

TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE. SOME CONCLUSIONS FROM SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

School culture and climate, more than any other factors, determine school efficiency. Building a positive school climate means to create the conditions both for students and teachers to work and learn effectively – feeling supported, safe, motivated and satisfied with their outcomes, and ready to contribute to the school improvement. In the light of many research, schools with positive climate are those which pay attention not only to the high academic outcomes, often measured by the tests, but also (or mostly?) to the social and emotional well-being of every student and adult. The subject of the article concerns the perception of school climate and learning setting by teachers and students from two Warsaw high junior schools, which significantly differ from each other in the effect of standardized external tests on students' academic outcomes. The text contains some conclusions from a multi-faceted exploration of school culture and climate at these schools. First, the author compares teacher – student perception of school climate within the school, and then compares two school workplaces focusing on human relationships as an important factor of school climate. In this text selected categories of school climate are analysed: (1) school satisfaction, (2) teacher – student and peer relationships, (3) teachers' support for students, (4) motivating students to succeed, (5) obeying the students' rights at school, (6) aggressive behavior among students. Quantitative analysis are complemented with qualitative analysis.

KEYWORDS: *school climate, social climate, teacher-student perceptions of school setting, teaching-learning environment, case study*

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to make a research-based case for increasing the interests of school climate as an important determinant of school safety, student motivation, teacher success, and academic achievement. According to L.M. Hopson, K.S. Schiller and H.A. Lawson, social processes within the school influence academic outcomes (2014, p. 199). The National School Climate Council emphasizes that school climate refers to the quality and character of school life. It is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Cohen & Geier, 2010). A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. This climate includes norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe. People are engaged and respected. It means that all members of school community (students, perceived, teachers, and parents) work together to develop a shared school vision (<http://www.schoolclimate.org/climate>, access: 4.04.2016).

This paper presents some conclusions from the comparative case studies on school organizational culture and climate, which were conducted in two high junior schools. Both of them are public, but there are significant differences in the outcomes of external exams. My intention is to find out how teachers and students from these schools perceived teaching and learning environment within the school, and then compare teacher-student points of view from one school to the other. It is important to express that I concentrate only on a chosen part of empirical materials collected during the study on school culture and climate. I focus on such categories describing school climate as: "school satisfaction", "relationships between students", "relationships between students and teachers", "teachers support for students", "motivating students to succeed", "obeying the students' rights at school", "aggressive behavior among students". It is worth noting that I will analyse only students and teachers perceptions of their relationships, without taking into account the prospect of others from these school communities.

SCHOOL CLIMATE AS A KEY TO SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS

Tony Wagner (2008) points out, that the knowledge and skills needed for the modern world go beyond the basic knowledge and skills that most state testing demands. In the world that is growing smaller every day and rapidly changing, the question of how to enable students not only to be successful in their learning process, but also to effectively function in globalized reality is, most of all, a question about the school quality, and its essential task (see Dernowska, 2014a). Students need the skills of problem solving, communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and collaboration. Moreover, “when we focus solely on academic achievement outcomes, we can often lose sight of what is most important – our students and what they need to assure their success” (Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 6).

Since the 1970s, school effectiveness research has been looking for process-variables filling the gaps between mainly structural school features and academic outcomes in students. Two concepts came to the fore: school climate and school culture (Van Houtte, Van Maele, 2011, p. 505). Both have similar characteristic, but climate is concerned with the process and style of a school’s organizational life rather than its content and substances (see Dernowska, 2014b; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2014). Climate, more than culture, is interpersonal in tone and is manifested in the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, students, supervisors and principals at work (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 217).

The definition of organizational climate depends on the approach taken. There is not one universally agreed-upon definition of school climate. Practitioners and researchers use a range of term, such as “atmosphere”, “feelings”, “setting” or “milieu” of the school (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 182). Garlie Forehand and B. von Haller Gilmer (1964, p. 362) define “organizational climate” as a set of characteristics that describe an organization and that distinguish one organization from the other; are relatively enduring over time; and influence the behavior of people in the organization. This is a broad definition, and according to this approach, climate is seen as an organizational feature. The other approach considers climate as a personal characteristic of the members of an organization (e.g. Schneider & Bartlett, 1968; see also Van Houtte, 2005). According to R. Tagiuri, climate is a molar concept comprised of ecology, milieu,

social system, and culture (Tagiuri, 1968). Ecology refers to the physical aspects of school; milieu consists of the social aspects of individuals and groups in school; social system deals with the human relationships within organization; and culture refers to belief systems, values, and cognitive structures. It is important to notice, that most studies of school climate focus on the social system and cultural dimensions of the school environment. Climate and culture are viewed as separate concepts at the same level (Hoy, 1990, p. 151).

