The Psychology of School Climate, 2nd Edition

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By

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"There are people who will say they have too much on their plate to worry
about school climate. They need to understand that school climate
is the plate."[1]
—Peter DeWitt

New research from the sciences of learning and human development demonstrates that learning depends on trusted attachments; supportive relationships; practical learning experiences; clear integration of social, emotional, and academic skills; and all within a positive and supportive school climate. In an article about educating the whole child within the context of a positive school climate, the authors wrote, "Given that emotions and relationships strongly influence learning and that these are the byproducts of how students are treated at school, as well as at home and in their communities, a positive school climate is at the core of a successful educational experience."[2]

School Climate

School climate in whole is more than the sum of its parts. Kurt Lewin's work on Gestalt psychology comes from the concept of "gestalt," which in German literally means "form, shape."[3] From his study of gestalt, Lewin developed Field Theory, an approach to the study of human behavior that was the genesis of social psychology and one of the first, if not the first, scientific reference to organizational climate. Lewin pursued the study of causal relationships between and among those things that influence human

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[1] Peter DeWitt, School Climate: Leading with Collective Efficacy, Corwin Publishing, (2017), ISBN-10, 1506385990.
[2] L. Darling-Hammond and C.M. Cook-Harvey, "Educating the Whole Child: Improving School Climate to Support Student Success," *Learning Policy Institute*, (2018).
[3] Calvin S. Hall, review of "A Dynamic Theory of Personality," by Kurt Lewin, *American Journal of Psychology*, 48, no. 2 (1936): 353-355. doi:10.2307/1415758.

behavior across the traditional boundaries of various sciences, including a person's environment. In his 1935 publication, *A Dynamic Theory of Personality*, Lewin wrote, "Every psychological event depends upon the state of the person and at the same time on the environment…."[4] He was one of the first psychologists to study how the social environment impacts behavior, motivation, and attitude. Lewin developed a formula that highlighted the interaction between a person and the environment: behavior is a function of both person and environment: b=f (P,E). This is a simple and yet complicated description of the interaction and interplay between people and their environments. Researchers claim that Lewin's work on social climate offered the first definition of organizational climate and its influence on people.[5] In the book *The Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate*, which is a compilation of research on organizational climate, the authors wrote that organizational climate "is a gestalt that is based on perceived patterns in the specific experiences and behaviors of people in organizations." They added, "…The sense people make of the patterns of experiences and behaviors they have, or other parties to the situation have, constitutes the climate of the situation."

People move each day from one climate to another, within their homes, communities, workplaces, and schools. When a person leaves work or school and rides a bus home, that person is leaving one climate and entering another one; even the bus has a climate. Climate is so pervasive as to be ubiquitous; it's everywhere. The climate at work, school, playgrounds, restaurants, places of worship, and other places constantly interacts with people's personalities, beliefs, fears, expectations, and physical and mental health and can affect people of all ages in powerful ways.

School climate is a widely used term that some have defined as falling within the *Input-Output theories* typically used to describe business environments and economic systems because schools input resources that influence student outputs (outcomes), such as student achievement.[6] Others, however, view school climate as less of a business or economic system and

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[4] Ibid, Calvin Hall (1936).
[5] Benjamin Schneider, David E. Bowen, Mark G. Ehrhart, and Karen M. Holcombe, "The Climate for Service: Evolution of a Construct," in *Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate,* eds. Neal M. Ashkanasy, Celeste P.M. Wilderom, and Mark F. Peterson, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, (2000), 21-36.
[6] Tamika LaSalle, "Cultural and Ecological Considerations within the Context of School Climate" (Presentation at Georgia State University School Climate Conference, 2013).

more of a cultural system.[7] The difference is significant because the cultural system model focuses on correlations and causation that are determined by relationships, interactions, and the psycho-sociological interplay of human behavior within a social system where the social system impacts individuals as much as or more than individuals impact others. The interactions become more complex as individuals within groups are individually and collectively influenced by the social system and the environment becomes part of the interactive flow of human behavior.

Researchers and theorists have also added the *ecological theory* to the study of school climate because some believe that school climate is indeterminate, that school climate comes to be determined through the apparatus used to measure it and without those measures it does not otherwise exist as a school phenomenon. This position is couched in the belief that climate is ubiquitous and therefore cannot be contained in a sated state of existence. Otherwise, there would be "endless climates" such as street climate, hallway climate, playground climate, gymnasium climate and so on. That is a pertinent and affirmative argument when a study of any type of climate is pursued. Pertinent because it acknowledges that climate intersects with people's movements every day in many ways. It's affirmative because climate can be defined within theoretical and practical terms. That is why understanding school climate as an ecological and social system is important, and it is important because people cross into and out of several types of climates and environments every day, which is applicable to the physical and social climates in schools.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory describes the nature of interactions ranging from immediate contexts such as families and schools, to overarching institutional-based patterns and cultural-social influences like political policies, social contracts, and collaborative interactions.[8] The *microsystem* includes the interactions and social roles that take place between the individual and their environment (e.g., home or school) while the *mesosystem* is described as the interrelations among two or more microsystems that influence the developing person.[9] For students, the mesosystem may include

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[7] Carolyn S. Anderson, "The Search for School Climate: A Review of Research," *Review of Educational Research,* 52, No. 3 (1982): 368-420, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170423.

[8] Eve Mayes, Melissa Joy Wolfe, and Leanne Higham, "Re/imagining school climate: Towards processual accounts of affective ecologies of schooling," *Emotion, Space and Society*, 36, (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emspa. 2020100703.

