ACHIEVING OPTIMAL SCHOOL CLIMATE

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Development of optimal school climate is the basis of educational, social and moral work in school. Optimal educational climate in a school is a condition for learning and development of all those attending the educational establishment (pupils, teachers and parents). The school is responsible for the personal, cognitive, emotional, social and moral development of pupils. The educational team has the ability and commitment to promote an educational climate. Improvement of study achievements of pupils is related, as well as conditional, to optimal climate. "A climate in an educational establishment is a key factor that affects the creation of environment which develops personal security and sense of affiliation, value and mutual respect" [12].

Keywords: School Climate, climate contributes, education, violence, respect, social values, personal security.

FORMAREA UNEI ATMOSFERE OPTIMALE ÎN ȘCOALĂ

Formarea unei atmosfere optimale în şcoala medie este baza lucrului educaţional, social şi moral în şcoală. Atmosfera educaţională în şcoală este o condiţie pentru instruirea şi dezvoltarea tuturor celor înrolaţi în instituţia educaţională (elevi, profesori şi părinţi). Şcoala poartă răspundere de condiţiile favorabile în dezvoltarea personală, cognitivă, emoţională, socială şi morală a elevilor. Echipa de profesori are abilitatea şi angajamentul de a promova condiţii educaţionale favorabile. Îmbunătăţirea realizărilor elevilor la învăţătură este legată şi condiţionată de climatul optim. „Atmosfera în instituţia educaţională este factorul-cheie care afectează crearea unui mediu ce dezvoltă securitatea personală şi sentimentul de afiliere, valoarea şi respectul reciproc" [12].

Cuvinte-cheie: condiţii în şcoală, climat contributiv, educaţie, violenţă, respect, valori sociale, securitate personală.

Contribution of optimal educational climate

Multiple findings indicate that a positive climate contributes to positive self-esteem of a pupil, gives confidence, calms, nurtures personal responsibility and willingness for involvement and affects study achievements. A climate contributes to the realization of the main goal of education and school. Bar-Lev, Langberg and Bar-Tal claim that an optimal climate contributes to the sense of affiliation between pupils, develops a desire of learning and arriving at a school, challenges pupils and awards them with a positive learning experience, allows for an ability to express themselves freely and for a sense of confidence. In addition, a positive climate contributes to a high self-image of a pupil and leads him towards success in study [1,2,10].

Kalderon has examined the relation between a pupil's perception of the quality of life in school and his achievements in the matriculation exams, and has found that the perception of the quality of life in a school contributes in different way to the achievements of pupils in matriculation exams. In addition, the results have confirmed the hypothesis of her study, that beyond their effect upon background variables and personal data, pupils' perception of school climate has a relation to study achievements [9].

The heavy emphasis leveled at study achievements in schools in Israel causes them to become a social resource of great importance in the consolidation of relationships in a class. The implication of this is that highlighting study achievements might delay a desired development of social relationships between individuals from various groups [9].

According to Fridman, climate most likely affects many phenomena, both amongst teachers and pupils. A healthy climate encourages those in the system to perform their job in the best possible way and make the best out of them. Additionally, it is characterized in encouraging pupils to become active as part of their attempt at studying, and a high perception of choice mainly characterizes wealthy pupils in the school [1,6]. In addition, in a "good" school climate, pupils from a weak economic background can reach better study achievements than pupils from a strong socio-economic background [6]. In fact, management encourages the activity of pupils as well; for example, encouragement of friendships between a principal and the team members and ensuring the satisfaction of teachers from their work as a primary purpose. Prediction of school effectiveness according to the leadership style of a principal, can contribute to the sense of satisfaction at work of teachers [1,6].

Regarding the contribution of optimal climate in relation to violence, the CEO's Circular of 2009 states that an optimal educational climate allows for physical protection, mental health, moral development, study functioning and acquisition of skills and values of citizenship in a democratic country. In-depth educational processes that promote mental welfare can prevent instances of violence and reduce the need for punishment. The formation of a foundation of ways of life lies in the basis of educational process of creation of a safe climate: life routine – daily rules and regulations that are known in advance which are enforced persistently and continually. This educational foundation is the basis for the formulation of processes for reduction of violence and significant responses to instances of violence. In addition, optimal climate allows for each individual to feel physically protected, acquire basic values of life in an egalitarian society, develop his abilities in each and every field of development (including moral judgment), accumulate knowledge and learn and acquire skills and thinking tools, for planning and solving problems [4].