Thomas J. Sergiovanni (1991) points out, that there is no simple answer to the question, what is the link between climate and teacher (and student) motivation, school improvement efforts, student achievement, and other school effectiveness indicators. Moreover, “schools characterized by a great deal of togetherness, familiarity, and trust among teachers may not be more effective – and indeed may be less effective – than schools in which this familiarity does not exist. In this sense, climate is a form of organizational energy whose telling effects on the school depend on how this energy is channeled and directed” (Sergiovanni, 1991, p. 215). But from the other side, there is a growing body of research showing how a positive school climate facilitates student learning and higher academic achievement and promotes the social and emotional development of students. Gabriel P. Kuperminc and colleagues (2001) reviewed 40 major studies between 1964 and 1980 and found over half of these studies reported effects of school climate on student achievement. In the light of the conclusions of these research, high students achievement is associated with high teacher engagement, positive peer norms, an emphasis on group cooperation, clearly defined and shared goals, high level of expectation held by teachers and administrators, consensus over curriculum and discipline (Kuperminc et al., 2001; see also Freiburg, 1999; Adelman & Taylor, 2005). According to J.E. Tubbs and M. Garner (2008), school climate can affect many areas and people within schools. Mike Van Houtte (2005) invokes the school-effectiveness research which pay special attention to school processes, namely to the social system and to the some cultural dimensions. The study conducted by M. Rutter and colleagues (1979, after Van Houtte, 2005, p. 73) showed that to explain school differences in school achievement the primary factor is the normative climate of the school, that is, the school ethos. Nowadays, school

climate usually is considered in the terms of the perceptual measurements-organizational attribute approach (Van Houtte, 2005, p. 73; see also e.g. Opendakker & Van Damme, 2000; Willms & Somers, 2001).

A growing body of research also shows that positive school climate is a critical dimension linked to effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, as well as teaching and learning (e.g. Cohen, 2001; Najaka et al., 2002; Juvonen et al., 2004). WHO promotes school health programmes as a strategic means to engage school (or the education sector) in efforts to change the educational, social, and economic conditions of health risks among children and youth (http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/en/, access: 4.04.2016; see also: Woynarowska, Sokołowska, 2000; Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2011). According to Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), caring, holism and ecology are essential issues in developing strategies for health promotion. A health promoting school focuses on: (1) caring for oneself and others, (2) making healthy decisions and taking control over life's circumstances, (3) creating conditions that are conducive to health, (4) building capacities for peace, education, a stable ecosystem, social justice, etc., (5) preventing leading causes of death, disease and disability, (6) influencing health-related behaviors: knowledge, beliefs, skills, attitudes, values, and support (http://www.who.int/school_youth_health/gshi/hps/en access: 4.04.2016).

From the above considerations we can conclude that positive climate for learning and teaching is one of the most important factors for schools "to promote the kind of social, emotional, ethical, and academic education that is essential for participation in democracy" (Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 14). This safe, caring, engaging learning environment is essential to provide the platform upon which people within the school teach and learn (Cohen & Elias, 2010).

ESSENTIAL SCHOOL CLIMATE FACTORS

Many factors affect school climate. According to C. Christensen and colleagues (2006, p. 74), the following factors influence school's climate: (1) school vision and mission statement, (2) faculty and staff work relationships, (3) type of communication, (4) principal's behavior and leadership style, (5) faculty and staff's feeling of trust and respect for leadership.

Bill Preble and R. Gordon (2011) identify four essential factors that affect school climate: (1) relationships, (2) respectful teaching practices, (3) physical environment, (4) belonging and empowering.