[9] Tamika P. LaSalle, Joel Meyers, Kristen Varjas, and Andrew Roach, "A Cultural-Ecological Model of School Climate," *International Journal of School and Educational Psychology*, 3(3) (2015): 157-166, doi:10.1080/216 83603.2015.1047550.

the interactions between home and school demonstrated as shared expectations, shared experiences, and shared decision-making between parents and teachers.

Researchers developed the *Cultural-Ecological Model* predicated on the position that student outcomes are impacted by social and emotional experiences that shape their interaction with and response to elements not only within schools, but extended to the study of influences outside of the school, such as the neighborhood and family.[10] The research included in this book on the psychology of school climate is based in large part on the Cultural-Ecological Model, but with the focus on multiple school and community settings around the world.

What is School Climate?

Often, schools rely exclusively on the long tradition of using the Attendance, Behavior, Course (ABC)[11] taxonomy to define, measure, and manage schools, which omits essential determinants such as school climate. The influence of multi-faceted school climate has proven to positively impact academic outcomes and serves as a mediating factor for student behavior. Enveloping the universe of the learner, school climate provides a holistic taxonomy from which academic, behavioral, and social competency outcomes can be identified and measured, and changes made. The assessment of school climate provides a systems analysis that can highlight systemic strengths and weaknesses while identifying specific domains that may cause deterioration of student supports and outcomes.

School climate refers to the characteristics of a school's environment that, according to research, influences students' academic and social development.[12] The quality of teacher-student relationships and student-student relationships, academic achievement and support for learning, how connected students feel to the school, the safety and security students experience in school, and the physical surroundings of the school building and campus

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[10] Ibid. LaSalle et al (2015).

[11] M. Su, L.A. Olson, D.C. Jarrett, S. Varma, J.A. Konstana, "Re-envisioning a K-12 Early Warning System with School Climate Factors," Proceedings of the Ninth Annual ACM Conference on Learning at Scale, New York (June 1, 2022).

[12] Stephen Brand, Robert Felner, Anne Seitsinger, Amy Burns, and Natalie Bolton, "A Large-Scale Study of the Assessment of the Social Environment of Middle and Secondary Schools: The Validity and Utility of Teachers' Ratings of School Climate, Cultural Pluralism, and Safety Problems for Understanding School Effects and School Improvement," *Journal of School Psychology*, 46(5) (2008):507-535. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2007.12.001.

are dimensions of school climate. The National School Climate Center defines school climate as, "The quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, interpersonal relations and social interactions, and organizational processes and structures."[13] If students do not feel safe at school, do not feel welcomed at school, do not receive respect and are not given opportunities to learn, cannot connect with others or engage in conversations, cannot learn from their mistakes, do not interact with peers and adults in meaningful way, do not have opportunities to be creative, and do not feel like they have a trusted adult to talk to they will not meet their social and academic potential, and they will not develop emotionally, mentally, physically or learn positive social lessons that are essential to their overall well-being and full intellectual and social development. In a study of school climate, researchers found that,

> School environments vary greatly. Whereas some schools feel friendly, inviting, and supportive, others feel exclusionary, unwelcoming, and even unsafe. The feelings and attitudes that are elicited by a school's environment are the school climate. Although it is difficult to provide a concise definition for school climate, most researchers agree that it is a multidimensional construct that includes physical, mental, social, and academic dimensions.[14]

It is important to note, also, that the value of a positive school climate is the emotional safety net that is created which allows students to practice social and intellectual interactions and learn more about their personal strengths and weaknesses and learn from their mistakes.[15]

According to researchers, climate is an experientially based description of what people see and feel is happening to them in an organizational situation: practices, policies, procedures, routines, norms, interactions, and consequences.[16] When we explore our memory palace, our recollection of our

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[13] National School Climate Center, *What is School Climate and Why is it Important?* (New York: NSCC, 2015), www.schoolclimate.org.

[14] Alexandra Loukas, "What is School Climate?" National Association of Elementary School Principals, *Leadership Compass*, 5(1) (2007, Fall): 1-3, https://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2007/LC2007v5n1a4.pdf.

[15] Virginija Rekienė and Rytis Pakrosnis. "The Importance of Perceived School Climate and Personal Strengths Use for Psychological Functioning Among High School Students." *Psichologija* 65 (December 2021), 40-55. https://doi.org/10.15388/Psichol.2021.45.

[16] Lawrence R. James and Allen P. Jones, "Organizational Climate: A Review of Theory and Research," *Psychological Bulletin*, 81(1)2 (1974): 1096-1112. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0037511.

school experience and the thoughts and feelings that permeate those memories, we are reliving school climate. What evokes our thoughts, mental pictures, and almost visceral feelings of school is from our experiences with the climate of our schools. Adding the physical, social, and academic dimensions noted by Loukas to the experientially based descriptions listed by James and Jones, together they form the basis for describing and understanding the powerful and lasting impact of school climate.

Researchers found that a positive school climate improves a wide range of emotional and mental health outcomes, because many factors matter: the school's physical appearance; orderliness, comfort and safety; the types, frequency and quality of the interaction between and among students and teachers and staff; the quality of instruction and the appropriateness of instruction; the availability of physical, academic, and social emotional resources.[17] Understanding more about these elements and how the interact with and influence behavior is essential to understanding the importance of school climate on the lives of children. John Dewey wrote, "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."[18] What students and teachers face in school each day because of school climate is "life itself."

