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Beyond Teaching: School Climate and Communication in the Educational Context

Eleni Mousena and Nikolaos Raptis

Abstract

Positive school climate promotes teachers' professionalism and students' social development and academic achievement. However, positive school climate cannot be taken for granted within a context of rapid change and increased complexity. Educators are often faced with critical situations, which result in many of them questioning their own abilities. The problem set forth in this study is based upon the changes in educational context as caused by current social, financial, and technological factors and their impact on school climate. This paper explores the variables of school climate and communication in order to find the extent to which their relationship can work in favor of an open, safe, and creative educational organization where teachers and students will wish to belong. It also examines the communication skills of school principals. The conceptual framework of the study is based on research related to organizational culture and educational communication. The study is a critical meta-analysis of literature on the statement problem. The results show that school climate is fundamental to achieving school goals. Communication among all participants is a key factor in creating a positive school climate, and the communication skills of the school principal are largely crucial.

Keywords: school climate, communication, listening culture, leadership

1. Introduction

In the last decades, the scientific interest in the quality of education and its outcomes has focused on the importance of school climate, indicating that a positive school climate can promote the academic and social development of children and the professional performance of educators [1, 2]. As well as this, school climate is one of the main aspects of the teaching and learning process. The deliberate cultivation of a culture of learning and participation in an organization requires the systematic collection, processing, and distribution of knowledge aimed at the organization's optimal performance [3].

However, school climate is not always positive or creative, and teachers and students alike may not feel good at school, while school objectives may not be achieved. It is a fact that conditions in education are becoming increasingly difficult, as a result of the broader, rapidly changing, and increasingly complex environment. Teachers are often faced with violent, even criminal, acts, which may cause them to consider changing careers or have low self-confidence regarding their chosen profession [4]. Critical situations can disrupt school climate [5–7]. Ways of dealing

with such problematic situations can be sought by competent bodies, but they can also come from within the school, from educators themselves, probably with more successful and long-lasting outcomes. This is because when the school community itself is involved in resolving a problem, there is increased likelihood of the solutions being viable. In contrast, when the solution is imposed by external agencies, it is often rejected by the school. The school setting is a microcosm of society. Here, participants are not production units of an industrial or business organization, but partakers in the learning process which is, first and foremost, an act of communication [8, 9].

At this point, the questions arise: How can a school become a space where teachers and students wish to belong to? What factors can foster a positive feeling and creativity? How can effective communication within the school unit act as a catalyst for enhancing school climate?

The problem set forth in this study is based upon the changes in educational context as caused by current social, financial, and technological factors, and their impact on school climate. The importance of this study lies in its effort to seek effective interventions in school that can create appropriate conditions for the development of teachers' and students' creativity. We argue that both effective interpersonal communication among all members of the school community and the principal's communication skills are crucial.

The aim of the present analysis is to examine the variables of school climate and communication in order to find the extent to which their relationship can work in favor of an open, safe, and creative educational organization where a positive school climate exists and to which teachers and students will wish to belong. In particular, the following questions will be considered:

- What does the concept of school climate entail and what is its importance?
- How can school communication contribute to its improvement?
- What is the role of school principals in this process?

Gorton and Alston note that through communication, the organization's culture is shaped, while the workforce is encouraged to develop, obtain, and process information, to take decisions and to plan ([10], pp. 96–97). The principal's role as pedagogomanager acts as a catalyst both in the formation of cooperative relationships and in the performance of the educational work of the school unit. The principal is the central regulator of school climate. The term *pedagomanager* is used to denote the principal's dual role, performing both administrative and pedagogical tasks ([11], p. 52). This is a feature that distinguishes educational organizations from other organizations in the market. These two types of tasks differ significantly, and the person entrusted with them must be 'transformed' into an optimal pedagogue or a perfect manager, respectively. According to Deal and Petersen [12], when it comes to shaping school climate, school leaders are models, potters, poets, and healers.

