

1987

# A qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of school climate utilizing the interview method

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**A qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of school climate  
utilizing the interview method**

**Winter, Jeffrey Steven, Ph.D.**

**Iowa State University, 1987**

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A qualitative study of teachers' perceptions of  
school climate utilizing the interview method

by

Jeffrey Steven Winter

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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For the Graduate College

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Purpose of the Study	4
Methodology	5
Sample	8
Format of the Study	11
Definition of Terms	12
REVIEW OF LITERATURE	13
The Importance of School Climate and Educational Effectiveness	13
Climate and school effectiveness	14
The principal as an influential factor	20
Teachers and school climate	24
The Use of Qualitative Research in Education	26
Public secondary schools in a midwestern city	29
Review of the Literature: A Summary	29
A Final Note	31
JOURNAL ARTICLE I. GENERAL FINDINGS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE	32
The Principal	34
Staff Relations	37
"Downtown"	40
School Pride and Support	42
Changes Over the Past Decade	45
Final Thoughts	47

	<u>Page</u>
JOURNAL ARTICLE II. CLIMATE SATISFIERS AND DISSATISFIERS-- WHAT TEACHERS WANT IN SCHOOL CLIMATE	50
Elements of a Positive Climate--Satisfiers	52
Recognition	52
Interpersonal relations	53
Relationship with the principal	53
Relationship with peers	55
Relationship with students	56
Achievement	57
Sources of Dissatisfaction	58
Interpersonal relations	58
Administrative policy	60
Final Thoughts	63
JOURNAL ARTICLE III. THE PRINCIPAL MAKES THE DIFFERENCE	65
Support	66
Caring	68
Recognition	70
Pride	71
Final Thoughts	71
DISCUSSION	73
Limitations	73
Results	74
Implications	75
Recommendations for Further Research	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	85

	<u>Page</u>
APPENDIX A	86
APPENDIX B	88
APPENDIX C	93
APPENDIX D	95
APPENDIX E	99
APPENDIX F	102
APPENDIX G	104
APPENDIX H	106

## INTRODUCTION

## Statement of the Problem

Business and education have in common the desire to achieve greater effectiveness in providing a product or service for large groups of people. Leaders in the American corporate world look over their shoulders at the galloping successes the Japanese enjoy in numerous areas. Educational analysts in the U.S. see a widening gap between the academic achievement of students here and the apparent superiority of students in Japan and several European countries, especially in the math and science areas. The search for variables which account for success in the corporate and educational worlds has led numerous researchers to the study of organizational climate.

When researching top performing corporations in America, Peters and Waterman (1982) in their book In Search of Excellence stated that a strong set of shared norms and expectations led to high performance and a shared idea of institutional purpose. They found that America's most successful companies tend to exhibit strong cultural values and a well-defined set of guiding principles. In other words, an overall climate of positive expectations is present in these high achieving organizations. These qualities, according to Peters and Waterman, are what distinguish excellent companies from the rest.

The corporate world along with the rest of America looks toward our schools as the place from which the great leaders of tomorrow will emerge. Unfortunately, however, the American school system is considered

by many to be falling short in its efforts to keep pace in an increasingly competitive world. Recent reports such as the U.S. Department of Education's A Nation at Risk (1983) underscore the urgent need to focus intensive efforts on our nation's schools. Attention has been spotlighted on secondary schools where a precipitous drop in test scores is most glaring.

Prominent educators and researchers in the past have recognized the importance of our nation's secondary schools in the overall scheme of educational achievement in America. In the late 1950s, James Conant led the comprehensive school approach which, according to Conant, reflected "our devotion to the ideal of equality and of opportunity and equality of status" (Conant, 1959:8).

Over the past quarter century, our nation has entered into a new phase of growth and increased expectations of our secondary schools. Numerous researchers have begun to question the structure and efficiency of today's high schools.

In a study of American high schools commissioned by the Carnegie Foundation and conducted by Ernest Boyer (1980), a number of troubling facts were reported. Many students are two years or more behind their grade level in reading and mathematics. Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) scores, a popular yardstick used to measure school performance, fell between 1952 and 1982 from an average of 476 to 426--an alarming drop of 50 points. In various subject areas, a team of researchers found that when average scores of students from various western countries were compared, the United States scores very poorly (Boyer, 1983:33).

The American high school received a mixed report card in the Boyer report. He stated that public support for education has declined partially due to negative news from and about schools. According to Boyer (1983:38), ". . . schools reflect both the strength and weakness of the nation. Caught in the crossfire of competing goals, faced with serious financial problems, and struggling to respond to profound social changes, most secondary schools in the United States are--like the communities that surround them--surviving but not thriving."

Authors Cohen and Neufeld (1981) recounted the problems seen in today's high schools ranging from disobedience and violence to falling academic standards. Dismissing popular notions of the causes for these ills such as the decline of teaching quality, the "youth culture," effects of mass media or the decline of the family, they explain the problems as originating in another area. According to Cohen and Neufeld (1981:69), "The problems we see now are in good measure the result of past educational successes." The success they refer to is the nearly equal access to secondary school for all members of society.

By the 1960s, students who often had not attended high school such as minorities, working class or highly unmotivated teenagers began to enroll in large numbers. By the 1970s, some 75% of all high school students graduated (Cohen & Neufeld, 1980). As high schools moved towards universal attendance, they also continued to provide equal education for all, including the unmotivated and the disadvantaged. This, in the view of Cohen and Neufeld (1980), has led to softened academic and social standards and weakened the value of a diploma.

School climate studies (Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979) have demonstrated the existence of a close relationship between school climate and student achievement. The teaching staff and the principal have been reported to play particularly strong roles in climate formation. Little is known, however, concerning specific factors which foster the development of positive climate. Since climate has a significant impact on school effectiveness, it is crucial for educational research to explore its diverse dimensions. Educational research concerning climate components eclipses the amount of available literature on how climate evolves. The data gathered in this study will add to our understanding of climate and what influences it.

Abundant questions emerge. How can we better understand climate formation? What are the phenomena which impact on teachers' perceptions of climate? What are positive and negative influences on climate? How do teachers perceive the role of the principal in shaping climate? These are some of the questions which the present study was designed to address.

#### Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to examine and present the perceptions of teachers regarding school climate with particular attention given to the influence of the principal. Thirty-two high school teachers were chosen from among 200 volunteers to participate in the study.

The study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main factors which impact on school climate?
2. What are specific instances and events which influence school climate?
3. What factors are closely associated with climate satisfaction and dissatisfaction?
4. How important is the principal in shaping school climate?
5. What is the role of the principal as perceived by teachers in shaping school climate?
6. What are the factors which make a good day for teachers?
7. What factors cause a change in school climate?
8. To what extent is climate influenced by "staff leaders?"
9. How do staff relations impact on school climate?
10. Has school climate changed noticeably over the past decade?

#### Methodology

Despite their multi-faceted nature, relatively little descriptive study has been undertaken of public schools. According to Lortie (1975), "That is nowhere more evident than in the case of the two million persons who teach in the public schools . . . although books and articles instructing teachers how they should behave are legion, empirical studies of teaching work--and the outlook of those who staff the schools--remain rare" (p. vii).

This study began with the decision to learn more about teachers' perceptions of school climate. It was decided to conduct interviews with



30-35 high school teachers from a midwestern city.

A qualitative research technique was employed, making use of interviews as the prime data-gathering instrument. The interview process was uniquely suited for this study. Through direct interaction, the researcher gained a depth of response which was compelling in its immediacy and quite personal in nature.

Several hurdles needed to be cleared before beginning the actual interviews. A summary of the study was submitted to the Human Subjects Review Committee of Iowa State University (Appendix A), along with the proposal and other relevant forms (Appendix B). The committee notified the researcher that they needed to know what the teachers would be told. They also requested a copy of the permission granted from the appropriate area in the school system to be studied (Appendix C). The committee requested that the principal investigator be the one who collected the forms from those teachers who chose not to participate in the study. The researcher agreed and incorporated the suggestion into the appropriate memorandum. The researcher, along with the professor in charge of major work, Dr. Jim Sweeney, met with the public school supervisor to discuss the project and receive permission to conduct the study. The supervisor assured us of his support and cooperation (Appendix C).

On February 4, 1987, the researcher delivered the necessary materials to the principals of two of the schools. One planned a staff meeting on that day and the other planned to insert the necessary information in the next weekly staff newsletter. To this school were delivered copies of Appendix D for each classroom teacher, while packets

with the same information were mailed to the remaining four principals.

The parameters of the study were explained in the following manner. The researcher presented to the principals a brief outline of the goals of the study and an explanation of the need to find up to 35 teachers from public secondary schools who would be willing to participate in an interview on school climate which would last for approximately one hour. Only classroom teachers with a minimum of 10 years experience would be eligible for the study and respondents would not be asked about their current working situation. The time and location of the interviews would be arranged before school, during planning periods, after school, or at other times according to the schedule of the teachers.

A meeting was arranged with the principal of one of the high schools. This was the only direct meeting the researcher had with any of the principals prior to their agreeing to participate in the study. The others were contacted about the study by telephone, after which the five others agreed to cooperate.

Four of the five principals requested that they be sent a summary of the study and stated that they would fully support the project. The fifth was willing to have the school participate; however, rather than have teachers fill out a form if they chose not to participate, the principal asked that a form be sent to fill out if the teacher did wish to participate. This was agreed to, and a summary of the procedures and parameters was sent to this school (Appendix E). The sixth principal was out of town and, upon return the following week, also agreed to participate.

The procedures and purpose of the study were explained to each principal, including the extent of involvement of the principal and teachers and the procedures to be followed (Appendix F). To the one principal requesting a slightly different procedure, a revised memorandum was sent. Enclosed with these memoranda were copies of the permission granted from the public schools (Appendix C).

By February 25, 1987, the participant lists of all six schools were received from which the sample was derived.

### Sample

The six participating schools all are within city limits and are fairly equal in size. Two of the schools might be considered "inner city," three are divided socioeconomically, and one school is a vocational campus.

The populations from which respondents were selected were classroom teachers with a minimum of ten years teaching experience and were currently teaching in public secondary schools in grades 9-12. The ten years of classroom experience did not need to be contiguous, and there were no minimum or maximum age requirements.

Upon receipt of the school staff lists of those teachers who met the requirements and who were willing to participate in the study, a systematic sampling procedure was used to select the population.

A total of forty-five (45) teachers was selected and contacted as candidates for the study. A greater number of respondents than was actually necessary was selected in order to compensate for people who

might move, become ill or decide to withdraw for other reasons.