School Climate and Motivation

So much of the importance of school climate is linked to human motivation, and the elements that motivate people. Motivation is what causes people to act. It is the process that moves people to meet their needs, react to challenges, respond to fear, and drives them to engage with others or a task or become detached. In an article about motivation and schools, researchers wrote,

> *For the development of healthy schools, with specific focus on academic emphasis, it is recommended that learners' lack of motivation be investigated; that school projects be introduced for the improvement of learner achievement (mastery); that motivation be stimulated, and that educator training on the impact of educator expectations on learner achievement be developed. It follows from these conclusions that perceptions of school climate are important because they may have a positive or negative impact on the implementation of change in schools, and on educators' job satisfaction,*

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[17] Niobe Way, Ranjini Reddy, and Jean Rhodes, "Students' Perceptions of School Climate During the Middle School Years: Associations with Trajectories of Psychological and Behavioral Adjustment," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 40 (2007): 194-213. doi:10.1007/s10464-007-9143-y.

[18] John Dewey. "Self-Realization as the Moral Ideal," *Philosophical Review*, (1893).

motivation, productivity and well-being in general, as well on learners' motivation and ability to achieve.[19]

Motivation cannot be separated from one's environment. Motivation cannot be discussed or considered without also connecting the person with his environment. Motivation experts identify three major components of motivation: activation, persistence, and intensity.[20] Activation is what initiates a behavior; persistence is the continuing effort toward a goal (positive or negative); and intensity is the vigor, concentration, and determination to pursue a goal (positive or negative). The definition of school climate in real terms provides a good measure of the important interaction between environment and motivation. If a student does not feel safe at school, what behavior is motivated? Most likely, the student is motivated to avoid school, or more precisely, to avoid students that he perceives are a threat, or perhaps certain parts of the school building threaten the student's sense of safety and security. The motivation shifts from positive behavior to a survival outcome–a more basic motivation to survive by avoidance. Sometimes, as the survival mode becomes the norm, a student may build up anger and resentment and the motivation to avoid people shifts to a motivation to retaliate against those perceived to be the culprits. If a student feels isolated in his school environment, where the school climate does not encourage positive student interaction and where bullying and intimidation, for example, are more the norm than the exception, the student's motivation is to limit interaction with classmates and avoid the normal risk-taking that is part of learning how to develop social skills, self-awareness, and self-regulation, or in some situation the student is compelled to fight back or act out. The student may frequently complain of headaches or other psychosomatic complaints and may ask his parents if he can transfer to another school, begin to skip school, and become truant. This component of motivation–persistence is often related to a negative school climate and the strong motivation to persistently seek another option, another school with a different school climate, for example. In extreme cases, motivation and persistence, driven by the activation of fear, frustration, and perhaps even anger, can motivate students in a hostile school climate to seek relief through retribution or self-destructive behavior.

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[19] Stephanus Pretorius and Elsabe de Villiers, "Educators' Perceptions of School Climate and Health in Selected Primary Schools," *South African Journal of Education*, 29(1) (2009): 88-99. doi:10.1590/S0256-01002009000100003.
[20] Don H. Hockenbury and Sandra E. Hockenbury, *Discovering Psychology*, 5th ed. (New York: MacMillan, 2010).

Impact of School Climate

If adults are asked to recall their school experiences, their school experience recollection can be a visceral recall, depending in large part on the memory of their school's climate. Seldom will an adult recall courses or class schedules, but they will recall the condition of the school, how many friends they had or did not have, the smell of the school, how they felt walking into the school, the interactions between students and the attitude of the teachers and other staff members, and whether they felt connected with anyone at the school. Those retrievals from memory are school climate-based. A study by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found that adults who felt connected when they attended school were 66 percent less likely to experience mental and physical health risk behaviors related to sexual health, substance use, and violence.[21] The study illustrates how profound school climate is on the formation of personality and motivation, and, thus, academic, social emotional, and quality of life outcomes. All over the world, educators are beginning to realize that creating a school climate that genuinely engages and supports all students is essential to increasing academic achievement and preventing students from dropping out of school.[22]

In William Ouchi's book, *How Good is Your School*, a successful high school principal answered the question "How do you tell a good school?" with this:

> *From the moment I approach the outside of a school, I notice things. Is the school clean? Did the custodian clean the hallways? Does the security guard or other staff members greet me warmly? Do they know their role and procedures? Are there parents in the school–do they look happy to be there and engaged? Are the kids smiling? What's the tenor of the building? Do the secretaries have the 'disease' where they look down, not at you?*[23]

The principal describes in realistic terms the dimensions of school climate. Schools with high suspension rates, poor student and staff attendance, low parent participation, little community involvement, and which are both unclean and unsafe are schools that will not benefit from school improvement

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[21] Riley Steiner, Ganna Sheremenko, Catherine Lesesne, Patricia Dittus, Renee Sieving, and Kathleen Ethier, "Adolescent Connectedness and Adult Health Outcomes," *Pediatrics,* 144 (1) (2019): e20183766.

[22] Maurice J. Elias, "School Climate that Promotes Student Voice," *Principal Leadership*, 11(1) (2010): 22-27, http://www.nassp.org/Content.aspx?topic=School_Climate_That_Promotes_Student_Voice.

[23] William Ouchi, *Making Schools Work: A Revolutionary Plan to Get Your Children the Education They Need* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

strategies unless they include means and efforts to *first* change the school's climate.