2. Literature review

2.1 School climate

2.1.1 Concept and importance

Over the last two decades, there has been a growing appreciation that school climate, the quality and character of school life, fosters teachers' professional effectiveness, dedication to the profession, and continuing professional development.

Research confirms what teachers and parents have claimed for decades: a safe and supportive school environment, in which teachers and students have positive social relationships and are respected, engaged in their work, and feel competent, matters.

But what is meant by *school climate*? The definitions that have been offered vary but they do share a common characteristic: school climate is related to the quality and features of school life, in the way that participants experience them. The term denotes the way in which interactions among participants in pedagogical events and phenomena are experienced. It focuses on emotions and describes teachers' interpersonal relationships. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures. School climate sets the tone for all the teaching and learning done in the school environment and, as research proves, it is predictive of students' ability to learn and develop in healthy ways. Further, research has shown that positive school climate directly impacts important indicators of success such as increased teacher retention, lower dropout rates, decreased incidences of violence, and higher student achievement [7, 13, 14].

The school experience is recorded as a process whereby participants interact based on the operation of principles, rules and values pertaining to teaching, learning, administration, and the school's relationship with the family and the broader environment. Relevant and alternative terms applied to the concept of school climate are "psychological climate," "pedagogical climate," and "pedagogical atmosphere". At the same time, Peterson & Deal write of school culture: "culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges" ([15], p. 28). Culture influences everything that goes on in schools: staff collaboration, abilities, and their willingness to change, the practice of instruction, and the relations among parents.

In this paper, we have adopted the term "school climate", which we define as the way in which the interactions of participants in pedagogical events and phenomena are experienced. The vast majority of researchers and scientists indicate that school climate, in essence, reflects the individual experience at school. School climate is described as pleasant, unpleasant, positive, negative, boring, fertile, shifting, open, closed, constructive, interesting, engaged, cold, etc. As an umbrella term, "positive" is more frequently encountered in the relevant literature to cover those terms that denote the above desirable qualities. Positive school climate exists when participants feel safe and at ease in a setting where interaction is favored through the care and support provided by principals and colleagues. A positive school climate is characterized by:

- A sense of warmth, an active interest in students, and adult participation;
- Setting limits to unacceptable behavior;
- Absence of corporal punishment when rules are violated or otherwise undesirable behavior exhibited;
- Adults acting as positive role models [16].

Such an environment has an impact on all those related to the school: educators, students, parents, and the broader community. Positive school climate favors the teachers' professionalization and students' development and progress at a socio-political, emotional, moral, and academic level. It constitutes a constructive experiential process preparing students for adult life within a democratic society. To create a positive school climate, the educator supports students, expresses high expectations, opts for student-centered approaches, provides immediate feedback, creates a

family-like atmosphere, encourages interpersonal communication, evaluates success positively, formulates clear rules, gives work and academic orientation, and expresses his/her confidence in students ([17, 18], p. 125).

It has been acknowledged that there are various elements that shape school climate although there is no universal agreement on its key features. What is certain is that “strong positive cultures are places with a shared sense of what is important, a shared ethos of caring and concern, and a shared commitment to helping students learn” ([15] p. 29). Researchers have divided climate into variables, subsystems, or dimensions in order to define the components of organizational climate. Owens and Valesky [19] explain that organizational climate is the product of four variables or subsystems: ecology, milieu, organization, and culture. A review of relevant research shows that there are 10 fundamental dimensions that shape individual experience in school, which are grouped in four categories:

- Safety (physical, social, and emotional);
- Teaching and learning (quality of teaching, social, emotional, and ethical skills for learning, professional development of educators, and leadership);
- Interpersonal relationships (respect for diversity, a sense of community, cooperation, and cohesion);
- The environment (space, materials, and time) [20, 21].

As far as the teaching and learning process is concerned, positive school climate activates motivation and the willingness to learn. Learning is not possible outside a suitable school climate, both in terms of the learning outcomes and in terms of the process. It is worth noting that the school climate that the child experiences at the start of his/her learning route is the foundation upon which he/she builds learning ability and experience.

