Dissertations   Dissertations and Theses

5-1-2010

The Voice of Elementary School Principals on School Climate

Suzanne Elayne Scallion

University of Massachusetts - Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.umass.edu/open_access_dissertations

**THE VOICE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
ON SCHOOL CLIMATE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

SUZANNE SCALLION

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 2010

School of Education
Teacher Education & School Improvement

**THE VOICE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
ON SCHOOL CLIMATE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

SUZANNE E. SCALLION

Approved as to style and content by:

_____
Linda L Griffin, Chair

_____
Robert Maloy, Member

_____
Gloria DiFulvio, Member

                              _____
                              Christine B. McCormick, Dean
                              School Of Education

DEDICATION

With all my love to Gerald E. Scallion… pioneer, hero, avid leaner and my devoted father.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Ro, my partner through all of this and my support team at home, I still can't believe that we adopted an infant son in the middle of this endeavor and moved 3000 miles. I simply could not have done it without you. And to Jerry, you are the miraculous and joyous center of our universe. To old and new friends, I hope to see more of you in the days ahead as I abandon my studying, writing, procrastinating and worrying. And Gretel, our beautiful Golden Retriever therapy dog, I can walk again! Gus, our boy cat, has served as a wonderful paperweight during the past several years.

To the Principals in the study, thank you for your time, your wisdom and your dedication. It was amazing to learn from you as a researcher and I only wish I had known your stories before I began my own career as an administrator. I believe your wisdom will benefit other principals in the future that in turn will impact the lives of the children and staff in their schools.

ABSTRACT

THE VOICE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

MAY 2010

SUZANNE E. SCALLION

B.S. WORCESTER STATE COLLEGE

M.ED., BRIDGEWATER STATE COLLEGE

C.A.S., HARVARD UNIVERSITY

ED.D. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Linda L. Griffin

School climate has been described as "the set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behaviors of each school's members" (Hoy, Smith & Sweetland, 2005). In the landmark study by Brookover, Schneider, Beady, Flood and Wisebaker (1978), school climate was found to be a more significant factor in student achievement than the variables of race and socioeconomic status. Principals need training in the phenomena of school climate and to develop the skills needed to alter it as needed for the benefit of students.

This phenomenological study explored the conceptual understanding of school climate by experienced elementary school principals. Further, the study sought to identify strategies used by experienced leaders to manipulate the school climate under the conditions imposed by standards-based curricula and high-stakes testing. Specific efforts

were made to distinguish between the terms school climate and school culture that are often used interchangeably in the research and by practitioners.

The findings indicate that many of the principals had an understanding of school climate consistent with the research. In most cases, these principals were still involved in coursework, extensive professional development or were avid readers of professional literature. It was also determined that principals who possess an understanding of the phenomena of school climate also acted with intention in efforts to alter it. For the roughly twenty five percent of the principals who did not have a conceptual understanding of school climate, their leadership had an accidental influence on it. For the benefit of all learners in all schools, all principals need pre-service training and support in school climate and its cultivation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Positive school climate has been recognized as the foundation of successful schools and a strong predictor of the academic success of students (Van Horn, 2003). Research has strongly supported the fact that the leadership of a school principal directly impacts the climate of the school and, in turn, the achievement of its students. (Norton, 2002). In spite of this available research, principals have largely overlooked the fact that a healthy school climate has a direct effect on student achievement. (Bulach and Malone, 1994).

There is evidence of the importance of the interrelationships between the principal's behavior, school climate, and school effectiveness (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). While there is ample evidence that a positive school climate promotes student achievement, specific strategies and practices to improve school climate and thereby improve the cognitive climate are absent in the research literature. This researcher has been an elementary school principal for the past 6 years in Massachusetts and held a similar position in California for 6 years. The impact of No Child Left Behind and statewide initiatives has created challenges to maintaining a positive school climate in both states. Based on my personal experiences, the challenge to adjust or improve school climate became more difficult as a result of Education Reform. It seems as if there is an exertion of energy from lawmakers that is 'reinventing the wheel.' Principals as the experts in adjusting school climate are locked within their own school settings trying to manage a job that had grown wildly. There is great knowledge about school climate that

could be tapped and is contained in the craft of those practitioners whose wisdom needs to be available to their colleagues.

Student achievement is what is at stake, which moves school climate into a new prominence as educators decipher the shortcomings of the current reform. Moving to center stage, the demand for research on successful practices in positive school climate will be greater than ever. Therefore, future principals need training and support to increase school effectiveness through an improved school climate before stepping into a leadership role. Current principals need continuing education and training to develop their skills in this area. School leaders must understand that they can alter their style or differentiate their leadership strategies based on the specific strengths and weaknesses in the staff they lead as identified in the research of Bulach and others (1995). The result of a healthy positive climate will be more productive and effective staff and improved student achievement.

A starting point for principals to improve the learning and work climate is to gauge the current conditions. There is a range of tools that can be used to assess the school climate and determine strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the wider school community. The following surveys are frequently used that have been developed specifically for elementary schools:

SCS - School Climate Survey

OHI - Organizational Health Inventory

ESB - Effective School Battery

OCDQ - RE - Organizational Climate Questionnaire - Revised for Elementary

The information from a school climate assessment can be analyzed and translated into an improvement plan or action template. The school plan is developed annually by School Councils comprised of a balance of educators and parents and chaired by the principal in public schools across the nation.

The demands of today's standards-based curriculum movement and high stakes testing are taxing administrators, students and teachers. The impact of current reforms is straining the climates of schools everywhere. "Administrators work 11 months a year and are on call 24 hours a day. There's increasing hostility from the public, with people complaining directly to school superintendents." Superintendent Dr. Kusel, who has led the Tarrytown, New York district for nine years, recounted a meeting with the district's teachers' union president, and she told him, 'You'd have to be crazy to be a principal.' (Rosenberg, 2001). At the same time many principals are detracted from the essential work in cultivating or maintaining a healthy school climate, as they are consumed with testing, curriculum, assessment and accountability. The positive aspects of education reform such as clearer identification of grade level standards and improved curriculum resources are being compromised as the climate of stress makes its impact.

The massive testing agenda and standards-based curriculum has the potential to backfire and collapse under its own weight. Aspects of today's education reform that are harming school climates include: competition between teachers and schools that reduces collegiality; rigid scripted curriculum materials that deskill teachers and diminish creativity; and misapplication and over analysis of test scores. For example, many elementary schools across the country have eliminated recess to increase instructional

time particularly in the subject areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics. Realtors often misuse test scores to rate neighborhoods and appraise the value of a home. The results of standardized tests generate specific information based on content that is scored locally, statewide or nationally. It is hard to imagine that realtors have the skills to correctly interpret such data.

The extreme demands imposed by accountability are unrealistic and a source of great stress to principals. Attempts to recruit future principals to the field from the teaching ranks are failing as teachers witness the intensity of the job of principal (Rosenberg, 2001). The role of the principal has become more complex as schools across the nation bend under the strains imposed by high-stakes testing, standards-based instruction, state and national curriculums. Sufficient funds have not followed the mandates and when funds are available they are heavy with regulations and paperwork in the way of HMO's in the medical world. All of this is occurring as children arrive at school with greater needs than ever before. High numbers of the students across America are English language learners, others are living in poverty and many more are impacted by an array of social and emotional challenges.

There is a never ending list of responsibilities for a principal to manage including discipline, meeting the needs of teachers, day-to-day operations, parent contacts, teacher concerns, scheduling issues, staff shortages, employee issues, PTO's, school councils, special education meetings, budgets, facility problems, supervision and evaluation.

The voice of principals is absent in the current research and it is important for researchers to document strategies for improving school climate from within. The nature of surveys and questionnaires on school climate provide diagnostic information but do

not identify next steps for improvement to be used by educators. There is little practical value to surveys without also providing strategies for change.

Principals need descriptive narratives from researchers who have documented transformative leadership and can describe models and effective practices to improve school climate. There is much to be gained from this information and skills that empower principals to improve school climate. Principals will lighten their own stress by improving school climate as it will also improve the working conditions for staff and students.

Principals must find ways to move all members of the school community into a concordant relationship. Based on my experiences as a principal and researcher I believe they will need strategies, mentors, feedback, models, reinforcement and time. An improved school climate will positively impact staff morale and ultimately student learning which is the purpose of schools (Fullan, 2002).

There is a critical gap between what is known in educational research about the importance of a healthy climate and what is implemented at schools sites. The practitioners are not using the research that is available and the research does not include the voice and knowledge of the practitioners in the matter of improving school climate. The care and cultivation of school climate is not part of most graduate programs for school leaders nor is it a component for administrative licensure. Yet, school climate governs the lives of students and school employees and impacts the academic success of children in schools everywhere. The voices of principals on the challenges of building or maintaining a positive climate are missing in the research although there is an abundance written about the shortage of effective school leaders and the challenges causing many to

leave the profession. Perhaps it is the overall climate itself that is causing the burnout and lack of effective leadership.

Teachers in a school with a positive climate experience less job-related stress and burnout and the school has a lower attrition rate (Pepper and Thomas, 2002). Research shows that the principal's effect on school climate influences the feelings that teachers have about their work (Littrell, Billingsley & Cross (1994). Teachers who believe their principal to be 'supportive' find work more rewarding and experience a more productive and motivating work environment. The experience of the teachers working in a school with a positive climate benefits the learning and success of their students (Van Horn, 2003).

There is ample research defining school climate, its measurement and its impact on achievement and morale. Absent is theory describing the development and cultivation of a healthy school climate by researchers or practitioners. Most notably missing is the voice of principals from inside of the schools. Thus, it is critical that the knowledge and perceptions of the principal be documented and analyzed with the goal of improving school climate, working conditions for all, and improved student achievement.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Positive school climate has been recognized as the foundation of successful schools and a strong predictor of the academic success of students (Van Horn, 2003). Principals who neglect the need to cultivate or nurture school climate are missing its known positive impact on school effectiveness. Teachers in a school with a positive climate experience less job-related stress and burnout and the school has a lower attrition rate (Pepper & Thomas, 2002). Research shows that the principal's effect on school climate influences the feelings that teachers have about their work (Littrell, Billingsley & Cross (1994). Teachers who believe their principal to be supportive find work more rewarding and experience a more productive and motivating work environment. Researchers have found that the experience of the teachers working in a school with a positive climate then benefits the learning and success of their students (Van Horn, 2003). The first section of this literature review will be to develop an understanding of the phenomenon of school climate. Second, there will be an historical review of the measures or indices of school climate. Lastly, the principal's impact on school climate will be analyzed with attention to the benefits in student achievement that a positive school climate will yield in this era of high-stakes testing and accountability.

Defining School Climate

The concept of school climate has received significant attention in educational research yet the definition remains imprecise. With the goal of identifying ways to improve student achievement, it is critical to develop a clear and commonly held understanding of the phenomenon of school climate. Many practitioners and researchers have used a variety of terms to describe parts or all of school climate. These include school culture, school environment, ethos, school personality and more. These terms will not be used in this work to avoid misunderstanding and confusion.

Researchers View

In their early work, Halpin and Croft (1982) believed "personality is to the individual what climate is to the organization". The tone of the building, the feeling one has while in the building, and the order of things broadens the definition of school climate (Drake, 1997). Identifying characteristics of positive school climate, Witcher (1993) included an emphasis on academics, an ambience of caring, a motivating curriculum, professional collegiality, and closeness to parents and community in her definition. She found that within such schools, an atmosphere or climate that generates high faculty morale is evidenced by increased job satisfaction along with an aura of cohesiveness and an increased sense of school pride.

Although researchers lack a common definition for school climate, it has been described by Hoy and Miskel (2005) as "the set of internal characteristics that distinguish one school from another and influence the behaviors of each school's members." In an earlier description, Hoy, Smith & Sweetland (2002) described school climate as "a general concept that captures the atmosphere of a school: it is experienced by teachers

8

and administrators, describes their collective perceptions of routine behavior, and affects their attitude in the school."

School climate is an enduring quality of the internal environment that is experienced by students, teachers, administrators and staff according to Sackney (1988). The climate of a school influences behavior and is described in terms of values, norms and beliefs. These values, norms and beliefs establish patterns and behaviors of students, teachers, administrators and other staff. As a result of school climate, the resulting behaviors promote or impede student achievement and distinguish one school from another.

The influence of school climate on families and home life is missing in Sackney's definition. Haynes and others (1997) expounded on the phenomenon of school climate as multidimensional. "In general, school climate refers to the quality and consistency of interpersonal interactions within the school community that influence children's cognitive, social, and psychological development. These interactions include those among staff, among students, and between home and school." (Haynes et.al., 1997) The breadth of this description of school climate demonstrates the lack of precision in its definition and the frequent use of other terms to precisely define it.

It is useful to examine the aspects of school climate that are often examined in measures or evaluations as a means to further develop a definition of the broad phenomenon. The major categories of school climate in the Inviting School Survey (ISS-R) are useful in a practical way to identify what climate looks like and feels like. They include People Items, Program Items, Process Items, Policy Items and Place Items (Smith, 2005). Some of the descriptors are included in Table I.

Table 1 Categories of School Climate Descriptors

People	Program	Process	Policy	Place
Teachers show respect for students.	Interruptions to the classrooms are kept to a minimum.	Students work cooperatively with one another.	Messages and other correspondence sent to homes are positive.	Furniture is pleasant and comfortable.
Teachers exhibit a sense of humor	The school sponsors extra-curricular activities.	Telephone calls are answered quickly and politely.	Teachers are willing to help all learners including those with special problems.	The air smells fresh in the school.
People in the school are polite to one another.	School programs include out-of-school experiences.	Everyone arrives on time for school.	Students have the opportunity to talk with one another during class activities.	The grounds are clean and well maintained.
People in the school want to be there.		People feel welcome when they enter the school.	School buses rarely leave without waiting for students.	The principal's office is attractive.
School pride is evident among students		Many people are involved in decision-making at the school.	Grading practices are fair.	Bulletin boards are attractive and up-to-date.
		Daily attendance by staff and students is high.		Clocks and water fountains are in good repair.
				There are comfortable chairs for visitors.
				The lighting in the school is more than adequate.

An essential category that has been left out of the Inviting Schools Survey and is much more difficult to describe and measure are items of a more subjective nature in the category of feelings including students appear happy and appropriately challenged, staff seems to enjoy their work, tension in the school is at a minimum, there is a friendly yet business-like atmosphere, there is productive and child-friendly noise, all children appear to be participating, the school feels welcoming.

