

Impact of school culture and school climate on student achievement essay sample

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Principals who want to improve student achievement in their schools usually embark on a series of obvious restructuring strategies: strengthening the curriculum, providing more training for staff and tutoring for students who need help. However, in reforming the school, some important aspects, like the beliefs and attitudes of the administration, teachers and students are overlooked. Good school climate and culture are keys to the success of schools. In order to create positive changes in the school, principals must make knowledgeable, data driven decisions in order to effect these changes.

BACKGROUND

It was observed that within the first two years of his new assignment at a secondary school, a principal was able to eliminate some of the problems plaguing that institution. The issue of graffiti was resolved and the appearance of the school and the grounds improved; the school plant was expanded, creating more classrooms and smaller class sizes which made teaching students with learning challenges, easier. Students also found the principal approachable and went to him about their concerns. These were not the only changes, however. Upon his arrival, the school motto and the school collect were no longer repeated at assemblies; instead, a slogan which the principal had personally conceptualised, was used. Many annual activities such as Speech Day, staff Christmas parties and concerts were either postponed or eliminated altogether. Unlike the previous principal, who had an open door policy, teachers found it difficult to have an audience with him; that privilege seemingly reserved for a few select teachers, the management team and students; he rarely spoke directly to the regular teaching staff.

Whilst still insisting on end of school year promotional examinations, the principal implemented a policy of automatic promotion, despite fierce opposition by the teaching staff. After five years, there was dissension amongst the staff. Grumbling about school activities was common and some staff members began to actively sabotage many of the activities proposed by the principal. Class disruptions and disrespect towards staff began to increase, as punishment was slight, if even meted out at all. Students began to be engaged in deviant and destructive behaviours. The school was no longer known for its excellence in sports and the Arts, as fewer students were willing to participate in these activities. Many students, aware of the new promotion policy, made little effort in their schoolwork and there was a steady decline in success in both internal and external examinations. Whilst much was done to initially improve the school climate, that principal's neglect and lack of understanding of the school culture ultimately created a toxic school environment.

PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to critically review the literature regarding the effect of school culture and school climate on student achievement. Also, the review will examine the role of the principal in initiating and promoting changes in the school climate and culture in an urban secondary school in Barbados. This review is framed around four questions:

1. What is the relationship between school climate and school culture?
2. How does school climate and school culture affect student achievement?
3. How does the principal affect student achievement?

4. How can a principal influence the school climate and school culture?

Significance of the Study

-To show that school culture and school climate are separate concepts that are intrinsically linked -To present research on the overall impact of school culture and climate on student achievement' -To highlight ways that a principal can create and promote changes that can result in a positive school climate and school culture

Operational Definitions

Since some of the key terms were used in the literature were used inconsistently, it is important to reveal how these terms were operationalised: School climate: climate is defined as the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape interactions between the students, teachers, and administrators (Macneil & Maclin, 2005). School culture: refers to the impressions, feelings and expectations held by members of the school community (Deal & Patterson, 1999; Van Houtte, 2005). These have been built over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together and deal with crises and accomplishments. Culture is based on past experience, which provides a template for future action. Culture is the supporting structure on which the school climate rests (Fiore, 2004). Student achievement: excellence in all disciplines, in class as well as extracurricular activities. It includes excellence in sports, behaviour, communication skills, Arts, culture etc. (U. S. Department of Education, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Climate and School Culture

A review of the literature revealed questions whether school climate and school culture could be considered as interchangeable concepts or as

distinct but interrelated constructs. In many studies prior to the 1980s, educators used the terms 'climate' and 'culture' interchangeably. With no attempt to differentiate between the two terms (Lindahl, 2006). More recent research supports the argument that the terms are different, even though the terms both describe characteristics of the school (Stover, 2005; Van Houtte, 2004) and have similar definitions. How the students and staff members feel about their school is climate; why they feel that way is determined by the culture- by the values and patterns of behaviour of those in the school. Schein (1985) described culture as the traditions and rituals that have been built over time. Culture is based on past experience which provides a template for future action. Fiore (2004) adds that culture is the support on which school climate is based. Schoen and Teddlie (2008) also perceived climate as a subset of culture. In all of the literature reviewed, the interrelatedness of the two concepts was evident.