The total population of volunteers (N) was 195. A group of 45 teachers needed to be chosen (n), and the researcher was to interview every Kth case. The selection formula was  $K = N/n$  or  $195/45 = 4.3$ . Rounding this down to its nearest whole number, every fourth name was selected.

The first person to be interviewed was randomly selected from among the first 10 names, and every fourth name was chosen thereafter until the end of the list. Of the 32 teachers who were interviewed, the average was approximately five teachers per school. All interviews were conducted by the researcher.

Interviews lasted from one to two hours and took place in locations convenient for teachers and conducive to open discussion.

The researcher met with the subjects before school, after school and during planning periods. Interviews were held mainly in classrooms, but storage areas, lounges and auditorium seating areas also served as interview locations. Nearly every interview was conducted on school grounds. The 32 taped interview sessions form the core of the data discussed in this study. All interviews were taped with prior consent of the subjects. Field notes were also taken by the researcher for later reference.

The subjects were offered the option of not having the sessions taped (had teachers chosen this option, the quality of the data might not have been as reliable or as accurate as the researcher wished). A set of questions related to school climate was brought to each interview

(Appendix G).

The teachers who participated were articulate, dedicated and forthright. Not one appeared to be anything less than a highly skilled professional who desired to give his or her students the best education possible.

Each interview began with the researcher explaining to the respondent a working definition of school climate. This helped assure a shared understanding of the term as it would be used. Questions were not given to the teachers in written form since changes might be made during the course of the interview. Questions were open ended and focused primarily on how the teacher perceives school climate and in particular the role of the principal in shaping school climate.

Respondents were asked about school climate as it impacted on them over the span of their careers, and not specifically about their present school situations. It was explained to each subject that this was to be a general study about school climate and not a study of the secondary high schools in their city. If names of schools or personnel were mentioned during the course of the interview, they would be deleted from the final report. It was further explained that the information given during the study was to be held in confidence and that the tapes would be erased following the completion of the study.

Following the completion of the interviews, the tapes were transcribed and coded according to subject areas addressed and trends which emerged. The researcher then began an intensive analysis of common themes and indicators of climate factors as perceived by teachers. When

patterns and dominant themes began to emerge, the data were analyzed and processed into the results which appear in this study (Appendix H).

#### Format of the Study

The format used in this dissertation was approved by the Graduate Faculty of Iowa State University. This format allows for a presentation of the research in manuscript form which could be submitted to professional journals for publication.

The study is divided in the following manner: The first section includes an Introduction, Methodology, and Purpose of the study. The second section has a Review of the Literature. The findings are composed into three journal articles.

Journal Article I summarizes the general findings of the research. It presents an overview of the prevalent themes which emerged: (1) the role of the principal, (2) "downtown" or outside influences, (3) parental pride and support, and (4) staff relations. Also discussed are teachers' perceptions of climate changes over the past decades.

Journal Article II examines factors which produce satisfaction or dissatisfaction in school climate. The elements of a positive climate discussed are (1) recognition, (2) interpersonal relations, and (3) achievement. Sources of dissatisfaction leading to negative climate perception were (1) interpersonal relations, (2) working conditions, and (3) administrative policy.

Journal Article III focuses on behaviors of the principal which influence school climate.

The final section of the dissertation includes a general discussion and summary of findings. Also presented are implications for the practitioner, and recommendations for further research. Appendices follow the Bibliography.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms are used numerous times during the course of this study. They are to be understood as having the meaning depicted below:

1. Climate--The beliefs, attitudes, and values held by people in a particular institution. Climate can be understood from a variety of vantage points, but for the purposes of this study it is to be understood as referring to the perceptions held by the inhabitants of the environment or institution.
2. Values--The favorable circumstances which people think ought to be.
3. Beliefs--The personal convictions that people hold regarding truth.
4. Attitudes--A person's feeling or emotion toward a particular fact or situation.
5. Perceptions--One's awareness and comprehension of an environment or situation.
6. Respondents--Any person who responded to queries presented by an investigator. In this study, the terms respondent, subject and interviewee are the same.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What follows is a review of literature relevant to school climate. First will be a discussion of several major studies which suggest a strong relationship between school climate and student achievement. Next, the importance of climate in determining school effectiveness will be discussed followed by a description of ways in which the principal and staff influence and are influenced by climate. The specific methods used to collect data in this study will be discussed in the section on the use of qualitative research in education. The penultimate section is a short description of the school system to be studied followed by a brief summary of the review of the literature.

It should be noted that to overcome problems of gender in writing and to preserve confidentiality, principals and teachers will be referred to alternating in the masculine and feminine gender.

### The Importance of School Climate and Educational Effectiveness

The concept of school climate has been examined and defined in numerous studies in areas related to educational effectiveness, school environment, and various modes of student achievement.

Several studies on school climate (Brookover et al., 1979; Sarason, 1981; Edmonds, 1982) defined climate as the atmosphere of a school building. It is the impressions, moods and feelings one experiences when walking the corridors, sitting in the classrooms, or standing on the playground.



Rutter et al. (1979) explained school climate as the product of the beliefs and values as expressed by people in a school. Kelly (1980) defined a social environment or climate as the product of the norms, beliefs and attitudes reflected by those who work within that environment.

The educational climate was defined by Keeves (1972:31) as that which gives rise "to stimuli that influence the individuals' acquisition of knowledge, development of intellectual skills and abilities and the formation of specific attitudes toward school life and school learning."

For the purpose of this study, climate will be defined as the product of shared attitudes, beliefs, and values as understood by the people in a school, integral parts of which include areas such as pride, esprit, and cooperation. Studies which have dealt with school climate sometimes use the terms "environment" or "culture"; however, for purposes of this study, they should be understood as having the same general meaning.

#### Climate and school effectiveness

Numerous studies have specified climate as an important variable in the school effectiveness equation (Rutter et al., 1979; Brookover et al., 1979; Lehming & Kane, 1981). Rutter et al. (1979), in a five-year study of the effects of school climate on student achievement, found that several climate and environmental factors affect achievement. Knight (1985) indicated the importance of further research into the interrelationships between academic performance and climate factors if

one wishes to help schools achieve the potential of their missions to educate. According to Malloy and Seldin (1983), "School climate has been identified as one of the characteristics which determine how effectively schools function."

In an analysis of climate studies, Dumaresq (1981) stated that school climate is formed by

people's norms, beliefs and attitudes which impact on the conditions, events and practices of the school environment. Climate not only concerns beliefs and expectations . . . but also how the organization, as a whole, works toward its goals--how decisions get made, problems get solved and people get rewarded or punished within the organizational structure.

Research indicates that climate is synonymous with the norms of a school. According to an ERIC Clearing House report (1984), ". . . schools are instructionally effective in large part because they are in the habit of being effective; they have developed by one means or another, a system of norms and accompanying behaviors that breed student success."

As one surveys literature on school effectiveness, it is common to find that these studies focus at least in part on the area of the impact of school climate on achievement. Climate, achievement, attendance, faculty and student morale, school pride, and parental attitudes may, in fact, be synonymous (Eicholtz, 1984).

Climate is part of the informal organization of a system, the human side, which is generated through informal communications and working arrangements. Hoy and Miskel (1987:426) explain: "[It] is a critical ingredient for explaining organizational behavior." Hoy and Miskel call

climate the "personality" of a school. They describe three conceptualizations of climate: (1) openness or the display of genuine feelings; (2) organizational health or ability to sustain trust and openness while coping with disruptive forces; and (3) pupil control be it custodial or humanistic. Climate tends to focus on shared perceptions of these behaviors.

An in-depth study of the organizational climate of schools was undertaken by Halpin and Croft (1962) which resulted in the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). This was an attempt to improve on the current methods of measuring a school's organizational climate. The dimensions measured by the OCDQ include 42 areas related to principals' and teachers' behavior. The distinctive types of climate are measured as: Open (supportive, freedom, low directiveness, high intimacy); Engaged (control, rigidity, high directiveness and restrictiveness, high intimacy and collegiality); Disengaged (highly supportive, low restrictiveness, low intimacy and uncommitted); and Closed (high restrictiveness and directiveness, low supportiveness, intimacy and non-collegial relations).

A study by McDill and Rigsby (1973:7) found that it has only been during the last fifteen years that serious attention has been directed towards the impact of educational and social climates on the academic performance of students. Despite this recent upsurge, the researchers stated, "There have been few serious attempts to identify those factors of the school environment which are related to what and how much students learn." The study of several secondary schools conducted by McDill and

Rigsby (1973) found that six climate factors had a significant effect on math scores: academic emulation, intellectualism, academic orientation, egalitarian estheticism, and scientism.

The impact of school climate pervades nearly all areas of a school. Several researchers have noted that factors related to climate may affect student attendance, academic achievement, behavior and delinquency (Edmonds, 1980; Rutter et al., 1979; Brookover et al., 1979).

Brookover et al. (1979) undertook a now well-known study of school effectiveness arguing that a school's social system affects achievement, academic self-concepts and self-reliance. They explained the social system of a school as including climate and structure. Climate as one of the major input variables influenced the students' role definitions, norms, expectations, values and beliefs. This, then, impacts on achievement and other student responses.

The study by Brookover et al. (1979) of 68 Michigan elementary schools isolated fourteen climate variables which significantly "accounted for variance in achievement beyond that accounted for by the composition variables, race and socio-economic status."

Brookover stated:

Perhaps the most important finding is, that the majority of the staff members in the higher achieving schools within each pair studied seemed to demonstrate attitudes and behaviors which were conducive to higher achievement, and the majority of the staff members in the lower achieving schools did not. . . .

Simply put, we believe that the more the teachers and administrators believe that their students, regardless of race and family background, are capable of higher achievement, and the more this belief is translated into real and observable classroom behavior, the higher the resulting mean achievement is likely to be.

The Brookover study found that climate variables explain as much variation in achievement as other input variables. This suggests that schools with similar resources can have dissimilar climates and different levels of achievement. A similar conclusion was reached by Edmonds (1983).

Keeves (1972) summarized the pivotal factors which comprise the educational environment. He assumed that a school's environment is related to the society in which it is set and is influenced by its location in that society. Environments also, according to Keeves, have some degree of consistency over time, may be classified in terms of observable characteristics using both qualitative and quantitative information, and contain a structure, attitudinal characteristics, and a process as determined by school personnel.

