# Identifying the Climate in Our School – the Offer of Evaluation Tools

**The concept of school climate, complemented by other attributes such as social, psychosocial, socio-emotional and socio-psychological, gradually established itself in the last forty years in the world and in the last twenty years in the Czech literature as well. This semantically ambiguous metaphor has also taken root in the vocabulary of politicians (among others as one of the main arguments supporting reform efforts in Czech schools), but also in the vocabulary of journalists, albeit so far it most commonly occurs in negative contexts, such as information on dangerous behaviour, violence or bullying in schools. Unlike its closest relative concept, which is the classroom climate, safely entrenched in the professional community, so much so that it is a normal part of university lessons and the methods to measure it have not only been tested here but also standardized, the very concept of school climate long stayed somewhat in the background.**

The phrase school climate (including its usual adjectives above-mentioned) easily raises intuitive impression of familiarity, even though it is somewhat more complicated with its real content. Whereas neither the lay nor professional public has a big problem with intuitive appreciation of the term school because it can rely on its own experience with this social institution and knows that there are kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and universities. That there are different sizes (small schools with composite classes, large schools, etc...). That schools may have different authority (state and private), that there is a difference between village and town schools, there are differences even among town schools depending on neighbourhoods and their inhabitants, and the more informed know that there are some differences among schools according to school curricula (additional language teaching, focus on sports, music, etc.). In terms of the climate research, however, it is necessary to take the above specifics into consideration in selecting and preparing the methods to identify it. The concept of climate is a more complex problem. Its content tends to be defined differently. The term of the school climate was originally used as a characteristic of a particular school environment, and a characteristic of a certain distinctiveness of this environment. Similarly to the way meteorology perceives the climate as averaged results of measurements of atmospheric conditions in a given location, the climate of the school provides an averaged perception of organizational environment (Mareš, 2005). Most of the current concepts understand the social climate of the school as dominant and relatively stable processes of perception, experience, assessment, and response of all persons involved in the events in a particular school, to the interactions and phenomena that take place at that school (see, e.g. Freiberg, 1999, Čáp, Mareš, 2001, Grecmanová, 2008, and others). A certain problem is the degree of subjectivity in the evaluation of aspects of social change. The authors speak of shared perceptions, others emphasize the subjectivity of opinions (e.g. Mareš, 2005), while others the emotional aspect (e.g. Ježek, 2003) in relation to various aspects of the school (social) environment; other approaches emphasize in particular the evaluation element. In summary these are social representations of the school environment.

An important characteristic of the climate is its certain dual quality. First, it contains elements of the individual perception and evaluation, but also involves sharing thereof and communication about them with other players. Ježek (2003) highlights the need to search for such groups and such subjects in relation to the school environment which will be so significant from the perspective of the respondents that sharing their importance with the respondents can be assumed. School climate is a product of a specific social group (management, teachers, pupils, non-teaching staff, parents) that has a common history and, to some extent, values and norms (Mareš, 2005) and is influenced by the immediate social environment (the school's reputation in the community, the way it is managed by its authority). School climate can also be understood as a socially constructed concept. Each of the participants shape their own views on the school environment in which they move, his views about communicating with people socially close, while in this environment moves himself and his views then affect their behaviour and contribute to shaping the social reality that is also seen. As Jones said (1986, p 42): „People often see what they expect to see - selecting evidence to support their stereotypes while ignoring exceptions." What topics will be communicated while sharing opinions, however, depends largely on the participants themselves, whether the pressure from the school will encourage a revolt or rather a sense of belonging and activity (e.g. Gill et al., 2004). Social climate is thus a subjectively ambiguous metaphor that attempts to capture individual-emotional and social dimensions of the institutional education, whether it is a curriculum or its actual implementation in the form of hidden curriculum. A good climate of the school or class is not an end in itself, it is a means. In an environment in which teachers and pupils feel good it is easier to achieve educational goals, because the players' attention is focused on teaching - not on solving other problems or conflicts.