Ways of creating optimal educational climate

The climate in an educational establishment is a key factor that affects the creation of environment that develops personal confidence and sense of affiliation, value and respect alongside social values such as responsibility for members of the community and reduces violence, hurting one's fellows and risk behaviors.

In order to create an optimal educational climate an overall system strategy needs to be implemented, that is planned, consistent and long-term, that relates at the same time to creation of a safe climate, promotion of mental welfare, designing a way of life that promotes affiliation, involvement and responsibility and handling the reduction of violence and risk behaviors on a system level as well as an individual level [4].

It has been found in studies that the desired educational climate for proper teaching and learning as well as pupils' integration in the social life of a class, has to be supportive, egalitarian, democratic and organized according to predetermined rules [5].

Peterson and Skiba have focused in their study on five main approaches to improvement of school climate, which purpose s prevention of violence. The five approaches are:

Parents' involvement and community – parents' involvement can assist in improvement of communication between home and school and make schools become more attentive and safe. Parents' involvement can be expressed in their involvement in study that takes place at home, in giving opportunities for volunteering in school and involvement in decision making circles in school and community [11].

Character education – educational programs for character emphasize values such as integrity, loyalty, respect, responsibility, decency, caring and citizenship. Increase of violence and behavior problems at home and the community bring about a deterioration of values. Character education program are programs aimed at handling precisely these problems and thus their importance and necessity.

Study programs for prevention of violence and resolving conflicts – conflict resolving programs focus on the understanding of conflicts and teach pupils ways of responding based on negotiation skills. Violence prevention programs emphasize enhancement of knowledge of pupils regarding violence and teach them alternatives for violent quarrels. There is no doubt that in the face of a reality of violence that takes over schools and society, lies a great importance of study programs that instill pupils with perceptions and skills that would assist them in avoiding violence [11].

Peer-mediation – peer-mediation is a strategy based on negotiation that teaches pupils strategies of mediation that can assist in resolving conflicts amongst their peers. Peer-mediation instills pupils with an alternative series of skills which they can apply in conflict situations. It is advisable to integrate mediation programs in a more comprehensive program such as life skills program or violence prevention program, in order to enhance its effectiveness [11].

Bullying prevention program–in the last three years, the level of awareness has risen to the level of bullying. Bullying prevention programs should be done in a school level and must deliver a clear message that bullying is not acceptable and the school would adopt a policy of zero tolerance of instances of bullying. Effective programs should include awareness and involvement of parents and teachers, and a creation of warm, supportive environment. Research knowledge indicates that good bullying prevention programs can decrease and even prevent bullying problems and improve the school climate [11].

In a study conducted by Dennis, it turns out that for the purpose of creation of a positive climate it is important to make limits, for example with a school code and a class code, that would define clear and applicable rules and regulations, that would focus and guide. In designing of limits, the intention is not to hurt the

independence of pupils, and they can be included in the formulation of codes. A school code formulates unified rules of behavior that define limits and red lines which cannot be crossed, including treating of behaviors related to physical and verbal violence and corruption of property. Creation of a class code is performed according to same principles of designing of a school code. It defines the rules and regulation in a class and is intended to instill pupils with normative behavior that is acceptable in a class. It has been found in the studied that with the help of a code a class can be navigated in a most effective way [5].

Another factor that contributes to a positive climate is the use of positive reinforcements. Positive feedbacks, encouraging body language and signs of acceptance increase pupils' alertness to desirable behaviors, contribute to the formation of a positive atmosphere is a class and increase the enjoyment of all participants in the educational act [5].

A positive and "open" climate is perceived as related to support, teachers' welfare, satisfaction from work, enthusiasm, involvement, vision and personal charisma. A sense of proximity between teachers and pupils and informal relations contribute to a creation of a positive climate [5,13,14]. A correlation has been found between a school climate and a class climate and between study and social variables of pupils. The school climate affects class climate and both of them affect a pupil's behavior, his level of knowledge' his study achievements, motivation, his self-image, his attitudes towards the profession, towards the class and school, towards education and teaching in general. The climate allows for encouragement of study, and raises the intellectual-achievement index, the motivation and support of teachers. Additionally, the climate affects and allows to identify and understand social processes in operation in a class and explain the behavior of pupils in a cognitive and emotional strata. A class climate allows for pupils to create independence, choice, creativity, cooperation, supportive leadership and mutual relations [14].