A study by Benjamin Bloom (1976) indicated that the learning environment itself exerts a strong influence on learning. Bloom (1976:9) stated:

In spite of all the evidence on the existence and stability of differences in school learning, this writer is convinced that much of the variation is attributable to the environmental conditions in both the home and the school. Much of individual differences in school learning may be regarded as man made and accidental rather than as fixed in the individual at the time of conception.

Bloom surveyed evidence from longitudinal studies of environmental conditions on the development of various characteristics and concluded that "the environment is a determiner of the extent and kind of change taking place in a particular characteristic" (1976:209).

Stewart (1978) related teachers' perceptions of climate to student

climate and achievement. Schools which were perceived as having more positive climates had students who demonstrated higher scores on standardized tests.

An ERIC Clearinghouse (1984) report on educational management stated that "the climate of high expectations is so pervasive in effective schools that it is scarcely noticed by the schools' staff and students" (p. 3). The report concluded that school effectiveness is a force of habit. The norms and behaviors which constantly reproduce themselves can be changed for the better, and the principal is the key person who can alter norms and create a climate conducive to school success.

Rutter et al. (1979) conducted a three-year study of twelve secondary schools surveying the achievement of 2700 pupils in London. They reported that differences in school climate have effects on achievement and behavior which are independent of a student's intelligence or home environment. School climate may raise the standards of behavior among all students in a school, but it does not lower variations among students in the same school.

Rutter's study showed that first teachers convey their expectations to students in how they themselves behave (e.g., punctuality, time on task). Second, shared norms in a school are closely related to better behavior and test scores. The standards of punishment, for example, are regarded as fair and consistent. Third, much feedback is provided to the students in forms other than formal grades.

The findings of the Rutter study indicated that the school staff can develop a positive climate whereby norms and values are formal and in

develop a positive climate whereby norms and values are formal and in turn influence achievement. Important climate factors which affect student achievement included academic emphasis, rewards and praise, discipline, staff organization and student/teacher interaction outside of class. The study also indicated that the principal's ability to build a positive climate may actually determine the difference between schools.

Studies of effective schools as summarized by Dumaresq (1981) indicated that positive school climate is characterized by: the ways that schools encourage attendance, commitment and progress, the focus on goals and relationships, a belief that schools can make a difference for the learners (emphasis by the author), assertive leadership and high teacher expectations, and a problem solving attitude within the school.

The climate of a school is also affected by the home and community. "The home and the school are partners in establishing the 'climate' of expectations that a youngster must confront" (Kelley, 1980:63).

This study focuses on various factors which influence school climate with particular attention given to the role of the principal.

#### The principal as an influential factor

Following is a review of literature concerning the principal and school climate.

Numerous studies indicated that the principal's leadership is an important factor in improving school climate as it relates to achievement

(Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Lezotte, 1980). The emphasis on the importance of the principal is a recurring theme in effective schools research. The principal has been shown to affect teachers' job satisfaction, community perceptions and students' attitudes. In 1977, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) devoted a volume to the topic of effective principals. They concluded that good principals demonstrate personal characteristics which prepare them for the job. They put in long hours, maintain high visibility and serve as influential leaders (McAndrew, 1981).

The principal plays a pivotal role in the implementation of change within a school. According to Sarason (1971:207), life in a school and the quality of its culture is in large part a function of the school's principal.

A report by Kelley (1980:36) indicated that leadership for improvement in schools lies primarily with the principal. The principal can impact on three areas of climate which may be seen as focal points for improvement. They are: the climate among faculty, climate as experienced by students, and climate of interaction between the school and community, family and social groups.

Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982) stated that the managerial behavior of principals is very important to school effectiveness. They explain that no particular style of management is appropriate for all schools. The report stated that, "Work in this direction which helps identify school-level factors which the principal can manipulate to improve school climate will add to the understanding of the principals'



role in improving student learning" (p. 49).

A study by Wiggins (1972) investigated the behavior of principals as they relate to school climate. The study using the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ), as developed by Halpin and Croft as well as other tools and procedures, found a significant relationship between the principals' interpersonal orientation and school climate.

Wiggins (1972:103) stated, "As the length of the principal's incumbency increased, the level of significance of the relationship between his behavioral characteristics and school climate increased." The author found that the stability of the climate had an effect of socializing the principal's behavior. Wiggins (1972) argued that over time schools tend to develop a stable organizational climate. New principals tend to adapt themselves to the school climate, and it is the school district which feels the impact of the new principal.

The principal appears to play a pivotal role in the school climate equation. One may wonder exactly how aware the principal can be as to how the myriad of actions he or she performs impact on climate. The magnitude and complexity of the principal's role in schools seems to have escalated at a nearly unmanageable rate.

A random survey of 1600 principals (McLeary & Thompson, 1979) found that ". . . the high school of today is larger, more complex, more fraught with problems and conflict--and much more demanding of administrators--than in the past" (p. 15).

A study of eight principals by Blumberg and Greenfield (1980:16) explored the "emotional toxicity" of the work place, or the areas of tension experienced by principals. The authors describe the principalship as a focal point for school critics and those who are bent on improving the quality of education. The authors bemoaned what the role of the principal has become: "Principals frequently are expected to be all things to all people, to do all things and to do them well. This might have been a reasonable expectation in days gone by, but it is no longer realistic given the increasing complexity of the role and its demands."

Harry Wolcott (1987), who conducted an ethnographic type account of a school principal, wrote:

Throughout my fieldwork I was struck with the number of occasions in which principals communicated to each other uncertainties about what they "should" be doing and what is their "real" role. To any outsider, whether teacher, pupil, parent, or even researcher, the principals I met were always ready to describe and defend the importance of the elementary school and their contribution to its mission. In their own gatherings, however, free from their usual audiences and oblivious to the observer, they probed constantly for guidelines to answer one common basic question, "What is the role of the principal?"

Authors Blumberg and Greenfield (1980:265-7) concluded that the character of the principal is a strong factor in determining the functioning of a school. They pled for further research:

The differences between principals and the consequences of these differences for principals as well as for those whom they serve through their office need to be more completely understood . . . whatever the catalyst of means, additional research on the principalship is needed, particularly at the middle and high school levels.

### Teachers and school climate

The researcher who attempts to analyze the perceptions of that multi-faceted group of people known as teachers faces a task of monumental proportions. Jackson (1971) advised, "Any attempt to describe the psychological attributes of such a large and diverse group of people as those who answer to the title 'teacher' is almost doomed to failure from the start." While keeping in mind the difficulties inherent in generalizing about this large group, the following summarizes some of the difficulties teachers experience related to school climate.

The perceptions of teachers form a significant part of the shared belief system of a school. Their thoughts and feelings resonate through and help form school climate. A study of their views, opinions, and experiences will provide the reader with insights into the primary forces by which climate is shaped and changed.

Research on the leadership skills of secondary school principals indicated that effective principals differ from less effective principals in how they interpret and implement the concept of creating a supportive environment for teachers. Effective principals allocated materials necessary to increase teaching effectiveness. They were less concerned with rocking the boat and more involved with making changes in order to support the goals and requests of teachers. According to Rutherford (1985), the leadership qualities of effective principals vary greatly in their daily behavior. Styles may include working as a team, developing camaraderie, working with individuals as needed or engineering special schedule considerations.

Teachers appear to understand the complexity of the role of the principal, yet the teachers have little opportunity to observe their daily performance. Teachers' perceptions of the principal are formed primarily through a few personal encounters (Sarason, 1971).

Current research findings on school climate such as that of Brookover indicated that the concept of climate has an important effect on student outcomes. The people who comprise the belief system and norms of a school are largely the teachers.

In his study of American high schools, Boyer (1983:154) wrote: "Whatever is wrong with America's public schools cannot be fixed without the help of those teachers already in the classrooms. . . . Teachers must be viewed as part of the solution, not the problem."

Lightfoot (1983), in an interview study of six "good" high schools, summarized the critical role of teacher in determining the effectiveness of educational programs:

In all of these schools, therefore, teachers are seen as the central actors in the educational process. Their satisfaction is critical to the tone and smooth functioning of the school. . . .

Good and Brophy (1985) stated:

Although there have been fruitful attempts to measure general reactions of teacher and students to school (e.g., Brookover et al., 1979), future research needs to focus more closely on participants' reaction to specific events, especially events believed to be central to school effectiveness.

It is a specific goal of this study to further such research.

### The Use of Qualitative Research in Education

The phrase "qualitative research" has been associated with other terms such as field research, naturalistic, ethnographic, symbolic interactivist, case study, phenomenological, the Chicago School, interpretive and descriptive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982:3). Authors Bogdan and Biklen outlined a history of social investigation, ethnographic studies, social anthropology and qualitative research on their book, Qualitative Research in Education (1982). They also described the growth of qualitative literature as it gained prominence in quantitative circles (p. 21).

Anthropological research into education is a form of qualitative analysis which paralleled other forms of qualitative research in schools. By the mid 1960s, the federal government began to encourage anthropological research into American schools (Eddy, 1985). Interest in qualitative analysis in education grew in the 1970s as researchers realized that qualitative research was not merely a descriptive undertaking.

The case study approach, interviews and participant observation are research instruments which have been used by authors of many scholarly, popular, and highly influential books and articles of the past quarter century. In their best-selling book In Search of Excellence, Peters and Waterman (1982) used interviews and case studies to describe the attributes which led to the fantastic success stories of some of America's top performing companies. Authors Margaret Mead and Studs Terkel have made liberal use of qualitative research using interviews and

personal testimony to contribute to a growing body of study of social groups.

A well-known and now classic qualitative and ethnographic study of a school principal was undertaken by Wolcott (1973). Through lengthy observations and interviews, the author created an account of the life of a school principal, depicting a graphic and profound characterization for the reader. This two-year study through its daily descriptions of the work life of a principal stands as a pioneering work in the field of qualitative studies in education. It holds great value for education practitioners due to the wider implications of this close scrutiny of one principalship. Some view the Wolcott book as a landmark in using ethnographic methods to study the culture and behavior of school personnel.

James Spradley, author of The Ethnographic Interview (1979), explained that qualitative research lends itself well to using the interview as a source of data where questions have been determined; yet allowances are made for topics to be generated during the course of the interview. The purpose of interviewing is to yield a cultural description as perceived by informants. Spradley (1979:25) wrote, "People everywhere learn this culture by observing other people, listening to them, and then making inferences. The ethnographer employs this same process of going beyond what is seen and heard to infer what people know" (italics in original). He continued, "An ethnographer seeks out ordinary people with ordinary knowledge and builds on their common experience" (italics in original).