**Tools created and modified in the project Road to Quality Improvement represent various ways of grasping this broad issue, whether in general or in the individual areas of the life of schools.**

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# Teaching Staff Climate. A Questionnaire for Teachers

The Questionnaire for Teaching Staff Climate (TSC) is designed to find out how relationships are perceived and valued at school in the professional and personal level, and what features the teaching staff shows as a whole. The questionnaire looks into both the collegial relationships within the staff and the perceived relationships of teachers in relation to the school management and leadership. The basis for this version of the questionnaire is an original foreign tool to measure the teaching staff climate (OCDQ, RS; Kottkamp, Mulhern, Hoy, 1987), translated into Czech by Lašek in 1995 (Lašek, 2001). This version of the evaluation tool is used also in some Czech schools. We adapted and standardized this adopted tool within the project Road to Quality Improvement with regard to the Czech environment. This means that some questions and their structure were changed so that the questionnaire better suited the diagnosis of the climate in Czech staffrooms of elementary and secondary schools. The process of adaptation and standardization will be described in detail for those interested in the user manual. The author of this adaptation and standardization is doc. PaedDr. Petr Urbánek, Dr., of the Pedagogical Faculty of Charles University in Prague and the Faculty of Arts, TU Liberec.

## The questionnaire measures the following subfactors

1. **Supportive head teacher behaviour (S).** The school management provides constructive criticism aimed at the welfare of the school and the teachers; assigns meaningful tasks; motivates teachers, setting an example through their own attitudes and work. Accepted are both the school operational requirements and social needs of the teachers. (10 items)
2. **Directive head teacher behaviour (D).** The school maintains close and constant control over all teachers, formulating clear requirements, using rigorous evaluation criteria; holds the control of the school firmly in hand, plans real visions and has an overview of what is happening at school. (7 items)
3. **Engaged teacher behaviour (E).** Teachers are proactive, proud of their school, respecting their colleagues and actively cooperating with them; teachers are willing to fulfil the common vision of the school. Their effort aims to support pupils and help them to be successful, preferred are bonds of friendship with the children and creating an atmosphere of trust. (11 items)
4. **Frustrated teacher behaviour (F).** Teachers experience excessive routine duties beyond their own teaching and a large number of difficult administration of which necessity and scope they are not convinced. Less favourably perceived are relationships between colleagues. The school management is perceived to have bureaucracy and managerialism features. (8 items)
5. **Intimate teacher behaviour (I).** Teachers evaluate the relationships among colleagues as solid and friendly, being able to solve any conflicts objectively while staying on top of things. Teachers know each other well, are close personal friends, and regularly socialize together. (4 items)



Graf 1: Porovnání umístění školy mezi ostatními školami.
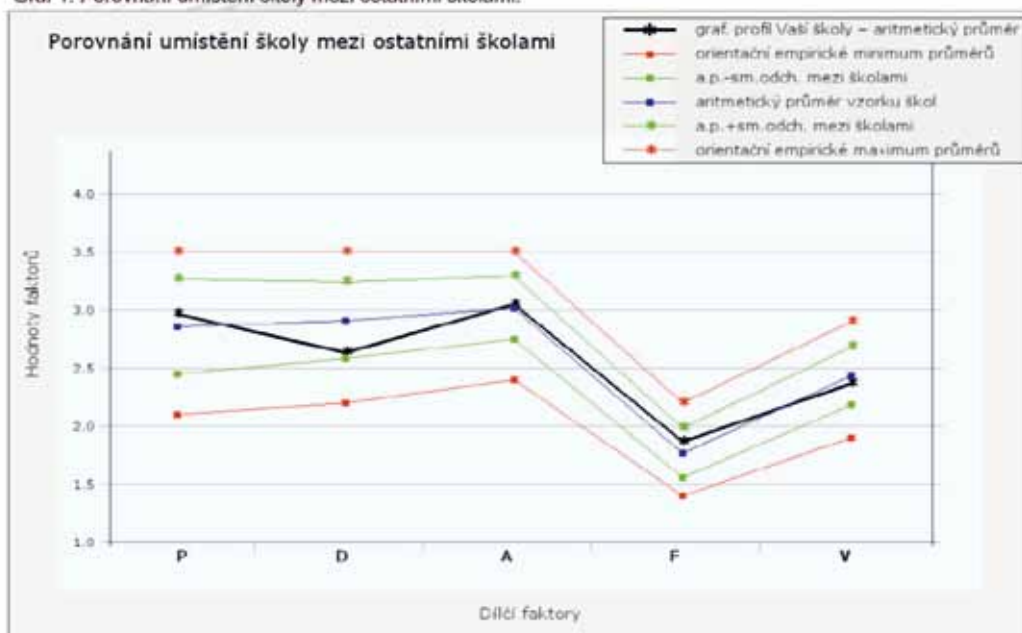
Poznámka: Spojnice v grafu nemají žádný věcný význam, pouze opticky zvýrazňují umístění hodnot pro jednotlivé faktory.

