives community a meaning. It determines activities and mobilises school staff. Smey- Richman (1991) describes school culture as a mechanism of social control that directs people's behaviour. Domović (2004) says that school culture affects peoples' behaviour and determines school life. Stoll (1998) describes it as the school reality which determines people's identity, gives them support and frame for professional work and friendship. Vrclj (2018) emphasises that schoolculture gives order which assures proper school functioning. It also includes school philosophy for successful and efficient education.

A TYPOLOGY OF SCHOOL CULTURES

School culture consists of elements related to students, parents and school staff (Golley, 1999). There are common elements combined in the term of school subject:

mission, vision, purpose, norms, values, beliefs, assumptions, activities, relationships, traditions, rituals, school's history, heroes, stories, myths, game, leadership, decision making, artifacts, symbols, architecture, cultural institutions, parents and local community, support, educational policy, curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment methods (Deal i Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985; Smey-Richman, 1991; Hargreaves, 1992; Alder, 1993; Heckman, 1993; Stolp, 1994; Stoll, 1998; Colley, 1999; Peterson i Deal, 2002; Schein, 2004; Tableman, 2004; Brown, 2004; Peterson i Cosner, 2006; Previšić, 2010; Kolak, 2013; Jurčić, 2014; Buljubašić-Kuzmanović, 2015; Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015).

According to levels and quality of mentioned elements we notice different types of school culture. Hargreaves (1995) uses the instrumental domein (level of social control and orientation to task) and the expressive domain (level of cohesion and positive relationships). He offers a four type model of inefficient school cultures: traditional (low social cohesion, high social conrol), welfarist (low social control, high social cohesion), hothouse (high social control and cohesion) and anomic (low social cohesion and control). Stoll and Fink (1996) focus on two dimensions, effectiveness-ineffectiveness and improving- declining of school. They have developed a five type model of school culture: moving (encourage students' progress, working together), cruising (pupils achieve in spite of teaching quality), strolling (doesn't cope with pace of change), struggling (ineffective) and sinking (isolation, ineffectiveness).

School culture are mostly divided into two basic forms: positive and negative cultures (petersen and Deal, 2002; Markić, 2014). Characteristics associated with positive school cultures are inspiring vision and challenging mission connected with curriculum and teaching methods, collegial and productive staff relationships, encouraging leaders and decisions based on verified information (Brown, 2004), sharing of responsibilities, faith, efficient usage of resources, recognized and celebrated success (Markić, 2014), collaboratively made decisions (Brust Nemet and Velki, 2016), clear expectation of positive behaviour and commitment (Duke, 1990) confronting the chalenges and emotional climate (Hargreaves, 1997), learning partnership (Grue-nert and Valentine, 1998), architecture and facilities suitable for children (Tableman, 2004). Negative school culture is determined by a low level of collaboration, passivity, pessimism, frustration, negative attitudes towards teaching and learning, empa-sis on failure, lack of togetherness (Markić, 2014), lack of clear sense of purpose and energy, inefficiency (Brown, 2004), inappropriate communication and antagonism (Peterson and Deal, 2002).

Characteristics of school culture can either be an abstacle or improve school and education. Considering this fact, principal and other staff members should strive in creating a positive school culture (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Mulford, 2007; Dufour and Marzano, 2009).

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

There are only few researches that use holistic approach when talking about school culture. Authors usually look into correlation between certain elements of school culture and specific factors in school. Some researches observe school culture as a

predictor of specific situations in school, while others observe the influence of school factors on quality of school culture. The text mentions researchers that determine correlation between school culture and students' academic achievements, presence of violence and deviant behaviour, teachers' satisfaction and level of stress, professional training, burnout and interpersonal relationship.

School culture is considered to be one of main factors which influence students' academic achievements (Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel and Coetsee, 2005). The research on correlation of school culture and students' achievements in maths (Bland, 2012) in secondary schools in Georgia has shown statistically significant correlation between students' achievement and specific elements of school culture: common mission, vision, values and goals. 16 310 students in grades four, six, eight and ten in 820 public schools in Illinois have been surveyed on five dimensions of school culture (academic challenge, achievement, acknowledgement, school community and goals). It was determined that positive school culture has great influence on students' outcomes and motivation as well as productivity and satisfaction of employees (Fyans and Maehr, 1990). If school goals strive to learning outcomes and curriculum is coordinated with goals, if professional training is encouraged and decisions are made collaboratively, learning motivation is higher. Thacker and McInerney (1992) have observed the influence of such school culture on students' achievement. The number of students who haven't passed the annual testing has decreased by 10 %.