In an analysis of varieties of qualitative research in education, Firestone and Dawson (1981) commented on the growing acceptance of qualitative methods as witnessed in their increased appearance in articles, books and papers. There remains, however, confusion regarding terms such as ethnography, field methods, case studies, qualitative methods and naturalistic inquiry. The authors explained that qualitative inquiry is derived primarily through observation and interviewing. Qualitative researchers use themselves as instruments of observation and interpretation who communicate the data to others "in the form of words rather than numbers" (p. 6).

In a qualitative study, the researcher is one of the data gathering tools used. Through direct observation and interaction, a subjective and personal element is necessarily involved with the study. According to Dobbert (1982:6):

Another reason that anthropologists have for utilizing themselves as influence of research is that human beings in everyday life are not objective. They act on the basis of their social positions, values, and preferences. One cannot understand subjective beings by means of detached, objective observations.

The data collected in a qualitative study are richly descriptive, addressing the dynamics of process. Data collected are often analyzed indirectly, meaning that data are first collected and relevant questions and hypotheses are generated afterwards. Hypotheses generated by the study may then be used for further testing, observation or quantitative research.

A qualitative study often draws on the skills of several research areas. When discussing school culture, Donald Willover (1984) stated

that the organizational culture of a school can promote the purpose of the organization and blend sociological and anthropological insights with philosophical concepts of purpose. A qualitative or ethnographic study of education may be particularly appropriate. According to Wolcott, the existing literature is prescriptive rather than descriptive. The available literature tells more about what schools should be than what actually goes on (Spindler, 1987:246).

#### Public secondary schools in a midwestern city

The subjects of this study were teachers employed in public secondary schools in a midwestern city. The city contains several colleges and universities as well as business and trade schools.

Average class size for the secondary schools is approximately 25 students. All participating schools are accredited by the appropriate Association of Schools and Colleges. All teachers except those teaching vocational subjects hold a bachelor's degree and are certified by the State Department of Public Instruction.

#### Review of the Literature: A Summary

Following an examination of effective schools research and school climate, it was found that climate with its inherent ambiguity is an important factor in determining school effectiveness. Climate is formed by the attitudes, beliefs and values shared by the people in a school. Research on school climate is often found as part of studies on school effectiveness (Rutter et al., 1979; Edmonds & Frederiksen, 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; O'Reilly, 1975).



School climate results from a complex interaction of factors. School leadership plays a central role in setting a school's tone and environment (Edmonds, 1983; Brookover et al., 1979). The principal may indeed be the key factor in determining differences between schools (Rutter et al., 1979). Faculty satisfaction and cooperation, according to Rutter et al. (1979) and Edmonds (1980), are important climate factors.

Studies show that teachers who work in higher achieving schools tend to monitor student work more closely, believe their faculty plays an important role in decision making, reported a greater amount of support from principals, and were more satisfied with various aspects of their work. Teachers play an important part in the formation of a school's climate.

Today's comprehensive high schools in many ways reflect the problems and successes of the egalitarian ideals of American society. Because a great number of America's youth attend and graduate from high school, expectations and offerings on the secondary level have gone through transformations which some say have lowered the overall value of a diploma and changed the behaviors and attitudes of the student population as a whole.

There is a dearth of literature concerning the personal perceptions of teachers as they relate to a school's climate. It also appears that most studies which do address the attitudes and beliefs of teachers are quantitative in nature.

There are strengths and weaknesses in the application of qualitative

analysis in a research setting. The use of qualitative or ethnographic research in education is growing in volume, both for academic and popular use. "

#### A Final Note

A qualitative study utilizing the interview method of working class families was undertaken by Lillian Rubin (1976). In the introduction, Rubin wrote:

The small sample not randomly chosen makes generalizations suspect. The anecdotal presentation raises the questions of representativeness in the use of the data. The only answer to these criticisms lies in the quality of the work itself--in its ability to persuade by appealing to a level of "knowing" that exists in all of us but is not very often tapped; in its ability--to borrow a phrase from psychology--to generate an "aha experience."

It was the goal of this study to glean from among layers of language expectations, traditions, thoughts, and impressions some of these "aha" truths about the school climate as they relate to teachers' perceptions. This study will also add to the expanding body of qualitative educational research.

## JOURNAL ARTICLE I. GENERAL FINDINGS ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

A significant body of literature links school climate with student achievement (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston & Smith, 1979; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer & Wisenbaker, 1979). While "school climate" has been associated with terms such as culture, environment, ethos, and atmosphere, it seems more productive to define it explicitly--"the shared attitudes, beliefs, and values of the people in a school." These include pride, esprit and cooperation.

While researchers continue to explore the impact climate has on achievement, a paucity of literature exists on how climate develops. The influence of the principal and other seemingly important factors remain a mystery. We know that climate makes a difference, but we know little about what makes a difference in climate. Researchers continue to measure climate. Yet, while surveys are useful in measurement, they provide little insight into how climate is developed.

The subject begs for further examination. How do people influence climate? Do actions taken by the principal help create a positive or negative climate? How do staff relations impact on climate? What outside influences affect the climate of a school? What factors are associated with climate satisfaction? These are some of the issues which must be explored to better understand school climate.

Only when one understands the perceptions of the professionals who are in school on a daily basis will the mysteries of climate unfold. Who, after all understands climate development better than those who

labor in the educational vineyard on a daily basis, teachers? Their perceptions are, in essence, the vital element in understanding climate.

In an effort to examine the perceptions of teachers, a qualitative research model consisting primarily of personal interviews was used. Data were collected from 32 "typical" high school teachers randomly selected from 200 volunteers employed in a midwestern public school system during the second semester of the 1986-87 academic year.

Each teacher had a minimum of ten years teaching experience and most had taught in at least two high schools. The six participating high schools ranged from "inner city" schools to schools from a higher socioeconomic area. The interviews were designed to elicit opinions regarding climate development and in particular the role of the principal in that process.

Conclusions drawn from the interviews were based on careful examination of dominant themes and the particularly poignant or revealing expression of a few which seem to represent the views of many. The names of all schools, subjects of instruction and people referred to during the interview have been changed. The principals and teachers are alternately referred to as "he" or "she" to protect anonymity and to avoid problems of gender reference.

Four dominant themes or factors emerged as the prime forces influencing school climate: (a) the principal, (b) staff relations, (c) "downtown" or outside influences, and (d) parental pride and support. Also discussed in this general summary are teacher's perceptions of climate change over the past decade. The importance of the principal was

reported to be the most significant single factor and is presented first.

### The Principal

The principal was mentioned with near unanimity as the prime force which shapes a school's climate. Actions of the principal apparently determine whether a teacher views the school in a positive or negative light. . .

The comments of this teacher typified the views of many as to how the principal makes the difference:

I think the principal impacts on the climate of the school the same way the captain impacts on the climate of a ship. Her actions are magnified as they go down the structure. I think that even though the principal doesn't teach a class, that the principal is the most important person in the school. There is just no question in my mind about that, and probably more so as the principal is perceived by the staff. Teachers today really need a lot of help. They need support. They need to be told that and told in many ways that the job they are doing is important, that it is meaningful. This is the role the principal plays.

Providing help seems to be an important role of the principal.

Teachers want an "open door" and someone to act as sounding board, mediator or counselor. Teachers want to know that there is someone to turn to when they need advice, bounce some ideas, or just let their hair down. The comments of two teachers were revealing:

With this principal you can go in any time you wanted to with a problem. He always had time for you. It's kind of like your kids, you always have time for your kids. If they have a problem you stop what you are doing and help them solve their problems. . . . You never felt like you were ever intruding upon his privacy or he had more important things to do.

A principal can serve as a sounding board for the staff so that he can talk to the different departments and get a feel for what is going on. A principal serves as everything from a father/confessor to a mediator to a boss.

Support is an important although elusive entity. Support means recognition, back up and appreciation. Many teachers, in their eyes go beyond what is expected. They appreciate being noticed. When pinpointing what causes a positive school climate, several teachers credited recognition from their principal:

The principal was just one of those rare people that made you feel like everything you did was important and that you were appreciated for what you did. A lot of times teachers go beyond their "jobs," and I feel like they need to be told that they are appreciated. It was so positive in this school that it was the reason I went back to graduate school and got my Master's degree.

Teachers also need to be "backed up" when the going gets rough. It may tip the "trust scale" toward the principal. The litmus test apparently comes when a teacher is "attacked" by a parent or someone else from outside the school. This comment sums up their views:

Teachers need to know that when the going gets really tough, the administrator will back them up. The key to having a successful school is having administration that will back teachers up, so there is no doubt in your mind.

Policy and rule enforcement are important. Rules should be followed by all, regardless of status. Inconsistent enforcement of rules tests the patience of teachers and may damage climate:

If there is a policy, the policy should be for everyone. There shouldn't be certain students that get around the policy because of their position or their parent's position in the community.

Definitely it causes a negative response with the faculty when certain rules are bent or changed like where kids can take a class when they are not supposed to or change for one reason or another. That definitely causes a resentment with the faculty.

Candor, somewhat surprisingly, is very important to teachers. Two teachers expressed the sentiment of many:

I think that if a teacher is doing wrong, he should be told and not just let it slide. . . . If a teacher makes a mistake, it should be said right there and then that this isn't right; you should not do this.

I feel that if a teacher is not doing his job, he should be aware in some way. Some will come right out and say, "You are doing wrong"; some of them will try to put pressure on you, give you the duties that you really don't desire like watching the front hall or some silly thing like that. But a principal should come right down and tell you.

Several teachers expressed disdain for the "silk glove" approach:

There are times that I have dealt with principals who are so diplomatic that I had no idea what they said when they got done.

Teachers place a premium on being treated with respect and dignity.

A teacher explained how prior to the opening of school the staff received a letter which set a negative tone for the year. She contrasted this with what happened in another school.

There were a number of new staff members one year and the letter that we received was simply, "School will start such and such a time," essentially "be there." At another high school, some of the teachers that had transferred got this really cordial letter with greetings and so forth from the principal. They had class lists a few days before school actually started with words of welcome and that sort of thing.

What do teachers want from their principal? Teachers look for support, both personal and professional. They want a principal who cares enough to listen patiently, applies rules fairly, and communicates honestly and candidly with his staff, even when communication is critical. The extent to which the principal does the aforementioned is strongly associated with the school's climate.

### Staff Relations

Working relationships are powerful factors influencing school climate. Teachers said that collegial support, friendship and positive group chemistry helped foster high levels of professional commitment and a positive climate. Several teachers recalled how unique staff relations impacted on climate:

This was a very unique group of people and it was one of the best parts of my life. We were starting some new programs that worked very successfully and that was a real positive feeling for teachers. I felt like I was always at home. I don't think I'll ever have that experience again. I never compare any other building I have been in to that experience, never.