The first two factors S and D follow the relationship expressed by teachers to the work of the school management, especially the perceived support, working conditions created and also the management's resoluteness and quality of leadership. The other two factors E and F represent self-evaluation of the quality of teachers work, professional commitment and level of perceived professional burden, or the level of handling thereof. The fifth factor I follows collegial relations among teachers in the personal and professional level. The school's results are automatically summarized in the report for at least 70% return (in case of small schools with up to seven teachers the return must be 100%) completed anonymously by teachers of the school. The results presented will allow the school to monitor various factors in the school as a whole even in the defined levels of the school or their components (such as lower and upper elementary school, junior and senior Gymnasium, secondary vocational school, vocational training school).

Surveyed is also the consensus of all teaching staff members' statements (expressed as standard deviation), which indicates a similarity of teachers views on the functioning of the school and may reflect the degree of cohesion of the staff's opinions as a whole. Major differences in the responses can be interpreted as a signal of not very good relationships among the teachers that can be rubbed off on the pupils during lessons. The actual results can be compared with the indicative results from other schools that participated in the questionnaire verification process.

## Recommended Reading

KOTTKAMP, R. B., MULHERN, J. A., HOY, W. K. Secondary School Climate: A Revision of the OCDQ. Administration Quarterly. 1987, Vol. 23, Issue 3, p. 31-48.
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# Classroom Climate. A Questionnaire for Pupils

The outcomes of the questionnaires can be used by a particular teacher to learn something about how students perceive the situation in their class in his/her lessons. Evaluated are the pages which are most relevant from the perspective of the classroom climate and successful teaching - the relationships among students and teacher's perception. Some of the factors measured are therefore more dependent on the particular teacher (e.g. Perceived Support from the Teacher or Equity Approach to Pupils) than others (such as Good Relationships with Classmates, Breaks). The questionnaire contains seven mandatory factors (35 items in total) and four optional where it is up for the school to decide which of them it wants to assign to the pupils in the given class. Pupils fill in the questionnaire anonymously. The questionnaire is applicable for upper primary schools and secondary schools of all types. The starting point of the variable version of the questionnaire is foreign questionnaires - Australian Catholic University: Multicultural Classroom Environment Instrument M. J. Carrolla (MCEI, 2006) and What Is Happening In this Class by J. B. Fraser at al. (WIHIC, 1996). The authors of the Czech adaptation and standardization are prof. PhDr. Jiří Mareš, CSc., of Faculty of Medicine in Hradec Králové and Mgr. Stanislav Ježek, Ph.D., of Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno.