The relationships that people (children and adults) have in their school most certainly affects school climate. These relationships shape person's perception of the school experience and provide the lens through which each one views all other behavior at school (Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 15). During the public presentation in 2008, J.H. Freiburg said, that school climate is about relationships: relationships among adults, relationships between adults and children and relationships among peers. It is about the quality of those relationships and in essence whether individuals inside schools treat each other appropriately. It boils down to this (after Preble & Gordon, 2011, p. 15). Aleksander W. Nocuń and H. Ochocka-Nocuń (2012) emphasize the importance of type of communication at school. The authors point out, that school, as a formal and hierarchical organization, favors asymmetric communication. In their opinion, asymmetric social interaction itself carries the risk of dominant attitude on one side (e.g. teacher) and passive or even aggressive attitude on the other (e.g. student), which has negative consequences for effective communication. According to the authors, the partnership communication style is the most effective one, but it is not easy to implement it into the place called school. Its implementation requires education and practice plan for all school community members. But it is important to make the effort to build the relationships among students and adults in school based on effective communication. It is a big challenge but also a big chance for school institution to become safer, friendlier and more inspirational place (Nocuń & Ochocka-Nocuń, 2012).

Not less important factor shaping school climate is the physical environment of the school. School building, as well as inside decoration, send a hidden message to students indirectly determining what is worth and valued, and what is unacceptable in that place (see Sikorski, 2013). In addition to the quality of physical setting of the school, B. Preble and R. Gordon (2011, p. 16) stress "respectful teaching practices" which reflect attention to the needs and interests of each student, a belief that learning results and academic success are achievable for every child. Bożena Muchacka and A. Solak (2015), writing

about teacher competence, refer to the concept of teacher assistance, through which they understand the correlation structure of teacher personality with a practical impact on diverse spheres of the student as an individual, a member of the school community, and other social groups. Therefore, it is important that the school acted efficiently and responsibly in educational tasks, that teachers responsibly (in the spirit of the rights and duties) treated their students, that school does not become a place with unpleasant experiences and negative feelings, but the harmony place, the place of assistants presence, which requires good and similar values.

It is also important to create as many opportunities as possible for every one to participate in school life and school improvement as a valued member of a school community. Belonging is also an important component of school climate. As B. Preble and R. Gordon note: “empowering students (and teachers) to feel valued for their input into policy making, management, and improvement of the school and the surrounding community raises commitment and motivation” (2011, p. 16).

Jonathan Cohen and colleagues (2009, p. 183) recognize that complex sets of elements make up school climate. “There is not one commonly accepted «list» of the essential dimensions that color and shape school climate. A review of research, practitioner, and scholarly writings suggests that there are four major aspects of school life that color and shape school climate”: (1) safety (physical and socio-emotional), (2) teaching and learning (quality of instruction, social-emotional and ethical learning, professional development, leadership), (3) relationships (respect for diversity, school community and collaboration, morale and “connectedness”), (4) environmental-structural (e.g. size of school, curricular and extracurricular offerings, cleanliness) (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 184).

Shaping and developing positive school climate cannot be reduced to the declaration of readiness to transform school climate, it also does not happen overnight, nor without conflict. It can be developed through assessment, analysis, and systematically monitoring progress (Tubbs, Garner, 2008, p. 18). It is valued to determine the health of the teaching-learning environment. “If one believes in continuous improvement, then a healthy climate for learning is best determined by those in the environment who can draw

from multiple sources of data and feedback, using measures or approaches that reflect the values and norms of the near and far school community and respond to pressing issues and questions” (Freiberg & Stein, 1999, p. 14).

ABOUT RESEARCH

The results presented in this text are the part of the multi-faceted exploration of school culture and climate at two selected Warsaw high junior schools. Comparative case studies were conducted. According to J. Feagin, A. Orum and G. Sjoberg (1991), the case study methodology is an ideal approach when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. Robert K. Yin (2009, p. 18) defines “case study” as an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon, set within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Case study research has a multiple sources of evidence. It can include both qualitative and quantitative data.

In the text I present only those sources of evidence, which allowed to answer the question sets out in the introduction of the article. To determine teacher and student perceptions of school climate, the inventory “Climate in My School” (Wojnarowska-Soldan, 2006) was used. This questionnaire consisted of nine dimensions of school climate. In the light of the above considerations, based on the literature review, there is no doubt that “human relationships” is an important dimension of school climate, therefore I will focus on such categories as: (1) school satisfaction, (2) teacher – student and peer relationships, (3) teachers’ support for students, (4) motivating students to succeed, (5) obeying the students’ rights at school, (6) aggressive behavior among students. Data analysis serves a double purpose: (1) to compare teacher and student perceptions of school climate (in school A and B), (2) to reflect on the quality of teaching and learning environments in these schools.