2.1.2 The rivals of school climate

School climate can be disrupted by a range of external factors, such as certain natural phenomena (e.g. severe weather conditions) or social events (conflict, transition, loss, etc.) or by internal factors, such as the educators' and the staff's behavior, the number of students, the composition of groups, third parties entering the classroom, an accident in the classroom, and so on. In cases when the disruption is threatening to participants, we speak of a state of crisis. According to Freiberg, “a healthy school climate contributes to effective teaching and learning. These instruments for assessing climate can help schools make informed and meaningful changes for the better” ([21], p. 22). To manage states of crisis in schools, it is necessary to take measures, including school readiness, the cognitive and emotional competence of educators in matters of mental health, information on the students' family background and health, good cooperation with educational institutions, parents, school administrators and educators, and clearly defined and predetermined rules of action. Hoy et al. note that “A healthy school climate is imbued with positive student, teacher, and administrator interrelationships. Teachers like their colleagues, their school, their job, and their students are driven by a quest for academic excellence” (2002:39) [22]. According to Marshall [23], school climate is influenced by the following factors:

- The number and quality of interactions between adults and students;

- The school environment, including buildings, classrooms, available materials, but also the educators' and students' perception of this environment;
- Students' academic performance;
- A sense of security at the school for all members of the school community;
- A feeling of trust and respect for students and educators.

School atmosphere can have an impact on many areas of the school experience. Positive school climate has been associated with fewer emotional and behavioral problems [24]. Commitment to compliance with school operational rules and positive feedback by educators are two aspects of the pedagogical climate that affect the school experience and students' self-esteem [25]. In addition, a special research project into school climate in high-risk urban settings has shown that a positive and supportive school climate can affect students' academic performance to a great extent [26]. According to another research project, positive interpersonal relationships and an increase in learning opportunities for students in all demographic settings can increase levels of achievement and decrease dangerous behavior [27].

Regarding the roles of the teaching and administrative staff, Taylor and Tashakkori [28] found that the existence of a positive climate in school is connected to an increased sense of job satisfaction for school staff. Finally, the transition from one educational level to the next is also influenced by school climate. Entering a new school can cause stress in teachers and students, and this can have a negative impact on the teaching and learning process. Research has found that a positive and supportive school climate is important for a smooth transition to a new school [21]. Establishing a positive climate in a school unit is a collective, coordinated, and, to a certain degree, disciplined endeavor by the whole staff. When teachers and students feel that they are in an environment that is truly and actually interested in them, they view their everyday teaching and learning experience as a positive process ([29], p. xi). These are schools where staff exhibit a passionate professionalism and enjoy extensible opportunities for collegial dialog, problem solving, and community building and where the culture encourages student involvement in community service and teacher commitment to continual instructional development ([15], p. 29).

2.1.3 Evaluation of school climate

Evaluating school climate is one of the best ways to ensure its positive characteristics. An environment of cooperation and learning is founded on the social and emotional environment of the school, which is reflected in school climate [9, 30]. The evaluation process is aimed at assessing the level of school climate and designing its further improvement so that schools with a positive school culture can be created. Although traditionally the assessment of student performance has used reading, mathematics, and scientific knowledge as its criteria, an increasing number of education agencies are realizing that these indicators cannot convey educational outcomes in their totality. Data from the assessment of school climate are now used as a complementary form of evaluation. Important information is derived from the reviews of students in their final year. As Freiberg stresses, "the feedback process allows students to be citizens rather than tourists in their school, as they realize that they have an opportunity to participate in shaping the education process" ([21], p. 26).

The school community determines policies that promote the holistic development of all participants in the school community—the social, emotional, moral, political, and intellectual. Also, it promotes an integrated system for overcoming

hindrances during teaching and learning. We could say that the school community creates an environment in which all members feel safe and creative. School climate and relationships within the school are one of the main areas of evaluation in the assessment programs for schools. Specifically, during the evaluation process, attention is paid to the following criteria of quality:

Relationships among educators: Quality of communication, creative collaboration and collective action, regular meetings, and cooperation with emphasis placed on pedagogical and teaching issues.