Many researchers observe certain elements of school culture as predictors of inappropriate students' behaviour and violence³³ in schools. They relate school size and design and number of students (Tableman, 2004; Bouillet, 2010) to violence among students (Fraser, 1996; Pollard, Hawkins and Arthur, 1999 according to Khoury-Kassabri and Associates, 2005). Barr and Higgins- D'Alessandro (2007) confirmed that students in small alternative school perceive school culture more positively than students in larger traditional schools. Schools with less students enable them higher involvement in extracurricular activities, more positive attitudes, fewer behavioral problems and a better sense of membership and cohesion among students (Moran, Tableman and Carlson, 2012). Holtzapels and Meier (2000) also emphasise that negative school culture has impact on deviant students' behaviour³⁴. Vlah and Perger (2014) determined that peer violence is made by students who perceive destructive relationships among students while students who perceive school as an insecure place are more often victims. Negative school culture stimulates aggressive and violent behaviour among students.

Dupper and Mayer-Adams (2002) concluded that one way of reducing low-level violence in schools is to create a more positive school culture. School which non-

33 Dan Olweus (1998) defines bullying as deliberate and intentional activity of discomforting or injuring other people. A student is bullied when he or she is exposed to negative actions on the part of one or more students.

34 Deviant behaviour is any form of behaviour that is contrary to the dominant norms and values of society (Popović- Ćitić and Žunić-Pavlović, 2005).

rich positive culture have less violence and more learning concentration. Students respect and obey school rules, have positive relationships with teachers and a sense of belonging (Lindstrom Johnson, 2009; Khoury-Kassabri and associates, 2005). Brand, Feiner, Shim, Seitsinger and Dumas (2003) say that consistent expectations predict more positive behaviour. Proactive teachers, strong cohesion and positive interpersonal relationship produce less verbal and physical violence. Clear school policy against violence decrease behavioral problems (Holtappels and Meier, 2000). Lindstrom Johnson (2009) considers positive relationships among students, positive relationships among students and teachers and clear and consistent school rules as elements of positive school culture. Purkey (1990) observes that school culture has a great influence on behavioral problems and students' achievements. Collaborative work and consistence in goal achievement can prevent unwanted students' behaviour.

Researches often observe teachers' perception of school culture and its contribution to their welfare. Hamilton and Richardson (1995) determined that school culture and teachers' expectations strongly influence their cooperation and professional training. Positive school culture encourages professional training and achievements. Teachers' experience is directly connected to culture and level of discipline in school (Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel and Coetsee, 2005). Brust Nemet and Velki (2016) conducted a survey on selfevaluation of emotional and pedagogical competence on 690 teachers in 30 elementary schools in counties in Slavonija. They wanted to know which factors predict positive culture and school efficiency³⁵. Demographic features (gender and age, lower or upper grades) weren't significant for school culture while pedagogical and emotional competences of teachers were the best predictor of all aspects of school culture. Teachers who selfevaluate a higher level of these competences also selfevaluate a higher level of positive school culture. Kanesan Abdullah and Arokiasamy (2016) determined a positive correlation between teachers' perception of school culture and their work satisfaction.

Teachers are happier and more satisfied in schools that nourish professional cooperative culture. Slavić and Rijavec (2015) wanted to examine contribution of cooperative culture characterized by cooperative leadership, professional development, mutual goals, support and partnership to explanation of stress and welfare of teachers. The survey was conducted on 256 teachers from 7 elementary school in Splitsko-dalmatinska county. The results show that factors of cooperative school culture are a positive predictor of welfare and negative predictors of stress among teachers. Teachers experience a lower level of stress if they cooperate with parents and students. This means that teachers and parents often communicate about expectations considering students' achievements. Parents' trust in teacher's competence is also important. Englert and Tarrant (1995), according to Colley (1999) conclude that cooperative school culture characteristics are mutual vision, mutual understanding and problem solving mechanisms. Less stressed teachers achieve progress and

³⁵ School efficiency refers to a level on which school achieves the desired standards and goals, by comparison with other schools (Scheerens, 2013).

are more satisfied with their job and life. Quinn (2005) emphasises that supportive school culture is directly responsible for lower level of stress. Lack of trust in teacher's professional competence and unpleasant environment are directly connected to higher level of stress and burnout (Friedman, 1991).

Interpersonal relationships in school are elements of school culture which influence its quality. Positive school culture has collegial relationships among employees (Anderson, 1985; Gottfredson, 1986 according to Higgins-D'Alessandro and Sath, 1996). Work experience isn't statistically a significant factor when evaluating school culture, but support, trust, team work and conflict solving have important influence in determining the quality of school culture (Roby, 2011). Teachers will be less absent and more satisfied and students will have less school problems if school nourishes a sense of togetherness (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993 according to Roby, 2011). Co-operative relationship with principal lead to more satisfied teachers. It is important that principal trusts teacher's expertise and supports and rewards their innovative ideas (Slavić and Rijavec, 2015). Teachers see their school culture as positive and are more satisfied and confident in schools which acknowledge success (Wong and Zhang, 2014). School culture correlates with teachers' attitudes towards their work so schools with good organisations, cooperative working and charismatic leadership have happier and more productive teachers (Yin Cheong Cheng, 1993 according to Stolp 1994).