Another means to broaden one's understanding of the concept of school climate is to consider a summary of research done at Yale University. The staff at the Yale Child Study Center produced a list of the components of a healthy school climate. The list was produced after a review of the literature on school climate. The parts and their definitions according to Haynes et al., (1997) are:

1. Achievement and Motivation – The extent to which students believe they can and are willing to learn

2. Collaborative decision-making – The involvement of parents, students and staff in the decisions affecting the school.

3. Equity and fairness – The equal treatment of students regardless of ethnicity or gender.

4. General school climate – The quality of interactions, feelings of trust, and respect that exist within the school community.

5. Order and discipline – Appropriateness of student behavior in the school setting.

6. Parent involvement – Frequency of parent participation in school activities.

7. School/Community relations – The support and involvement of the community in the life of the school.

8. Staff dedication to student learning – The effort of teachers to get students to learn.

9. Staff expectations – The expectations of staff members that students will do well academically and will lead a successful life.

10. Leadership – The principal's role in guiding the direction of the school and in creating a positive climate.

11. School Building – The appearance of the school building.

12. Sharing of resources – Equal student opportunity to participate in school activities, materials and equipment.

13. Caring and Sensitivity – The extent to which the principal shows consideration for the students, parents, and school staff and cares about their needs.

The phenomenon of school climate is broad and a clearer common understanding will enable practitioners and researchers to deepen our understanding of its impact on student achievement. In addition, school leaders and researchers can prioritize the cultivation of positive school climate as a critical focus.

Climate or Culture

School climate and school culture are often used to describe the character of schools and the concepts are used interchangeably. Researchers have lobbied for a clear distinction between school culture and school climate as using the two concepts interchangeably only adds to the confusion. (Van Houtte, 2005). A clear understanding of each concept will assist investigators and school leaders in school effectiveness research.

Since the Hawthorne studies in the 1930's, researchers like Van Houtte have applied organizational theory to school. Schools are unique organizations that cannot always be rightly compared in general ways to other organizational configurations such as companies. Public schools provide free services to children as consumers. Schools receive children as they are upon enrollment and the range of differences and backgrounds is extreme. In this era of high stakes accountability, schools that serve children who either come from poor families or who speak languages other than English at home, are strained to meet this wide range of needs. An additional challenge is to produce test scores that meet the demands of the state and federal government. The final results of services provided by the school are determined well in the future as compared with a company that produces a specific product. The company has control of the raw materials, the production quality and the final product.

With the distinction between schools and organizations made clearer, strategies for change or improvement can be developed according to the unique characteristics of schools. Sergiovanni (2000) maintains that strategies for change that might be effective in formal bureaucratic organizations will be less effective in schools. He believes that

schools must be perceived as communities and not as organizations and that only then can leadership and change forces be matched to this framework in order for schools to change.

School culture develops from at least three sources including the social environment of the school, the internal structure and the action of school leaders over time (Van Houtte 2005). Culture is passed from one leader to the next and changes to culture are slow and incremental. School culture spans time and is broader in scope than climate. Guiding behavior and setting standards, culture weathers short-term disruptions. A leader has a greater chance of influencing climate as it is a function of how individuals within a school feel about their institution. Climate does affect culture over time and in this way, school leaders have a hand in shaping culture over the long term.

The distinction between climate and culture was comparably delineated in a school improvement research project in England. According to Hobby (2004), climate is "a short term, transactional product of management practices (particularly leadership styles)." The same researcher described culture as a transformational feature of schools that is shaped by the external environment and leadership.

Transactional components related to climate include the day-to-day business of running the school. These features are fairly pliable and easily influenced by the leadership style of a principal. Examples of the transactional parts include tasks, skills, structure and systems. These parts control specifics such as schedules, policies and procedures that govern the school day, student and staff recognition, job assignments, routines and discipline.

The transformational aspects of a school culture including its mission, strategy and overall leadership are shaped over a longer period of time and are influenced by more participants. These aspects comprise the foundation of organizations including schools. "Change can be arranged or may come about through the application of uncontrolled outside forces, but it will involve substantial upheaval in all transaction-level systems and will take time." (Hobby, 2004)

Leadership influences both climate and culture and is the key component to shaping a school. The broader school culture could inadvertently thwart the success of any attempts to change climate by a leader. Leadership not only shapes climate through the daily transactions or routines of schools but also has privileged access to domains that shape the deeper school culture.

In summary, climate and culture are different aspects of school character. Culture is the set of shared assumptions held by community stakeholders. The climate of a school is identified by the shared perceptions of the members in a school community. (Van Houtte, 2005) School culture can be understood by examining artifacts as in anthropology. School climate must be considered within the more subjective limits of the unique nature of individual perceptions that will be explored in the next section.

School Climate as a Property of a School or Participant

There is disagreement among researchers as to whether climate is a property of schools or the subjective perception by the participants of the school. Many researchers work from the belief that climate is a property of the school and that the parents, students, staff and administrators experience the climate in their interactions with the school. The

contrasting view holds that climate is a psychological property of the individual within the school. In this scenario, the climate will be different for each participant based on personal characteristics and perceptions. Before measures of school climate can be considered, the disagreement as to whether school climate is a property of the school, the individual within the school, or both, needs to be resolved for the purposes of this paper.

The belief that school climate is a psychological property of the individual means that the climate will be different for every member of the school community. The degree to which individuals agree on climate factors could be measured and used as a tool for assessing school climate. "Average climate within the school is still meaningful and interrater agreement ratings could be combined to form a "climate quality." (Lindell and Brandt, 2000).

Researchers who believe that climate is a property of the school and that the unit of theory for climate is the school, believe that each participant experiences the climate through their interactions with the school. Participants include students, staff, parents, teachers, administrators and the wider school community.

The discernment of school climate as a school or individual-level property has implications for interventions to improve climate. If climate is a school-level factor, efforts to improve it should focus on characteristics of the school. Alternatively, if climate were an individual-level property, efforts to improve climate would need to focus on the perception of the participants.

The purpose of Van Horn's (2003) investigation was to identify the correct unit of theory. The results support the school-level conceptualization of school climate. He stated, "School climate is a property of schools that is experienced to a greater or lesser

degree by all school participants. The school social climate encompasses a composite of variables as defined and perceived by members of this group. These factors may be broadly conceived as the norms of the social system and expectations held for various members as perceived by the members of the group and communicated to members of the group." (Brookover and Erickson, 1975). Norms are the common beliefs concerning the appropriate forms of behavior for the participants in the school as a social system. Expectations involve the definition of appropriate behaviors and the perceptions of these expectations as understood by members of the school.

For this study, school climate will encompass both individual and school level properties. I believe the perceptions of each individual are components of the broader concept of school climate and mark the opposite ends of a continuum. Neither can be ignored in efforts to improve climate and one impacts the other. Efforts to improve climate will be considered at a holistic level.   It is noteworthy that the disagreement about whether climate is an individual or institutional property is largely based on quantitative methodology. Perhaps there are aspects of climate that are better understood and replicated using other methodologies that include the voices of principals.

Measures of School Climate

In order to gain an understanding on how school leaders shape school climate, there needs to be a way to gauge school climate and monitor changes to it. Over the past 50 years, a variety of instruments have been developed most of which are surveys of the school community members. There is agreement by educational researchers on several

generalizations related to assessments of school climate. According Johnson and Johnson (1992):

     1. There is a core of activities organizations undertake to achieve their objectives, to maintain their internal environment, and to adapt to and maintain control over the "relevant" external environment.

     2. Organizations are dynamic and operate in an historical perspective.

     3. For organizations to change, valid information on the actual status of the organization is necessary.

     When improvement in school climate is a goal, a clear gauge of the current climate is needed. Knowledge of the various assessment tools is necessary to choose the best measure for the school.

     There are several measures of school climate beginning with Halpin and Croft's Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire that was developed at Ohio State University. Over time variations on the OCDQ were developed for elementary, middle and high schools based on the differences between the levels. The elementary version, revised by Wayne Hoy, is called the OCDQ-RE (Revised Elementary) and has been widely used in research. This 42-item instrument depicts schools as Open, Engaged, Disengaged, or Closed. These classifications are derived from the relationship between the two measured components of principal behavior and teacher behavior.

     It is useful to consider the OCDQ-RE more closely due to its widespread use and validity. The ratings that schools receive are a result of the relationship between the behaviors of the principal and the teachers. Principal behavior is comprised of three

dimensions, identified as: directive, supportive, and restrictive (Glascock & Taylor, 2001). Directive behavior is when a principal acts with single-handed authority in matters that could be collaborative such as curriculum, daily schedules, assemblies, field trips and purchasing. A principal who jumps in to help staff in a wide range of activities from covering classes to chaperoning school events is supportive. Restrictive behavior is exhibited with rigidity about curriculum, behavior and ritual.

An open rating in principal-teacher relationships is characterized by high supportiveness, low directedness (encouraging teachers to act independently and try new ideas) and low restrictiveness (does not interfere with teachers' jobs).

Teacher behavior, the second component, is broken into three similar dimensions identified as: engagement, intimacy, and collegiality. Engagement is a behavior that reveals a teacher with high involvement and alignment with student success and curriculum development. Intimacy describes a closeness and trust with the community including students, staff and families. A collegial teacher is one who shares successful curriculum and ideas and supports fellow teachers.

An open rating in teacher-teacher behaviors is characterized by high intimacy (friendly and supportive of each other), high collegiality (accepting, respectful and enthusiastic of each other) and high engagement (interactions that are tolerant and meaningful)

The overall climate is determined by the combination of the Principal behavior and teacher behavior as shown in Table 2.

19

Table 2 OCDQ-RE School Climate Ratings

Climate Rating	Principal Behavior	Teacher Behavior
Open	Open	Open
Engaged	Closed	Open
Disengaged	Open	Closed
Closed	Closed	Closed

An "open climate" is characterized by having a principal who avoids burdening teachers with bureaucratic trivia and busy work. The faculty is open to students and committed to helping them. This results in, leads to or supports neither critical nor disruptive behavior. Teachers and the principal have relationships that are open and supportive.

An "engaged climate" finds teachers who work together and are committed to their students despite a Principal who supervises too closely and burdens teachers with bureaucratic trivia. In this climate, the teachers work together in spite of the principal.

A "disengaged climate" is the opposite of an engaged one, whereby the principal is supportive of the teachers to no avail. Faculty is indifferent to one another and may not go out of their way to help students.

A "closed climate" is not a healthy system and distrust reigns. Teachers are often apathetic and uncaring and the principal is often rigid and authoritarian.

The Organization Climate Index (OCI) initially consisted of 300 items but has been pared down in a succession of revisions to about 40 true-false items. The six factors addressed in this survey completed by teachers are: intellectual climate, achievement

standards, supportiveness, organizational effectiveness, orderliness and impulse control. There are variations of the OCI that gather data from students and other school staff. In 2003, Borkan, Capa, Figueiredo and Loadman evaluated the OCI using Rasch measurement. They found the reliability to be .96 with most items on the revised 40-item index to be working well. The OCI is not specifically designed for elementary schools.

The Charles F. Kettering School Climate Profile has been used for nearly 30 years and is not designed for any specific level. Johnson and Johnson (1992) conducted a psychometric investigation on the Kettering Scale and suggested some modifications to the subscale subdivisions to make it more effective. They were also critical of the fact that only one validity measure was done in the development of the survey instead of the standard practice of using at least two. The subscales of the Kettering Survey include respect, trust, high morale, opportunity for input, continuous academic and social growth, cohesiveness, school renewal and caring.

In 1997, Hoy and Tarter redesigned the Organizational Health Inventory for Elementary Schools known as OHI-RE. In 2000, Goddard, Sweetland and Hoy conducted a multilevel analysis and found it to be a reliable tool. This inventory was recently updated to include a factor for academic emphasis that has been validated in three separate studies (Goddard et al.). The same researchers accounted for the recent wave of standardized testing and accountability, and believe their measure including academic emphasis is "a particularly potent way of characterizing how schools differ so markedly in their 'feel' (Goddard et al.)."

The School Climate Survey (SCS) was developed by a professional group (National Association of Secondary School Principals) and was designed to address

problems with other climate measures that predated school effectiveness reform. The

SCS was designed for use in conjunction with school-level intervention. In Van Horn's

(2003) study, the SCS was modified for use in elementary schools. Results of the SCS

ratings by all raters (teachers, families, principals, students) were found to have high

internal reliability. Van Horn believes that the performance of children is influenced by

their perception of school and that student ratings should be analyzed at the individual

level while teacher and family ratings can be combined at the school level. This view

allows for flexibility in the tension between whether school climate is a property of the

school or the individual.

Table 3. School Climate Measures

Instrument	Designer	Result or Rating	Year
OCDQ Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire	Halpin & Croft	Open Engaged Disengaged Closed	1962
OCDQ-RE Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire Revised for Elementary	Hoy	Open Engaged Disengaged Closed	1960's
OCI Organizational Climate Index	Hoy	Measure of: Intellectual Climate Achievement Standards Supportiveness Organizational Effectiveness Orderliness Impulse Control	
ISS-R Inviting School Survey-Revised	Purkey& Schmidt	Measures of: People Places Processes Policies Programs	1990

Table 3. School Climate Measures

Instrument	Designer	Result or Rating	Year
SCS School Climate Survey	Haynes et.al., NASSP	Dimensions: Fairness, order & discipline, parent involvement, sharing of resources, student interpersonal relations, student teacher relations, achievement motivation, general school climate (students), school building, equity & fairness, collaborative decision-making, family involvement, school/community relations, staff expectations, academic focus, achievement motivation, parent involvement, caring & sensitivity	1996
OHI Organizational Health Inventory	Hoy & Feldman	Dimensions: Institutional Integrity Initiating structure Consideration Principal Influence Resource support Morale Academic emphasis overall health index	1999
ESB Effective School Battery	Gottfredson	Dimensions: Safety Respect for students Planning & Action Fairness of rules Clarity of rules Morale Resources Race relations Parent/community involvement Student influence	1991

24

Table 3. School Climate Measures

Instrument	Designer	Result or Rating	Year
SLEQ School Level Environment Questionnaire	Fischer & Fraser	Dimensions: Student support Affiliation Professional interest Staff freedom Participatory decision-making Resource Adequacy Innovation Work pressure	1991

School Climate and the Principal

Research has revealed that the leadership of a school principal directly impacts the climate of the school and, in turn, the achievement of its students. (Norton, 2002). In spite of this available research, the connection between a healthy school climate and student achievement is often overlooked (Bulach and Malone, 1994). This gap between what has been studied and proven by researchers and what is practiced in schools is described as the gap between theory and practice. The importance of school climate is not part of all graduate programs for school leaders nor is it a component of administrative licensure in most states. Yet, school climate governs the lives of professionals and children in schools everywhere. The voices of principals on the importance of a positive climate are missing in the research although there is an abundance written about the shortage of effective school leaders and the challenges causing many to leave the profession. In many cases it could be the overall negative climate that is causing the burnout and lack of effective leadership.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and School Climate

The range of responsibilities for the principal have grown and broadened over the past decade or so and No Child Left Behind (also known as NCLB) imposed one of the most significant stressors. While the demands for student achievement have grown, funds for administrative support have dwindled. In Western Massachusetts, most districts have just started their sixth consecutive year of funding cuts. Principals in the elementary setting are often the only administrator on site and are held accountable for school operations including day-to-day scheduling and facility management, staffing, supervision, evaluation and student discipline. Added to the list are frequent meetings

with central administrative office, Special Education teams, and parents. And, the preparation and testing accompanied by the pressure for successful results has taken a toll on school climates from the front office to the classrooms. The Bureau of Education and Research (BER) offer workshops across the country for administrators and teachers alike. A recent offering focused on Survival Skills for the Principalship: Maintaining a Balance in Your Life. Specifically, the workshop offered strategies for reinforcing a climate of excellence. Malachi Pancoast offered a program on stress and time management at the recent National Association of Elementary School Principals in San Francisco. Principals who had traveled across the country to attend were turned away as the forum was completely sold out forcing organizers to schedule additional workshops.