Relationships between educators and students and among students themselves: The pedagogical teacher-student relationship, development of initiatives for creative teacher-student cooperation, student conduct that complies with school rules, and student participation in the formulation of regulatory practices pertaining to school life.

Relationships between school and parents: Effective mechanisms for regular and two-way communication between the school and parents, quality of the information exchanged with parents, development of initiatives for creative cooperation with the Parents' Association.

Relationships between the school and agencies: Constructive communication and collaboration with education authorities and agencies, the local community and the broader society, frequency, content, and quality of communication [31].

The process of evaluating and improving school climate is a demanding one. It is understood as a circular process consisting of five stages, including preparation and planning, assessment-evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, and needs, understanding evaluation outcomes, designing and application of the action plan, and reassessing what has been achieved and developing the next stage for improving school climate. The evaluation of indicators is based on data collected through the use of qualitative and quantitative methods and observation and recording tools [32]. The quality of education is, to a great extent, a function of school climate quality, which can be improved substantially, especially when it is understood and evaluated internally by the individuals actually involved in the education process. Internal evaluation requires additional competences on the educator's part, but experience has shown that educators avoid recording data of their pedagogical action. The collection of data with the use of various methods identifies the educator as an education researcher, a quality inherent in pedagogical action. A combination of methods and techniques for observation and recording is the most effective way to cross-check and interpret data, and to define goals for each of the stages of evaluation [33].

School climate is expressed by tangible means, it is greatly influenced by leadership, and it responds to change rapidly. It becomes evident through collectivity, communication, decision-making, trust, expectations, recognition, support, and experimentation. School climate should reflect directly the school's mission statement through its focus and actions. External factors, such as increased funding and provision of resources and staff can play a key role in shaping positive school climate. We are aware, however, that when planning and interventions are carried out by those involved in the internal environment of the school, they tend to be more viable. Could internal school communication be efficient in this respect? This question is analyzed in the following section.

2.2 Communication in educational context

2.2.1 Concept and definition

Communication is the main parameter in the creation and development of civilization. For ancient Greeks and Romans, it was an area of great importance.

The Athenian society called for greater competence in oral speech. When in court, citizens could not hire advocates but, rather, they had to defend themselves publicly. Those who stood for public office had to learn how to voice their ideas clearly and convincingly. In an attempt to understand the variables affecting persuasion, modern scholars have tried to transfer the classical persuasion practice into modern reality.

A multitude of definitions can be found in the literature with regard to communication. It has been defined as the delivery, reception, processing, and interpretation of information. This information can be transmitted orally, in writing, and in an active, passive, formal, informal, conscious, or unconscious manner ([34], p. 290). Robbins, Coulter and DeCenzo note that communication is the transfer of understanding and meaning ([35], p. 446). According to Schermerhorn [36], communication is an interpersonal process of sending and receiving symbols with attached messages. Communication is an interpersonal, that is, a social process, which can only be considered complete when some kind of understanding has been reached. It never is a simple case of a stimulus and a response in the way that these terms are used in psychology. Communication is the mechanism by means of which human relationships exist and develop. Irrespective of its conceptual definition, it must involve not only the transfer of meaning but also an understanding of it. Only when the sender's message is fully understood by its recipient(s) can communication be considered effective ([34], p. 294; [36], p. 491).

Communication is a social activity, a social phenomenon that is present both at the interpersonal level and at the organization level. Communication is about transmitting and receiving information and messages between individuals and between groups through a system of symbols. Educators, just like doctors, social workers, psychologists, vocational guidance and business counselors, etc., are what is called "interpersonal professionals", meaning that a great part of their work is dedicated to face-to-face interactions with other people. Such professionals must possess certain skills:

- Cognitive skills: the fundamental knowledge pertaining to their profession that characterizes it and distinguishes it from other professions;
- Technical skills: skills involving the use of tools and instruments relevant to the profession;
- Social and communication skills: an individual's ability to interact effectively with others at a professional level [37].