In his book, *The Management of a City School*, Arthur C. Perry wrote,

> *The order, the industry, and the culture of our schools, though indirect and often unconscious, are yet efficient and ever-present moral influences which we cannot well overestimate. Granting this, it is evidently incumbent upon the principal to develop in his school a maximum of morally effective order, industry and culture.*[24]

In 1916, when John Dewey declared education is life itself, he also pointed out the importance of the social group and the individual's need and necessity to be a part of the social group in a meaningful and interactive way.[25] The social climate in the group environment could shape the individual for a lifetime, according to Dewey. In 1961, Emile Durkheim, the imminent sociologist, expanded on Dewey's social connectivity when he wrote,

> *We see in the organization of the family the logically necessary expression of human sentiments inherent in every conscience; we are reversing the true order of facts. On the contrary, it is the social organization of the relations of kinship which has determined the respective sentiments of parents and children.*[26]

It was also in 1961 when John Michael referred to the social organization's impact on decision-making and career choices.[27] He made the connection between the climate of a school and the likelihood that students from schools with a positive school climate (defined as schools with adults who supported, academically challenged, and nurtured students) would attend college. Michael cited the research showing that the prediction of college attendance was tied to student ability and family background. But he also noted that the number of students attending college varied among high schools even when the demographics were the same. According to Michael,

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[24] Arthur C. Perry, *The Management of a City School* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908).
[25] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916).
[26] Emile Durkheim, *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*, trans. by Everett K. Wilson and Henry Schnurer (New York: The Free Press, 1961).
[27] John A. Michael, "High School Climates and Plans for Entering College," *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25(4) (1961): 585-595, http://www.jstor.org/stable /274.

Some schools seldom produce a college-bound senior, while others contrib-
ute a disproportionately substantial number of seniors to the college rolls.
The fluctuation of college-entrance rates from school to school is not ade-
quately explained by inspecting variations in the individual attributes, abil-
ity and family background. Rather, the amount of college attendance is re-
lated to the high school's characteristics.[28]

School Climate and Social Emotional Learning

The crosswalk between child development elements, such as social emo-
tional learning and cognitive skills, is important to understanding the impact
of the learning environment on children. In the 1960s at Yale School of
Medicine's Child Study Center, James Comer discussed the significance of
environment on children. He wrote, "The contrast between a child's expe-
rience at home and those in school deeply affects the child's psychosocial
development and this in turn shapes academic achievement."[29] To study this
relationship, the Center worked with two low-income elementary schools
in New Haven, Connecticut with a history of poor student achievement, sig-
nificant student discipline issues, and poor student attendance. One of the
first strategies they utilized was to form a team at each school that included
teachers, parents, and the principal; and later a mental health worker was
added. The management team, the equivalent of a school climate team,
made decisions on issues related to academics, behavior, social interaction
programs [connectedness], and school operations. Within a decade, the two
schools were topping national averages in student academic achievement,
primarily because school climate improved, which resulted in lower truancy
rates, fewer discipline problems, and more focus on the needs of all students
through universal screening and the identification of the individual needs of
students using a systematic decision-making process that provides levels of
support matched to the level of student needs.[30] The results captured na-
tional attention and the two schools became examples of social emotional
learning and provided a strong nexus between social emotional learning and
school climate.[31] From this work, the K-12 New Haven Social Development

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[28] Ibid. Michael (1961).
[29] James Comer, (Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center, 1960).
http://childstudycenter.yale.edu/. Dr. Comer is the Maurice Falk Professor of Child
Psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine's Child Study Center and has
been a Yale medical faculty member since 1968.
[30] George W. Noblit, Carol E. Malloy, and William Malloy, *The Kids Got Smarter:
Case Studies of Successful Comer Schools* (Hampton Press, 2001).
[31] Ibid. Noblit et al (2001).

program was founded to advocate for a framework that allows schools to incorporate social emotional learning into schools as part of school climate development. The researchers found that the effectiveness of social emotional learning can be impacted negatively by a school's climate. Conversely, efforts to improve relationships and the operations of a school can increase opportunities for children to feel connected at school, where they do not feel socially or emotionally isolated. From the efforts to promote social emotional learning and improving school climate, the Collaborative to Advance Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded.[32] It has supported several projects to use what is known about social emotional learning to develop prevention programs for mental health, substance abuse, and violence, with a focus on healthy choices, healthy relationships, and healthy environments. According to CASEL,

> *Social emotional learning involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.*[33]

Social emotional learning that is effective should include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and effective interaction with the surroundings (climate), according to CASEL. All these elements are essential components and results of a positive school climate. Sometimes the effects of school climate get lost in the discussions of social emotional learning, but the relationship is too important to ignore or omit; it is a symbiotic relationship. Some SEL programs have been confined to teaching skills through designated lessons in the classroom and have not been fully integrated into the daily lives of students and staff members.[34] Consequently, schools are now blending SEL and school climate. There is a significant move towards coordinated, systematic, systemic, schoolwide, and districtwide programming that is ecological and integrates school climate and SEL approaches and prioritizes engagement

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[32] Tim Shriver, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), 1994. www.casel.org. In 1994 CASEL was founded following a series of meetings with researchers, practitioners and child advocates about children's social and educational development.

[33] Ibid. Shriver et al (1994).