Supporting creative and independent teachers has become more challenging for school leaders. With the advent of clear and rigid state and national standards, many school systems have adopted instructional programs that are highly structured and time consuming. Such curricular plans leave little room for creative and off-the-path classroom experiences. Taking advantage of a teachable moment or event might well prevent a teacher from following a 'canned program' or 'scripted curriculum.' Maintaining a high morale within the teaching staff is a critical factor in a positive school climate. Rigid curriculum materials are appropriate for new teachers or those in need of improving skills in meeting state standards. Some principals take a position that teachers must teach the standards using the materials in a flexible way as a foundation while other leaders are on the far end of the continuum rigidly implementing programs.

Roland Barth (2006) defined a successful school leader today as "one who discovers what is needed and has the courage and resourcefulness to provide conditions within the school that is hospitable to human learning."   When asked how No Child Left

Behind had affected school leaders, Barth described the many constants in the position of principals. He also pointed out that NCLB has "placed the finger on the principal as the point person." (2006). He identified new demands that make the role of the principal more complex than ever such as the shifting demographics, new laws from the federal and state governments and demands from parents, faculty and the central office. The intense scrutiny by policy makers, state departments, governors and federal agencies has placed an enormous emphasis on performance assessments. The pressure has fallen squarely on the shoulders of the principals who have to manage and mediate the full range of these demands. For example, teachers today often feel demeaned by scripted curriculum and the emphasis on test preparation and results. It is up to the principal to support the teachers in their work and help maintain equilibrium between standards-based instruction and curricular innovation, creativity and independence. At the same time, the principal must satisfy the demands of the district administration and parents. According to Barth (2006), the principal must negotiate all of these dimensions in any attempt to improve or alter school climate.

Leadership Style and School Climate

The ability of a principal to negotiate all of the angles of demand and create a positive school climate is a key to a school's success. Although this task falls into a superhuman realm, one wonders if there is a leadership style that is more effective in creating a positive school climate in this era.

Many studies have been conducted to identify a link between leadership style and school climate. A study by Decker (1993) did not find a relationship between leadership style and school climate in the 80 Iowa elementary schools that were part of the research.

28

In a study of schools in various types of communities, results were similar for 57 urban, suburban and rural schools in New Jersey (Anderson, 1993). Lastly, Nichols (1993) did research in an urban setting and had similar results leaving the relationship between leadership style and school climate inconclusive. These three studies represent the full spectrum of public schools including all levels and types of communities.

Other researchers found that any leadership style could result in a positive school climate depending on the maturity level of the staff (Bulach, Lunenburg and McCallon (1995). This is a significant result as it reveals a need for school leaders to identify the needs of the staff and adjust their leadership style accordingly. More specifically, Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) stated that principals must deal with the various skills and abilities of their staff in a wide range of situations and complex environments. Principals require a broad range of skills and knowledge to both assess the staff needs and adjust leadership accordingly.

Principals who facilitate the development of the school norms, beliefs, values and assumptions while keeping the focus on students and supporting the professional growth of teachers are building a positive school climate through transformational leadership. Leithwood (1992) suggests using the strengths possessed by the people in the organization through a collaborative effort rather than by making demands and using an authoritative approach (Pepper & Thomas, 2000).

School Climate Surveys and the Principal

Aspects of leadership that are examined in school climate indices are varied yet serve as a starting point for an exploration of qualities of a principal effective in the area of school climate. The School Climate Assessment Questionnaire (SDSCAQ) examines

communication, innovativeness, advocacy, decision-making, evaluation, and attitude towards staff development.

In Hoy's Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Elementary (OCDQ-RE), teachers are asked to rate 16 statements about the principal. The selected statements regarding behaviors of the principal are listed in Table 4.

Table 4 OCDQ-RE Selected Questions on Principals

4. The principal goes out of his/her way to help teachers.
5. The principal rules with an iron fist.
9. The principal uses constructive criticism.
10. The principal checks the sign-in sheet every morning.
15. The principal explains his/her reasons for criticism to teachers.
22. The principal looks out for the personal welfare of teachers.
23. The principal treats teachers as equals.
24. The principal corrects teachers' mistakes.
28. The principal compliments teachers.
29. The principal is easy to understand.
30. The principal closely checks classroom (teacher) activities.
34. The principal supervises teachers closely.
35. The principal checks lesson plans.
39. The principal is autocratic.
41. The principal monitors everything teachers do.
42. The principal goes out of his/her way to show appreciation to teachers.

Of the 42 factors in the total survey, 16 relate to the performance of the principal. The fact that over a third of the survey questions relate to behaviors and practices of principals indicates the weight of the principal's impact on climate. Each item also gives a clear message about the ideal behavior of the principal in shaping positive school climate.

As discussed previously, research has been inconclusive regarding the most successful leadership style for improving school climate. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) examined the factors of preferred style of leadership, maturity of followers, expectations of followers and task at hand in designing the Situational Leadership Model that established four styles of leadership. These are autocratic (telling), democratic (selling), social and encouraging (participating), and laissez-faire (delegating). Leaders who use the 'situational' approach must choose the appropriate response based on the situation and circumstances of an event in the school.

When considering the cultivation of school climate, principals were more motivated to building a positive climate than one with an academic or cognitive emphasis in spite of the pressures of high-stakes testing (Mitchell & Castle, 2005). The reasons offered by the principals included the potential of the significant payoffs: it was encouraged by higher level administrators, it created a nurturing atmosphere for students and teachers, it helped everyone feel good about coming to school, and it provided the foundation for the academic or cognitive climate. The principals in this study gave little attention to the development of the cognitive climate, as they believed that an improved overall school climate would be the foundation for an improved academic or cognitive climate.

Principal as Instructional Leader

In the research literature, the perspectives regarding the role of the principal as instructional leader are contradictory. Hannay and Ross (1997) believe that the direct involvement by principals is essential while Hallinger (1992) contends that instructional leadership has waned due to conceptual and practical limitations (Mitchell & Castle, 2005). Instructional leadership drifts to the background as principals dig out from under the paperwork and managerial tasks imposed by the focus on accountability. In Mitchell and Castle's recent study, principals expressed discomfort serving as instructional leaders because they had been out of the classroom for some time and they equated instructional leadership with curriculum expertise. Researchers Sergiovanni and Starratt argue that the role of the principal as educational leader should be configured as facilitator of processes such as collaborative inquiry, problem solving, and school development (Mitchell & Castle).

According to Leithwood (1994), the role of the principal as provider of instructional leadership is being replaced by the concept of principal as agent of transformational leadership. "Such leaders are characterized as having three fundamental goals: (1) helping staff develop and maintain a collaborative, professional school culture; (2) promoting teacher development; (3) helping the school community solve problems together more effectively" (Leithwood, 1992).

School Climate and Student Achievement

In research on school effectiveness, there is an emphasis on the importance of a school climate in which optimal learning occurs (Brophy and Good (1986). Student

achievement has been linked to a positive school climate and long-term achievement is related to schools with an academic emphasis within the context of a healthy school climate (Hoy, Tarter, and Bliss, 1990).

In a landmark study by Brookover, Schweitzer, Schneider, Beady, Flood and Wisenbaker (1978), it was found that the variables of race and socioeconomic status are less significant factors related to student achievement and that school climate played a more significant role. In their study, measures of the contributions of composition (percent white and socioeconomic status) were carried out on a sample of schools. Elementary schools with similar socio-economic and racial composition were selected comparing schools with atypical achievement and those with typical results. From this pool, schools for the study were chosen randomly.

When the climate variables are analyzed prior to the socio-economic and percent white factors, more than 72 percent of the variance in school achievement is explained by climate variables. "Furthermore, much of the variance in mean school achievement attributed to composition variables may actually be the result of differences in climate associated with composition." (Brookover et.al. 1978).

Having found that school climate variables more significantly impact school achievement, an examination of the individual contribution of several climate variables was conducted. The climate variables included 1.) Students' sense of academic futility, 2.) Students' perception of present evaluations and expectations by teachers and 3.) Teachers' present evaluations and expectations for high school completion. In all cases, students' sense of academic futility contributes more than any of the other variables of school climate. And this variable was more important in predicting achievement in schools with a higher majority of black students.

The work by Brookover and others connected school climate and school achievement through statistical analyses. To supplement the quantitative results, observations were made at several of the sampled schools for several weeks. The four schools chosen had similar socio-economic (SES) and racial composition but significantly different levels of achievement. One pair of schools was predominantly low SES and black and the other pair was predominantly white with contrasting levels of achievement.

Several characteristics were found to contribute to school achievement in the high achieving schools (predominantly white and black, and higher SES). First, a factor for teachers who spend more of class time in instruction was translated into a greater concern for and commitment to their students' achievement. Second, low SES schools with low achieving students tend to 'write off' more students by placing them in slow groups with low expectations for achievement. Third, schools with higher achievement were likely to use instructional strategies that have students compete as teams rather than individually. And fourth, in higher achieving schools there was little evidence of teachers reinforcing incorrect answers by low-achieving students. In lower achieving schools, reinforcement was confused and sometimes positive for incorrect answers.

School composition does not determine school climate and changes in composition will not necessarily improve school level achievement. Low socio-economic and minority schools are more likely to be characterized by high rates of student academic futility, low academic norms and low expectations for students. Norms are expressed in the common beliefs for appropriate forms of behavior for the members in the school and expectations are the perceptions of the norms as understood by students and teachers. The demographics may contribute to the development of differential

expectations, norms and feelings of futility but do not invariably produce climate differences. It is these climate differences that Brookover et.al (1978) believed necessary for high achievement. This particular research project did not demonstrate how these favorable climate characteristics develop in a school setting.

Organizations other than Schools

It is useful to consider climate theory related to the success of business organizations or corporations and businesses as there is a more substantial availability of research. Although schools are considered unique organizations for the purposes of this research there are similarities and overlaps that can guide school leaders as they seek to implement strategies to improve their organizations. Despite the fact that the metaphorical 'workers' in a school include children and that the goal is learning, not profit, there might be strategies for schools that can be drawn from business models.

In their comprehensive book *Reframing Organizations* (2003), Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal describe organizations as profoundly complex and difficult to manage. The book is both a scholarly review of leadership and a guide to greater organizational success. To help leaders and managers develop successful practices, they propose that leaders view their organization with four lenses or frames to glean a clearer vision and meaning about the complexities of organizational life. The goal to examining the organization through these frames is to develop more successful practices as the leader of an organization.

The structural frame as proposed by Bolman and Deal considers the bureaucracy of an organization and considers the issues of differentiation and integration. Work is divided by creating specialized jobs and roles for the members in an organization.

Integration occurs when vertical and lateral techniques are tied together. Vertical coordination considers such aspects as rules and policies, authority, planning and control systems. Practices related to meetings, task forces, schedules and networks are the lateral components. The right structure for an organization is dependent on the conditions at the time and must include the goals, technology and the environment of an organization. In a school setting much of the structural frame is established at a higher level including the district office and not at the school building level.

The human resource frame is built on the symbiotic relationship between the worker and the organization. The core assumptions as developed by Bolman and Deal are that organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse and that people and organizations needs each other. People need a salary, career and opportunities while organizations need energy, ideas and talent. Further, the fit between the system and individual will determine the benefit that can be derived by either. An individual will find satisfaction in their work and the organization will get the work and talent needed to be successful when the fit is a good one.

This frame comes close to the concept of climate when it considers human needs. The fulfillment of needs is believed to lead to a sense of satisfaction and a positive experience of the work place. When workers experience such fulfillment a positive climate is often palpable. The concept of needs is controversial to some theorists who believe it is too vague and difficult to observe. (Bolman & Deal, 2003)

Human needs are explored within the human resources frame as a basis to the fundamental question of how well will the organization fulfills one's needs and the organization's quest to find and retain people with the skills and attitudes to do the work of the organization. Specifically, the proponent hierarchy of needs as proposed by

Maslow is identified as key to understanding what motivates an individual. An individual must have lower level needs met before having the capacity to function at higher levels. These needs include physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization. Successful organizations find a way to align the needs of the individual and the organization. High performing companies do a better job responding to the needs of employees and attract better people motivated to do a superior job (Pfeffer, 1998).

The political frame as espoused by Bolman and Deal has a powerful influence on organizations that must adapt to a constantly changing environment. For schools, the internal politics influence school climate as does the external influence of local and national politics. Like all organizational leaders, those who work in schools must be mindful of both the internal politics and the external forces that impact the school's functioning.

Leaders of organizations with emotional intelligence have capacities that include awareness of the self and others in addition to the skills to handle both emotions and relationships. This enables such leaders to build positive and supportive social networks that are beneficial to the organization. (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Daniel Goleman was instrumental in following and developing the work of Salovey and Mayer for schools as organizations but was criticized for failing to suggest ideas for enhancing emotional intelligence. (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The third frame refers to the organizational culture and symbols. Bolman and Deal (2003) define culture as "the interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that defines for members who they are and how they are to do things." This definition is consistent with the stance taken by this researcher. Corporate use of symbols and logos is expressed as highly significant. Jim Collins laid out impressive

evidence connecting symbols to the financial bottom line in *Built to Last* (1994). In
Collins more recent *Good to Great* (2001), his research team made a cultural distinction
between good and great companies. "Great companies had leaders who built a culture of
discipline while good companies had leaders who personally disciplined the organization
through sheer force." (2001). While Collins is highly regarded for his research on
successful corporations, some of his most highly ranked organizations like Circuit City
have recently gone under due to financial mismanagement and deception. Companies
who utilized 'cooked books' or deceptive business practices experienced success under
pretense.

