

# School Climates and Student Behavior: Implications for Counselor Role

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The current research on the study of school climates is described, and implications of this research for counselor role are indicated. This research has examined the nature of educational climates and environments, as well as the relationship of various environments to student achievement, attitudes, and behaviors. The research provides information about the nature of school environments as they are affected by staff characteristics and behaviors and student peer group characteristics. This research indicates that schools do have quite different climates which are supportive of diverse types of student and staff behavior. It appears that the adjustment and success of an individual student may well be a function of (a) the type of climate of the school he attends, and (b) the extent to which the school climate is supportive of his individual needs. After an extensive review of nine methodologies for studying school climate, possible applications of these research findings by the counselor are described.

WITHIN THE PAST few years, a large body of research has been completed which has examined the nature of educational climates and environments and the relationship of various climates to student achievement, attitudes, and behaviors. These studies of school climates are based on a sociological view of schools. Schools are seen as organizations which have institutional norms and goals. The nature of these norms affects the overall climate of the school. These research studies have developed

methodologies for identifying the basic nature of the norms, values, and goals held by educational institutions. These factors affect the nature of school climate and subsequently the behavior and attitudes of students and staff.

School climate research has also indicated that in addition to the overall climate of an educational institution, subgroups can be identified which may or may not hold the same norms, values, and goals as the institution. This research suggests that there are student subcultures within the schools, and that the nature of these subcultures is not necessarily determined by the prevailing school climate. This means that there are apt to be a number of students who do not see the school as a referent group but rather derive their values and attitudes from other sources. Research has shown that within schools there are deviant student

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This article is the first in a projected series of ERIC CAPS Reports on Research.

subcultures, that is, student groups which hold different norms than the predominant school norms. These deviant subgroups have special problems adjusting to the school environment.

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School climate research has resulted in the development of research methodologies which have general applicability. Several of them are quite well developed and tested and have potential application for counselors in the study of the climates of the schools in which they are employed. The need for studying the climates and student subcultures prevailing in individual schools seems to be supported by the results of school climate research. This research indicates that there are distinct differences between schools, and it is, therefore, inappropriate to operate on the assumption that all schools and student subcultures are similar in nature. These studies suggest several different ways of conceptualizing school climates which may be used by counselors in analyzing the climates of their own schools.

To date, the results of these studies are descriptive in nature. Little has been done to attempt to change climates after initial description has been made. This, however, seems to be a possible step. The study of school climates can provide information which can help the counselor make decisions about specific counseling procedures which meet particular needs of groups within his school.

It is the purpose of this review to describe some of the currently available methods of studying environment and to suggest possible implications of these climate study techniques of counselors. The review concentrates on the major school climate research studies, presenting the theory, methodology, and results of these studies. *The materials used in the review are primarily those which are available from the Educational Resources Informa-*

*tion Center (ERIC). These resources were used because they represent complete research reports and because they represent a body of literature which is not readily available through regular publication channels.*

## NEEDS-PRESS STUDIES

Pace and Stern have developed both a model for viewing college environments and the instruments for measuring the nature of these environments. This work is based on a theory of personality which describes personality as the strength and relationship of individual needs. The individual lives in an environment which has the potential for satisfying or frustrating these needs. This potential in the environment is called environment press (Pace, 1964).

To measure personal needs and environmental press, two instruments were developed. The Activity Index (AI) is an instrument which measures the personal needs of students. This is a 300-item instrument which contains 30 10-item scales corresponding to such personal needs as dominance, nurturance, and achievement. A second instrument, the College Characteristics Index (CCI), asks for student responses to the nature of the school environment. The CCI measures the press of the environment and is scored on scales which parallel the needs measured in the AI.

A third instrument has been developed which can be used in measuring students' perceptions of their own fields or areas of specialization and of the students with whom they associate most closely. This instrument, the College Characteristics Analysis (CCA), can be used in the study of subcultures within the university. The CCA is a measure not of the needs-press dimension, but of the particular academic and student subculture on the dimensions of major objectives of programs (scientism, practicality, humanism, or welfare), and parts of the environment (administrative, academic, and student).