It is a fact that the ways used to communicate today have increased significantly compared to the past [38, 39]. Although educators have several new possibilities and media at their disposal that enable them to send their message to multiple audiences, they still seem to be lacking in key communication skills. It is also true that educators are not concerned about the way and the outcomes of their communication with students on the micro-scale of the classroom. However, experience has shown that this is not the case when they need to collaborate and communicate with other groups, such as staff associations, parents' associations, and education agencies. On such occasions, the necessary communication skills are situated on the macro-level of the social and political sphere, where argumentation and persuasion require more complex knowledge and skills [40].

Conversation analysis in the school context aims to highlight the kinds of conversation that are most effective in students' understanding of the material taught. Most research focuses on teacher-student dialogs [41–43], while studies into student-to-student talk within the education process are rather limited in number. The orality movement has helped to emphasize the significance of oral discourse

in the school context. Regarding the systematic research of talk, two models of communication have been proposed. The *Transmission Model of Communication* views oral discourse as a medium for the transmission of information between a sender and a recipient. Although this model is held in high regard in educational practice, it fails to penetrate the complexity of oral discourse ([44], p. 132). The second model, the *Dialogic Model* [45] draws on Piaget and Vygotsky and their constructive process of discourse. According to the *Dialogic Model*, understanding between interlocutors is constructed through dialog and is shaped by the social and cultural context. Hence, talk is a complete system of cooperative understanding. The dialogic model is also connected to Volosinov and Bakhtin, according to whom utterances and responses constitute a chain of interlinked verbal events [44].

2.2.2 *Listening culture*

Listening is a complex parameter of communication rather than a simple and natural hearing process. According to the Speech Communication Association, listening is the process of receiving and assimilating ideas and information from spoken messages. Effective listening involves both the literal and the critical understanding of ideas and information transmitted through oral speech ([46], p. 282). Listening is an active process that the individual chooses to occur. Of the events that take place in his environment, the individual selects the ones to which he will direct his attention, which he processes and uses, and which he may even retain and combine with other bits of information that he has previously chosen to save in his memory. The skills of active listening can be cultivated through practice and knowledge acquisition [47]. However, communication can encounter difficulties deriving from a failure to listen. Such hindrances include listeners who do not actually listen but pretend to do so, *selective listeners*, who employ a kind of partial listening whereby they deliberately direct their attention to certain parts of the speaker's talk, and, finally, *egocentric listeners*, who regard themselves as the center of each and every transaction or activity [46]. For a listening culture to be developed, emotional intelligence and empathy on the part of those involved are essential. Listening culture is a determining factor in promoting collaboration among educators and in shaping positive school climate.

According to contemporary educational research, communication is one of the main factors in the development of a sustainable system for improving school climate ([29, 48], p. xv). Within a school unit the whole of the educational workforce communicates with one another, with colleagues from other school units, with the community of parents, but also with various agencies from outside the school [49]. The communication process occurs on a daily basis with all educators within school organizations. For cooperational relationships to be developed in the school, effective communication among members of the school community is considered essential ([35], pp. 428–36). Sergiovanni notes that “School climate and relationships are obviously affected by the organization and communication in the school; school climate lies at the center” ([50], pp. 100–101).

2.2.3 *Communication and leadership*

School principals' communication skills can determine, to a large extent, school efficacy and the achievement of goals. Research has shown that school principals devote a great amount of time to communicating with students, other educators, parents, education authorities, and with other individuals relevant to the school environment ([51], p. 53). According to certain findings, their communication is not rigidly planned, but, rather, spontaneous and relaxed, while they do not seem to make a systematic effort to receive or provide feedback or evaluate the

effectiveness of communication. In addition, the communication roles assumed by school principals have increased, mainly because of the possibilities provided by new technologies. Gordon and Alston [10], 97–99) talk about four communication roles of principals: a) communication agent, b) message recipient, c) supervisor, and d) communication seeker.