Several teachers experienced a blending of professional support with friendship. This was expressed poignantly by one woman who recalled how it impacted on climate:

We worked hard together; we played hard together. There was an instance where one of the teachers had a bat in her house. She called one of the other teachers during the night, and he came over and got the bat out for her. That was the type of atmosphere and camaraderie we had. It was a wonderful atmosphere in which to work. We were very supportive of one another. We shared our personal lives, wept together, and laughed together. I had a teenage son who was having all sorts of fits, and the younger teachers supported me and tried to help me see my son's side of things. I had not been in an atmosphere like that before or after. It's been closed 10 years and we still get together for parties and keep track of each other.

How do these positive relationships develop? They are fostered through personal chemistry, a mutual exchange of skills and a willingness to help one another. A shop teacher explained:

It builds a rapport when we can trade off work. Like the auto mechanic will repair my car, while I may strip off a piece of furniture for him. If the administrator or secretary asks me to refurbish something, I would be glad to do it. I've never worked in a place where they were as friendly as they are in this place.



Others pointed to cooperative planning and mutual goal setting:

The staff had done a lot of work together, cooperative planning, and spent a lot of time together. We had the same goals because we hammered them out together. I think we really felt we knew what we wanted to do and all of us were really trying to do that.

Key leaders appear to have a strong impact on the thoughts and opinions of much of the staff. Numerous teachers indicated that the opinions of a small cadre of staff members strongly affected school climate:

There are some key people here that influence the climate. I don't think they even know that they are that influential around here. They just have natural leadership qualities and they are very well liked. They say if we are going to stand for something, and we stand for it. If they tend to lay back, then the whole faculty will lay back.

Another teacher agreed:

I think within this building there are just some persons who are naturally more assertive, more verbal and take on leadership roles in an informal way. We have department chairpersons who supposedly are the ones who provide some guidance and leadership. But in addition to that, there are people who assume leadership roles. . . . Sometimes the same person will appear as the leader in every situation.

While staff cohesiveness can positively influence a school's climate, cliques can have a negative impact. Several teachers recalled some cliques vividly:

If you were a member of that particular group, the camaraderie kept you afloat. If you weren't a member of the group, you didn't make it. Some teachers did not like our attitude, and they did not become a working member of the group. I saw a number of them drop out before the end of the year.

We had a lounge crowd; they were good teachers but rowdy and vocal. Some people complained about this, so we had to have a human relations type develop a better climate and so forth. It was a special group. They would cut names off the coffee list that they didn't want in here any longer, and put it in their box. It was a

very strong group, no doubt about that. As a result, we had to leave. It wasn't a very good time for some people who weren't part of it.

It helps to know not only who shapes climate, but where it happens.

The lounge can be a key area in both a positive and negative way.

The teacher's lounge can pretty much determine a lot of school climate. A lot of the philosophies that come out of the faculty come out of the teacher's lounge before or after school.

Lounge conversations can even affect policy.

I think it provides an opportunity to get some answers to what is happening within the building; it also gives an opportunity for people to give a little bit of input into some procedures and policies. It could be simply a conversation between two colleagues and eventually that gets back to administration.

Some avoid the lounge as they perceived it to be a place which can foster negative feelings.

The year that the morale of the staff was down, I didn't even want to go to the teacher's lounge any more because it was just real negative.

Teachers also see it as a place to practice sexism which negatively affects climate.

It made a lot of the women very mad, especially to walk in and to see this large table with swivel chairs and the women's lounge had this little room off to the side somewhere. But I had already heard beforehand that this would be the case--that this was a sexist principal and there were women that were angry that they were excluded from the main faculty and things like that.

Staff relations including support, friendship and personal chemistry exert a powerful influence on climate. A few key leaders may emerge as climate shapers. Apparently, staff interactions are nearly as important as the principal in shaping school climate.

### "Downtown"

School climate is affected by forces outside its walls. Those forces, commonly thought of as the bureaucracy in large school systems, were labeled "downtown." Teachers tended to view central administration, the School Board, influential parents or even state politicians in the same light, referring to them as "those downtown types," somewhat amorphous intruders complicating their lives and interfering with their school. A typical comment was:

So much of how we feel about ourselves, the anxieties we may have, the frustrations we may have come out of the bureaucracies that exist downtown. Testing and evaluation, for instance, have been a real problem area for teachers to work through. That has done more to create a negative climate on the part of the teachers than the principal has. He's really been superseded in that.

Several teachers attributed a negative influence on climate to the legislature and School Board.

School climate is determined in the legislature as they bat us around with the raises. The climate is also determined by the Board of Education messing around with seven-period days and adding to the contract year. It's just so many different messages that I think it would be very difficult to say that it is the principal alone who controls the climate.

Others saw the meddling of influential parents in administration as having a deleterious impact on climate. One teacher summed this up:

It's intimidating to know that there are powerful downtown types whose kids are here, who, if unhappy with the circumstances, can twist arms with great effectiveness. That's an intimidating thing, and as a result I think as years have gone by some teachers have left because they are somewhat uncomfortable in dealing with that power. As a result, then, a cooperative, cohesive kind of environment isn't what happens.

Numerous respondents noted that the principal can be part of the problem:

My perception is that the principal is now part of that downtown bureaucracy and there is no real buffer between what many of us perceive to be the bureaucracy downtown and the school building.

Most see their principal as somewhat caught in a vice. The comment below describes the vice:

If the principals are worried about how they are doing their jobs, and how the downtown offices are going to view "their school," they tend to be very uptight. Then that trickles down to the teachers who become uptight and that trickles down to the students. I've been in two schools where we have done climate studies and that has shown up in both cases. Actually, you can take it all the way to the superintendent because if the supervisors and the people downtown are uptight, it is because of the superintendent. So, it actually is a very broad based kind of effect.

Teachers occasionally attend workshops or other professional growth sessions arranged by their principal in cooperation with central administration. Unfortunately, as a result of preexisting negative perceptions, the beneficial aspects of the workshop may be lost.

Sometimes we gripe about it. We say, "Oh, geez. We are going to have another one of those pep talks. We are going to bring in some guy from the university down here who is going to tell us about having a positive attitude or something." Well, we need it, but we don't want to admit it.

This group of outsiders, the School Board, central administration, and the legislature comprise a large slow moving target for teachers. Names of people in this force remain faceless, but their impact is sorely felt. Teachers apparently feel that their principal is caught in the middle, and while political survival may be important to their administrators, teachers find that they are the ones bearing the brunt of political decisions.

### School Pride and Support

How much support do parents contribute? Are parents proud of their schools? Parental support was seen as an important part in the school's climate.

One teacher recalled with pride how her school's alumni influenced climate.

We have alumni who have had children, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents attend our high school. One died and left \$200,000 to our high alumni association to give scholarships to students here. Another left over \$100,000 and maybe 20-25 scholarships are given each year to students. They feel this--that feeling is here that you don't have at the other schools.

Teachers who had taught in small schools almost invariably recalled significant parental involvement. Two teachers described their experiences:

In the smaller school, the school was and is the city. Everything revolved around the school. Parents had more interest in keeping it up. While I was there, they built a new school and the Jaycees provided the playground equipment. Maybe you get that a little bit in the different sections of this city, but this was a whole little town that rallied around that little school.

If something was going on that parents felt very strongly against, they voiced it by being at school, by coming to meetings, or at school board meetings. Our school board meetings were very different from other ones I've heard of. I've been to one here, but in Texas sometimes there would be as many as 150-200 people there. I think parents communicated by voicing their opinions. They were very well received, whether it was negative or positive. The district did listen a lot to the community.

Parental expectations are part of the foundation of student achievement. Several teachers mentioned the link between parental support and student performance:

I think that if we were to just magically flip flop the teachers from here to West Town and from there over to here, the same kind of

high expectations the teachers have here would fall over there. It reflects an attitude that in some communities it's important to do well, whereas in other communities it's just get your diploma and get on with life. The teachers discovered that some communities will support their demands for good hard work instead of getting constantly slammed in the face by kids or parents who don't care.

Teachers often feel powerless in the face of parental apathy. Lack of parental concern was described as a potent climate factor:

I think that the staff, faculty, and school can only do so much. There has to be support and encouragement from the community and particularly from the parents before there can really be excellence achieved. It's a rare student who's going to be able to really achieve excellence simply through the efforts and encouragement of the school.

When student achievement is not a parental priority, teachers sensed it and expressed frustration. One teacher expressed the views of others as she recalled:

We teachers can't insist that these children read at home because parents have things for them to do. We've had parents jerk their kids out of school because they have to babysit while the parents go shopping.

Parental subversion of rules may create the very climate which parents later complain about.

Oddly enough, large numbers of our community here are not happy with what they perceive as a lack of respect for authority, lack of order and discipline. Yet, I think they are getting pretty much what they want. There are many instances where they abuse their authority as parents. Parents take kids out of class for vacations all the time; they don't even bat an eye. All kinds of things indicate that this is the kind of school they want. If a principal were to say "I don't think we are going to tolerate that," we would have a tough time because phone calls from downtown come back out here.

Numerous teachers felt that their salaries were a reflection of low parental support for education and teachers. This was thought to affect school climate. One teacher was very definite:

I think it is part of that package about lack of respect for schools, the fact that many of us have post graduate work, we've taught for 17 or 20 years, and we're not making what some of our students who graduate and take up a trade make in two years! That is a fact. We certainly aren't making what kids right out of college who go into business are making by their first or second year. Some of these kids sign on with a company at \$22,000-\$26,000. It has taken me 17 years and post graduate work to get to that. I think it is very definitely a factor that we are not really viewed as professional people, and the salary is just one more stinger to emphasize that point.

Another teacher told a poignantly amusing anecdote about one colleague's nonverbal expression of a similar opinion:

One of my sons has a teacher who every pay day wears a Mickey Mouse shirt. He's told me that's why he wears it, because it is pay day and that's what he feels his pay is--it's Mickey Mouse pay. He said he only tells that to parents who are teachers, but the rest of the kids begin to catch on.

Teachers did not see eye to eye on salaries. For some, teaching is a "calling" and pay a peripheral issue. Two teachers clearly expressed this view:

I think teaching is a true profession and our pay doesn't matter to me. In business I made a great deal more money than I do now, but I wasn't happy. If teachers want to make money, they should be in business.