Stern (1964) has summarized the research done in the validation of the AI and the CCI. This research indicated that colleges differ systematically in the kinds of students they attract and in the

experiences to which they are exposed. The needs-press dimension is one which is capable of differentiating types of student groups and college environments. This study also indicates that entering freshmen tend to have a stereotyped view of college which they apply to all colleges. This view combines some of the academic characteristics of the elite liberal arts college with the community spirit, efficiency, and social orderliness of the church-related school.

### STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IN SMALL COLLEGES

Chickering (1966) has begun a four-year study of the school climates of 13 small colleges (enrollments under 1,500) in the Project on Student Development in Small Colleges, sponsored by the National Institutes of Mental Health. The study focuses upon various aspects of the small college as they influence patterns of student development. It is hypothesized that student development is influenced by the nature of the college organization.

In the study, student change centers about the development of autonomy or independence in the student. Autonomy is viewed as having three components: emotional independence; instrumental independence; and recognition of interdependence (Chickering, 1967). Such environment factors as teaching practices and objectives, curricular flexibility, off-campus experience and responsibilities, opportunities to assume responsibilities within the college community, and the quality of relationships with older persons affect the development autonomy.

This study measured both college variables (patterns of curriculum organization, religious orientation and emphasis, regulation and supervision of students, student-faculty relationships, and institutional objectives) and student variables. Students were administered the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) which has a number of scales including atheism-agnosticism, developmental status, estheticism, theoretical orientation, originality, and liberalism. A cluster analysis of the OPI scores yielded three clusters of student types which were labeled Intellectual

Altruists, Practical Conservatives, and Altruistic Conservatives. The results indicate that student and college characteristics are highly congruent. Students tend to attend those colleges which are most compatible with their own personality orientations. Chickering suggests that the study of student types has implications for the nature of mental health function in the college. In future work, he intends to develop a model for college mental health programs based on this research.

### COLLEGE STUDENT CULTURES AND DEVIANCE

Newcomb, in his studies of Bennington College (Newcomb & Flacks, 1964), has been interested in identifying the dominant norms of one particular college and in identifying and studying the nature of the students who deviate from these norms. This research is concerned with studying the methods of deviant adjustment to the college environment and the effect of deviance on the attrition of college students. It was hypothesized that there are two possible types of deviant student behavior: Collegiate and Non-Collegiate. Students who are in the Collegiate category are involved in the college peer structure, and these students comprise a visible group. The Non-Collegiate type of student does not hold the norms of the institution and does not belong to an identifiable subgroup.

This theory suggests that the Collegiate deviant will belong to a clearly identifiable group, will be recognized as a deviant by others, will have more friends in the college environment, will be less apt to exhibit changes in the direction of institutional norms and will be more apt to remain in school. The Non-Collegiate deviant will not exhibit strong group membership, will be less recognized as deviance by others in the college community, will have fewer friends, and will tend either to move in the direction of greater acceptance of institutional norms or to leave school.

A number of measures were used in this study. The Omnibus Personality Inventory was used to identify the prevailing college norms; sociometric measures and inter-

views were used to identify student subcultures. The basic descriptions of the Collegiate and Non-Collegiate deviant groups were supported.

### TAXONOMY OF STUDENT TYPES

Clark and Trow (1966) have developed a model of student subcultures which is based on two major factors. The first factor is the extent to which students identify with the school as an institution. The second factor is the extent to which students are concerned with ideas. Based on these two dimensions, four subcultures of students are described. The Academic Group is one which strongly identifies with the college (through the faculty) and is involved with ideas. The Collegiate Group identifies with the college (through fraternities or athletic teams, etc.) but is not involved with ideas. The Non-Conformist Group is involved with ideas but does not identify with the college. A final group, the Vocational Group, neither identifies with the college nor is involved with ideas.

This taxonomy of student subcultures has been revised by Mauss (1967) to apply to the junior college. Mauss maintains Clark and Trow's dimension of involvement with ideas but changes the dimension of identification with the college to identification with the adult community. From these dimensions, he derives four revised student subcultures for the junior college. These are the Academic Group, which identifies with the adult community and is involved with ideas; the Vocational Group, which identifies with the adult community but is not involved with ideas; the Incipient Rebel Group, which does not identify with the adult community but is involved with ideas; and the Perpetual Teenager Group, which neither identifies with the adult community nor is involved with ideas.

### COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The American Council on Education has been conducting longitudinal studies, with one research emphasis being the impact of the college environment upon students. Two major studies have been reported.

The first study (Astin, 1965) was based on data collected in 1961 by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation on all entering freshman students at a national sample of 248 colleges and universities. A second study is described by Astin (1967). This study is based on data collected from 254,480 students at 307 institutions of higher education.

A major emphasis of these studies has been to determine the impact of the college environment on the student's development. Through this research program, 36 environment variables have been identified and grouped into four categories: classroom environment; physical environment; peer environment; and administrative environment. Astin (1967) reports a study of the relationship of these environmental characteristics to attrition in college students. Twenty-one of the possible 36 college environment variables were found to have a significant relationship to college attrition. This study suggests that

Students are more likely to complete four years if they attend colleges where student peer relationships are characterized by friendliness, cooperativeness, and independence, where the students frequently participate in college activities, where there is a high level of personal involvement with and concern for the individual student and where the administrative policies concerning student aggression are relatively permissive [Astin, 1967, p. ii].

### COLLEGE ENVIRONMENTS

The American College Testing Program (Skager, 1966) has conducted research on the changes in student self-rating and goals due to college experience. This research has attempted to relate these student changes to characteristics of the college environment. Student changes were studied on the dimensions of scholarship, expressiveness, practical-mindedness, popularity, sensitivity to the needs of others, and self-confidence (intellectual). The colleges were measured on two dimensions. First, the colleges were characterized according to the institutional characteristics as developed by Astin (1962): size of enrollment; expenditure per student; masculinity as measured by

the percentage of male students; variety of curriculum; and selectivity of admissions. Second, the Environmental Assessment Technique (EAT) developed by Astin and Holland (1961) was used. This technique uses eight factors, which describe the characteristics of the student body to measure the college environment. The theory for this measurement technique is that the environment is affected by the personalities of those people attending the college. The EAT uses the following data: size of student enrollment; average intelligence level of students; and number of students in major fields. The number of students in major fields are grouped according to six personal orientation categories: Realistic (practical fields); Intellectual (scientific and rational fields); Social (service and social fields); Conventional (business and commercial fields); Enterprising (persuasive fields); and Artistic (esthetic and humanistic fields).

This research program has indicated that changes in students due to college experience are related to college environmental factors and institutional characteristics.

#### ADOLESCENT SOCIAL CLIMATES

Coleman (1959) has done research on the nature of adolescent social climates. This research was concerned with identifying adolescent social climates, determining what school and community factors affect the nature of these social climates, and determining the consequence of such social climates on the adolescents living in them. Data were gathered through questionnaires, interviews, and student records from 10 high schools. Different adolescent social climates were identified. The basis for this research was the belief that adolescents look largely to their peers for approval, acceptance, recognition, and status; members of various adolescent social systems differ in the values they hold; and the school and the community can potentially have some control over the nature of the values held by these adolescent cultures.

McDill (1966) studied adolescent social systems in 20 high schools, and he related academic attitudes and behaviors of students to membership in them. This study

identified general climates of the total school and specific adolescent social systems within the school. The total school environment was described in terms of a number of factors: (a) absence of academic emulation or excellence; (b) student perception of absence of intellectualism-estheticism; (c) cohesive and egalitarian estheticism (the extent to which academic excellence is a criterion for status); (d) absence of scientism; (e) humanistic excellence; and (f) academically oriented social system. The results of studying the relationship of these factors to students' academic attitudes and behaviors indicate that in those schools where academic competition, achievement, intellectualism, and subject-matter competence are demonstrated and emphasized by faculty and other students, individual students tend to adopt these scholastic norms to have higher achievement, greater educational aspirations, and more intellectual values.

When effects of membership in different peer groups were studied, it was found that peer group membership has greater effect on student attitudes and aspirations than on student achievement.