Two versions of the questionnaire were used: one for teachers, and the other one for students. Respondents (school A: teachers = 31, students = 445; school B: teachers = 34, students = 402) based on a scale of five scores (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – neither agree or disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree) express their feeling toward the statements given. The article will be presented mean score for selected school climate dimensions.

It is also worth to present some qualitative data: examples of students' comments about "what would you change in your school", as well as some information from voluntary interviews which were conducted with teachers. This allows to have deeper insight into teacher and student perceptions of social climate within the school.

WHAT SCHOOLS? – DESCRIPTIONS OF TWO SCHOOL WORKPLACES

The study was conducted in two public high junior schools selected because of academic performance. One of them takes a high position in the Warsaw School Ranking and is perceived as an ideal place for learning. Every year many students try to get there. The other school is not as famous as the first one, and the effects of standardized external tests are not as spectacular and high. There is a significant difference between school A and school B on this field.

Both schools are similar in size, and both have similar number of students and teachers. Both offer a wide range of extracurricular classes and activities to enable students to develop their skills and talents. School A is famous for great achievements of its students in various competitions, particularly in Maths, Physics and German. In the statutes, both schools declare that they are friendly to their students, that they call attention to students' activeness and creativity. According to these declarations, students feel good and safe there.

TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IN SCHOOL A

The score mean and standard deviations of the dimensions of school climate in teacher and student perceptions are summarized in table 1.

These findings suggest that there is the difference between teachers and students perception of the same school workplace. Based on the obtained data we can say that teachers find their school as a place where people feel good, satisfied, and where teachers provide support for students and obey not only their duties but most of all the rights. From this point of view, it is a good place for teaching and learning. By contrast, students vision of school climate is different, especially its social dimensions as: relationships between students

and teachers, teachers support for students, motivating students to achieve, or obeying students' rights. Moreover, a significant number of comments which students have made about the school and its atmosphere is much more disturbing.

Table 1.
Teacher and student perceptions of school climate

Descriptive statistics	Teachers' perspective			Students' perspective		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
School Climate Dimensions						
School satisfaction	30	4,29	0,58	440	3,64	0,81
Relationships between students	31	4,04	0,49	441	3,97	0,80
Relationships between students and teachers	31	4,22	0,51	445	3,74	0,78
Teachers support for students	31	4,68	0,34	441	3,63	0,79
Motivating students to succeed	31	4,26	0,67	440	3,64	0,81
Obeying the students' rights at school	31	4,46	0,54	441	3,78	0,88
Agressive behavior among students	31	1,92	0,51	444	2,42	0,93

Source: own research

Answering the question: “what would you change in your school”, many students said that in general there is a strong need to change the atmosphere within the school, and the profile of human relationships, especially teachers attitudes towards them. Some examples of students' statements are given below:

I feel like a junk which this school just has to throw from one place to the other.

I don't like this school, it destroys people.

Some teachers even don't know my name, so... definitely approach to teaching, they only see marks not human beings, they don't care what kind of person you really are.

I wish teachers look at the student as a person not like a robot performing tasks. We have too much work here and I know a few people who become addicted or get sick because of this school. After various festivals we usually have so many tests. So we cannot think about family life during this time.

I would change the principal and a large part of the teachers who don't respect our opinion and give us so much work to do at home. This often causes stress and a need of work late at night. Therefore we are still under pressure which can lead to a sickness. It may cause asocial behavior. But most of all we should be treated fairly, we are not ROBOTS!

Although this school is famous for its high performance, social and emotional aspects of schooling cannot be ignored there. Meanwhile students declare that they feel overworked and emphasize the emotional cost of learning, which often is higher than they previously thought. Therefore, it is interesting to note that students perceive the same school climate categories in a different way than their teachers do. The examples of teachers' opinions about the school and teacher-student relationships within this place are presented below:

I think that learning is the most important here, and this is the main goal above everything.

They learn so much here, so I work much with them, but I also think, yes I suppose and the feedback let me tell like this... that they rather enjoy this... that... but there is a kind of labor. But from the other side they don't treat this as a 'ballast', that they have to do something again. They just satisfy with learning and knowledge. But taking together, there is too much all these things here.

