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ABSTRACT
               Value climate refers to the social atmosphere of a
school, and it reflects the differences that the public perceives
among schools. Three factors determine value climate: (1) the
characteristics of the entering students--abilities, motives, values
and expectations; (2) the characteristics of the school--norms, role
requirements, and types of facilities and resources available; and
(3) the traditions, values, and norms of the informal student social
organizations. This paper discusses the factors which influence value
climate, and the strategies for manipulating the climate to enhance
academic learning and the image of the school itself. (JD)

The Need for Altering the
School's Value Climate when
Planning Educational Reform

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Value climate refers to the social atmosphere of a school, and it reflects the differences that the public perceives among schools. Some schools are noted for their school spirit in athletics. Others are noted for their community involvement or civic-mindedness. While some schools are recognized for their academic excellence, others are known for their violence or serious drug abuse.

Before meaningful educational change can occur within curricula or classrooms, the context of the educational process, the value climate of the school, must be investigated and possibly altered to produce an atmosphere conducive to learning.

In this presentation, I will discuss the factors which influence value climate, and the strategies for manipulating the climate to enhance academic learning. Hopefully, with this knowledge, school boards, administrators, teachers and parents can join together to discover how the school's atmosphere is presently perceived by the students and the community, and how the climate can be modified.

Backman and Secord (1968) listed three factors which determine value climate. The first factor relates to the characteristics of the entering students, such as their abilities, motives for attending school, and their values and expectations. In public high schools, these characteristics are, to some degree, independent of the school and are dependent on the composition of the population within the school district. Many

3

school administrators have noted that as neighborhoods change,
the social atmosphere of the school changes with it. Yet,
there is some opportunity, for public school personnel to affect
the characteristics of entering freshmen. For example, as the
public's image of the school changes, parents may either be
more or less inclined to send their children to a private school.
For colleges and private schools, this factor can be more readily
affected by school personnel. The characteristics of entering
students also depend, to a great extent, on the other two factors
which determine value climate, as will be seen.

The second factor that Backman and Secord cited as a deter-
minant of value climate refers to the characteristics of the
school, including norms, role requirements, and the types of
facilities and resources available. The extent to which a school
promulgates and enforces a specific set of student regulations
regarding attendance, dress, and participation in extra-curricular
events will affect the desire of different types of students
(and their parents) to enroll in the school. Epstein (1980),
for example, found that positive school climate is affected
significantly by school policies that encourage attendance, atten-
tiveness to learning, and commitment to academic progress.

Similarly, the presence or absence of science laboratories,
dormitories, athletic facilities, and libraries, as well as the
qualifications of the teachers, will influence who the school
attracts and retains as students. Those interested in utilizing
such facilities and resources would probably reject a school

4

that did not have them, or which had such resources but only at a minimal level and quality. Again, this factor is inter-active. If a school finds itself with a group of students talented in music, the school might decide to enhance its resources in that area, budget permitting.

The third factor influencing value climate involves the traditions, values, and norms of the informal student social organizations. This factor includes, to a large extent, what older students tell younger students regarding desirable and appropriate behavior. The informal student organization has a particularly significant effect, since many teenagers seek approval and recognition from their peers. These youths often find it very difficult to pursue interests or develop talents which are actively discouraged by other students in their class.

These three factors, the entering student, school charac-teristics and peer group, are interactive and form a pattern which becomes the context for learning within the schools.

A review of the literature on value climate, presented by Scileppi (1984), concluded that this contextual factor has a strong influence on student learning. For example, value cli-mate affects college applications, political attitudes, student values, and achievement, time spent studying, choice of college major and vocational decisions.

Since value climate is such an important contextual variable affecting student learning, it would be useful to consider some

of the strategies for altering value climate. Using Backman
and Secord's three determinants of value climate, it is possible
to construct interventions. For example, school administrators
can decide to alter the characteristics of the entering students
by establishing admissions criteria consistent with the desired
value climate. In addition, students and their parents will
be attracted to a school based on the public's perception of
the institution. Thus, it would be important to insure that
all news releases and advertising emphasize the intended image
of the school. The Poughkeepsie (NY) School District for example,
publishes a newspaper, _Poughkeepsie Pride_, which has affected
the community's knowledge about unique educational opportunities
and exceptional achievements of students in that city's school.
Also, to whatever extent possible, the school newspaper should
also reflect the values the staff decide to encourage.

To continue the example of changing a school's value cli-
mate, it should be noted that a public image inconsistent with
the actual reality of the school's climate will soon be dis-
credited and the new students will become frustrated. Therefore,
't is important that the second determinant of value climate,
the school norms, facilities, and resources, also be altered.
Some changes are both obvious and typically expensive: a
sports facility to encourage athletics or an improved library
or better qualified faculty to foster a greater academic orien-
tation. Yet some changes are more subtle and far less costly.

The school might create and enforce more challenging role expectations for students. Coleman (1982) found that stricter discipline, and the expectation that students would be assigned homework in each class each day were associated with significantly higher student achievement. Modifying class attendance requirements, changing the requirements for graduation, or rewarding and publicly recognizing student achievements consistent with the desired value climate are all means of developing a new atmosphere in a school.

The final determinant of value climate, as was mentioned earlier, is the informal student organization. Although staff cannot alter this directly, they can intervene indirectly. The school could organize events and establish student clubs with the cooperation of those student leaders who support the change. Also, in residential schools and colleges, a school can decrease the interaction between upperclassmen (who presumably prefer the older value climate) and the entering freshmen by establishing freshmen dormitories and by educating the staff in these residence halls concerning the new climate. This intervention is consistent with Watson and Johnson's (1972) structure-process-attitude model of attitude change. That is, after a social structure is altered, the process of interaction within the structure is modified and, over time, the attitudes of the participants are changed. In this example, after a few years experience with a special freshmen program which incorporated modified regulations and norms, the entire student body

will be affected, and the informal student organization will begin to reflect the changed value climate.

In order to effectively change the value climate, a total systems perspective is needed. Frequently, the impact of piece-meal innovations will be countered by the entropy and inertia of the rest of the system. Dumaresq and Blust (1981) and Brookover and Lezotte (1979) argued that changing a school's value climate is not the result of implementing a few simple isolated strategies. Instead, successful school atmosphere modification requires a great deal of planning over at least a three year period, and the commitment of the staff to the change process.

In conclusion, value climate is a significant component of the total educational system, and an educational reform which includes an investigation and modification of school value climate will be more successful than an intervention which fails to consider this contextual factor.

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