Reframing organizations through the lenses of the structural, human resource,
political and symbolic frames will provide information that must be interpreted by an
effective leader. Bolman and Deal believe that leadership must vary with the situation
and that there is a need for further research on forms of leadership for varying
circumstances. And though theories about situational leadership are abundant, they argue
further that "they fail to distinguish between leadership and management, typically
treating leadership as synonymous with relationships between managers and their
subordinates."

Hersey & Blanchard (1977) developed the popular Situational Leadership Model
that focuses on the two dimensions of leadership involving task and people. Task
behavior according to Hersey (1984) is "the extent to which the leader engages in
spelling out the duties and responsibilities of an individual or group." The people or
relationship behavior is "the extent to which the leader engages in two-way or multi-way
communication and includes listening, encouraging, facilitating, providing clarification,
and giving socioemotional support." A two-by-two chart designed by Hersey shows four

possible leadership styles based on the two dimensions of leadership. The four styles are telling, selling, participating and delegating and are used according to the situation. The Participation model is used when followers are able but unwilling or insecure and is defined as high relationship, low task. The Selling model is used when followers are unable but willing or motivated and is high relationship, high task. The Delegation model is used when the followers are able and willing or motivated and is low relationship, low task. And the Telling model is used when the followers are unable and unwilling or insecure and is low relationship, high task.

Consistent with research cited earlier, Hersey and Blanchard recommend that leaders use a model consistent with the maturity level or readiness "coupled with the skill level of the subordinates." Hersey and Blanchard's choice of the word subordinate in and of itself reveals a great deal about the perceived relationship between a leader/ manager and the work force. As popular as the Situational Leadership model has become for organizations including schools, it does not provide specific strategies for leaders to move their organization to a higher level of functioning.

In Bolman and Deal's exploration of gender and leadership, they discuss the "female advantage" that women bring to leadership. They cite characteristics such as concern for people, nurturance, and willingness to share information as beneficial but also state that "research evidence for gender differences in leadership is equivocal." They also cite the evidence for the glass ceiling in organizational leadership including the stereotypes that associate leadership with maleness and the discrimination faced by women in leadership positions.

It is noteworthy that while the concept of climate does not emerge from any of the four frames as proposed by Bolman and Deal, the significance is addressed in the

epilogue. They state, "organizations need leaders who can impart a persuasive and durable sense of purpose and direction deeply rooted in values and the human spirit… Leaders must be deeply reflective, actively thoughtful, and dramatically explicit about core values and beliefs." (2003) This researcher contends that these are aspects of organizational climate that are shaped by a successful leader. "Success requires artistry, skill and the ability to see organizations as organic forms in which needs, roles, power and symbols must be integrated to provide direction and shape behavior." These are leadership behaviors that shape organizational climate.

Implications and Questions

There is ample evidence of the importance of the interrelationship between the principal's behavior and school climate. Absent in the research literature are specific strategies and practices to improve school climate and thereby improve the cognitive climate. Moreover, the experience and voice of the principal is absent in the literature.

Future principals need focused training on school climate and school effectiveness. Principals need to be coached on how to adjust their style or differentiate their leadership strategies based on the specific strengths and weaknesses in the staff as described in the research of Bulach and others.

Principals have a range of tools to assess the school climate and determine strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the wider school community. This information can be translated into an improvement plan for the school and its members. Specific steps need to be identified through research identifying the role of each participant in the school community.

Ironically, the demands of the today's standards-based curriculum movement and high stakes testing are taxing administrators and teachers and the impact of these reforms

is straining the climates of schools everywhere. At the same time many principals are detracted from the essential work in cultivating or maintaining a healthy school climate, as they are consumed by the logistics necessary for testing, curriculum, assessment and accountability.

This accountability movement could backfire and collapse under its own weight as it weakens positive school climates. Aspects of Ed reform that are harming school climates include: competition between teachers and schools that reduces collegiality; rigid curriculum materials that deskill teachers and diminish creativity; overemphasis on and misuse of test scores. Many elementary schools across the country have eliminated recess to increase instructional time. Realtors use test scores to rate neighborhoods and appraise the value of a home.

The positive aspects of education reform such as clearer identification of grade level standards and improved curriculum resources are being diminished as stress dominates the climate. The potential improvement in student achievement as a result of recent reforms is potentially harmed by the damage to school climate. The role of the principal has become more complex as schools across the nation bend under the strains imposed by No Child Left Behind and other mandates. A few of the more significant challenges facing today's administrators include high-stakes testing, standards-based instruction, and state level curricula influenced by national organizations such as NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) and NSTA (National Science Teachers Association). Sufficient funds have not followed the mandates and when funds are available they are heavy with regulations and paperwork in the way of HMO's (Health Maintenance Organizations) in the medical world. All of this is occurring as children arrive at school with greater needs than ever before. Significant numbers of the students

across America are English language learners and many are living in poverty in predominantly urban settings.

There is a never ending list of things for a principal to manage including building management, staffing, supervision, special education, parent concerns, discipline, meeting the needs of teachers, day-to-day operations, teacher concerns, scheduling, staff shortages, employee issues, PTO's (Parent Teacher Organizations), school councils, budgets, facility problems, evaluation and assessment.

The demands imposed by accountability are misguided and a source of great stress to principals. Attempts to recruit future principals to the field from the teaching ranks are failing as teachers witness the negative intensity of the job of principal. A focus on collaboration and delegation by principals and a greater role by teachers in instructional leadership could provide principals with some relief at the same time that it creates improved school climate by empowering teachers. Principals need training, information and strategies on delegating and collaborating as part of developing a positive school climate.

The voice of principals is absent in the current research and it is important that strategies for improving school climate be identified by the practitioners. The nature of surveys and questionnaires on school climate provides information that is useful but does not identify next steps for improvement to be used by principals. The available research provides` little practical value to the stakeholders in the school setting.

Principals need descriptive narratives by researchers who have documented transformative leadership and can describe models and effective practices to improve school climate. There is much to be gained from this information. School climates will improve as principals develop collaborative skills to transform climate. Principals will

serve themselves by improving school climate and improve the working conditions for all staff and students.

Principals must find ways to move all members of the school community into a concordant relationship. They will need strategies, support, mentors, feedback, models, reinforcement and time. An improved school climate will positively impact student learning which is the ultimate purpose of schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the phenomena of school climate as constructed by

experienced elementary school principals in Western Massachusetts. In addition to how

the principals learn about school climate, efforts were made to determine whether explicit

strategies were utilized to alter school climate. Further, the impact of external stressors

on school climate was explored with a focus on the challenges to maintain a positive

work and learning environment. Research practices common to a phenomenological

study were utilized with the goal to develop a theory based upon the analysis of how

people act in response to phenomena (Creswell, 1998). Drawing upon the work of

Glaser, Corbin and Strauss, it is hoped that theory will be derived from the data that will

be useful to principals and will "offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide

meaningful guide to action. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

The steps used for conducting the study will be described below including: the

participants and how they were selected, the entry and consent process, the researcher's

profile, the data collection process, a description of the interviews, the documentation

procedures, the data analysis and a description of the trustworthiness of the data.

<u>**Setting and Participants**</u>

Elementary school principals in Western Massachusetts were selected to

participate in this field study and for the purposes of this study; ten principals were

interviewed at the school site. Participants voluntarily shared their thoughts, opinions

and practices with this researcher who is also an elementary school principal.

Participants who have experience as a principal at their current school site for

more than 5 years were chosen for the study. In addition, each principal has experience

as a principal in at least one other elementary school. The ability to compare the climate in more than one setting was viewed as important to this researcher. While climate issues are often specific to a school or community, it is hoped that a broader perspective by each principal helped to identify wider climate issues in elementary schools.

Gaining Entry and Informed Consent

All elementary principals (67) in a 50-mile radius of Amherst were mailed a letter (Appendix A) that included a description of the study and a form to be filled out and returned in an addressed and stamped envelope. Several questions on a critical incidents form provided the researcher with information to identify a pool of candidates. Questions identified the number of years experience as a principal, the number of sites where the principal has worked, and whether the Principal had worked in other states.

Three pools were developed from the 40 responses that were received. The first pool was determined not to be part of the study due to minimal experience as a Principal and employment at only a single school. The second pool was comprised of those who had worked at more than one site as Principal and more than 5 years at the current site. This was the pool chosen for this study. The final or third pool is comprised of principal who have more than 5 years at their current site and have experience from a state other than Massachusetts. This pool is being held for the purpose of future research.

Initial contact to participate in the study was made by telephone and appointments made to discuss participation in the study and to make an initial site visit. Once participants provide signed consent (Appendix A) to participate in the study, data collection and analysis began. Permission for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at University of Massachusetts (Appendix B).

Participants

Ten elementary school principals were the participants for the study that included 8 women and 2 men. This gender ratio is typical at the elementary level across the nation. All principals had been placed at least 2 different schools and all had been at their current site for at least 5 years. With the goal of protecting the identities of participants in the study, no further details will be made about them. School data will be examined in general terms for the same reason of protecting identities.

All schools were located within a 50-mile radius of Amherst, Massachusetts. None were in urban areas but all were in either suburban or rural settings. This was a deliberate decision to limit the number of factors that influence school climate. Urban schools are believed to face an even broader range of challenges to school climate.

The school populations were all fairly average in size ranging from 200 to 400 students and most had a class size average of 20 in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. The percentage of white students varied from 60 to 95 percent with an average of 81 percent. The remaining students were mainly Hispanic/Latino with a smaller number of African American students.

The number of families on Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) as defined by the United States Department of Education measures poverty. The label SED (Socio-Economically Disadvantaged) is used to represent the percentage of families on free or reduced lunch. The percentage of SED families in the schools that participated in the study ranged from 8 to 48 percent with an average of 23 percent.

Researcher Profile

In studies of a qualitative nature, the researcher must identify potential researcher bias. I am a partnered, white, middle-class mother of a young adopted son. Our family lives in Napa, California where I am a School Principal. I am also a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and have completed all requirements except the dissertation. I have also been a Principal for six years in Marin County and for six years in western Massachusetts. I lean towards progressive and liberal politics that protect the vulnerable members of our society and I utilize a psychological perspective to understand most personal and more global events.

Schools are reverent places where children learn the skills to live a productive and globally responsible life. Sociologist Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot has been a strong influence in my academic and professional life and her narrative and descriptive writings have helped me develop my voice as a professional educator and student. I believe that by carefully documenting the experiences and craft of principals we will continue to refine successful practices and build a research base from which to train future administrators.

All relationships with research participants were collegial and professional while bound by the ethics of research. I am an outgoing extrovert with strong 'people skills' and have been trained in qualitative methodology, open-ended questioning and school ethnography at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, Harvard's Principal Center and the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts.

Based upon my experiences and training as a principal and a researcher, I possess a unique filter through which I observe and make meaning of the world around me. To

the greatest degree possible, I observed, listened and analyzed while being mindful of this personal lens. The use of audiotapes was very helpful so that important details during the observations and interviews at schools were not missed. The impartial nature of technological tools for the purposes of recording interviews was very useful for this reason.

I believe that most principals regardless of leadership style have the capacity to create successful learning climates. I don't believe that my strategies would be successful for others in any strategic capacity. What works for one individual is based upon their personality, leadership style and personal filter. There is no way to replicate those individual traits.

My experiences as a coach of field hockey and track gave me an understanding of motivation and success and an insight into the importance of climate in a social organization. What I learned from my coaching experience is that every individual and combination of individuals, whether a team or grade-level cluster, requires something different from their leader or coach. For some athletes, I neutralized their anxiety and gave them an external focus and structure to optimize their performance. Other athletes were so intrinsically motivated that I needed to keep them relaxed and maintain conditions that minimized distractions. Yet others needed the discipline and external pressure from me to draw out their very best. I came to understand this as situational leadership and I believe my success came from having a wide range of practices and the confidence to know when to apply a given strategy. For this same reason, I believe that each and every principal has the capacity to utilize his or her leadership style in a way that benefits school climate and student achievement.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was completed on the topic of school climate and elementary principals. Adjustments were made as a result of the pilot study before conducting the study in larger scale. Specifically, adjustments were made to the interview questions, the overall research questions and the review of research.

Pilot Study Interview Questions

The goal of the interview in the pilot study was to determine the most productive style of questions to ask the participants about the following aspects of their leadership and experiences regarding school climate.

- Professional Background of Principal

- Perceptions about School Climate

- Implementing Change

- Obstacles to Improving or Maintaining School Climate

- Climate and Achievement

Allowing principals who participated later in the pilot study to elaborate on broader, open-ended questions yielded more data as opposed to orally presenting the list of questions. As researcher, I interjected questions as needed from the list and monitored that each participant had addressed each of the following research questions during the interview. I utilized index cards with each question written in large bold letters so that I could see them easily and not disrupt the flow of the conversation by looking at a sheet or list.

Conclusion of the Pilot Study

Principals have extensive knowledge about school climate that would benefit colleagues and future educational leaders. There is a great need to cultivate the skills of

principals so that they begin their career with important knowledge that will benefit the

learners and staff in their buildings. Waiting for a principal to gain the experience needed

to induce or shape a positive school climate is not an acceptable practice. While the

school waits, achievement and morale are vulnerable. Knowledge about school climate

and leadership by future school leaders should be components of preparatory programs

everywhere.

In this study, an elementary principal was interviewed about school climate to

determine both her understanding of it and her strategies to influence it. The opportunity

to pass the craft from one generation of leaders like the principal in this study to the next

will benefit schools and learning. Sadly, the furious pace of the job of today's principal,

gives little time for such engagement. The principal featured in this field study was

anxious to share what she knows and was hungry for a listener. In our conversations, it

was evident that she was highly intelligent and reflective. She demonstrated

intentionality about adjusting the school's climate to increase student learning. The

opportunity to harvest the experience-based knowledge such as hers is inspiring and

should be a valuable resource to those in the profession.

As a result of this study, the following conclusions have been developed:

- Principals have a conceptual (often constructivist) understanding of school
  climate that is consistent with the dominant research (Hoy, Tarter, Bliss)

- School leaders develop intentional and tactical plans to adjust school climate

- There is a strain on school climates as a result of standardized assessment and No
  Child Left Behind.

- The profession of school principal has grown exponentially as a result of recent
  education reform and is a source of great stress.

- There is a vast untapped resource in the practices and knowledge of principals that will be valuable to future school leaders.

There is a significant opportunity to document the successes of school leaders into the body of educational research regarding school climate. The value of this rich knowledge to future administrators is immense as it holds the promise of improving school climates and consequently student achievement.

Research Questions for the Dissertation

As a result of the pilot study, I proposed that I adjust the methods and procedures and embark on an in-depth exploration of school climate and the elementary principal. Specifically, I am interested in addressing the following revised research questions.

- How do elementary principals conceptualize school climate and their role in managing it?