#### CLASSROOM CLIMATES

In work on school climates done in connection with the Harvard Physics Project, Walberg (Walberg & Anderson, 1967) developed a model of school climates which was hypothesized as one factor contributing to student achievement in physics and attitudes toward physics laboratory work. This model of school climates considers two factors which comprise school climate. First, there is the Structural factor which is the role expectations held by students for their own student behavior. This factor consists of the student behavior expectations which the entire student group holds as acceptable behavior for a group member. The nature of these role expectations is determined by the way in which the classroom is structured and organized. This Structural factor has three dimensions: Coaction (the amount of compulsive restraint or coercion used by the teacher); Organization (efficient direction of activity); and Isomorphism (the tendency for class members to be treated equally).

The second major factor in school climate is the Affective factor which is determined by individual students' predispositions to act in unique ways. The Affective factor has two dimensions: Synergism (the personal relations among class members); and Synality (the extent of the individual student's identification with group goals).

Of these variables, Isomorphism and Organization predicted learning better than Coaction, and Synergism predicted better than Synality.

### OPEN AND CLOSED SCHOOL CLIMATE

Halpin and Croft (1962) have developed the concept of open and closed school climates. They suggest that the climate of an organization is similar to the personality of an individual. The open and closed dimension in the measurement of school climates closely parallels the idea of the open and closed personality structure. The open school climate is one where the staff group is characterized by caring among members and openness of communication. The closed school climate is one in which the staff group feels little commitment to the group and is unwilling to be open with other staff members. Halpin and Croft suggest that the major variable determining the school climate is the leadership style of the school administrator.

To measure school climates on the open-closed dimension, and instrument called the Organization Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) was developed. The OCDQ is administered to the school staff and yields two groups of scales. One group characterizes the staff according to the degree of disengagement, hindrance, esprit, or intimacy exhibited. The other characterizes the behavior of the leader according to the degree of aloofness, production emphasis, thrust, and consideration exhibited.

The initial work on the development of this questionnaire was done with a sample of elementary schools. Based on this work, six types of school climate were identified. These are open, autonomous, controlled, familiar, paternal, and closed.

### RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The following section contains conclusions from the reported research, and some implications and applications of this research for counselor role and preparation.

1. It would appear that the research provides a legitimate base for conceiving of educational institutions as having identifiable and describable climates which affect students differentially. In particular, it would appear that climate has a greater impact upon values and behavior than it does upon academic achievement. There further appears to be a rather high degree of self-selection by students regarding colleges which offer climates congruent with their own personality make-ups. At the secondary and elementary level, however, a given school may experience a high degree of variance between the existing school climate and the congruence of that climate with particular student subgroups. Some students may relate rather well to the existing climate while others may be highly incompatible.

2. Student group membership may very well affect the perception of, and student responses to, the counselor. Students who are members of subgroups that are not congruent in goals and ideals with the prevailing school climate may see the counselor as a member of the establishment who represents an alien ideal. The counselor's efforts at establishing a relationship can be perceived as the intervention of an establishment member who aims to subvert the goals of the subgroup and is all the more to be feared because of his efforts to be understanding and helpful. Thus generalized, counselor efforts to be accepted by and to relate to students may be frustrated with those student groups that he may particularly desire to work with—those students not congruent with the school climate. What appears to be called for is not generalized efforts to be accepted, but highly specific efforts aimed at developing services and programs relevant to the needs of different student subgroups.

3. A salient fact for counselor behavior is that it may be very difficult for a counselor to obtain faculty support and mutual participation in the climates existing in

many schools today. Many faculty are concerned only with survival under the existing conditions and have no real expectation that they will enjoy their work or have high morale. For many faculty it is no longer a question of doing the job well, but rather a decision as to how to last through each day and week. In a real sense, faculties in many schools may no longer entertain serious concern about their schools' progress toward broad educational goals. In some schools, the faculty exists in a closed climate where communication and support are at best difficult and where getting through today is much more important than planning for tomorrow. In such a climate, counselors may be evaluated not so much on their success in "helping kids" but how they contribute to keeping the lid on.