I'm always surprised that I get paid for doing something I truly enjoy so much. I've always felt that way. I'd rather see more money coming into the school room than into my pocket. The people that enjoy teaching school are going to be willing to sacrifice some money, and the people who think money is more important, they are going to be out in the business world.

There are many ways through which parents exhibit pride and support their school. Involvement with educational matters may range from supporting educational goals to involvement on a policy or legislative level. Teachers are sensitive to parental support and see this as part of the school climate picture.

### Changes Over the Past Decade

Have schools changed over the past decade or two? How is climate different from what it was in 1980 or even 1970? Teachers had strong but divided opinions on this. Some saw climate as more positive than a decade ago. The majority, however, said that students are more apathetic than those of a decade ago and that climate has suffered:

The kids just don't seem to care. I've been here long enough that I have had fathers and sons as students, and I've gotten a lot more out of the fathers. I don't know if it is television or drugs or what. There has been an increase of the student saying, "I don't care."

Numerous veteran teachers bemoaned the decline in student motivation. One teacher summed up the views of many:

The attitudes of the kids have changed tremendously. I don't know if it is because of exposure to TV and so on, about how we are supposedly doing such a bad job. Kids just are really hard to motivate nowadays. A lot of kids are taking classes because it's required to graduate. All they care about is getting through and nothing more. For kids, it doesn't seem to be fun to come to school. They would rather do anything else but come here. It's really discouraging because throughout most of my career I really enjoyed it; I loved teaching; I loved working with kids.

Changes in society are reflected in classrooms. Teachers often pointed to parental work patterns, economic shifts, and parental supervision of their children as impacting on student behavior and school climate. One symptom of this problem is parental sanctioning of students taking evening jobs:

I had one student come to me who had worked 20 hours over the weekend, and he was like a zombie. He is a senior and he's been kicked out of his house. He is trying to keep an apartment going, a cheap one I'm sure, and he has a car. I had a girl who said she worked 12 hours one day, and six hours the next day. There are kids who come and say they worked 'til midnight, or they closed some place at like 10:00 or 11:00 at night. For some students, working



is a matter of survival; for some, it's a matter of buying all their own clothes, and for some, their parents don't have that much money. You have to sympathize with them, but what do you do in that situation?

Students apparently develop less skills at home which have spin-off in the classroom. Teachers indicated that this makes a difference. This opinion was expressed numerous times, in particular from home economics and industrial arts teachers:

I noticed that as far as these shops are concerned, that kids today don't have a garage at home or some place to work in. I feel sorry for them in that they haven't had an experience in doing some type of mechanical work in their younger years. This hurts them today. If the kid intends on getting into this mechanical type work, he is really held back, for example, by not being able to tear his bicycle apart and put it back together.

Several teachers resented the increased demands which society now imposes on teachers. Teachers see this as another example of parents saying, "We can't do it, so give it to the teachers."

I think teachers have become more irritated and angry at what all is expected of them. The general public seems to say, "Well, I don't have time to do that, so it should be done in the schools."

Not all teachers perceived a negative shift in school climate. Several teachers took just the opposite point of view. They saw a change in student attitude but towards the positive:

It seems like now the kids are getting more involved in things. Back then they wouldn't go out for speech or drama. It was hard getting involved in school activities, and I think that's important for kids. Then, starting about ten years ago, kids started getting back and enjoying themselves. You're still going to have the kids that are potential drop-outs which you always have and the kids that hang out on the curb and smoke (which you probably saw as you came in), but there are less of those and more that are getting involved in school activities. I see a trend to the positive.

Teachers were not in agreement concerning climate development over

the past decade. The majority of those who perceived changes noted decreased parental concern for student achievement and less involvement from parents at home. Several teachers, on the other hand, felt that school climate has improved due to more positive student attitudes. Complex and dynamic societal changes are often felt first in the schools. Dealing with these "new realities" becomes a responsibility of the teacher.

#### Final Thoughts

It is difficult to quantify the elements which comprise that elusive element, school climate. Teachers, however, seem to have a common understanding of what school climate is and strong feelings as to what influences it.

The principal appears to have the most powerful influence on climate. Teachers look for personal as well as professional support from the principal. They want candid communication, fair enforcement of rules, and a sense that the principal cares. When they get that, they say, the climate is more positive.

Teachers indicated that outside forces can exert a negative influence on climate. Edicts from the School Board, legislature or central administrative offices were neither received nor implemented with enthusiasm. Principals are often viewed by teachers as pawns in political maneuvers. "Downtown types" should be sensitive to the impact which their political decisions have on teachers and on the climate.

Parental support for school policies and student performance are pivotal elements. When parents demonstrate care and concern for education, it has a positive impact on climate. Teachers saw parental care and support for education demonstrated through supervision of their children after school, following school policies, and political advocacy. Many teachers also view their salaries as a barometer of the level of care parents show for education.

Staff relations are important. When teachers develop close working relationships or perhaps even friendship, a bond forms which may strongly impact on climate. A few key staff members often step forward and exert influence on the opinions of others. Staff relations have the potential to create an exceptionally positive climate as well as one of mistrust. It is clearly a powerful climate factor.

How has climate changed over the past decade? While there was no unanimity, teachers seemed to feel that students and parents are more apathetic than ten or twenty years ago. It appears that parents have relinquished to schools much of the education and support which homes once provided. A strong minority of the teachers, however, indicated higher student involvement and a more positive climate than a decade ago.

A number of factors apparently influence climate. Given the importance of school climate in student achievement, it seems that school boards, central office administrators, parents, teachers, principals and students would benefit greatly from understanding the factors which make a difference in climate. The more information they get, the better

chance we have in improving school climate and enhancing student achievement.

JOURNAL ARTICLE II. CLIMATE SATISFIERS AND DISSATISFIERS--  
WHAT TEACHERS WANT IN SCHOOL CLIMATE

Literature on school effectiveness as well as corporate success often indicates that a positive climate is found in high achieving institutions. Peters and Waterman (1982) in their research of over 60 successful companies found that shared norms and expectations led to high performance in the corporate world. Numerous studies on school effectiveness have indicated that climate is a key variable in determining student achievement (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston & Smith, 1979; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer & Wisenbaker, 1979).

Frederick Herzberg (1959) developed a now widely accepted theory explaining factors which cause job satisfaction and others which cause dissatisfaction among workers. The study found that certain factors called "satisfiers" increase job satisfaction. "Satisfiers" are achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility and advancement. Absence of these factors does not necessarily cause job dissatisfaction. Job "dissatisfiers," factors which produce dissatisfaction, are interpersonal relations, supervision, administration, working conditions and personal life.

Thomas Sergiovanni (1967) paralleled the Herzberg study using teachers as subjects. This study supported the assumption that certain factors are associated with job satisfaction, while others are associated with job dissatisfaction. Factors strongly associated with teacher job satisfaction were achievement, recognition and the work itself. Factors

which, if negative, had a significant impact on dissatisfaction were interpersonal relations, supervision, school policies and relations with students (Hoy & Miskel, 1987). The goal of the present study was to determine those factors which teachers closely associate with school climate satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

This study applied qualitative research methods in order to peel back the layers of information which shroud the issue by examining teachers' perceptions of climate. What specifically are the elements which impact on climate satisfaction and dissatisfaction? Are there specific actions taken by the principal or others which create a positive or negative climate? What makes a good day for teachers? These are some of the questions this study addressed.

The need to explore these issues led to approximately 50 hours of on-site personal interviews with 32 high school teachers evenly distributed between six public high schools in a midwestern city. Research data were collected during the second half of the 1986-87 school year. Teachers were randomly selected from 200 volunteers. Each teacher had a minimum of 10 years classroom teaching experience.

Following the completion of data collection, the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. In order to protect the anonymity of the teacher, references to actual individuals have been changed or deleted. To avoid problems of gender reference and to protect anonymity, the principal and teachers will be referred to alternately as "he" or "she."

This article presents aspects of climate which teachers typically

indicated enhanced climate or detracted from the climate.

#### Elements of a Positive Climate--Satisfiers

Teachers reported numerous factors which were closely related to a positive climate in their schools. These factors fell into three categories: (1) recognition, (2) positive interpersonal relations, and (3) achievement. Sources of negative climate were (1) negative interpersonal relations, and (2) administrative policy. Climate satisfiers will be discussed first.

#### Recognition

What the principal does strongly influences climate. One behavior which was often cited as particularly powerful was when teachers were recognized by their principal. In explaining this quality, one teacher's enthusiasm spoke for many:

He was just one of those rare people that made you feel like everything you did was important and that you were appreciated for what you did. A lot of times teachers go beyond their "jobs," and I feel like they need to be told that they are appreciated. It was so positive in this school that it was the reason I went back to graduate school and got my Master's degree.

Numerous teachers mentioned praise as an important part of climate.

Praise may be given privately or in a group.

Our principal uses his faculty meetings a lot of times when he lets us know the good things that we've done and the positive things that are going on. He tries to keep it real upbeat. Last year he picked seven or 10 teachers that got certificates for outstanding contribution in and out of the classroom. Not only teachers, custodians, clerical staff, and they certainly need the boost as much as any of us do.

Recognition from students can be an immensely rewarding source of

satisfaction for teachers. One teacher vividly recalled the effect:

When a kid comes back a few years later and thanks me for helping, not just on football but helping him to grow, cope with society, or that he came to the office with a problem and we talked it out--I really feel good about that. I know teachers had that same thing where a student comes back and thanks them for being a little tougher on them or made them do something. That's the reinforcement that makes you feel good as a teacher.

As teachers recalled a time when they had experienced a positive climate, they often remembered having been recognized by their principal for a job well done. This along with recognition from students were potent "satisfiers."

### Interpersonal relations

Perhaps the most powerful factor associated with a positive climate was interpersonal relations. Teachers attributed a positive climate to their relations with their principal, peers, and students.

Relationship with the principal While teachers have little daily contact with their principal, their relationship is often the yardstick from which climate is measured. Teachers look for a principal who will treat them as an individual:

The principal knew all the faculty personally. He would greet them in the halls and would know just a little bit about their outside life besides that they taught English. He was accessible, maybe stopped into your room, not just for evaluation, but to know who was there. He'd always smile, always be happy, wouldn't interrupt the teaching. He might just stand by the door, smile and nod. And maybe before school when you walk through the office he would just ask if everything was going okay. It was more, "Can I help you?" I guess body language had a great deal to do with it.