- What are the greatest challenges for principals to maintaining a positive school climate?

- Identify research-based strategies principals apply to alter school climate.

- What type of principal training is needed to be able to assess and adjust school climate with the goal of improving student achievement?

- What leadership skills will be most effective to maximize student achievement?

- Do school leaders perceive standardized testing to be a detriment to school climate?

Data Collection

Multiple data sources were used to document the practices of principals regarding school climate in this era of high stakes accountability. Sources included interviews, direct observations, documents and participant observations.

Interviews

Principals were interviewed in their offices for approximately ninety minutes during a formal visitation. An interview protocol that had been field-tested was administered. The focus of the questions was on the background and experiences of the principals, a description of the school climate when each first arrived as contrasted to the climate at the time of the interview. Informal follow-up interviews and visitations were conducted to deepen the researchers understanding on an as-needed basis.

Areas of Interview: Professional Background of Principal

Perceptions about School Climate
Implementing Change
Obstacles to Improving or Maintaining School Climate
Climate and Achievement
No Child Left Behind and School Climate

The following questions were asked to each interviewee during the interview:

- ❑ Tell me about your career in education prior to becoming a principal…

- ❑ How long have you been a Principal at this school? In your career?

- ❑ What attracted you to the Principalship?

- ❑ Is there someone who has been an influential role model? Why? Were there any other influences?

- ❑ How would you define or describe school climate?

- ❑ In your current school, tell me about the school climate…

- ❑ How has the climate changed since your arrival as Principal?

- ❑ Are there any specific things that you have done to change climate. Why were you successful or not?

- ❑ Compare the climate of your current school to climates of other schools where you have worked. Describe your role in the different schools. (teacher, counselor, administrator)

- ❑ What external factors have affected school climate (local and global)?

- ❑ In your role as Principal, what is your role is establishing school climate?

- ❑ Has NCLB or high stakes testing had an impact on your school's climate?

- ❑ Has NCLB or high stakes testing had an impact on your capacity to influence school climate?

- ❑ If you had an abundance of support and resources, what are some things that you would implement to improve school climate…

- ❑ Why is a positive school climate important?

- ❑ How would an improved school climate change your school?

- ❑ How has NCLB affected school climate from your perspective?

- ❑ Do you think there is a difference between school culture and school climate. If yes, what?

- ❑ Describe the ideal school climate.

- ❑ What are indicators of a positive school climate?

- ❑ Do you believe there is a connection between school climate and student achievement?

- ❑ How has your leadership style influenced school climate?

- ❑ Name challenges or obstacles to making the changes you intended to make?

- ❑ Is there anything else you would like to share?

Documentation

The researcher obtained school documents including newsletters, staff meeting agendas, the student handbook, the discipline code, and the staff handbook. The websites of the school and district was also examined.

Recorded or Written Field Notes of Observations

During visitations, the researcher documented observations through notes or recordings of observations made immediately after the site visitation. The focus of the observations document perceptions about school climate by the researcher in addition to questions or thoughts that arose related to the interview process. A third party professionally transcribed the recorded observations and interviews verbatim.

Data Analysis

Initially, I proposed utilizing strategies from both grounded theory and phenomenological research. Since I was interested in recording all possible meanings and perspectives of the experiences of school climate held by the principal I used practices common to phenomenological research. Since the sample was limited to 10 principals there are also qualitative analysis techniques common to case study research.

As open coding of the transcripts was underway using a researcher-designed form (Appendix C), cross checks were made between the transcriptions of the interview to develop categories that emerge from all data sources. Two critical friends reviewed and discussed concepts and the categories on an on-going basis. Member checks were made by asking follow-up questions to the interviewee to clarify areas of uncertainty.

As categories developed, axial coding will assist in the development of themes that will help develop conclusions and implications for future research. This researcher will not attempt to limit the scope of the concept of school climate but instead will document the phenomenon as understood by principals in the study.

Trustworthiness of Data

Strategies that were used to build trustworthiness and reliability were triangulation of data, member checks and the use of critical friends. The researcher identified her personal biases that emerged during the research or were present prior to commencement of entry into the field. Recordings of observations and field notes were made immediately after site visits and were kept on an on-going basis and reviewed frequently to maintain a focus as researcher and not peer/principal.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

As a result of this study, it became evident that principals influence school climate with intentionality or not. Several of the principals knew it was their mission to improve the school climate from the moment they were hired. Another arrived in the position knowing the importance of maintaining a school's climate from his experience in the business world. And a few had awareness of its importance from current studies in leadership and administration. The three that were least able to articulate their beliefs and impact are also influencing school climate in a way that this researcher will identify as accidental. Based on this small study, acting with intention regarding school climate will influence it more consistently than accidental practices.

School climate is often described as positive when it might better be understood as synergistic. A synergy is defined by having different entities such as teachers, parents and administrators cooperate advantageously for a final outcome. In a school setting, it means that teamwork will produce an overall better result than if each person was working toward the same goal individually. For the purposes of this research project, the term positive in reference to school climate also refers to the more concise concept of synergy.

Those principals who are enrolled in graduate school, attending conferences, participating in professional development or reading the professional literature had a climate awareness or consciousness. They possessed what this researcher will describe as an intentionality about maintaining or influencing school climate and were able to articulate strategies to make adjustments.

The other principals were not aware of the significance of school climate and were unable to articulate their actions and intentions regarding it. By the leadership role of every principal, there is an impact on school climate. For these principals without the awareness, the climate is accidental or a result of behaviors and practices without intention.

Overall this study examined the phenomena of school climate from the principals' perspective. Results from this study will be reported in three broad categories. First, there will be focus on the meaning of school climate to the participants in this study. Second, there will be an examination of the challenges to the elementary school climate as identified by the interviewees. Challenges include site-specific obstacles and those imposed from outside the school including the community and state or federal mandates. Finally, strategies for improvement as proposed by the elementary principal participants will be identified.

Principals Define School Climate

Principal Sally Jones, was articulate in her understanding of the concept of school climate and her construction was consistent with the research literature. She stated: "school climate is kind of a consistent atmosphere in the school that people can recognize." She elaborated further when talking about staff: "I've gotten comments from faculty who were transferred from other places who have said that this is a great place, that they really enjoy coming to work every day."

Hamilton School Principal Patrick Gray was able to elaborate even further distinguishing between climate and culture in a way that aligns with the dominant research. He stated, "Climate is more transient and you can have an event that changes climate instantly. The culture, it is like turning around a super tanker… it takes years to

alter the culture. The climate or palpable feel of the place over time influences culture."

Judy Schultz also made a clear distinction between climate and culture that aligns with

the predominant research when she stated, "I think the more colloquial meaning of

culture is [sort of] the rituals and the traditions and [the way] the unspoken things work in

a system." While elaborating on cultural shifts in her 9 years at the school, she believes

hard work was already a value prior to her arrival but the commitment to support one

another and the children has grown. "I was very committed to that when I came here so

that's an additional, [that's a] cultural shift here, welcomed by the staff and families."

When first visiting Patrick's school, I recall the welcome from the secretary.

"Are you Suzanne?" she asked. She was expecting me, she was welcoming and my

appointment was on time. When I mentioned this observation to Patrick he described the

importance of customer service and the need to "make the trains run on time" as

foundations to a positive school climate.

Describing many of the characteristics of school climate, Principal Jan Frazier

summed it up simply by stating, "You can feel it." In reviewing her 10 years at the helm,

she described the changes from the early days at Latimer Lane School and working hard

to make it feel like everyone belonged. She described the school's history as a place

where middle class parents were reluctant to send their children and as a place that was

non-engaging for children. Although she didn't articulate the goal of altering school

climate, she stated that "when I took the job, I felt that would be my challenge, try to

wake it up." The metaphor she gave to help make the distinction between climate and

culture was very revealing. She said, "My faith is that Bush hasn't destroyed the

American culture but he sure has impacted the climate."

Describing school as a second home to staff and children, Principal Beth Page believes that "your number one task as a principal is to make the climate nurturing, caring… because it just takes a little part of it to be wrong to change the whole dynamic." Page will be assuming a multi-site position next year as her district manages the budget crisis. Administrative positions were cut and the scope of responsibility was increased for the remaining principals. She fears for changes in the positive school climate at her current site as she will no longer be there on a full-time basis. She recalled the climate when she first arrived and her superintendent issued her the orders to "just try to get this place working so people can get along." She believes that there has been a lot of progress from the early days and hopes that her multiple site assignment will only last a year.

Unable to describe school climate, Principal Judy Martin spoke of the need for a common language in schools but did not name any specific characteristics of school climate or culture. She spoke at length regarding a number of things about staff unrelated to school climate and did not elaborate even when the question was restated or she was redirected.

She believes she got off to a strong start in her first job as a principal by being very visible in the classrooms where she felt most comfortable and at the same time, she was showing her staff that she know how to teach. It was not her intention to demonstrate her teaching abilities; she said "it was where my comfort level was." She stated that from her visits "respect and trust started building up." Without her naming these as such, respect and trust have been previously identified as foundations to a positive school climate by researchers.

Becoming a Principal after a stint as a Professor of Education, Holly Schultz wanted to learn if there was "any connection between all this theory that I was teaching

60

and what was going on in the real world." She learned that she loved being back in the elementary school setting and has never returned to college teaching.

She initially answered the question about defining school climate with a series of questions. "What does it feel like emotionally and socially and intellectually to be a member of this school community every day? What is that like for us, for the child, for the families, for visitors… does it reflect our deepest understandings of what we're about in school?"

When asked to elaborate on school climate at Lincoln School, she described the "three big components." She stated, "school climate here is reflected primarily in our understanding that whatever we do here revolves around the children and what we agree is best for the children… anything else that flows from that and be easily recognized."

Teachers had recently expressed concern over the disorderly dismissal process. This was offered by Holly as an example of how the staff works through problems and concerns and described the process by which the staff worked this out. At the next staff meeting after the concern was brought up, the teaching staff discussed the following questions: "Is our objective to get children out of the building faster? Is this a concern because parents' are complaining? We all agreed that there's something not quite fair about saying to children two or three times 'get in line, quiet down.' Does that flow from our concern for children? What kind of dismissal do we want to create?"

At that point she made the connection to school climate and core beliefs in a way that no other principal did. She said, "So I think the school climate here is centered on how we can do what's best for children and how we can be sure that whatever decision we make we can trace back to that core belief that's our first responsibility as teachers." She added the two additional core beliefs beyond the primary one of doing what's best

for children. They are being as inclusive and extending to families as much as possible by "purposefully seek them out, keep that communication more than perfunctory." Finally she elaborated on how staff relate to one another. "Our primary responsibility towards one another is to be supportive and respectful and use humor whenever we can because how we are with one another every day in things big and small impacts how it feels to be in this building."

John Duncan was months short of retiring when he participated in an interview. He believes that the climate he created in his 18 years at the school will be his legacy. He stated, "If there's something that I see as the legacy here, it is that I've established a [positive] school climate." When asked to elaborate on the meaning of school climate, he answered by saying, "you know, it's funny, I don't have a full definition but I can tell you operationally… I want to partner with the parents so the school is described as inviting, welcoming, that they come in and like the tone of the building." Duncan mentioned at least 5 current educational or business authors (Bolman, Deal, Blanchard, Hallwell, Peters) during our time together.

A summative definition of school climate based on the responses of participants in the study would be the palpable sense of a school as experienced by students, staff and visitors that affects the emotional and academic experiences of all participants and can be influenced by behaviors of the principal and others. There was variation about the specific traits for a positive school climate though the most common factors included a focus on the academic success of students, clarity of purpose, collaborative participation of all staff and efficient customer service for all.

While most of the principals were insightful about school climate in a way that was consistent with the dominant educational research, it is important to note that there

were exceptions. Based upon this researcher's observations and evaluation of the

transcriptions of the interviews, the three principals who are still actively involved in

professional development and graduate coursework were insightful and eloquent in

discussing their understanding and influence upon school climate. And, the principal

who was a self-professed avid reader of professional literature was perhaps the most

insightful of all regarding climate and culture.

Table 5 Summary of Principal's Knowledge of School Climate

School	Principal	Articulate about School Climate?
Abraham Lincoln Elementary	Schultz, Holly	Yes
Canal Street Elementary	Jones, Sally	Yes
Center Street School	Martin, Judy	No
Christa McAuliffe Elementary	Sparks, Tom	No
Einstein Academy	Page, Beth	Yes
Hamilton School	Gray, Patrick	Yes
Latimer Lane Elementary	Frazier, Jan	Yes
Maple Street School	Duncan, John	Yes
Rosa Parks Elementary School	Downes, Marian	Yes
Thurgood Marshall Elementary	Haley, Dana	No

Observations of the Administrative Assistant as an Indicator of Climate

The examination of artifacts from each school site provided an interesting view of

each school's communication style that is an important aspect of school climate as

defined by participants in the study. This study utilized the artifacts of newsletters, the

office lobby and the website to explore evidence of positive communication.

Newsletters were the first artifacts to be compared as they were available from

every school. The distribution ranged from weekly to quarterly and were anywhere from

one to eight pages in length. In six of the samples, the secretary or a parent volunteer did

the newsletter. This made the newsletter an unreliable artifact of the principal's influence

on communication relative to school climate.

Websites were available for all but two schools and also had a considerable

range of timely and useful information. Several were updated weekly and included

detailed information about the calendar, school events and classroom news. Others were

updated annually and contained mandatory information regarding state testing and basic

district and site contact information. Like the newsletters, the websites were determined

to be unreliable indicators of the principal's influence over school communication as only

one principal in the study participated in website maintenance. Instead, a district

technology assistant, teacher or parent volunteer at the sites in the study managed this

job.

The school lobby or office waiting areas varied widely and did convey

information about communication style. In each case, there was close proximity to the

principal's office that indicates the principal would have some awareness of the displays.

In most cases, these spaces had timely parent information regarding school events,

calendars, lunch menus and information from local organizations relevant to families. In

the three schools that felt tired and unwelcoming to this researcher, the displays of

information on bulletin boards, magazine racks or tables were out of date, cluttered

or irrelevant. Like a doctor's office waiting room, a client can get a positive, comfortable

and welcoming feeling from the information available while waiting for services.

Although it was this researcher's intent to compare climates at each site in part by

examining each of these common artifacts, it was determined that two of the three were

not reliable. Since each principal had a very different role in the development of the

artifacts, no connection could be made between principal behavior and this aspect of

school climate regarding the newsletters and websites. Regarding the lobby, it is believed the principal should have some awareness of the efficiency of communication in these areas and some control over the behavior of those whose job it is to maintain and update information.