I think that this place is really very good, and that... that all staff here work for this. So we share educational goals and consequently together try to reach them. And teaching... well... our results show everything. Right? I love working here, there is such... this atmosphere here is really good. (...). You know... from one, average school in Warsaw we have made one of the best high junior school here.

In my opinion, despite of all emotional load [the school] is student-friendly, safety... and the relationships between student and teacher are really cool. As graduate students say, and I also feel this, that there is no boundary between teacher and student here, so despite of all comments, as a place of learning and our work... our cooperation with the students, it is a cool, positive place where students want to come... despite of these loads... so... generally they are satisfied and... and... (...) they want to be here... they come and want to learn.

It is a fantastic place but it requires a huge work from us.

Taking into account the picture of school, especially its social climate, which emerges from this sample of teachers' interview comments, we can surmise that this workplace provides good conditions for teaching and learning, and finally for student's development. They stress a high quality of the school, and express their pride of being members of such school community. Teachers find this place as a student-friendly, and safety, where teacher cooperates with student to achieve common goals. From students point of view, the school is more like corporation focuses on high results and neglecting the positive human relationships.

Taking together we can conclude, that there is no congruence between teachers' and their students' perceptions of school A and its social climate.

TEACHER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IN SCHOOL B

As previously mentioned, there are many similarities and also many differences between school A and B. Certainly, the second one is not as "good" and famous as the first one. It is valued to determine how do teachers and students perceive climate within this school. Table 2 contains data reflected teacher and student perceptions of school climate in this school. The score mean and standard deviation of selected school climate categories are presented below.

Table 2.
Teacher and student perceptions of school climate

Descriptive statistics	Teachers' perspective			Students' perspective		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
School satisfaction	34	4,52	0,45	389	3,34	0,75
Relationships between students	33	3,73	0,52	397	3,61	0,91
Relationships between students and teachers	32	3,98	0,60	402	3,37	0,84
Teachers support for students	34	4,80	0,30	398	3,34	0,77
Motivating students to succeed	34	4,50	0,48	402	2,99	0,84
Obeying the students' rights at school	32	4,71	0,37	400	3,58	0,88
Agressive behavior among students	33	2,12	0,55	395	2,99	0,96

Source: own research

As can be seen, there is a difference in school climate perception between students and teachers. There is a difference between students and teachers satisfaction with the school, both sides also see in a completely different way such categories, as “teachers support for students”, “motivating students to succeed” or “obeying students’rights” in school.

To the question: “what would you change in your school” many students answered, that they would change some elements from the physical school space (e.g. lack of toilet paper or intimacy in a toilet because doors are broken), just few of them said that they would change nothing, and many point out the weakness of teacher – student relationships. They emphasize the lack of respect, communication difficulties between students and teachers, or teacher indifference in response to their various initiatives. Some examples of students comments are presented below:

Students are willing to engage actively in school life and inform teachers about this but they do nothing to develop their ideas.

Teachers don’t respect students and they do not let them express their opinions (not all of them). Some teachers conduct lessons too rapidly, they don’t know how to teach us.

Obeying students rights is insufficient here.

Most of all it should be changed teachers attitudes towards the students and the atmosphere in school. Before this school was very active, but now it is like something died inside the teachers.

I would change those teachers who don’t respect students.

Based on the material from interviews, which were conducted with the teachers, we can conclude, that their opinions about school workplace, as well as about (social) climate in school, are positive. Here are some examples:

This school never gives up. If there is a kind of problem, it searches till it will find the solution or even minimizing the problem. It is a place which wants to attract people. Students. Parents. Now we will fight for new students. Opinions are different. But is not so bad. You just have to get deeper. People usually don’t talk about schools positively, because

if there are high demands, people complain. Oh yes. We try our best. We concentrate on student, not only those who has great achievement. We try to motivate every child. And these kids really need it.

This place is really great. Very good. The staff here is super. Sensationally prepared. These teachers assist their students. They know how to talk to students. Students here are very nice. I never observed any aggressive behavior towards me. They are kind. I also know how to communicate with them.

I know that teachers stay after school, after their classes to help weak students.

Good atmosphere is here. It is a safety school and teaching is very good, very good preparation to the high school.