In a critical analysis of these roles, we could suggest that the roles of the agent and recipient are somewhat inherent in the principal's responsibilities, while the roles of supervisor and seeker require the development of communication skills and practices by the principals themselves. The role of a communication agent requires, first and foremost, that the principal understands the main objective of the message they wish to transfer [52]. When they understand the purpose of the message, they will be able to determine precisely both its content (message encoding) and the appropriate means of transmission (communication channel) ([36], pp. 491–493). At the same time, they must be aware of potential obstacles that may arise in the process of decoding by the person or persons that the message addresses (recipients). Such obstacles can be lack of interest on the recipients' part, their poor cognitive background, prejudice, a problematic situation, etc. An important factor in this process is the existence or nonexistence of mutual trust between the agent and the recipient. Trust, i.e., confidence in the integrity, personality, and competences of a manager, constitutes a key parameter of communicative efficacy, as it is through this trust that the principal can convince recipients of the legitimacy of the objectives involved in the message ([35], p. 413). The role of recipient requires that principals be active listeners who try to decodify the sender's messages without making judgments or resorting to spontaneous interpretations. Instead, they should engage in close observation of nonverbal clues, avoiding distractions and, above all, strengthening empathy for the sender. But how capable are school principals of understanding the emotions of others, including educators? With a certain degree of emotional intelligence, school principals can "read" other people's feelings by focusing communication on actual behaviors, such as verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic clues. Communication is of great importance when it comes to understanding and interpreting the feelings of others, that is, their emotional intelligence. Donaldson [53] researched his own high school principalship by surveying staff members regarding communication. He analyzed both direct and indirect forms of communication finding a discrepancy between how he saw himself and how his staff members saw him.

Teachers are in a state of ongoing interaction and communication. The quality of this interaction is mainly dependent on the form of communication they use. An authoritarian attitude and administration turn workers into passive and submissive individuals and can ruin any possibility for meaningful communication and interaction. By contrast, a democratic attitude can contribute to the creation of a better emotional climate of cooperation, optimism, sincerity and responsibility and provides better possibilities for working efficiently and developing the personalities of those involved. A democratic principal can help create a positive school climate and, by doing so, a climate that is also productive. A principal who is demanding, pressing, and authoritarian cannot foster the improvement of interpersonal relationships. By contrast, a friendly, democratic principal can contribute substantially to the development of good relationships among the staff, which is a necessary condition for the progress of the whole organization. "School leaders—principals, teachers, and parents—are the key to eliminating toxic culture and building positive culture" ([15], p. 28).

To conclude, it can be argued that school principals should not restrict their communication roles to sending and receiving messages. Supervising and seeking communication within, from and to the school unit are quality features for establishing an appropriate process of communication than can make a difference in

the lives of all stakeholders—educators, students, and parents. These roles call for a principal who is constantly active and has a profound insight, a principal whose vision will be the enhancement of communication at all levels so that a climate of trust can be created and communication can be promoted.

2.3 Meta-analysis approach of the literature

The problem set forth in this study is based upon the changes in educational context as caused by current social, financial, and technological factors, and their impact on school climate. This analysis explores the variables of school climate and communication in order to find the extent to which their relationship can work in favor of an open, safe, and creative educational organization where a positive school climate exists, and to which teachers and students will wish to belong.

2.3.1 Literature identification

The conceptual framework of this study is based on research related to organizational culture and educational communication. The material analyzed consists of contemporary articles and books, which highlight the importance of positive school climate in achieving school objectives, and interpersonal communication as a determining factor in terms of the research questions posed.

2.3.2 Articles selection

The examination of literature developed on a general-to-specific basis. By constructing the specific research question, we narrowed the focus of the research. We decided on the specific preliminary research question and identified key concepts and preliminary search terms. We selected appropriate databases in library catalogs and on the World Wide Web open access journals.