As the project unfolded, this researcher determined that the different feel of each office as experienced by a visitor and as influenced by the administrative assistant could be compared as an indicator of school climate. The professional behaviors of the administrative assistant are in direct control of the principal and were found to provide an observable comparison of schools in the examination of climate as impacted by a site principal.   This researcher relied on the analysis of field notes recorded immediately after visiting each school to develop this comparison.

In one office, the secretary announced my arrival with enthusiasm and conveyed that she was expecting me. In most others, I was treated coolly and respectfully. In one, the secretary never looked up and the Principal rescued me as I wandered about on the other side of the counter between us.

Three of the ten principals in the study indicated they were actively involved in reading current educational research, attending conferences and participating in graduate programs. Interestingly, the secretaries to each of these principals stood out as especially helpful, friendly and inviting. And two of these principals extemporaneously spoke of the need for positive customer service as a foundation to positive school climate.

John Duncan recounted a story about his secretary missing a payroll deadline and having a lack of respect for district timelines. When the Superintendent called him about the missed deadline, he personally delivered payroll and pledged his "two thousand percent assurance that this will never happen again. We created an imposition at central

office; I have pride that this will never happen again. We're not going to grow if we're under microscopic examination and this is what keeps us there. I had a staff meeting the next day and said, '[it's] important to me that central office get what they need in a timely manner.'" Duncan sent a powerful message to his secretary and staff on that occasion that has influenced school climate and school culture. As he said to me, "you can't underestimate the value of a good secretary."

Challenges to a Positive School Climate

Challenges to school climates were examined with the goal of cultivating replicable strategies for other practitioners. A successful school climate is characterized by a positive and welcoming feel to all participants, open communication, a focus on the success of students, a clear mission, a professional work ethic and mutual collaboration.

Open coding of the interview transcripts resulted in the identification of hundreds of concepts or labeled phenomenon. Then, as suggested by Creswell (1998), categories on which to focus were developed from the concepts extracted from the transcripts. The other concepts that were not chosen for the purposes of this study were not identified as strategic targets for successful change by the principals interviewed in this study. The concepts named were then sorted into the following themes more commonly found in the research literature on school climate including internal stressors, external stressors and the challenge of competing demands.

The categories are common to schools in Western Massachusetts in the current era of MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) and NCLB (No Child Left Behind). This commonality should facilitate the development of a model for improving school climate if that is the goal of a school community. Other school regions or states may face different obstacles to school climate though there are bound to be many similar strategies for success to schools everywhere.

Internal Stressors

Internal stressors are individual to the school being studied and include properties that were found in the data and either identified by the principal or observed by the researcher. There is a wide range of stressors on this continuum and the impact of each concept has the capacity to be unique and powerful. For example, the 'old guard' that refers to the veteran staff who monitor the culture, can be either a huge asset or an enormous challenge to a principal trying to alter school climate.

When Jan Frazier became Principal, she had a perspective as both parent of graduates of the school and as a teacher with a strong international background. She painfully recalled her initial consciousness about the preferential treatment afforded her own children at the school. "I knew that as middle class white parents my kids had better treatment. I saw it, it was painful."

A series of six principals had preceded her in a rapid progression and the school had become a stepchild in the district with many middle class families refusing to send their child there according to Frazier. She found the climate oppressive and "the teachers were running the place in a way that was not respectful to all children." Yet as a parent she had been determined that her children participate in the public school. As a new Principal, she was determined to change the status quo at the school.

Naming members of the staff as the biggest challenge to changing school climate, Beth Page believes that "strong personalities, inflexibility, and an unwillingness to change" hindered her early efforts. "After about three years some had left on their own, moved on or came around," she stated. Likewise, without hesitation Judy Martin named "veteran teachers' as an obstacle to changes she intended to make regarding school climate. When asked to elaborate, she went on to name the "paras who also have a strong

union" as her biggest challenge. She was referring to the paraprofessionals who support teachers and students who receive special education services.

Martin went on to describe the hiring of teachers that she has been able to do over the past decade. "I've had a lot of say in who's here and I've hired more than half of the staff. On the other hand, I haven't had the opportunity to hire many paras. It's a group that's written in stone." At that point, I asked whom she was referencing when she used the word staff. Her response was, "I float back and forth. I would love to say this is a whole cohesive body, [but] it isn't always." The distinction she makes between staff as teachers while paraprofessionals are sometimes included in the definition is noteworthy. If staff perceives this division, Principal Martin is having a negative effect on school climate.

Her biggest criticism of staff was saved for her secretary. "Prior to my arrival, she literally ran the school. She had all the power, she really had an in with the paraprofessionals because she identified more closely with them than she did with the teachers, and that has been the biggest challenge in this building. She knew way too much and was happy to share it. And to this day when she's out, it is a very different school…. We've got fifty-five days and she retires… I've been waiting nine years for this. And there's nothing that has risen to the firing offense. The occasional 'Oh my goodness, I wish you hadn't said that to this parent' conversations to which she's well aware and she usually apologizes quite freely but it doesn't change." As a result of this experience with her secretary, she has come to believe that "a principal should be able to hire their secretaries – that should be a given."

Principal Marian Downes credits the Responsive Classroom program and it's training for the positive school climate at Rosa Parks Elementary School. But, she has

been at the site for 18 years and has had the opportunity to replace most of the teaching staff with her own hires during those times and believes that the hiring she has done has also enhanced the school climate from its former state. When she was first hired, she was told by the Superintendent to "fix the place so people stop leaving." She stated that she believes school climate is the most important piece of any school and she has devoted a majority of her energy to that end. Up to ten schools send visitation teams to Rosa Parks each year to observe the social climate using the Responsive Classroom model.

Regarding the stress imposed by recent curriculum mandates from the state and federal systems, she is concerned that there is never enough time to complete all of the things there are to teach and do. "I think the struggle that we have had given the curriculum frameworks for the state and the structure from the Feds with No Child Left Behind is that we are working doubly hard to not lose that social climate that we believe is so important for kids." She explained that the ideal is to spend the first six weeks of school for modeling and learning a positive learning community and that has been pared down to two weeks. "It can't happen anymore. It can't take 6 weeks, maybe in Kindergarten… and that's the core to Responsive Classroom. I think that's the biggest struggle, is [how do you], how do you continue everything you know and believe in that works for kids as well as give them everything academically that they need to have?"

External Stressors

The external stressors were relatively consistent among the schools involved in this study. Funding is a challenge in most of Western Massachusetts and is a worsening problem. Parents tend to be involved in school fundraising activities in the suburban and rural districts that were part of the study. Some of the districts in the study were in close proximity to Springfield, Massachusetts while other rural districts were spread further out in the Connecticut River Valley and had limited city and town services. Urban or city districts were not part of the study as their challenges are unique and considered different from the suburban and rural schools in this study.

Canal Street School has failed to meet the state's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2 consecutive years. Principal Jones sense is that "teachers are so worried about the test that they do a lot more drill than they used to and make sure that the kids know." She also worries about the children who "talk about it in the lunchroom. They are still stressed by the idea of a test and it comes up." She wants to find a way to strike a balance between the students, staff and parents on the school council who are "completely opposed to it. There is absolutely zero, currently zero support for high stakes on my school council."

Another major stressor to Beth Page are the people "above" who are so focused on the numbers and the scores and all that kind of stuff. They're getting so detailed on a particular test instead of looking at the whole child." She describes her students as stressed by the test and even 3rd graders have told her, "I hate MCAS." Because she was a Principal in Texas before she came to Massachusetts, she has been able to help her teachers anticipate what is next. "We have been following what has already happened in Texas as far as testing and programs go and everyone is trying to find the magic answer."

She cites the DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) progress monitoring system as an example of just such a phenomenon. In her case, administrators at the district level were saying "if you don't have eighty percent of your class at benchmark, something is wrong with your program." She suggests that the problem is that all children are administered DIBELS even if they can't speak clearly and it has little to do with any program. "There are no children that fit the one size fits all way of thinking. It's just one example of taking something like that type of instrument and making it so big." It is this support of her staff and their skills that helps to maintain a positive relationship and maintain a positive school climate. Several principals in the study believed that the structure associated with many new curricular programs left teachers stressed by the 'one-size fits all' delivery, pacing and lack of context for children. The same principals believed this was significantly damaging to school climate. It is significant that each of the three also found standards-based instruction to have positive aspects. I believe the fact that each could see the positive as well as the challenging aspects to this curriculum movement speaks to the overall balance in perspective that each principal possessed.

Although she never named the testing as a stressor per se, Judy Martin did reminisce about the days prior to Education Reform in 1993 when she had time be in the classroom and more time to interact with kids. She felt as if she became "more a manager and less of an instructional leader after Ed Reform." As for stress from the central office or Superintendent, she added, "I can kind of shut off the central office white noise and just focus on what's going on here…"

Prior to her arrival at Lincoln Elementary, the relationship between the teachers and school committee was strained. In the past several years, teachers have come to feel

supported by the school committee for their work. Schultz says, "That [respect] does impact climate that they [teachers] feel respected by not only me but this elected representatives." Regarding the current budget crises, she feels that teachers hold anxiety about what they could lose if the crisis impacts their funding.

Multiple Roles and Responsibilities: The Challenge of Competing Demands.

Sally Jones described the stress of trying to meet a plethora of competing demands as "nearly impossible to manage" and a major impediment to success at cultivating a more positive school climate. She stated that she had not received training on school climate at any point in her career.

The unrealistic expectations of the job leave Jan Frazier searching for staff that has experience. She states, "I've got to find somebody who I don't have to do a lot for, honestly, except kind of support them… but I have to say not all of my hiring were what I wished for…" One of the reasons Frazier believes that the job of the Principal is so demanding is related to the size of the school. "It's way too big (500 students) for one person to manage and to be effective, I think. I do fine but I have a sense that I'm kind of behind the eight ball trying to keep up with knowing everybody and I think that's a key piece to the climate, is that sense that you know them."

Citing the need for principals to be better advocates for their profession, Judy Martin spoke of the "political time that we can make a difference. I think educators really stink at speaking up for themselves and what they do, so we let other people tell us what we should so and that's where No Child Left Behind came from; and it's where the Education Reform of Massachusetts came from – the business community. If I had one great wish it would be that we all became eloquent at advocating and explaining how

hard this job is and how smart you have to be to do it. And there is a reason we have summers off because otherwise we'd be insane. I think we are very poor public relations people for education. We don't have time. I was thinking last week, can you imagine calling the physician when people are arriving for their surgical procedures to come out and take care of traffic?"

Teachers feel more cramped in terms of instructional time and Principal Holly Schultz believes this creates a struggle with time for enrichment activities or school wide programs. Although her teachers are not mandated to follow pacing guides that determine what curriculum will be covered according to a calendar, she believes they do feel the pressure to "cover everything." With pride, she describes the staff's opposition to the next "holy grail in terms of the next program. We're determined rebels when it comes to that… we really believe it's not in the best interests of kids to continue trying the latest and the best and we don't do it."

In response to a follow up question about the staff's attitude towards a new research-based program, she stated, "we're not research adverse at all." And yet, there are no curricular programs in use at Lincoln School. "If NCLB wants you to do Reading First, we don't do that. How could you know? You don't know our children so how could you know what would work with them" offers Schultz.

<u>Strategies to Improve School Climate</u>

Each of the subcategories to the challenges of school climate as identified by the principals in this study intersected with the category of academics. Specifically, aspects of the categories of internal stressors, external stressors and competing demands all crossed into the area of academic achievement and performance. This heightens the

importance of the strategies for improving school climate and its impact on student achievement that will be reviewed.

The cycle between improved academic achievement and school climate is such that achievement nourishes school climate in the same way that a positive school climate leads to improved academic achievement (Bulach, 2002). The connection between school climate and student achievement is symbiotic in that one cyclically supports the other. Yet, not a single principal in the study made this explicit connection during the interviews.

Leadership was another major concept that intersected with the challenge subcategories during analysis. The skills of the principal to effectively manage school operations and maintain a highly motivated staff were understood as basics to improving school climate by the majority of the principals. In addition, diplomacy in relationships with parents and the central office appeared in the data repeatedly. An additional area of focus targeted by principals in the study is the nature of change for staff, families and students.

The achievement/climate cycle

With the goal of improving student achievement as the core reason for examining school climate and making necessary changes, Principal Jones proposed that academic support in various forms was necessary both to improve achievement and climate. She stated that, "first of all, I would reinstitute our remedial program. I think a big stress on our teachers and parents is noticing issues that need to be addressed but really not having the means to address them." Strategies that she proposed to improve achievement include academic tutoring, remedial classes, reducing class size, classroom aides in every

primary level room, summer school and reading specialists. Improved student

performance will improve teacher confidence and morale.   The trend of recent cuts that

have occurred during the fiscal challenges of the past decade must be reversed. It is

important to note that each of the strategies listed had been subject to elimination in

budget cuts.

Principal Jones wants professional development for teachers is that refines

instructional practices without compromising professional independence. She expressed

concern for the "rigidity of curricular programs" associated with the standards-based

systems. She also reported that teachers often expressed frustration over the complexity

and scripted nature of the curriculum materials.

Like Jones, Principal Judy Martin would bring more professional development to

teachers and paraprofessionals alike. She states, "I would put huge resources into

professional development and I think we need to be very thoughtful about the social and

emotional needs of these kids and not worry so much immediately about academic

growth."   Although Martin was not explicit about the application of Maslow's hierarchy,

it seemed this is exactly what she was doing. With a goal of children experiencing

greater academic success, Principal Martin seeks to meet the basic needs for safety and

belonging.

Collaboration time for her staff was another strategy for improved school climate

according to Martin. Currently, teachers have very little time to meet by grade level

teams. This was a common concern among many of the principals in the study and

seems unique to elementary schools. Frazier explained that "with the cuts in school

budgets, programs that created prep time for elementary teachers have been eliminated."

Frazier would direct more energy towards teacher supervision if she didn't expend so much of it on managing the day-to-day operations of the school. "If I had a way to carve out the time, I'd like to be there teaching and then talking about it with them… try to do it in a colloquial way," she stated. In her district, there was a grievance about using staff meeting time for professional development. The contract prohibits this and she had to cancel a series of planned workshops. It would seem that hers is a district that has thwarted administrators from establishing an on-going focus on professional development due to restrictions in the teachers' contract.

Summing up the importance of a positive school climate on learning, Principal Marian Downes states, "what I want is for children to feel safe when they come to school… research says if children don't feel safe, they can't learn. And when you're dealing with a very diverse population, then you don't always know what children are dealing with at home and this is their safe haven. Then you as a community, not just as one individual, needs to do everything you can to create that sense of love, caring and safely. So when kids do walk in the door, they can… leave all that baggage behind them so they can learn. We all say we love coming to work and that's because there's a positive climate for adults and peers."

