THE SCHOOL CLIMATE – THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES AND RESEARCH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS

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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 of significance: 1) the overall attitude to school and the motivation to study; 2) teachers' qualities and competence; 3) school rules and discipline in class; 4) the solidarity of the class as a social group; 5) the architectural, aesthetic and hygienic aspects of the school. The paper also seeks to present new practical methods supported by long experience of school climate gained abroad and even by similar experience lately picked up in the Czech Republic. Whereas in Europe and elsewhere school climate is part of basic educational disciplines, in the Czech Republic it is still waiting for recognition as a regular educational and psychological phenomenon. The primary overall aim was to devise a suitable method, i.e. a questionnaire, for the current research. This questionnaire was tested in a quantitative way. It has assisted in judging the quality of five areas of the school climate at a grammar school. One-factor analysis of dispersion revealed differences in pupils, teachers and parents' judgement of the five areas. A comparison of the average answers given by the three groups of respondents shows that it is the teachers who are most satisfied with all areas of the school climate. Parents appeared to be less content. The biggest dissatisfaction is among pupils. In future, the gained results can become a basis for further research in this area. The long-term goal should be to propose a model for the creation of a positive school climate in the form of practical advice and recommendations for teachers and head teachers. The significance of the present work consists of setting up a survey method and carrying out the actual research.*

Key words: *school climate, students, teachers, parents, research, questionnaire.*

1. SPECIFICATION OF THE TERM SCHOOL CLIMATE

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 contemporary events, but also based on the past and with the perspective of the future. All aspects of school life exist in mutual relations. The processes in school life are the reflection of changes realised in the past. Together with this, they have the character of adaptation and anticipation. The processes and circumstances in the school environment should be observed with respect to contemporary conditions. At the same time, it is necessary to confront the contemporary state with the perspective and for the benefit of the future. While judging the school climate, we should therefore study the whole evolution of the school environment.

Experts cannot agree on what the term school climate includes and what it does not. Obdržálek (2002) states that the school climate is a socio-psychological phenomenon which is very complex and exceptionally challenging to analyse and explore. Mareš (2000, 242) lists as its variables the school equipment, processes taking place in the school, the leadership style, the public reflection of the school, teachers' dedication to the school and to school work, and student specifics. Some provocative opinions have emerged that the term school climate is out of date and therefore no attention should be given to it (Finlayson, 1987 in Mareš, 2000, 242). We do not share this opinion, but on the contrary seek to research these problems and develop theoretical viewpoints.

We know that the school climate (in some sources named school atmosphere, the 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. It does not just happen, but grows continually. It is a long-lasting phenomenon which is typical of the individual school.

Some authors describe the term school climate as school culture, an informal perception of the processes which take place at school (Deal and Kennedy, 1985, in Aurin, 1990, 58). From our point of view, it is not possible to understand the terms school culture and school climate as synonyms. Indeed, there is a mutual relationship between school culture and school climate, which is not of a one-way process. According to Obdržálek (2002), the school climate influences the school culture after some time, and it affects the satisfaction of the school staff, pupils and teachers. In turn, the satisfaction positively influences the culture of the school. If all individuals feel good and satisfied in the school environment, the effectiveness of the school increases. Good results in school work serve as a motivation for other activities and for the fulfilment of the set aims.

Spanhel (1993, 225) describes the school climate as the perceived reality or basis which can be observed at school. Every activity has its meaning

in regular school life. We mainly concentrate on the goal for which teachers and students would share good relationships in the everyday life of a class or school, would be able to manage the problems or struggles and solve the set tasks together. All these aspects can be positively influenced by a good school climate. This algorithm also works vice versa. Friendly relations and a good mood can help in producing a pleasant school climate. The school climate enables teachers and students to have a similar perception of the school environment. We shall also try to answer the question on how we can improve the quality of the school and school instruction through a good school climate. Every school should try to build its own concept of how it will optimise the school climate in everyday school life.

When judging the school climate we are mostly interested in evaluating the participating individuals, i.e. students and teachers (cf. Eckert, 1988, 135; Saldern, 1991, 190). We also consider the ideas of headmasters, parents, the parents' association, school founders or state school authorities. When we contemplate the school climate, we can also study the objective data about the school, i.e. the number of students, number and size of classes, school organisation, student population, characteristics of the school leadership, and teacher education (Bessoth, 1989). However, these data do not speak about the relation among students and teachers, about student and teacher motivation for instructional activities or cooperation among students. For us, the more important features are the subjective views of the school actors, their ways of thinking, attitudes, opinions, ways of behaviour or acting, etc.

2. SCHOOL CLIMATE RESEARCH

2.1. CONSTRUCTION OF THE RESEARCH METHOD

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

At the pre-research phase we optimised the research method. After this adaptation, we built questionnaires for students, teachers and parents, each of which consisted of 50 items. The items were divided into five selected areas which characterise the school climate. The areas were as follows:

1) overall relationship and motivation towards the school (items no. 1 – 9);
2) teachers' quality and competences (items no. 10 – 21);
3) school rules and classroom discipline (items no. 22 – 29);

4) cohesion 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, stating how far they agreed with the individual item. They circled their response on a 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. CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH AND PROCESSING THE RESULTS

The research took place at one grammar school in the Olomouc region. The sample involved 231 students, 27 teachers and 221 parents.