2.3.3 Method of literature analysis

This study is a critical meta-analysis of literature on the research hypothesis, that communication is a key factor in promoting positive school climate. Meta-analysis is a recent trend in research. It refers to analyzing published studies to examine trends in the literature or in the results of research studies, such as the impact of a certain independent variable on another [54, 55]. By combining results found in scholarly journals and chapters, researchers can tell how much of an effect a particular variable has had over time.

The availability of electronic databases containing the results of published studies was a substantial benefit for the researcher conducting this meta-analysis. Databases such as <https://eric.ed.gov/>, www.ascd.org, <https://www.hepg.org/>, <http://education.gsu.edu/>, and databases of libraries were used. Sixty articles and books on the subject were selected that cover the key aspects of the topic and the new directions. A thorough study and analysis of their content was performed.

3. Results and discussion

These results are presented and discussed under subthemes, which addressed the questions posed for this study. Thus, the subthemes: “The concept and the importance of school climate”, “The Rivals of school climate”, and “Evaluation of school climate” emerged for, for the theme “School Climate” and “*Concept and*

Definition”, “Listening Culture”, and “Communication and Leadership were formed for the theme “Communication in Educational Context”. A specific aspect of the problem is clarified in discussing each section of the literature review results.

3.1 The concept and the importance of school climate

We have discussed the concept and the importance of school climate for ensuring the effectiveness of educators’ work and achieving school objectives. The conditions of school life are increasingly harsh, with incidents of violence and aggressiveness becoming part of the daily life in schools [6]. As a microcosm of society, school is influenced by the broader environment, in which rapid change, uncertainty, violence, and insecurity prevail. Furthermore, verbal and physical abuse often occurs in settings of grinding poverty. There are two sides to school climate: for those directly involved it can be understood as a subjective experience, while for outsiders it can be seen as a set of objective characteristics. Such characteristics include violent and aggressive acts, negative behavior, higher dropout rates, and educators abandoning the field of education.

We have analyzed the parameters that can contribute to the improvement of school climate as lived experience. In the workplace, educators observe and record aspects of the broader society. Their profession becomes harder not so much because of the demands concerning teaching and the promotion of knowledge as the social and psychological problems they are required to address. They have to work in an environment of increasing cultural and technological complexity, at a time when availability of resources is being restricted. Studies on educators’ work-related stress indicate that their profession is becoming increasingly demanding and their role is being redefined. In the context of this redefinition, many are those who take a decision to leave their jobs [4]. We have seen how school climate as lived experience can be a crucial factor affecting educators’ performance and a sense that they are effective and competent. When there is tension, violence, and uncertainty in school, it is not only the performance of educators that is reduced but also, as a consequence, that of students as well. By contrast, in a school climate which is positive, job satisfaction increases, while work-related stress tends to decrease. This finding has provided an answer to the first research question.

3.2 Communication as a key factor for positive school climate

There are several ways to create a positive and creative climate in schools in order to enable educators and students to express themselves, create and experience the joy of achievement. It is true that external agencies and competent bodies cannot sense school experience. To them, school reality is an abstraction, an object to be observed, a set of quantitative data to be statistically analyzed. It is hard for outsiders to perceive the lived school reality and thus to fully understand the meaning of school conditions. Given this fact, factors that can contribute to forming positive school climate which come from within the school community were identified in the literature. We have found that interpersonal communication in school is an invaluable tool that can be used to this end. Communication is a social activity *per se*, forming relationships and promoting solutions. Furthermore, the collective work which is organized on the basis of effective communication, emotional intelligence, and empathy can indeed contribute to solving problems and creating positive school climate. The profession of educators is a social profession, not only in terms of what is provided to society as a whole through educating students but also because of its inherent nature. The teacher is not a lonely worker; such an idea is useless and limited in its perspective. Instead, he/she is understood as an

interpersonal professional [46], one who shares his/her ideas and thoughts, and acts collectively. A teacher with social and communication skills can deliver both within the school community and in the broader society. Communication and teamwork, then, are key factors in promoting positive school climate, in forming a school in which all teachers and students will wish to live, work, and exist. This finding has provided an answer to the second research question.