Academic focus

School success is not just about a positive climate and Jan Frazier believes it is also about the academic climate and the teaching practices in the classroom. She said, "It has to be the kind of practice that allows the kids not only the belonging but also the achievement. They should excel because they can."

Based on her prior experiences in Texas, Beth Page encouraged teachers to endure the cycle and "just teach the kids. Please just teach them because that's what they need. You are the teacher and you know what to do." She, like Frazier, believes working in the classrooms alongside the teacher has increased her credibility with the teachers and boosted morale.

The Responsive Classroom model used at Rosa Parks Schools emphasizes high expectations for academics and social behavior. Principal Marian Downes credits the consistent language and high expectations for the academic success of the students in her school. She explains that "we model respect as a community of teachers, parents and students and what we expect amongst adult to adults, as well as adult to child… some children are taught ethics and social skills at home and others aren't. And for all of them it's really important to have that common core and base at school because then you can continue your learning and you move ahead quicker if you have that same basic respect." In keeping with the theory of Maslow's hierarchy, the school operates on the belief that meeting the basic needs for safety and belonging, children can function at higher levels allowing for greater learning.

During the spring testing season, Downes and her staff encourage children to "do their personal best to show the people in the state who are looking at them as people, individuals, and as Smithtown as a town what we can do." In addition she strives for "balancing that social piece with what I know I want them to do for themselves, not for me, but for them."

Leadership

Staving off the potential Education Reform and the testing mandates, Jan Frazier works with parents to keep testing in perspective. At the same time, she guides teachers "to pay attention to what we're doing, reflecting on our classes and making sure it's the right road out." She sees the curriculum frameworks as "wonderful and it's kind of turned to save things without the baby going out with the bath water." She longs for a "very well articulated stand as a school district about what we think is important to kids. This is where leadership is critical at the central office level."

Concerned that educators and not politicians should be in charge of schools, Frazier works hard for local, state and national candidates. She describes her frustration in dealing with the teachers' union and the local politics and the sadness over losing her former superintendent and mentor. She turns to her elementary principal colleagues but claims that time makes it very difficult to get together as often as she would like to or need to. "It's not just to have somebody there for you; but for me to be able to give to other people. That's very restorative too; to help somebody else. There just doesn't seem to be any chance for that with our new superintendent." Frazier sounded discouraged by the current circumstances in her school created by poor leadership by the new superintendent. This is especially difficult for Frazier who had close ties with her former boss and relied on that relationship for counsel and support.

Frazier is a prolific writer and issues a detailed letter to staff and families every week covering all aspects of schooling and her life as Principal of Latimer Lane School. Her secretary reports that parents often come into the building on Fridays to collect their letter early.

Duncan credits his background as an athlete and coach for his leadership successes. He encourages staff to take risks and grow more comfortable with making mistakes as that is when great learning occurs. He and the staff have recently devoted professional development time for brain research and learning. Although he and the staff want the students to succeed on the MCAS, he reminded me that "the Unabomber would have had a perfect score on the MCAS but I wouldn't want to live next door." His professed focus is on making the school a great and fun place to learn and to work.

Staff

Facing the disrespect towards children and families head on, Principal Jan Frazier described the early days as very painful and reflects, "Looking back on it I think, I don't know how I stood it. We drew a fence and we had people on one side and on the other, and some sitting on it." When she overheard disrespectful conversations in the building about children or families, she found her bottom line. She expressed it this way. "I'm sorry and I'll do anything to help you but you can't treat people that way." She described trying to get the momentum going towards a more respectful community while also trying to build trust and security with the teachers so that I could help them move with me... It was a very, very difficult two years I have to say."

Ten years later, Frazier attributes her success at the school as the result of both the painful early conversations and the fact that some of the early staff who offered the greatest challenge have moved on. She took advantage of hiring new staff more aligned with her philosophies and believes that was key to her cultivation of a more successful school climate. "You have to have people who are with you; you can't do it all yourself."

The least senior member of Holly Schultz's staff has 17 years experience at the site. Her seasoned staff would often prefer that she tell them what to do. An example she cited, "just say it's a rotten math series and my research says this is a better series. We'll trust you, we'll get it." She believes that although there are times they want that kind of leadership, it would infantilize them and this is already a problem in educational systems. "We tell teachers to do this and this is what you'll do for professional development."

Stakeholders

Principal Jones believed that stakeholders bear responsibility in shaping a positive school climate. Parents, staff and students were identified as key participants at improving school climate working with the principal. Appropriate funding and high levels of participation and volunteerism were described as indicators of a positive environment and are the result of involved stakeholders. According to Jones, the maturity of the staff and their willingness to change must be aligned to the vision of the school held by the community.

Building her team first with kids and families was a strategy used by Jan Frazier in the first days of her leadership. She believes she "got success pretty early and it helped make the writing on the wall very clear to the teachers. We're doing this and the kids are going to ask for this and the parents are going to ask and I'm going to support them with being more engaging and more active in learning and being more respectful."

At the same time that she built community with kids and families, Frazier was vigilant about how people were being treated. She said, "Climate cannot be anything that is good or positive if anybody is being treated badly… I think a lot of people learn through modeling and a lot of the teachers acknowledge that… They have said that they

didn't know you could do it differently." She believes that teachers were "taught a way to be a teacher that either didn't explicitly talk about the need for respect and acknowledgement or actually said in order to be effective and a good disciplinarian and manager that you have to be remote and maybe even less than respectful."

Some staff reacted to Frazier's focus on respect by "dismissing me or actively not liking me." In a follow up question, Frazier was asked about her capacity to withstand the negative behavior for the good of the school's climate. She offered that she did step out of her personal self and put on a persona. "I think I'm conscious that there are times when I do step out and I can be really firm and say, 'this is not acceptable.' I step out because of the importance of it." She described how she managed the emotions in these situations by being explicit with adults saying "I don't feel comfortable with telling you what you have to do because I very much respect you, but it can't be this way. You cannot harass a kid or you cannot… I don't like having to do it at all and it will take something heinous."

When asked if this leadership strategy had worked, Frazier described the toll that it had taken on relationships with staff and families in the beginning. "There are people with whom there's no more relationship. Some of the teacher aren't here anymore and some of the families. I think it surprises them sometimes but there is a line being crossed. I just hope that it continues to be a learning situation."

Citing superior community support and family involvement, Holly Schultz explained that her site budgets had passed in under three minutes for the past decade.

Leader Behavior and Skills

A range of leadership skills is viewed as essential by the principals in the study although no particular leadership style was identified as more successful than another. More than a particular style, skills such as intelligence, empathy and flexibility were viewed as significant.

Ms. Jones described a horseback riding strategy she learned as a child as something she uses constantly as a leader. The tactic of 'check and release' involves pulling on the reins of a horse and releasing them like pumping brakes. She described the response of staff as pulling back even harder if she only pulled and did not also release.

Also using reins metaphorically, Patrick Gray reports that people often mistakenly credit his leadership for the vibrancy of the school. He states, "The reality is that it's loosening up on the reigns and running with teacher ideas." To get to that place over 6 years, Patrick devoted energy into the cultivation of communities of practice and transformed staff meetings into a time for community practice where the teachers are sharing strategies for improving instruction. At the time Patrick arrived at Hamilton School, he reports the school was ranked at the bottom of the list for state testing and has made great gains since that time. He recalled the early stages with his staff when he convinced them that "ten really wonderful gems (ideas) emerge only when we start with a thousand harebrained ideas." He also made it safe for the teachers to make mistakes when they were challenging themselves with new ideas. He coached them, "If you are so comfortable within your realm and you're never challenging yourself and you never try anything new and you've been doing the same thing for twenty years, that's a problem." He believes that getting away from top down leadership and empowering the teachers is key to success in cultivating a positive climate and to improving teaching and learning.

Weighing in on keeping pressure off of her staff, Frazier describes the feeling of "axes hanging over us." She uses the testing mandates to help keep a focus on "what we're doing, reflecting on our classes and making sure it's the right road for our students." She believes educators need to stay in the driver's seat. She encourages her teachers to "act professionally and be educators who are really helping to lead the way."

The faculty who work in a school with a poor climate require "care and feeding" in order to maximize their performance according to Jones. When asked to describe what is meant by care and feeding, she stated that, "staff needs positive reinforcement, recognition and a sense of professional accomplishment." Further she stated, "When teachers are held in a defensive position such as one where they experience constant scrutiny, they cannot function at an optimal level." She believed that her role is to buffer teachers from the pressure by parents and the central office. Parents can do a great deal to support staff and schools through formal and informal channels but they must be guided into these supportive directions. Parent/Teacher Organizations (PTO's) sponsor Appreciation Meals and provide funding for classroom supplies at Canal Street School. Parents have advocated for their school to the school committee and superintendent in other instances.

An additional challenge for a principal according to Jones is to delegate responsibility and utilize a collaborative decision-making model with the staff as is possible. Specific strategies for accomplishing this offered by Jones included subcommittee work, department or grade level responsibilities and opportunities to serve as head teacher in the absence of the principal from the building.

According to Jones, it was also important to constantly remind teachers of their power and influence with their students. Holding the image of oneself as a constant

teacher and role model is critical to guide learning and appropriate behavior by children. And, the principal saw herself as a role model to staff, parents and students. As she said, "I was very careful of how I spoke to children, of how I did discipline. Later when I heard how teacher were speaking to children in the same way, I knew that it was having an effect."

Constantly monitoring the staff's energy and attitude, Holly Schultz describes herself as a "living barometer… so I can take a read and be where I need to be to shore up any area that needs a little help. I should be available for the teacher who just got a ticket on the way to school… The second piece of that role [I think] is to remind us that the kids are at the core of what we do and to remind myself and to remind teachers individually and as a group.

The Process of Change

The nature of change is a complex phenomenon of the human condition. Principal Jones often made references to the importance of leading a school community through change and offered strategies for success. The ideas drawn from the data on change will be part of this project though the more complex and ambiguous notion of change itself will be left for others to describe.

Change is a remarkably complex process and principals can only do so much to ease it along. According to Jones, she came to realize that she had been hired to improve the school climate only after asking the superintendent if she had to change anything right away. He responded that she should not change anything right away but to work towards it. Her strategy was to have the community comprised of teachers, parents and children identify what needed to change and what needed to stay the same as a first step in preparing the school for eventual change. Her superintendent was supportive of this strategy and she is still the principal at the same school after 12 years.

A frustration about change that was expressed in several interviews was that the pace of change was often much slower than the principals would have liked. Yet, there was fear that speeding up the process could backfire and teachers in particular would obstruct the forward momentum. Patience and a focus on the long-term goals of the school were suggestions to manage the identified frustration.

The principals interviewed for this research project had a clear sense of what they could do to improve school climate. Constraints to implementing their strategies were abundant and several described the job as "too demanding" and its scope as too broad. Yet, several like Principal Jones also described their 'calling' to the profession and moments where they had experienced significant personal satisfaction. One strategy to

keep moving forward in spite of all of the obstacles was by bringing moments of success into consciousness as a reminder of the work that had been done and as motivation for the work ahead. One stated that when she felt overwhelmed, "I walk around the building and visit classrooms even though I know that the papers are piled up in my office."

Experience in the business sector prior to becoming a school leader gave Patrick Gray a perspective on the functioning of high performance teams in his work at Proctor and Gamble. When he arrived at Hamilton School, there had been a succession of short-term principals and his impression was that the teachers believed, "we can hold our breath longer than any initiative that someone's imposing." The first thing he asked his staff to do was to identify three things they loved about the school that made it a great place. And he asked them to identify three things that could be changed. From his informal needs assessment, he created a list and looked for a common theme that he identified as decision-making. It emerged that the teachers wanted to collaborate on the big things, not so much the little things. They wanted, "someone to make the trains run on time and wanted to concentrate on the bigger issues. I told them that I heard them. My strategy was to go after the low hanging fruit, the easy things to fix and then came back as a faculty and rolled up our sleeves to tackle the bigger things."

Again, as a result of his experience in the business world, Patrick had a belief that a Principal needed to stay on the job from four to eight years to make sustainable change in a school. "Beyond eight you've really given everything you have to give and it's time for someone else's perspective… you want things to operate no matter who's in there." He went on to describe a recent example when one of his teacher's developed an idea who believed that parents don't know how to read to their children effectively or see the power of it. "The next thing I know there are twelve teachers involved on their own time

organizing an evening event with a local museum that was attended by hundreds of

parents." Another example of the safety in presenting ideas was revealed when a first

year teacher offered a workshop on co-teaching. In discussing it with her later, Patrick

reported that he had commented how courageous it was for her to hold a forum as a brand

new teacher. Her response according to Patrick was, "it was a climate where I felt safe

that I could do this."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The leadership skills of a school principal directly impact the school climate and the achievement of its students (Norton, 2002). As a result of this small study, the majority of principals were determined to possess an awareness of school climate yet none had received training on its impact on student achievement or how to influence it. Those who had such a consciousness were able to act upon school climate with intentionality. Those principals in the study who lacked a consciousness about school climate exerted more of an accidental influence on it.

Principal Jones and others made reference to the stress of competing demands and a lack of time and resources as an impediment to improve the climate in their buildings. And as Barth (2006) has described, the job of the principal has become more complex than ever. The inability to act upon the ideas and plans for school improvement was a source of great frustration. The fact that the majority of the principals in this study were able to articulate what is needed to improve school climate is encouraging. At the same time, it is evident that principals are struggling to keep up with the demands of the job.

Trying to determine if there is a particular leadership style that would be most effective in cultivating positive school climate under current circumstances is a worthy topic for future research. The work of Decker and Nichols (1993) did not find such a link. Perhaps the specific demands in schools today will yield a more conclusive finding. The capacity to manage great levels of stress while maintaining a tight focus on the school vision would be an important personality trait. Whether that translates into a particular leadership style has not been determined.

In addition to having knowledge about what needs to change in order to improve school climate, principals must also be prepared to deal with the various skills and abilities of their staff. (Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty, 2005). It was not clear in this study if principals have a broad enough view of the staff to effectively integrate the varied professional strengths, emotional competence and needs within their staffs. This is not suggesting a shortcoming on their part; this is more an indicator of the volume of minutiae that obstructed their broader view. The majority of the principals in the study believe that the principalship has grown more complex and despite years of experience, it has become a more difficult job than ever before.

The model of situational leadership might be the best style for improving school climate. Without adequate time, it would be impossible for a principal to both determine and implement best strategies. Hersey & Blanchard's work on Situational Leadership (1988) has tremendous value although most principals would need additional administrative help to carve out the time for effective implementation.