Studies reveal that an improvement of relationship between a teacher and a pupil, is a necessary condition for improvement of motivation of a teacher as a person with status, and in a pupil who is mature in terms of position. Therefore, it is important to educate a pupil in democracy and equality in relations between an authoritative figure and a learning figure. This explanation relates to emotions that encourage success and creation of a special atmosphere that makes a pupil arrive in a class and fee there as in "second home".

Fridman claims that a school climate is perceived as filling a principal role in effectiveness of education of a school. The means of improving a school climate, according to Fridman, relate to five different components: sense of freedom of pupils, teachers-pupils relationships, inclusion of pupils in decisions, management-teachers relations and the external structure. The sense of freedom of pupils would be expressed in the fact that pupils do not feel as prisoners, are not constantly being imposed with instructions, orders and regulations [6].

Pupils consider their good relations with teachers as a key factor in their success in study. According to pupils, good relations with teachers would take place when they are pictured in the eyes of pupils as "human beings" and not only as teachers, indoctrinators and when pupils would feel comfortable to be exposed in front of their teachers openly and honestly. Good teachers, in the eyes of pupils, show understanding, do not judge their pupils, they are more of friends than teachers, do not yell or stress out, show tolerance and are always willing to assist [6].

Inclusion of pupils in school decisions that would mainly be expressed in the fact that pupils would open channels to express their opinion and aspirations, can as well improve school climate.

The way management personnel treats teachers affects as well the improvement of school climate. It has been said that a reduction of external pressures on teachers, avoidance of changes that affect the perception of 'self'of a teacher, reinforcement of the sense of security of a teacher and the adjustment of the leadership style of a principal to the needs of teachers in the school can as well improve the school climate [6].

In addition, structure as well can create a sense of warmth and encourage a relaxed feeling amongst the team of teachers and learners. In a successful structure there are various components, starting with the choice of the building suitable for study, as well as the human quality delivered to a pupils and a teacher through the unique seal of the system, that is reflected in decoration, furniture, cleanliness, color, etc [6].

Summary

Development of a positive school climate that creates a sense of support of children and positive expectations from them requires a consistent effort on the part of the adults operating in the school system. Therefore, it is important to provide them with opportunities to strengthen the relations among themselves. Furthermore, school staff, parents, and members of the community must take part in activities that strengthen the relation

between them. When parents work with the school staff a support network for the children develops. When parents bolster positive expectations from school and the school staff supports the positive expectations from the parents, then the children can rely on a consistent complex of positive expectations regarding their achievement, behavior, and future success. Consistent expectations remind the children that they are in the care of an extended community, and that the adults are taking responsibility for their development. Consistent messages can provide children with emotional security, since they are not making decisions by themselves. Even adults are comforted and feel better with such consistency [7].

The school must create a consistent, ongoing systemic program based on a long term strategy referring to many elements including the range of ages in school and the cultural context of the school environment, while creating partnerships among all the elements involved.

The principal and educational staff lead the process of forming a safe climate. They provide a personal example in their own behavior and by taking responsibility for the educational process.   Constructing a safe climate and dealing with violence are the responsibility of the principal and the educational staff and should not be assumed by external elements. Indeed, there is place for temporary integration of programs operated by external professionals, but the emphasis must be on the empowerment of the school's internal forces by extending the training and expertise of the educational staff, including the support staff [4].

The principal has a primary role in improving the school climate and reducing violence. Inbar argues that the increasing pedagogical and financial autonomy of schools is accompanied by an increase in the principal's influence as the leader of significant processes in school and the person responsible for the prevailing school climate [8]. According to Bush and Gulliver, the research literature in education indicates that the principal's effect on the school, whether negative or positive, is felt to a greater extent the more the school staff, students, and students' parents feel that he is a driving force in school. In recent years, with the relaxation of central supervision over educational institutions in Israel, principals have been granted greater autonomy to manage their schools their own way, so that their personality can be expressed to a greater extent than previously [3].

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