3.3 School principal communication skills and school climate

In our study, we found that school principals have a very important role to play regarding school climate. School principals should possess considerable communication skills, be democratic, and promote cooperation. Understanding the attitude and behavior of educators is one of the desiderata of school leadership. But for this to happen, principals should be emotionally intelligent; in other words, they should be capable of “reading” the emotions of those they work with. Individuals with high emotional intelligence are capable of the following:

Characteristics of Principals personality	Principals’ emotional intelligence actions
Self-awareness	Understand the way in which they experience their own emotions
Empathy	Be sensitive to and understand other people’s feelings
Socially responsible	Offer assistance voluntarily and willingly
Reality-oriented	See things as they are
Sociable	Develop interpersonal relationships, approach others, and care about other people’s interests
Impulse control	Manage situations that may cause them to be upset or angry

4. Conclusion

Positive school climate is an essential attribute of a school in which each individual experiences positive emotions, a school that everyone involved wants to belong to. This study has attempted an examination of the importance of school climate for achieving school objectives and identifying the factors that can ensure its improvement. School climate is defined as the way in which interactions between those participating in the school community are experienced. In short, it is an experience during which emotions are formed and participants’ motivation enhanced, thus promoting educational work and meeting expectations.

Creating a pleasant school climate, however, is not an easy task. External factors, such as the broader social environment, provision of funding and resources, and collaboration with educational and social institutions, can be crucial in shaping positive school climate. On the other hand, internal factors have proved to be more effective. It is mainly educators’, principals’ and students’ action and behavior that create a school’s atmosphere. This is because these are the ones who experience school reality and the effects of its quality. They are directly involved in the school’s problems and achievements. For this reason, they are more aware than external actors that a positive and efficient school environment can facilitate the fulfillment of goals and expectations.

Educational work, being a social process, requires effective communication and cooperation. A listening culture, empathy and a collective spirit are

conducive to resolving problems and conflicts. Central to the management of school climate is the role of school principals. A principal who employs a democratic system of administration and has high communication skills can be vital to the creation of positive school climate. The communication skills of teachers and school administration can be a stepping stone or an obstacle to the formation of a pleasant, desirable, and productive school. Every teacher should be aware of their students' needs and potential. With increased emotional intelligence, a teacher can know how to make the best of these needs and potential for their students' benefit. Similarly, the school principal should be aware of the teachers' needs and potential and support them so that the best possible result can be achieved from their work.

Positive school climate is based on respect for singularity and freedom of expression, and on cooperative understanding. It requires work carried out through democratic processes for all participants in the school community. Positive school climate cannot be created in a definitive manner. Instead, it is an ongoing process of observation, planning and evaluation. Each and every member of the school community has an influence on and is responsible for its creation. In conclusion, positive school climate should satisfy the following requirements:

- Covering the biological, emotional, and exploratory needs of participants;
- A surrounding space which is pleasant and provides stimuli for action;
- The ability of neutralizing negative factors;
- Possibilities for verbal, nonverbal and symbolic communication;
- Teacher-centered leadership;
- Educators' ability to communicate and self-regulate emotions;
- Collaboration between school workforce and external agents;

Effective communication and positive school climate in the school context can be viewed as a challenge and an achievement, but also as the core and source of students' and teachers' well-being and development. After all, what both students and teachers later remember from the school experience is how they felt and whether there were conditions encouraging personal expression and creativity, rather than what they were taught or taught to others. For seeing school climate as a fertile soil where knowledge can be cultivated and diffuse, communication is an essential requirement.

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Author details

Eleni Mousena^{1*} and Nikolaos Raptis²

1 University of West Attica, Athens, Greece

2 University of the Aegean, Rhodes, Greece

*Address all correspondence to: mousenaeleni@yahoo.gr

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