Although many of the schools had a positive feel to them and community members expressed pride and enthusiasm, the academic performance of the students on state testing varied widely. Principals blame various factors for the low scores including increased class sizes, obstructive staff, and inadequate remedial programs for kids falling behind. According to the research of Mitchell and Castle (2005), a positive school climate yields an improved academic climate. Other obstacles and deficiencies are overriding the effects of a positive climate. And, the decline in student achievement has the potential to erode the positive school climate that may be present as outlined in the research of Bulach (2002).

The tactics to maintain a synergistic school climate are situational and in constant flux as a result of the rapid changes that have occurred in schools. Principals must possess the skills to go beyond managing the climate of a school and instead coordinate the momentum needed to bring all parts into synergy. What may have been successful in years past might not produce the same results with the changes in schools of today. The changes relate to the imposed standards and accountability and also to the broad range of needs of the students. Principals today need a knowledge base that includes the powerful effect that school climate has on student achievement. And, the principals need access to and knowledge of current research to negotiate the obstacles to effective school climate in the manner of Hersey & Blanchard's Situational Leadership Model (1988). That is, they must have the tools to adjust to the change and variability along with the time and professional development to stay current with educational research. Beyond professional preparation on school climate and ongoing professional development related to educational research, the 21st century school leaders would benefit greatly from the collaborative knowledge of their colleagues.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Principals have extensive knowledge about school climate that would benefit

colleagues and future educational leaders. There is a great need to cultivate the skills of

principals so that they begin their career with important knowledge that will benefit the

learners and staff in their buildings. Waiting for a principal to gain the experience needed

to induce or shape a positive school climate is not an acceptable practice. While the

school waits, achievement and morale are vulnerable. Knowledge about school climate

and leadership by future school leaders should be components of preparatory programs

everywhere.

In this study, elementary principals were interviewed about school climate to

determine both their understanding of it and their strategies to influence it. The

opportunity to pass the craft from one generation of leaders like the principals in this

study to the next will benefit schools and learning. Sadly, the furious pace of the job of

today's principal, gives little time for such engagement. The principals featured in this

study were anxious to share what they know and several were 'hungry' for a listener. In

our conversations, it was evident that the principals were highly intelligent and reflective.

All had the goal of a positive school climate with its potential to increase student

learning.

As a result of this study, the following conclusions have been developed:

- Principals have a conceptual (often constructivist) understanding of school
  climate that is consistent with the dominant research (Hoy, Tarter, Bliss).

- School leaders develop intentional and tactical plans to adjust school climate.

92

- There is a strain on school climates as a result of standardized assessment and No Child Left Behind.

- The profession of school principal has grown exponentially as a result of recent education reform and is a source of great stress.

- There is a vast untapped resource in the practices and knowledge of principals that will be valuable to future school leaders.

- Successful practices to influence school climate from this study include: assess climate as a community and develop a vision with all stakeholders, focus on the site-specific needs of the students, train principals on school climate during their preparation for the profession, focus on small successes towards larger goals, hire with great care.

This has been an opportunity to document the successes of school leaders into the body of educational research regarding school climate. The value of this knowledge to future administrators is relevant as the link between positive climate and academic success is widely known and documented. Yet, there is scant research available on how principals can take intentional action to alter school climate. And none of the principals in the study had professional training regarding school climate. After a decade of intensive curricular interventions with little success at improving student achievement, it is time to focus on this already known fact; students are more successful in schools with a positive school climate. This study is a beginning and the schools are waiting…

APPENDICES

A. INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

B. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER AND PARTICIPANT
    CONSENT PAGE

C. CODING TEMPLATE

Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA
Graduate School of Education

Study Title: The Voice of Elementary School Principals: The Relevance of School Climate in an Era of Educational Reform

<u>CONSENT FOR VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:</u>

I, _____, volunteer to participate in this qualitative study and understand that:

- Suzanne Scallion will interview me using a guided interview format.

- The questions I will be answering address my views on issues related to the role of elementary school principals regarding school climate.

- I understand that the primary purpose of this research is to identify successes and challenges in maintaining a positive climate in an era of high stakes testing and accountability.

- The interview will be tape recorded to facilitate analysis of the data.

- Neither my name nor the name of my school nor the name of the district will be used, nor will I be identified personally, in any way or at any time.

- I may withdraw from part or all of this study at any time.

- I have the right to review material prior to the final oral exam or other publication. To ensure accuracy, I have the right to review a copy of the audiotape.

- I understand that results from this interview may be included in Suzanne Scallion's comps, oral presentations, and doctoral dissertation and may also be included in manuscripts submitted for publication. I am giving explicit release for the use of my words in the interview.

- I am free to participate or not to participate without prejudice.

- Because of the small number of participants, I understand that there is a slight risk that I may be identified as a participant of this study.

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Participant's Signature
_____   _____
Date   Date

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER AND
PARTICIPANT CONSENT PAGE

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST
HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**

Study Title: The Voice of Elementary School Principals: The Relevance of School

Climate in an Era of Educational Reform

Introduction to the study:
I am inviting you to be in a research study that I am conducting as part of my doctoral
dissertation under the direction of Linda Griffin, Ph.D. The purpose of the study is to
find out how principals perceive their role regarding school climate. I plan to publish the
results of the study in my doctoral dissertation and submit them for publication.

What will happen during the study?
During the study, I would like to interview you in your office at school. I will make an
audiotape recording of our conversation and your responses to open-ended questions
about your work as a Principal. The interview will take from 1 - 2 hours of your time. I
may ask to return for a later visit to clarify the results of the interview.

Who to go to with questions:
If you have any questions or concerns about this study you may contact Dr. Linda Griffin
at the University of Massachusetts. Her telephone number is 413-545-4345 and her e-
mail address in lgriffin@educ.umass.edu.

How participants' privacy is protected:
I will make every effort to protect your privacy. I will not use your name or the name of
your school in any of my research reports. Any information that I get during the study
will be protected through the use of a pseudonym for you and your school. The key that
matches your identity and the school's identity will be stored electronically in a locked
file and will be destroyed at the completion of the study.

Risks and discomforts:
Potential risks noted in the study include the cost of participation (loss of time, anxiety
about loss of privacy, embarrassment and/or painful self-reflection during or after the
interview process). At the conclusion of the study, I will destroy any evidence that links
the information from the interviews to specific individuals. I do not know of any way
you will personally benefit from participating in the study. The study will provide
information for practitioners and interested members of the academic community and
general public.

Your rights:
You should decide on your own whether or not you want to be in this study. You will not be treated any differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you do decide to be in the study, you have the right to tell me you do not want to continue with the study and stop being in the study at any time.

Review Board approval: The Human Subjects Review Committee from the Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies at University of Massachusetts in Amherst has approved this study. If you have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this study you may contact Linda Guthrie at (413) 545-6984 or by e-mail at lguthrie@educ.umass.edu

---

PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT AND SIGN IF YOU AGREE

I have had the chance to ask any question I have about this study and my questions have been answered. I have read the information in this consent form and I agree to be in the study. There are two copies of this form. I will keep one copy and researcher Suzanne Scallion will keep the other copy.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Witness*   Date

*Witness signature is required only when the capacity of the subject to understand the description of the project and its associated risks is in question or when otherwise required by the Institutional Review Board

Review Board approval:

_____

Appendix C

CODING TEMPLATE

Coding Table of _____ Interview   Date _____

Concept	Category	Property	Dimension	Quote	Pg #

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, J.E. (1993). The relationship between perceived principal leadership style and the degree and depth of implementation of cooperative learning. *Dissertation Abstracts,* AAC 9320287.

Allen, L. (2003). The relationship between the emotional intelligence competencies of principals in the Kanawha county school system of West Virginia and their teachers' perceptions of school climate. West Virginia University, Morgantown.

Borkan, B., Capa, Y., Figueiredo, C., Loadman, W. (2003, October 18, 2003). *Using rasch measurement to evaluate the organizational school climate.* Paper presented at the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Columbus, Ohio.

Brookover, W.B. & Erickson, E. Sociology of Education. Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1975.

Brookover, W., Schweitzer, J., Schneider, J., Beady, C., Flood, P. & Wisenbaker, J. (1978). Elementary school climate and school achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 15*(2), 301-318.

Brophy and Good in Handbook of research on teaching / edited by Merlin C. Wittrock, New York : Macmillan, 1985. xi, 1037 p. : ill. ; 29 cm. *******

Bulach, C., Lunenburg, F., McCallon, R. (1995). The influence of the principal's leadership style on school climate and student achievement. *People and Education: The Human Side of Schools, 3*(3), 333-350.

Bulach, C., & Malone, B. (1994). The Relationship of School Climate to the Implementation of School Reform. *ERS Spectrum. 12*(4), 3-8.

Coutts, D. (1997, February). *Measuring the degree of success in improving school climate with new principals.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators, Orlando, FL. (ERIC document Reproduction No. ED 407 726)

Creswell, J.W. (1998). Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deal, T.E. (1985). The symbolism of effective schools. *The Elementary School Journal,* 85(5), 601-620.

Decker, S.R. (1993). The relationship among principal power tactic usage, leadership style, and school clime in selected Iowa schools. *Dissertation Abstracts,* AAC8919922.

Dietrich, A.P, & Bailey, E.L. (1996). School Climate: Common-sense solutions to complicated problems. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80(576), 16-25.

Drake, L.A. (1997). Perceptions of school leadership and its effect on climate in a suburban school system. Dissertation Abstracts International, 58-08A, 2921. Abstract from: First Search File: Dissertation Abstracts Online

Freiberg, H.J. (1998). Measuring school climate: Let me count the ways. Educational Leadership, 56(1), 22-26.

Fullan, M. (2002). The change leaders. *Educational Leadership. 59(8), 16-21.*

Glascock, C., Taylor, D. (2001). The elementary principal/superintendent relationship as perceived by teachers and its effect on the school: A case study comparison. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 9*(45).

Goddard, R., Sweetland, S., Hoy, W. (2000). Academic emphasis of urban

elementary schools and student achievement in reading and mathematics: A multilevel

study. *Education Administration Quarterly, 36*(5), 683-702.

Halpin, A. & and Croft, D. (1963). *The organizational climate of schools*.

Chicago: University of Chicago.

Hannay, L., Ross, J. (1997). Initiating secondary school reform: The dynamic

relationship between restructuring, reculturing, and retiming. *Educational Administration*

Quarterly, 33, 576-604.

Hardin, D. T. (1995). Principal leadership style, personality type, and school

climate. *Research in the Schools, 2*(2), 39-45.

Harvard Graduate School of Education. (2006, December). *Q&A: The Principal's*

Center Founder Roland Barth. Retrieved January 1, 2007 from the Graduate School of

Education Newsletter Web site:

http://www.gse.Harvard.edu/news_features/2006/12/01_barthqa

Haynes, N.M., Emmons, C., & Ben-Avie, M. (1997). School climate as a factor

in student adjustment and achievement. *Journal of Educational and Psychological*

Consultation, 8(3), 321-329.

Hobby, R. (2004, March). A culture for learning: An investigation into the values

and beliefs associated with effective schools. Retrieved August 4, 2007 from

http://www.schools-of-ambition.org/sofa/files/Culture%20for%20Learning.pdf

Hoy, W., Hoffman, J., Sabo, D., Bliss, J. (1996). The organizational climate of

middle schools the development and test of the ocdq-rm. *Journal of Educational*

Administration, 34(1), 41.

Hoy, W., Smith, P., Sweetland, S. (2002). The development of the organizational climate index for high schools: Its measure and relationship to faculty trust. *High School Journal, 86*(2), 38-50.

Johnson, W. L., & Johnson, A. M. (1992). A study on the Kettering school climate scale [Electronic Version]. *Education. 112,* 635-639.

Kelley, R., Thornton, B., Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures of leadership and school climate. *Education, 126*(1), 17-25.

Lehr, C.A., & Christenson, S.L. (2002). Best practices in promoting a positive school climate. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology IV* (pp. 929-948). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Leithwood, K. (1992). Transformational leadership: Where does it stand? *Education Digest. 58(3),* 17-20.

Leithwood, K. (1994). Leadership for School Restructuring. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 30: 498-518

Lindell, M., Brandt, C. (2000). Climate quality and climate consensus as mediators of the relationship between organizational antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology. 85,* 331-348.

Littrell, P., Billingsley, B., & Cross, L. (1994). The effects of principal support on special and general educators' stress, job satisfaction, school commitment, health, and intent to stay in teaching. *Remedial and Special Education, 15*(5), 297-310.

Mitchell, C., & Castle, J. B. (2005). The instructional role of elementary school principals. *Canadian Journal of Education, 28*(3), 409-433.

Noonan, W., & Goldman, P. (1995). Principal succession and elementary school climate: One year's experience in an urban school division (pp. 17).

Norton, S. (2002). Let's Keep our Quality School Principals on the Job. *High School Journal*. 86.2, 50-57.

Pepper, K., & Thomas, L. H. (2002). Making a change: The effects of the leadership role on school climate. *Learning Environments Research, 5*(2), 155-166.

Pfeffer, The Human equation: Building profits by putting people first. Boston: *Harvard Business School Press*, 1998.

Roach, A.T., & Kratochwill, T.R. (2004). Evaluating school climate and school culture. *Council for Exceptional Children*. 37(1), 10-17.

Rosenberg, M. (2001, January 21). Schools face a shortage of top officials. *New York Times*, Retrieved November 26, 2007, from http://www.nytimes.com

Sackney, L. (1988). Enhancing school learning climate: Theory, research and practice. In D. O. E. Administration (Ed.) (Vol. 180, pp. 146): SSTA Research Centre.

Salisbury, C. L., & McGregor, G. (2002). The administrative climate and context of inclusive elementary schools. 16p.

Sergiovanni, T. (2000). The Lifeworld of Leadership: Creating Culture, Community,   and Personal Meaning in Our Schools. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Shreeve, W. (1984). *Job Satisfaction: A responsibility of Leadership*. (Report No. 028 188). Eastern Washington University. (ERIC Document No. ED 275 638).

Smith, K.H. (2005). The inviting school survey- Revised (ISS-R): A survey for measuring the invitational quality (I.Q.) of the total school climate. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice,* 11(1), 35-53.

Van Horn, L. (2003). Assessing the unit of measurement for school climate through psychometric and outcome analyses of the school climate survey. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 63*(6), 1002-1019.

Van Houtte, M. (2003). Climate or culture? a plea for conceptual clarity in school effectiveness research. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 16*(1), 71-89.

Warner, D. S. (1994). Educational leadership styles of elementary school principals and the effect on school climate and pupil achievement. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 54*(11), 3959.

Wilson, J., J. Pentecoste, D. Bailey. (1984). The influence of sex, age, teacher experience and race on perception of school climate. *Education, 104*(4), 2.

Witcher, A. E. (1993). Assessing school climate: An important step for enhancing school quality. *NASSP Bulletin, 77*(554), 1-5.