4. Among the more meaningful outcomes is the opportunity provided by climate measurement for responding to counselor performance. Under this approach, counselor effectiveness can be thought of as a function of the appropriateness of the counselors' behavior to the needs of different student subgroups. Thus counselor effectiveness will not be thought of as necessarily doing more and albeit better counseling, but rather understanding the ethos of student subgroups and adopting counselor strategies and interventions which are relevant to the needs of a particular student group. It is interesting to speculate, given this definition of effectiveness, on how resourceful counselors might become in responding imaginatively to student needs.

5. It seems hard to escape the conclusion that we must give new emphasis to our consideration of student subgroups as well as continue our appreciation for student individuality. The behavior of individual students is at least partially determined and in many cases primarily determined by the significant groups in which they hold membership. Student behavior as it relates to values and attitudes would appear to be in large part group-determined and group-expressed. The increased presence of organized student behavior at both the secondary and college levels also raises serious questions as to the efficacy of responding to students

as if they were individuals without significant referent groups. The counselor of tomorrow may very well find himself "negotiating" with groups of students, on what they regard as a desirable mix of student services.

6. The changing nature of student behaviors in general and in a given climate in particular would seem to underwrite strongly the need for an on-going program of data collection regarding school and student climate. Rather commonly, schools offer programs for students of yesteryear. An on-going data collection program on school climate will provide the means for counselors to be sensitive to the crucial influences in the environment of students in his school. Studies of deviant adjustment at the college level suggest that this type of data and appropriate interventions are needed if the school is not to have at best a neutral, and at worst a negative, effort on students.

## IMPLICATIONS

The review of the research suggests both implications and applications for counselor preparation and practice.

1. It would appear that research on school climates has developed to the point that there is now methodology and instrumentation as well as a body of knowledge which has not previously been available and which can provide a counselor with information on the environment in which he must perform. It hardly seems debatable that both because of the body of knowledge to be learned and the methodology to be acquired, an investment of counselor time for learning in this area would be amply rewarded.

2. As a body of knowledge either specific to a given school or generalized to many schools, information on school climate can serve as a backdrop against which counselors can come to view their own behaviors and perceptions in a broader perspective. Such viewing can be instrumental in the counselor's adopting more constructive and adaptive behaviors in the work climate in which he is located.

3. A particularly fruitful avenue will be that provided by developing and re-

searching the impact of specific counselor strategies in each of many different school climate situations. As we come to better understand the dynamics of a certain type of school climate, we should also be exploring the means by which the counselor can have the greatest influence in that situation. Relating counselor strategy to student need seems a highly desirable approach if we are to make counseling more meaningful for all students.

4. It also seems that as we become more adept at studying school climates, we will more readily see the need for variety in counselor behavior. Different school climates and different student subgroup congruence with school climates will encourage and challenge counselors to be inventive in the means which they utilize to respond in different mixes of climates, students, and faculty. It is probable that under the need for greater response breadth, counselors will be drawn more to a systems approach to counseling where there is emphasis upon matching guidance means with behavioral objective and paying careful attention to the relationships between parts in the system (guidance program). If this development occurs, we may see a greater interdisciplinary focus in counselor education, particularly with reference to course work in media and communications.

5. Overall, it is intriguing to consider what a greater attention to studying school climate will do for counselor role. It is interesting to envisage the counselor as a researcher on school climate who consults with both students and staff regarding their behavior in a particular climate, who is resourceful in assisting people to adopt more adaptive and constructive behaviors, and who serves as a linking agent between the school faculty and students with regard to the development of viable change strategies.

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## Special Research Training Programs Planned

► The Center for Vocational and Technical Education, under a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, and in cooperation with the American Vocational Association, is conducting a series of four one-week research training programs, to be held at different universities. Each program will utilize the host institution's physical, educational, and research facilities, as well as their staff competencies. The programs are as follows:

**May 4-9:** "Planning Vocational Education Programs Based upon Manpower Research," The Pennsylvania State University, University Park.

**August 3-8:** "Patterns of Career Development as Applied to Vocational Education," University of Missouri, Columbia.

**August 17-22:** "Evaluation of Vocational-Technical Education Program Effectiveness," University of California, Los Angeles.

**October 6-10:** "Student Characteristics: A Determinant for Program Planning and Development," University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

For further information, write to Neal E. Vivian, Coordinator, Special Research Training Program, The Center for Vocational-Technical Education, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, Ohio 43210.