[34] David Osher and Juliette Berg, "School climate and social and emotional learning: the integration of two approaches," *American Institute of Research Brief*, (January 31, 2018).

of the larger school community. Aligning school climate and SEL can create synergies and can reduce the fragmentation and burden of repeating decisions and consequences that are ineffective.[35] The relationship between positive school climate and SEL is interactive and co-influential, it occurs in all settings and student-teacher-staff interactions, and the relationship influences teachers and staff directly. There is a dynamic interaction among aspects of school climate and SEL. Student and adult social and emotional competencies influence and are influenced by interactions among students and adults, and the dynamic interaction between school climate and SEL is bidirectional. School climate affects SEL and vice versa. For example, when there is less bullying and violence in the school, students become less fearful, are more likely to employ non-violent methods to resolve conflicts, and interact more effectively, cooperatively, and successfully. As a result, there are fewer disciplinary incidents and disruptions of learning which allows for better resource allocation leading to positive outcomes.[36] It is important to note that the interconnectedness of school climate and SEL occurs across levels of a school district. The mutually reinforcing nature between school climate and SEL occurs in moment-to-moment interactions within classrooms and other school settings, which set patterns and norms with student and staff expectations and norms.[37]

Use of SEL concepts to improve school climate has been successful in some schools. A study investigated changes in teachers' and 3rd-6th grade students' perceived school climate in the first and second years of implementing a SEL program in schools.[38] In the first year, teachers received training on the implementation of schoolwide (not just classroom) SEL and received ready-made lesson plans for the direct practice of social and emotional skills. In the second year, the SEL teachers received additional supervision during the implementation. In the first year, students from 3rd to 6th

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[35] Ibid. Oser and Berg (2018).

[36] Hill M. Walker and Jeffrey R. Sprague, "The Path to School Failure, Delinquency, and Violence: Causal Factors and Some Potential Solutions," *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 35(67) (1999). doi: 10.1177/105345129903500201.

[37] J.A. Durlak, A.B. Dymnicki, R.D, Taylor, R. P. Weissberg, and K.B. Schellinger, "The impact of enhancing students' SEL: A meta- analysis of school-based universal interventions" *Child Development*, 82(1), (2011), 405–432. https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/.

[38] Sabine Berzina and Baiba Martinsone, "Changes in Teachers and Students' Perceived School Climate Through the Implementation of the Social Emotional Learning Program: A Longitudinal Study," *Human Technologies and Quality of Education – International Scientific Conference Studies*, (November 2021), 44-59.

grade participated in the SEL program alongside a control group. In the second year of SEL implementation, 3rd to 6th grade students participated in the program where teachers received regular supervision, and students continued the SEL implementation process. The Georgia School Climate Survey suite of personnel, elementary and middle/high school forms were used to measure teachers' and students' perceived school climate. The results showed that in both the first and second years, overall perceived school climate results were higher for SEL teacher groups compared to the control teacher group. After the first year, students in grades 5 and 6 showed better mental health results. In the second year, only 5th and 6th grade students whose teachers received regular supervision showed better mental health results. In the second year, both SEL 3rd- and 4th-grade student groups showed higher perceived school climate compared to the control group. The results did not change during the second year, which indicates that the SEL concepts primarily improved mental health results for 5th- and 6th-grade students and overall perceived school climate for 3rd and 4th-grade students starting from the second SEL year. The researchers stated, "Ongoing support for teachers also stimulates better outcomes in mental health." It is important to note that this study used SEL as a schoolwide strategy and not just a focus on individual classrooms.

The importance of social emotional learning was taken to a higher level of interest by the widely popular book written by Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*.[39] Goleman made the connection between social and emotional reactions: "The emotional brain responds to an event more quickly than the thinking brain."[40] He also captured the critically important element of understanding the early impact on children: "Emotional intelligence begins to develop in the earliest years. All the small exchanges children have with their parents, teachers, and with one another carry emotional messages."[41] The number and quality of these exchanges are frequently determined by the climate of the school and home and how effectively or ineffectively children interact with and understand the environments they encounter every day, everywhere. This becomes even more critical for children who have mental health issues; for example, students experiencing post-traumatic stress from complex trauma come to the school setting with possibly underdeveloped executive functions in the prefrontal cortex, which makes them more likely to be negatively affected by a school climate that does allow children opportunities to connect with others, engage in school activities and functions, build relationships with other students and adults

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[39] Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York, Bantam Books, 1995).
[40] Ibid. Goleman (1995).
[41] Ibid. Goleman (1995).

in the school, or feel safe. Therefore, their propensity to replace "thinking" with "doing" and reacting instead of responding increases the likelihood of failure in school and a disproportionate number of discipline referrals for children with mental health issues. Additionally, research shows that students with undeveloped or underdeveloped language skills are more likely to flounder in schools due to their lack of receptive language skills (understanding what is being said to them), expressive language skills (ability to express feelings, needs, and thoughts in constructive ways), and pragmatic language (the ability to combine receptive and expressive skills in social interpretation and response to others), or weaknesses in one skill that compromises the others. For example, children with adequate receptive language skills understand what is being said, but if they have underdeveloped expressive skills, they cannot express themselves which could then lead to the use of behavior as their "language," and it could be inappropriate or ill-timed behavior.[42]