The principal should be available and interested in a variety of matters:



In this case, this administrator always seemed to be available and interested and would initiate conversations about things that were not problems. He would initiate conversations about individual students, about curriculum projects, or about almost anything, politics, whatever.

Teachers want a principal who cares. Care should be shown to a teacher during "losing years" as well as when things are going well. At times instead of complete candor, teachers need assurance. Timing appears to be the key when delivering criticism:

I've had a few losing seasons too. He'd pat me on the back, write me a letter, see me in the hall more than usual and give some positive reinforcement. I'm sure he does this in other classes. If someone is having a problem in English or Math, then maybe he goes in and gives them a little assurance that they're doing a good job and pats them on the back. I don't know how other principals do, but ours does a nice job of that.

Another teacher emphasized this point:

Jim is the type of person who will let you develop to your very utmost potential because he allows you freedom to use your creativity. If you stumble and fall, he always picks you up and allows you to continue and try again. He doesn't shut you down. Teachers are very creative people if they are allowed to create, and he allows people to do that.

When parents call or a teacher is threatened from outside forces, a principal demonstrates concern in backing teachers up. When teachers feel this support, it is a very powerful source of satisfaction.

If I did receive calls from parents, he was buffering them. He would say that Mr. Smith is an established member of this faculty and what he did was right and so forth, and he would fend off the parents in that respect. Whereas in other positions you are guilty and now you have to defend yourself. We didn't feel that with this principal; he was defending us; he was standing up for us.

Teachers must know that when the going gets really tough, they have the administrator right there to back them up. I think that the key to having a successful school is having administration that will back you up--no doubts in your mind.

Relationship with peers Teachers identified staff relations as an extremely important influence on climate. Teachers who felt part of a cohesive group expressed tremendous satisfaction. One teacher expressed the view of several others:

My first teaching experience was at a junior high school. We had an extremely special group of people the first two or three years that I was there. This was said by administrators in that it was a very unique group of people, and it's one of the best parts of my life. We were starting some new programs that worked very successfully so that was a real positive feeling for teachers. You felt like you were always at home. I don't think I'll ever have that experience again, never.

Another teacher gave a powerful example where a staff's unique working relationship became a climate satisfier:

We worked hard together and we played hard together. There was an instance where one of the women had a bat in her house, and she called one of the other male teachers during the night and he came over and got the bat out for her. That was the type of atmosphere and camaraderie we had. It was a wonderful atmosphere in which to work. We were very supportive of one another, shared in our personal lives. People wept together, and they laughed together. I have not been in an atmosphere like that before or after.

Sharing skills apparently affects climate satisfaction. Several comments like the following were made:

It builds a rapport when we can trade off work. Like the auto mechanic will repair my car, while I may strip off a piece of furniture for him. If the administrator or secretary asks me to refurnish something, I would be glad to do it. I've never worked in a place where they were as friendly as they are in this place.

Office personnel influence climate. Several teachers mentioned this factor:

We need support from other staff people, the whole thing, the janitor who brings you whatever you need or helps you out of a mess, the nurse who comes in and helps you with a sick kid, the librarian who puts a cart of books together for you on a special project. Everybody, all of that lends to a school's atmosphere.

Staff relations begin the moment a teacher reports to work. Two teachers recalled being welcomed to the school building. It created a long remembered feeling of warmth and trust:

In the office, the people are friendly; they have everything in order. It was neat and clean. They welcomed me to this high school, not 'welcome to the job.' They said, 'We are glad to have you here. We're proud of this school, and we think you will be too.'

I think that for a new teacher coming into a building, you can feel the climate almost immediately in the office. By that I mean the secretaries, the principal, vice-principal, counselors, whomever. I've been in a building where they immediately make you feel as if you belong.

Teachers want to know that their colleagues care. When staff relations were close and supportive, teachers indicated a high level of satisfaction, both with their jobs and with the school's climate.

Relationship with students      Student attitudes and behaviors were often associated with a positive climate. This was considered by most teachers as the most important factor in determining a good day for them.

Numerous teachers made comments like the following:

Always my day hinges on my students, the interaction I have with my students. If an assignment is due, I feel particularly good if everybody has it done. If my students are all there, and all eager, and all participating in what I am wanting them to be doing, I feel it is a great day. I feel particularly good if I've tested my students and they've done well; that to me is just an upper that can't be described here. I want so badly for my students to succeed because my students who experience regular success in school are rare. I want them to understand the joy of learning, feel good about it, know what they studied and that it paid off.

When asked what factor provides them with the greatest satisfaction, the following answers were typical:

A day where I've touched the kids in some way, they've touched me.

Kids that want to come to school; they are awake and enthusiastic and really want to learn.

One teacher explained how positive student attitudes affected teacher and other students:

The attitude of the students was just tremendous; they were real eager to learn, and as a band director they wanted to do new things. They were excited about band and they were real active. They were encouraged to be in activities. The philosophy seemed to be, "Let's encourage these kids to participate." We all fought hard for our kids, too.

Students are the main people with whom teachers interact. When this interaction is positive, it is a great source of satisfaction for teachers and affects school climate.

### Achievement

Teachers are cognizant of the relationship between lesson planning and effective teaching. When this produces positive results, teachers feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction. The following response typified the views of many:

Just the achievement, that is what it is all about. I like to see it better today than it was yesterday; I feel then like I got something done.

Teachers look for results. When students have achieved, so have teachers.

A great day is when you can walk into a class and take the plans that you have made for that class, and everything falls into place. The students are enthusiastic and everyone in the class is involved to the level they are capable of, so that somehow you affected every student. You were able to communicate with every person either verbally or non-verbally. In the process, you get some feedback from students that was positive. Like if they asked a question that gave you the idea that they were excited about something you did.

When asked what makes a good day, one teacher spoke for many others:

Successful evaluations of my students. Everyone doing better than I thought they would, and having a good day with my fellow teachers.

A poetic response provided by an English teacher indicated his concern that each student achieve personal growth. He sees himself as the farmer who plants the idea. Student growth is the goal.

Being needed, being able to pick someone up when they've fallen down, a day when I'm not swamped with paper work, or a day when I learn something from my classes. A day when I can start something and then let it grow and then let it develop on its own. Kind of a seed planting. A day when I can be the farmer planting the seed and then watch it start to take sprout.

As teachers reported what brings about a positive climate, responses appeared to fall into the areas of recognition, interpersonal relations, and achievement. Interestingly, Sergiovanni's study also showed achievement and recognition as job "satisfiers" but indicated interpersonal relations as job "dissatisfiers." In this study, interpersonal relations were strongly linked with a positive climate; however, as we will see in the following section, interpersonal relations may cause a negative climate as well.

#### Sources of Dissatisfaction

As teachers described factors which created a negative climate, their responses fell into two areas: (1) interpersonal relations, and (2) administrative policy.

#### Interpersonal relations

The relationship established between principal and teachers should be based on trust. When this is not present, climate suffers. Several teachers recalled incidents where a lack of trust caused a negative

climate:

There was no support for the teachers, no support in the main office. The principal had a way of going to an individual and faking concern for a particular faculty member. He was not the least bit concerned about them; what he wanted was to have files. He was just plain nosy. He wanted to have dirt or gossip and would literally go and approach members of the faculty to basically spy or convey stories back to him. But it got to where it appeared that a certain group of teachers seemed to be awfully "palsy walsy" with the principal, and so the others distanced themselves from them because they thought, "Well, if they are getting along and are real good friends with him, I don't know that I want to speak freely in front of them."

When distrust is present, a negative climate develops. The following cases exemplify this situation:

There is a high school I know of where the principal seems to have an attitude of "Don't cross me or I'll put you on the skids fast." This isn't the message that comes across immediately; it's more a "good old boy" kind of image, but don't cross him. . . . He operates by intimidation and if you end up doing something he doesn't like, there would be a letter written. He might keep it in his own files, or he might send it downtown or something like that.

I would say that a very negative action that I've seen is to talk behind a teacher's back about something that that teacher is doing that may not be just according to the principal's liking.

The principal's attitude towards teachers is communicated in many ways. A negative climate may be fostered through a communication which seems to indicate a lack of care:

There were a number of new staff members one year and the letter that we received that first year was simply, "School will start such and such a time," essentially "Be there." At another high school, some of the teachers that had transferred got a cordial letter of greetings.

Teachers expect support from their principal. When support is not forthcoming, a chaotic working environment may develop. One teacher described such a scenario:

I was in a school that the principal was so uptight that everybody transferred out. This particular principal would issue dictates, and you would find them in your mailbox, or she would come over and give directions to the teachers as though they were the students. The principal received very little input from the teachers as to what they thought about things. There was basically no support from the office on discipline matters. I know of several instances where teachers were just left out on the end of a limb, and the limb was sawed off under behind them. I would just hear horror stories about things that had occurred that there was no follow through, there were no suspensions; it was just chaotic. I have since heard from parents that they were thinking of open enrollment because they have heard that the discipline was so bad. It had nothing to do with the teachers; it had to do with the fact that the teachers were getting no support, so after a while--why bother.

Several teachers indicated the need for principals to speak individually with staff members if a problem arose. Anxiety and dissatisfaction rise when individual problems are discussed in larger groups.

If a person on the staff is causing a problem, the way for a principal to handle it is individually. Pinpoint the problem, take care of it on a one-to-one basis, sit down with the teacher and say, "Here's the problem; let's work it out. Let's come to an agreement about how this can change." The thing not to do is to address the whole staff and say this is a problem. I think that really destroys morale, so that is one very important contributor to low staff morale, addressing negative concerns in front of the entire staff when the entire staff is not responsible for the problem.

Teachers were unanimous in their feelings that their relationship with the principal was a most potent influence on climate. When trust and caring and support are not present, negative feelings about climate increase.

#### Administrative policy

Following relations with the principal, teachers often cited administrative policies as creating a negative climate. This may come in

the form of internal rule enforcement or directives imposed on the school from the outside.

Several teachers expressed annoyance and distrust when external bureaucracies affect change in schools. One teacher summed up the views of others:

You know a few years ago I would have said the principal is the climate. Now we have such a strong central administration downtown. They really solidify their power base. So much of how we feel about ourselves, the anxieties we may have, the frustrations we may have are coming out of some of the bureaucracies that exist downtown. Testing and evaluation, for example, have been a recent problem area for teachers to work through. That has done more to create a negative climate on the part of the teaches than the principal has. He's really been superseded in that.

It was common for teachers to see principals as playing along with "downtown," either out of personal allegiance or for political survival. In either case, this creates conditions where teachers feel abandoned or manipulated.