As we can see, teachers find the school as a supportive environment, where the student and his/her development is a priority. But it is important to notice that teachers often raise the issue of the lack of learning motivation. They said that many students show very little interest in the subject or not devoting enough time to study. However, in their opinion, the reason of this is rather beyond the school.

DISCUSSION

In spite of the differences between school A and B, there is a gap between teacher and student perceptions of social climate in both schools. It is clearly seen in such dimensions, as: teacher – student relationships, teachers support for students, motivating students to succeed, or obeying the students' rights in school.

Aleksandra Tłuściak-Deliowska (2015, p. 167) also draws attention to the disharmony between student and teacher perceptions of teacher behaviors. She recalls the effect of social approval. Social approval is the positive appraisal and acceptance of a person by a social group. It means that teachers have a tendency to declare acting the way which is socially acceptable and desirable in the process of teacher – student interactions. Therefore, teachers who answer the self-reported questions, as representatives of specific professional group, may want to “do well”, while students make comments about their real behaviors. Mary M. Mitchell and colleagues (2010) research

on student and teacher perceptions of school climate – it was a multilevel exploration of patterns of discrepancy – show that teacher ratings of the overall climate were not associated with student ratings of the overall climate. Similar discrepancies in student and teacher perceptions have been previously reported. Darrell L. Fisher and B.J. Fraser (1983) found that teachers described their classrooms as more orderly and having greater rule clarity than their students did. Specifically, teachers reported greater students involvement and greater teacher support than did their students. According to M.M. Mitchell and co-workers (2010), these differences may reflect differences in power. Teachers have greater control over daily activities, therefore they may feel more positively toward the teaching-learning environment. Students may hold less favorable views of the climate as they have less power in controlling their daily activities.

Robert W. Maloy and C.A. Seldin (1983) examining school climate, assessed the extent to which teachers, students, and also parents view eight selected value statements: “prepare for further schooling”, “concern for needs of others”, “improve social/economic status”, “prepare for the 1980s”, “prepare for jobs and careers”, “fulfill self as person”, “develop intellectual abilities”, “respect for the rules of society”. They found out that the climate of the examined school was characterized by differences in the perceptions of teachers and students. But in this case, students viewed everyday school life as meeting their expectations while teachers rated the same category as falling short of their expectations. Students also felt more positively than their teachers about the ability of school to prepare them for adult life. In students’ opinions, whatever purposes teachers think should be emphasized were being emphasized. By contrast, their teachers identified considerable differences between what they wished would be emphasized and what they thought was being emphasized.

The researchers note that understanding school climate can benefit students by promoting achievement, reducing dropout rates through expanded learning opportunities and supporting students’ efforts, as well as increasing positive attitudes. For teachers, a better school climate helps foster a positive working environment, and increasing job and school satisfaction (Monrad et al., 2008).

CONCLUSIONS

School climate is a key to school safety, teacher job satisfaction, student motivation, and academic performance. The first step to make school a better place for everyone is to realise that top-down imposed change rarely sticks. Shaping and developing positive school climate cannot be reduced to the declaration of readiness to transform school atmosphere, or to the set of positive affirmations about the school. The results presented in this text emphasize the importance of taking into account both student and teacher perceptions in future research on school climate. There is no successful school climate improvement initiatives, and there will be no schools with honoring, respectful, positive climate without mutual understanding and commitment both sides: teachers and students. A recent study of successful school change (see Hammond et al., 2007; see also Preble, Gordon, 2011) shows that involving students as partners was the crucial force for assessing, improving, and sustaining school climate improvement. Students are truly the experts on the climate within their school. Taking into consideration their point of view on school environment, will help adults to understand their schools more deeply. Moreover, “without these students’ diverse perspectives, adults will not fully understand school climate and learning issues” (Preble, Gordon, 2011, p. 57).

The study has empiriacly examined the differences in school climate perceptions between teachers and students. The discrepancy in ratings of selected school climate dimensions suggests that while all of the respondents may have shared objectively similar experiences connected with school social life, their perceptions of those experiences varied significantly.

It is important to point out certain limitation of the study: for more reliable concluding there is a need of statistical verification mean-differences using non-parametrical tests. But in this text I decided to settle for mean score interpretation, and use qualitative material to complement quantitative analysis.

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Endnotes

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² The article is an extended version of the speech delivered during the 3rd International Academic Conference “*Good practices*” in teaching and educating children, adolescents and adults in Józefów.