Principals are important creators of school culture and when they realize there is a need for change and improvement they aim towards cooperation and respect (Fullan, 1999). Martin (2009) analysed a relation between leadership styles and school culture. He determined a positive correlation of transformacional leadership and school culture and negative correlation of school culture and Laissez-fair leadership. Transformacional leader clearly defines school vision, motivates employees and supports progress.

School culture is a complex term that influences all the participants. Because of that complexity, authors analyse the influence of certain elements of school culture such as students' educational achievements, violence and inappropriate behaviour, teachers' welfare and interpersonal relationships, but also the influence of school factors on quality of school culture.

SCHOOL CULTURE IMPROVEMENT

It is necessary to analyse and improve school culture. We can influence the improvement of quality of educational process and school life by changing the elements of school culture. Empowering the present school culture means determining the initial state, examining the quality of certain culture characteristics and systematic and planned work to improve deficient features.

Determining the school culture quality of a specific school includes using different research methods which will give information on identity and functioning of school. To research school culture, authors use qualitative methods (formal and informal in-

terviews, analyse of school documents, observations, field information, photographs) and quantitative methods (surveys) (Higgins-D'Alessandro, Sadh, 1997; Gruenert, Valentine, 1998; Maslowski, 2001; McLaughlin, Talbert, 2003; Cowley, Voelkel, Finch, Meehan, 2005; Barr, Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2009; Eger, 2010; Slavić, Rijavec, 2015; Spajić-Vrkaš, 2015; Kanesan Abdullah, Arokiasamy, 2016). Most often used surveys about school culture by foreign authors are *School Culture Scale* (Higgins-D'Alessandro, Sadh, 1997), *School Culture Survey* (Gruenert, Valentine, 1998), *School Culture Inventory* (Higgins-D'Alessandro, Sadh, 1997), *School Culture Indicators* (McLaughlin, Talbert, 2003), *The Perceptions Of School Culture* (Cowley, Voelkel, Finch, Meehan, 2005), *School Culture Review* (Eger, 2010) which Croatian authors use and adapt to Croatian language and cultural context (Slavić and Rijavec, 2015).

After determining the initial state of school culture, we should define a path for achieving success. Interventions in school improvement are made for different reasons and in different ways (Stoll and Fink, 1996), but they imply mutual discussion of school community members (Vujičić, 2008).

Key factors in school culture improvement are deeply entrenched attitudes and beliefs on education which often obstruct the changes (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2008). We should determine static and toxic attitudes and their causes and ways for possible changes (Peterson and Deal, 1998). Activities which encourage togetherness, cooperation, mutual respect and positive relationships initiate wanted changes (Spajić-Vrkaš, 2008). Stoll and Fink (1996) identified 10 cultural norms that influence school improvement: shared goals, responsibility for success, collegiality, continuous improvement, lifelong learning, risk taking, support, mutual respect, openness and celebration and humour.

Changes within school can happen only if values, beliefs, norms and interpersonal relationships start to change (Stoll, 1998). If school wants to improve its culture, it is necessary that all participants are willingly involved in those changes (Hughes and Andreas, 1995 according to Colley, 1999).

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this paper was determining school culture as an important factor in achieving a quality life and work in school. The goal was to point out the connection of school culture with students' achievements, presence of violence and deviant behaviour, teachers' welfare, interpersonal relationship and the role of principal.

There are many definitions of school culture, but authors agree that school culture is an important, complex and multidimensional term which determines school life. School culture combines many elements which form our conclusions on quality and type of school culture and its impact on students, teachers and other staff members. School culture is usually divided into positive or negative culture. Positive culture enables and supports development and progress of school members while negative culture disables and/or hinders progress.

Scientific researches show that less students, positive interpersonal relationships, focus, consistent respect of school rules, team work, group cohesion, cooperation,

professional development, togetherness, support and partnership, acknowledgement of success and transformacional leadership contribute to positive school culture. Negative interpersonal relationships, indifference, students' non-involvement in decision making, emphasizing of failure and lack of togetherness contribute to negative school culture.

This paper is intended for teachers as bearers of educational progress. It is also intended for principals who have the most important role and impact on school culture as leaders of positive changes. The results conclude that only a few researches on school culture in Croatia have been conducted. It is necessary that we systematically research school culture in Croatia and encourage its positive changes.

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