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

2.3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research certainly confirmed differences in the evaluation of the areas of school climate from the perspective of students, teachers and parents.

In the area "overall relationship with and motivation to school", there appeared some differences among the groups of students and teachers, and also among groups of parents and teachers.

In the second area "teachers' quality and competences" no differences were found.

The area "school rules and classroom discipline" was approached differently by the compared groups of students and teachers, students and parents, and parents and teachers.

The fourth area "the cohesion of the class as a social group" did not show any differences from the perspective of students, teachers or parents.

In the fifth area "architectural, aesthetic and hygienic aspects of school" we found differences in the evaluation of the groups of students and teachers, and the students and parents, but there were no differences within the groups of teachers and parents.

On the basis of the research results, we can gather not just the results of the evaluation of the selected areas, but we may also deduce which group of respondents evaluates the studied area best and which worst.

The first area "overall relationship and motivation to school" was most positively judged by teachers (average evaluation of 4.23), then parents (3.81) and worst by students (3.65).

In the second area "teachers' quality and competences", similar results appeared. This was evaluated best by the teachers (3.78), followed by parents (3.56), and worst by students (3.42).

The third area "school rules and classroom discipline" was again best viewed by teachers (3.87), parents (3.45), and worst by students (3.32).

The fourth area "cohesion of the class as a social group" was positively judged by teachers, (3.40), with a similar value by parents (3.29) and students (3.22).

In the fifth area "architectural, aesthetic and hygienic aspects of school" there were no dramatic changes in evaluation. The area was again best viewed by teachers (3.98). The evaluation of parents (3.62) and students (3.60) was almost the same.

Now we can compare the average assessments of the three groups of respondents – students, teachers and parents. All areas were best evaluated by the teachers, and worst by students, while in the middle were the parents.

We can also judge the overall assessment of the areas of school climate. The most positively viewed by all respondents was the first area "overall relationship and motivation to school". The worst evaluated of all areas was the fourth "cohesion of the class as a social group".

In our opinion, some circumstances could have occurred which might have distorted the results of the research. We believe that some side factors could have played a role in the process of filling in the questionnaire (e.g. personal matters of the respondents) which were reflected in the final evaluation of the selected areas of school climate.

However, we do not want to make a final conclusion on the basis of these results. We realise that we have to be cautious in interpreting the facts. Despite this, we believe that the evaluation of the selected items of the school climate at a grammar school is more or less optimistic. But we also realise that even the negative aspects of school climate belong to the studied phenomenon. They signify a challenge for improving and optimising the school climate.

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ŠKOLSKA KLIMA – TEORIJSKA NAČELA I ISTRAŽIVANJE S MOTRIŠTA UČENIKA, NASTAVNIKA I RODITELJA

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Sažetak – *Ovaj rad proučava kvalitetu školske klime. Jedan od njegovih ciljeva jest definirati temeljne pojmove, poput okruženja, ozračja, klime, i odabranih inačica klime, posebno školsku klimu. Pozornost se usmjerava na sljedećih pet područja školskoga života koji su, prema mišljenju autorice, značajni: 1) sveukupan stav škole i motivacija za učenje; 2) kvalitete i kompetencije učitelja; 3) školska pravila i razredna disciplina; 4) solidarnost razreda kao društvene skupine; 5) arhitektonski, estetski i higijenski vidovi škole. Ovim se radom žele predstaviti i nove metode poduprte dugim iskustvom vezanim za školsku klimu, a prikupljenim u inozemstvu te sličnim nedavnim iskustvom iz zemlje. Dok je u Europi i drugdje školska klima dio temeljnih obrazovnih disciplina, u Češkoj ona još uvijek čeka na priznanje da se radi o redovnom obrazovnom i psihološkom fenomenu. Glavni cilj cijeloga rada jest pronaći odgovarajuću metodu, odnosno upitnik za provođenje istraživanja. Na ovom je upitniku provedena kvantitativna provjera, a pomogao mi je pri ocjeni kvalitete u pet područja školske klime u jednoj gimnaziji. Disperzivna analiza u jednom čimbeniku otkrila je razlike u ocjenama učenika, nastavnika i roditelja za pet područja. Usporedivši prosječne odgovore tih triju skupina ispitanika, možemo zaključiti da su najzadovoljniji sa svim područjima školske klime nastavnici. Proizašlo je da su roditelji nešto manje zadovoljni. Najveće nezadovoljstvo postoji među učenicima. Dobiveni rezultati mogu u budućnosti biti temelj za daljnje istraživanje u ovome području. Cilj bi trebao biti predložiti model stvaranja pozitivne školske klime u obliku savjeta i preporuka nastavnicima i ravnateljima. Važnost rada sastoji se u izradi metode upitnika i provođenja istraživanja u praksi.*

Ključne riječi: *školska klima, učenici, učitelji, roditelji, upitnik*