Organizational Psychology and School Climate

The field of organizational psychology has for many years addressed the culture of the workplace and its dynamic effect on employee morale, productivity, and retention. For reasons not clearly understood, this recognition of workplace culture has not been transferred to schools in a widespread, meaningful way, which is unfortunate because much can be learned from organizational psychology. Many of the business turnaround models and strategies and the stories of successful efforts have and continue to focus on changing or improving the workplace climate, which in turn affects the behavior and productivity of employees. Some researchers have suggested that seven characteristics of culture can be applied to school place culture and climate: (1) culture = behavior; (2) culture is learned; (3) culture is learned through interaction; (4) subcultures form; (5) people shape the culture; (6) culture is negotiated; (7) culture is difficult to change.[43] According to research, people in the workplace learn and display behavior that they are exposed to on a regular basis–negative or positive. How employees interact with one another is often determined by how the supervisors interact with the employees, and that interaction has the "subordinate" effect, where

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[42] Pamela C. Snow, "Psychosocial Adversity in Early Childhood and Language and Literacy Skills in Adolescence," *Perspectives*, 6(2) (April 2020), 253-261, doi.org/10.1044/2020PERSP-20-00120.
[43] K.R. Thompson and F. Luthans, "Organizational Culture: A Behavioral Perspective," in B. Schneider (Ed.), *Organizational Climate and Culture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

the negative behavior and attitude is pushed down the ranks of the organization, creating a negative climate that results in a lack of comradeship and mutual support in the organization. The organizational psychology model explains how subcultures are created in organizations. All individuals have needs and some of the basic needs are belonging, interacting, and receiving feedback from others. If a person does not feel like he belongs and only interacts with a small number of colleagues or friends, and there is either no feedback or negative feedback from supervisors or other colleagues or friends, the person feels driven to find a subculture of like individuals. These subcultures can over time undermine the strength of the organization. Another way of explaining this is to understand the relationship of culture and climate: culture is the behavior of people in the organization and climate is why they behave that way. This applies to any type of organization or institution, including schools. This explains in large part why students gravitate to cliques and gangs that represent the subculture of a school, because they need to feel connected to others.

Social Psychology and School Climate

Many of the organizational psychology components are reflective of Albert Bandura's work in social psychology, which can be applied to the school setting. In a landmark study, Bandura and his colleagues found that 88 percent of the children who viewed adults strike and kick a doll imitated the aggressive behavior, and eight months later 40 percent of the same children reproduced the violent behavior observed in the doll experiment.[44] Bandura developed the *Triadic Responsibility Model* that triangulated overt behavior, personal factors, and the environment.[45] The environmental component of the triad includes the physical surroundings of the individual that stimulates, stifles, or otherwise influences the behavior and attitude of individuals. Bandura's triad has been referred to as *reciprocal determinism*. Reciprocal determinism suggests that people function based on a dynamic and reciprocal interaction among their behavior, environment, and personal characteristics. The personal characteristics include a person's thoughts, feelings, emotions, expectations, beliefs, goals, and motivation. Behavior is a person's skills and actions, and the environment is a person's immediate social and physical surroundings. All three systems interact repeatedly and

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[44] Albert Bandura, Dorothea Ross, and Sheila Ross, "Transmission of Aggression through Imitation of Aggressive Models," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 63, (1961): 575-582, http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Bandura/bobo.htm.
[45] Ibid. Bandura et al (1961).

even predictably with one another, which means a change in one will influence the other components. Reciprocal determinism postulates that people have a determination element in deciding their future, because of reciprocal interactions.[46] Reciprocal interactions suggest that changing a person's environment significantly can trigger changes in personal characteristics and behavior in either negative or positive ways. There are indications that the positive ways can include students' sense of happiness while at school. Using a descriptive relational survey model with over 500 students, researchers tried to determine if school climate is related to students' sense of happiness at school.[47] In the study, two scales were used to determine the relationship. The findings indicated that students' perceptions of school climate were related at a significant level to students' sense of well-being and happiness at school. According to the researchers, "As a result of the relationship analysis between school climate and school happiness, it has been found that as the level of school climate increases, the level of school happiness also increases." The researchers added that academic, social and artistic activities enrich school climate and create school happiness that can occur with a positive school climate. The results of the study indicated that school climate predicted and affected school happiness at highly significant levels, thus illustrating the importance of Bandura's triad in understanding the influences on behavior as well as the significance of school climate in the triad.

School Climate Research Dimensions

Research on school climate and issues related to school climate abound in several countries and in many settings, from small schools to large schools. It is important to understand the dynamics of school climate, including operationally defining school climate and the impact of school climate on students and teachers both in the academic domain as well as the social emotional domain. In *A Review of School Climate Research*, the authors categorize the research on school climate into the following categories, or what they referred to as the "*dimensions of school climate*": (1) Safety, (2) Relationships, (3) Teaching and Learning, (4) Institutional Environment, and (5)

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[46] Steven W. Lee, *Encyclopedia of School Psychology* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2005).

[47] Muhammet İbrahim Akyürek, "Examining the relationship between school climate and happiness according to primary school students' perceptions," *Education* (2022), 3-13, DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2022.2089711.

the School Improvement Process.[48] However, a review of international research on school climate suggests 12 research dimensions of school climate:

1. Student Achievement
2. Social Emotional
3. Connectedness
4. Teachers
5. Leadership
6. Student Discipline and Safety
7. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports
8. Physical Health and Activities of Students
9. Institutional Environment (School Building and Grounds)
10. Assessment of School Climate
11. Racial and Ethnic Climate
12. Population-Based Effects of School Climate

However, results from a review of school climate measures largely supported five primary dimensions of school climate (safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and school improvement processes) with at least three dimensions present within all reviewed measures.[49] In addition to these primary dimensions of school climate research, there are other unique sub-dimensions that offer valuable insights into school climate, such as alternative educational settings and dropout prevention, racial issues, the influence of community on school climate, social emotional development, sexual orientation, and others. A study of the multiple dimensions of school climate concluded that school climate is complex because it includes levels of determinants that impact the perception and reality of school for students regardless of the type or location of the school. The researchers highlight the importance of multi-reporter methodologies to fully comprehend the complexity of school climate.[50] Toward that end, this book includes the constellation of factors that are and that influence school climate.