## The questionnaire monitors the following aspects of the classroom climate…

### The basic version of the questionnaire - the mandatory factors (with five items in each factor)

1. **Good Relationships with Classmates.** Sufficient quality of relationships with classmates is a necessary condition for working with the class as a whole. Good relationships with classmates are also one of the development-related needs of children. In case of bad relationships, students can „work" harder on the relationships among themselves, which reduces the potential for collaboration and learning.
2. **Cooperation with Classmates.** In terms of working with the class, it is important whether the pupils are accustomed to work and solve problems or tasks together. The questions do not ask about the need or desire for cooperation, but directly about cooperation as behaviour.
3. **Perceived Support from the Teacher.** The teacher does not always manage to make sure that the support he/she offers is perceived that way by the student as well. This scale surveys the extent to which students sees the teacher as someone who helps them, supports them, is on their side. Generally, thus perceived support also indicates good quality of the relationship between the student and the teacher.
4. **Equity Approach to Pupils.** This scale surveys the extent to which pupils feel that the teacher treats all equally. It is thus the absence of experienced discrimination, whether negative or positive. It focuses on the positive aspect of equality; one cannot thus infer the lack of individual approach from high equality. Conversely, pupils which are treated individually as appropriate have a tendency to respond positively on this scale. As with the previous scale, pupils having a good relationship with teachers tend to speak about it positively within the scale.
5. **School-family Transfer of the Knowledge Acquired.** For meaningful learning in the school one cannot rely solely on the future benefit arising from the education. For a child and early adolescent it is the present what is especially important, which can be understood as the perceived usefulness and relevance of the knowledge acquired at home. Low values on this scale may indicate that it is more difficult to motivate students to study in the area.
6. **Competition Preference.** Optimal teaching combines competitiveness incentive to relatively high individual performances and cooperation enabling improved performance of the whole group and often even the absolute performance. This scale focuses on the preference of competition and comparison between schoolmates.
7. **Breaks.** This screening scale only checks whether the breaks are a desirable opportunity to rest or not. High values on this scale indicate potential problems in the pupil group rather than problems in the organization of the breaks.

### Extended Version of the Questionnaire - Optional Factors

1. **Discussion with the teacher.** It is often desirable that students bring to the lessons their thoughts and ideas and share them with the teacher. This scale focuses on the actual presence of this element. (8 items)
2. **Initiative.** This scale determines the extent to which the pupil actively and independently acquires knowledge in the area. In a situation where such an initiative contrasts with his/her performances in the subject, this information can be rewarding. (4 items)
3. **Task Orientation.** Like initiative, attention students pay to achieving objectives and tasks is an important completing element in their perception of class climate. A high value on this scale indicates self-discipline and diligence in the traditional academic sense. A low value may indicate focusing more on social class aspects of life, or rejection or resignation to learn. (7 items)
4. **Effort to Appeal.** The scale determines the extent of student conformity in student communication, retention of the first impulse and adaptation of one's response to others' responses. A considerable degree of conformity is natural in the childhood and adolescence and for a teacher seeking a high level of interactivity of lessons it is an obstacle. (4 items)



The questionnaire also provides a comprehensive assessment by the final question/thermometer which allows displaying how corresponding students usually feel in the school. Part of this overall assessment is related to the school as a whole, a part to the teacher or subject evaluated, and a part to the class.

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# School Climate in the Perspective of Other Evaluation Tools

The following tools can be seen as a way to acquire or enhance information about the views of education stakeholders in partial areas of the school.

## The School Climate. A set of questionnaires for teachers, pupils and parents.

This evaluation tool works with statements of the main actors of the school life - teachers, pupils and parents. The aim is to determine the prevailing rate of satisfaction of key stakeholders of the school life with various aspects of the school life. Formally, there are three versions of the questionnaire with fifty questions. The Tool Report allows comparison of satisfaction of students, parents and teachers. The tool was created by a team of authors led by prof. PhDr. Helena Grecmanová, Ph.D., Department of Education and Social Studies UP in Olomouc.