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[48] Amrit Thapa, Johnathon Cohen, Shawn Guffey, and Amy Higgins-D'Alessandro, "A Review of School Climate Research," *Review of Educational Research*, 83(3) (2013): 357-385. doi:10.3102/0034654313483907.

[49] B.M. Lewno-Dumdie, B.A. Mason, D.B. Hajovsky, and E.B. Villeneuve, "Student-Report Measures of School Climate: A Dimensional Review," *School Mental Health,* 12(1–21) (2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-019-09340-2.

[50] Chiaki Konishi, Tracy K. Y. Wong, Ryan J. Persram, Luis Francisco Vargas-Madriz and Xuedi Liu**,** "Reconstructing the concept of school climate**,"** *Educational Research*, 64(2) (2022), 159-175, doi: 10.1080/00131881.2022.2056495**.**

School Climate is Like the Air We Breathe

Jerome Freiburg, author of *School Climate*, wrote: "School climate is like the air we breathe–it tends to go unnoticed until something is seriously wrong."[51] When school climate "goes wrong," students and school staff members suffer the consequences. Whether it is the result of a sudden tragic event or the long-term ill, insidious effects of a negative school climate, the impact on students, parents, and staff members can be devastating. Educators, teachers, and school leader training universities and colleges, parents, child advocates, public education advocates, and other stakeholders need to understand and learn about the importance and influence of school climate on children from preschool to secondary school and even at the postsecondary level.

A positive school climate can help all students by stabilizing the school environment and creating a norm of safety, security, engagement, connectedness, and positive relationships. A positive school climate can also help gifted and talented children reach new heights, help children with mental health issues discover care and support from peers and adults, and help children of all ages, ethnic groups, and family backgrounds find a place in their world that is stable, secure, welcoming, supportive, and with lofty expectations. However, teachers and school administrators are not often provided with a thorough understanding of the dynamics and importance of school climate. Christopher Peal wrote about the challenge facing school principals who are learning about school climate:

> With so much to read and to digest, it is easy to become overwhelmed. The average principal could spend a year pouring through mountains of available data, studying the implications of assessment results, and graphing their intricacies in multicolored Excel files. Add a few hours a day to devote to reading the latest research, a couple more days to attend a workshop or conference, and the school year has slipped away.[52]

School climate affects student populations, from high-ability students and capable learners to underserved groups, such as those living in low-income environments, English language learners, immigrants, refugees,

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[51] Jerome Freiburg, *School Climate: Measuring, Improving and Sustaining Healthy Learning Environments* (Philadelphia: Routledge-Falmer, Taylor and Francis Group, 1999).
[52] Christopher Peal, "In the Real World: The Big-ness of School Climate," *Leadership Compass*, 5(1) (2007): 1-2.

and those from racial or minority groups. To this point, a study considered if refugee children's adjustment to school in a new country would be influenced by the climate of the school. The study included 682 students in the fourth grade with a refugee background who responded to the Middle Years Development Instrument[53] over the course of six years.[54] Perceived supportive school climate, support from adults in school and at home, and peer belonging were each independently associated with better emotional health and successful adjustment to school. The results were similar for first- and second-generation children. According to the researchers, "Taken together, results suggest a unique role of school climate to refugee children's emotional health. School-based programming that promotes positive school climate can be considered as an important approach to support refugee children and their families."[55]

An equitably positive school climate is one that is sensitive to the wide range of cultural norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, social expectations, and organizational structures within the broader community. Cultural and social competence requires a commitment from all within the school community. Creating a positive school climate also means that students who identify in multiple ways feel valued, supported, and nurtured, which allows them to feel safer, engaged, and more connected to their schools. The more often students are offered the opportunity to truly be themselves and explore their interests and test their social and cognitive skills in a safe environment the more likely they can learn from successes and failures, which ultimately allows them to then to contribute to a positive climate.

School equity refers to the extent to which students are treated fairly, ensuring that each student receives what they need to be successful. School staff can play a vital role in creating an equitable school climate for students. However, there is evidence of incongruence between teachers' and students' view of the equity of school climate. Some research suggests that staff perceptions of school equity are often higher than students and incongruence in perceptions may have a negative impact on students' connection

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[53] The MDI is a self-report survey of children's social and emotional competencies and social context factors completed at school.
[54] S.D. Emerson, P.M. Gagné, M. Guhn, E. Oberle, K. Georgiades, C. Milbrath, M. Janus, K.A. Schonert-Reichl, and A.M. Gader, "Social context factors and refugee children's emotional health, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, (September 25, 2021), doi: 10.1007/s00127-021-02173-y.
[55] Ibid. Emerson, et al (2021).

to school.[56] However, incongruence can be mitigated by efforts to improve school climate based on input from students, teachers, and other school staff members.

Whole Child and Whole School

It is important to point out that in this book the term "whole child" is not used because the importance of a "whole school" approach in which teachers, administrators, and other school personnel establish a warm, responsive classroom and school climate is a recognition and acknowledgement that conditions that negatively and positively influence students must and can be addressed. Whole child without whole school is a narrow-minded view of the world of students and harkens back to "blaming" the child. As Alexander Den Heijer wrote, "When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows not the flower."[57] Likewise, when students are not doing well in school or when a school is often disrupted and becomes unsafe students will not develop typical social skills, will not develop problem solving skills, and will not meet their learning potential.[58] While there is no doubt or debate that students need resources and those needs must be meet, to do so without considering students' interaction with and response to their environment is naïve and counterproductive. If, for example, a student needs corrective glasses and that need has been identified all efforts should be made to get the glasses to the student as soon as possible, but what purpose has truly been served if after being fitted for the glasses the student is pushed up against the lockers and her glasses are either broken or stolen while she's walking back to class. Another example is a student has been diagnosed with asthma and an asthma management plan is developed, but the student does not follow the plan because he has no relationship with teachers, administrators, or the school counselor, because he does not feel connected to the school. Therefore, the foundation of this book is a focus on whole school which is grounded in school climate with, of course, many references to the needs of students within the environmental context, including the whole community.

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[56] K.J. Debnam, A.J. Milan, J.H. Bottiani, J.H., and C.P. Bradshaw, "Teacher-Student Incongruence in Perception of School Equity," *Journal of School Health* (2021), https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.1306.

[57] Alexander Den Heijer, *Nothing You Don't Already Know,* (Independent Publishers 2018).

[58] Camilla Forsberg, Eva Hammar Chiriac, and Robert Thornberg, "Exploring pupils' perspectives on school climate, *Educational Research*, (2021), doe.org/10.1080/00131881.195698. =

Epidemiological Perspective

The word epidemiology comes from the Greek word *epi*, which means on or upon, and *demos*, which refers to people while *logos* refers to the study of. The word epidemiology has its roots in the study of what impacts a population; it is a population-based term. According to the *Dictionary of Epidemiology*, "Epidemiology is the study of the distribution and determinants of health-related states or events in specified-populations and the application of this study to the control of health problems."[59] Epidemiology is a scientific discipline that focuses on methods of scientific inquiry at its foundation. Epidemiology is data-driven and relies on a systematic and reliable approach to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data without bias. Basic epidemiologic methods depend on careful observation and use of valid comparison groups to study trends and impacts, such as the number of cases of a disease in a particular region during a specified time of period or the level of exposure among persons with a disease. However, epidemiology also draws on methods from other scientific fields, including biostatistics, social, economic, and behavioral sciences.

Epidemiology is the basic science of public health because it is a quantitative and qualitative discipline that relies on expertise in the fields of probability, statistics, and sound research methods. Also, epidemiology is a method of causation study and reasoning based on developing and testing hypotheses grounded in scientific fields that include biology, behavioral sciences, physics, and ergonomics to explain health-related behaviors, states, and events that produce certain outcomes. Epidemiology does not, however, rely solely on research activity; it also depends on an integral component of public health, which is providing the foundation for directing practical and appropriate public health action based on science, observations, case studies, and causal reasoning.

Epidemiology studies the frequency and patterns of health events in populations based on foundational principles of *distribution* and *determinants*. Distribution considers *frequency* and *patterns*:

Frequency refers not only to the number of health events such as the number of cases of a disease in a population, but also to the relationship of that number to the size of the population. The resulting rate allows epidemiologists to compare disease occurrence across different populations.[60]

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[59] J.M. Last, *Dictionary of Epidemiology 4th Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press; 2001), p. 61.
[60] Applied Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Section One-Concepts in *Principles of Epidemiology in Public Health*, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2002).

Pattern refers to the occurrence of health-related events by time, place, and person. Time patterns may be annual, seasonal, weekly, daily, hourly, week-day versus weekend, or any other breakdown of time that may influence disease or injury occurrence. Place patterns include geographic variation, urban/rural differences, and location of work sites or schools, as well as the conditions of the places. Personal characteristics include demographic factors which may be related to risk of illness, injury, or disability such as age, sex, marital status, and socioeconomic status, as well as behaviors and environmental exposures.[61]

Epidemiology also focuses on *determinants*, which are the causes that influence the occurrence of disease and other health-related events. Epidemiological studies start with the assumption that diseases or illnesses *do not occur randomly* in a population but happen only when determinants exist and within patterns. To search for these determinants, epidemiologists use epidemiologic study methods to provide the "Why," "Where," and "How" of such events. Epidemiologists assess whether groups differ in their demographic characteristics, genetic or immunologic make-up, social or individual behaviors, environmental climate exposures and interactions, or other potential risk factors. The analytical study provides evidence to determine prompt public health control, mitigation, and prevention measures.

Epidemiological methods can be used to discern if there are patterns or clues to problems and by looking for determinants and the impact of them on the population. Since health problems do not occur randomly, there are almost always patterns and clues linked to the determinants. Within that method of studying problems workable solutions emerge. The focus is on *solutions* (long-term) and not *remedies* (short-term).

School leaders, teachers, school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers that adopt an epidemiological mindset will not be satisfied seeking short-term strategies or remedies when instead they can identify solutions by discovering the basic problem and not just reacting to presenting problems. If they are task driven, they are interested in addressing the presenting problem without seeking to acquire valuable information that could uncover the basic problem. The purpose driven educator understands the value of seeking information about the basic problem so that the problem can identified and resolved. This approach also applies to prevention efforts. Educators should seek and utilize information and research that has

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[61] Ibid, CDC (2002).