## Interaction of Teachers and Pupils. A questionnaire for pupils.

Interaction of Teachers and Pupils determines the characteristics of teachers' educational effect with students. For this purpose it uses two key characteristics. The first one finds out how students perceive and describe (reflect) the relationship of the teacher to them, the second one focuses on the way pupils are led by the teacher, i.e. the extent to which the requirements are placed on pupils, or what freedom they are allowed. The results obtained in both characteristics are important for self-reflection of teachers, to describe their teaching style.

The method is applicable for pupils of upper primary schools and all types of secondary schools. The authors of the tool are doc. Mgr. Ilona Gillernová, CSc., and PhDr. Lenka Krejčová, Ph.D., Department of Psychology Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.

## Lower Primary School Community. A questionnaire for students in the form of a computer game.

This tool should help answer questions about how a lower primary school pupil perceives his/her school environment. It determines which aspects of the school attendance they evaluate positively and which negatively, and what aspects of formal and informal education make the child enjoy the school. The diagnostic tool is primarily designed for lower primary school pupils because it is particularly important in the early school age to make sure that the child likes the school and has a reason to go there.

The child is not required to be able to read or write. It assumes minimal ability to work with a computer (mouse movements, clicking), but neither this skill is necessary if the child is guided by an adult while working with the tool. The author of the tool is PhDr. Denisa Denglerová, Ph.D., working at the Masaryk University in Brno.

## Preventing Behaviour Problems with Students. A questionnaire for pupils.

This evaluation tool, which takes the form of a simple questionnaire for pupils (includes 35 items), mediates the perception of school activities (in the broader concept of the school life) pupils and teachers (the school) makes it possible to apply appropriate strategies for preventing, or intervening pupils problem behaviour. The target group can be pupils of both lower primary schools and gymnasia and secondary vocational schools. Based on analysis of pupils' attitudes, the questionnaire provides educators with information about the attitudes of the class or school as a whole to the following areas of school life: overall satisfaction with the school, success and opportunity, negative feelings, the teacher-pupil relationship, pupil's position in the school (school status), identity formation (support), social integration in peer groups. The questionnaire was made in a team of authors led by doc. PhDr. Věra Vojtová, Ph.D., working at the Pedagogical Faculty of Masaryk University in Brno.

## Survey for teachers. Survey for pupils. Survey for Parents.

Aggregate information on these three surveys which the school creates itself by choosing from a list of prepared questions was provided in the Annex to the last bulletin issue. The list of questions includes a number of those that provide certain orientation information on the climate. These questions are in the thematic groups of Relations, Cooperation, Support from the School ... Information the school obtains from answers to some questions may trigger the need for more accurate measurements of the climate using evaluation tools presented above (especially climate and faculty classroom climate). The author of the surveys is Mgr. Tomáš Kohoutek of the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno.

## Group Review of Graduates. A method for the evaluation of the course of school education

The aim is to offer schools a way to learn which topics students recall in reviewing their school attendance and to which topics they attach the greatest importance. On this basis, the school may propose measures to improve the school. The tool is designed for 9th year pupils of primary schools and secondary schools. Whether the topic of the climate appears in the conversation depends on the pupils given how intensely they experienced it, whether negatively or positively. The authors are PhDr. Karel Starý, Ph.D., and Mgr. Michaela Poláčková of Institute of Research and Development, Faculty of Education, Charles University in Prague.

The list of evaluation tools also includes those touching particular aspects of the school climate issue. It is **Good School - a method for schools to set their priorities, Pupil Attitudes towards the School - a questionnaire for pupils, School Website Presentation – an assessment arch**. For brief annotations to them, see Evaluation Tools Created and Published on page 24, Issue 5 of the bulletin On the Road to Quality Improvement or the project website: www.nuov.cz/ae.

We wish you that the outcomes of the climate survey become incentives to improve professional and interpersonal relationships of your staff, among pupils, between pupils and teachers, between the school and parents, while supporting the quality of the functioning of your entire school. .

Jan Mareš, Martin Chvál