Some principals fear that they'll get in trouble downtown, so they play it right to the contract. Other principals that have been in this system for 30 years are doing it the way they always have and are willing to risk the fact that they may be chewed out.

My perception now is that the principal is now part of that downtown bureaucracy, and there is no real buffer between what many of us perceive to be the bureaucracy downtown and the building.

For some teachers, a psychological line has been drawn and principals stepped over it.

There is a line that's been drawn between teachers and administrators. It's hard for me to say when it started. Maybe it started with comprehensive bargaining agreements, but they're on that side and we're on this side. They are on one side, and we're on the other side.

Teachers need to know that their principal has control of the



school. Some bemoaned times when outside appearances seemed more important than the reality inside.

This situation was negative because the principal was absolutely not in control and as long as nothing brought negative publicity to her school, she had no interest. As long as everything looked okay on the outside, she didn't care what went on. That was lack of control or no control, or it probably was fear of her higher-ups or even some of her staff members.

Teachers expect fairness in discipline. When rules and policies are established for students, they should be applied fairly. When this is not the case, climate is negatively affected:

If there is a policy, the policy should be for everyone. There shouldn't be certain students that get around the policy because of their position or their parent's position in the community.

It's intimidating to know that there are powerful downtown types whose kids are here, who, if unhappy with the circumstances, can twist arms with great effectiveness. That's an intimidating thing that I think bothers some people and as a result, I think as years have gone by some teachers have left because they are somewhat uncomfortable in dealing with that power. As a result, then, a cooperative, cohesive kind of environment isn't what happens.

Occasionally, changes in demographics or budget may cause major shifts in school structure. Several teachers at one school recalled a climate of distrust which resulted from changing a comprehensive high school to a vocational campus. Teachers felt powerless to influence the decision, and that the educational impact was not fully understood by those implementing the change.

Closely related to policy are changes in school structure. Several teachers in this study reported local events which created unrest and deep dissatisfaction among the teaching staff. Several teachers at one school recalled an attitude of distrust and adversarial relationships

between teachers and administrators which resulted from changing a comprehensive high school to a vocational campus.

We fought changing from a vocational school to a central campus as a faculty. We fought them from 1978 clear up until they did change us in 1982. . . . The whole idea was to change this type of vocational education which came out of the centralized, comprehensive vocational education to a decentralized vocational education. They would close this building down completely and move some of the vocational programs out into the other high schools. . . . These things affected the climate in this school. They all affect the teachers' attitudes and the climate that we have. We're still fighting some of this, and it is affecting our attitude whether we are thinking positive or negative. What it comes down to now is we feel that they are still trying to close this building. . . . We are really not a high school any more; we are an extension of five other high schools. . . . The kids don't have the pride even in their vocational areas that they used to have. . . . I think one of the things these kids don't have is contact with each other like they had before; I think that has hurt the school pride. They used to get together at noon and talk about their area while they were eating lunch, and everybody pretty well knew what was going on in the building. Today that doesn't happen. They run out of here, go out and jump on a bus, go back to their own school; and they have to rush just to make it.

The policies and rules a school enacts need to be followed and enforced fairly. When inequities appear, it is a source of great dissatisfaction among teachers and negatively affects climate.

#### Final Thoughts

The results of this study closely approximate research by Herzberg and Sergiovanni. Teachers often mentioned recognition, responsibility and work itself as important factors in a positive climate. Sergiovanni's study placed interpersonal relations in the "dissatisfier" category, while teachers in the present study closely associated this factor with both a positive as well as negative climate.

Factors which were frequently mentioned as causing a negative

climate were interpersonal relations, and administrative policies. Both were called "dissatisfiers" in Sergiovanni's study.

Schools which want to make a difference should look for ways to eliminate the dissatisfiers and enhance those areas which contribute to positive climate formation. A negative climate is formed through mistrust, inconsistent policy enforcement, and needless meddling from outsiders. School administration would be well advised to give recognition to teachers, increase responsibility, promote positive collegial relations, and promote a sense of caring as means to develop and enhance positive climate formation.

## JOURNAL ARTICLE III. THE PRINCIPAL MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Numerous studies have shown the linkage between school climate and academic effectiveness (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979). A recurring theme in the literature indicates that the principal makes the difference in determining positive or negative school climate. Yet, we know little about what the principal does to exert such a strong impact. Is it a matter of personality? What behaviors of the principal seem to affect teachers positively or negatively? These are some of the issues which must be explored to better understand why the principal makes such a difference.

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of "typical" secondary school teachers as to how the principal shapes school climate. Qualitative research methods were used which consisted primarily of personal interviews. Data were collected from interviews with 32 randomly chosen secondary teachers selected from among 200 volunteers from public high schools in a midwestern city during the second semester of the 1986-87 academic year.

The six participating schools covered the spectrum from "inner city" schools to schools from a higher socioeconomic strata. Each teacher had a minimum of 10 years classroom experience, and most had taught in at least two high schools.

In analyzing the data, the researcher found strong agreement that in the eyes of teachers the principal is a prime mover in shaping school

climate. One teacher summed up the views of many:

I think the principal impacts on the climate of the school the same way the captain impacts on the climate of a ship. Her actions are magnified as they go down the structure. I think that even though the principal doesn't teach a class, the principal is the most important person in the school. There is just no question in my mind about that, and probably more so as the principal is perceived by the staff.

Perhaps the theme which best encapsulates what teachers look for in a principal is leadership. Four characteristics or qualities associated with leadership were (1) support, (2) caring, (3) recognition, and (4) pride. A brief description of each follows.

#### Support

Teachers expect many things from their principal, but perhaps no function is as important as support. Support comes in many different packages: nurturing, showing appreciation, and backing teachers up.

Teachers today really need a lot of help--they need support; they need to be told that and told in many ways that the job they are doing is important, that it is meaningful, and this is the role the principal plays.

There are many ways which a principal lets teachers know that he appreciates them. One teacher attributed an especially positive climate to her principal's informal way of showing support.

I think two or three things caused that positive climate. Our administration I thought was excellent, a little laid back, very supportive of the staff. The principal himself was very supportive; he was a human being. He wasn't the boss, a high and mighty type person. He circulated throughout the building; he knew the kids' names; he would drop in and give you a pat, both physically and emotionally.

Teachers feel support when they are allowed to be creative and implement their own ideas. This kind of support affects climate.

The principal simply felt that the teachers were professional, that they knew what was best for students, and that they could develop their own curriculum and could follow that curriculum, and in the end good things would accrue. It was a really supportive kind of environment as far as change is concerned, as far as innovation was concerned.

Other teachers echoed the idea of being allowed to exercise their potential in the classroom. Encouraging teachers to develop and implement ideas contributes to a positive climate. The following responses sum up the feelings of many:

It was really amazing. We got to do everything we wanted to do, and we never felt like we were being restricted even if we were. I would voluntarily go to the principal and say to him, "This is what I need to do"; and he'd say, "Well, maybe you shouldn't." He'd just read me, what I really wanted, and take me off the hook and I'd go back to my band and I'd say, "You know, Mr. Jones and I talked and we just decided that maybe it is not best for our school to do this." I think as an administrator, his key was that he related well to his individual teachers. I felt he was a very sincere person and felt totally supported by this man.

She gave me the feeling that she wanted me to do everything I could. She used to always say, "I want teachers to challenge me to do whatever they think they can do, and I will say yes until I think it is to a point where we just can't possibly do it." She never told me "no" that I can remember.

A critical type of support which teachers expect from their principal is "back up." Backing a teacher comes when a teacher feels attacked by parents or others from outside the school. Failure to stand behind the teacher could undermine a trusting relationship.

A principal may say everybody is doing a good job, but I think when the situation comes up where she is going to have to kind of stand on the line for you, I think then that determines climate. The glad handing and all of the other smiling, it's all right, but I think we all gain respect when the principal will stand up for us.

You have to have a degree of that in a school where teachers know that when the going gets really tough, that they have the administrator right there that's going to back them up. I think

that is the key to having a successful school, having administration that will back him up, no doubts in your mind.

When teachers feel a lack of support from the principal, it has a negative impact on climate. One teacher's comments were typical of others:

There is a high school I know of where the principal seems to have an attitude of "don't cross me or I'll put you on the skids fast." This isn't the message that comes across immediately; it's more a "good old boy" kind of image, but don't cross him. . . . He operates by intimidation and if you end up doing something he doesn't like, there would be a letter written. He might keep it in his own files, or he might send it downtown or something like that.

Supporting teachers comes in many forms: nurturing, appreciation and backing them up. Teachers who feel support from their principal generally hold positive attitudes about their school's climate.

#### Caring

Caring contributes powerfully to climate. It is a personal quality often communicated through body language and informal conversation and may take the form of moral support, constructive criticism, or help.

He'd always smile, always be happy. He wouldn't interrupt the teaching. He might just stand by the door, smile and nod. And maybe before school when you walked through the office he would just ask if everything was going okay. Do you need any help with anything? But he never came in and just sat down to see what you were doing. It was more, can I help you? I guess body language had a great deal to do with it.

When faced with pressure from students and parents, teachers look to their principal as one who always cares. Casual conversation and morale boosting are important:

I think teachers have a real hard time keeping a good morale, mostly because of the salary problems, money crunch, general lay-offs and

that kind of thing. I think the principal can be really instrumental in making teachers feel that they count and that they are important, and that they are needed. The principals who don't come out into the halls and talk to the teachers, or who don't visit with them, to me prevent morale from being as high as it could be.

Care is seen when a principal helps teachers who are going through difficult times. Anyone can face a "losing season."

I've had a few losing seasons too. He'd pat me on the back, write me a letter, see me in the hall more than usual and give some positive reinforcement. I'm sure he does this in other classes. If someone is having a problem in English or Math, then maybe he goes in and gives them a little assurance that they're doing a good job and pats them on the back. I don't know how other principals do, but ours does a nice job of that.

When a teacher is down, the caring principal helps pick them up:

Our principal is the type of person that will let you develop to your very utmost potential because he allows you freedom to use your creativity. If you stumble and fall, he always picks you up and allows you to continue and try again. He doesn't shut you down. Teachers are very creative people if they are allowed to create, and he was allowing people to do that.

Care may come in the form of constructive criticism. Several teachers indicated that they are appreciative when the principal spoke to them with candor. When problems arose, teachers want to be told in an unambiguous, yet dignified, manner. Two teachers explained:

I think that if a teacher is doing wrong, he should be told and not just let it slide. . . . If a person makes a mistake, it should be said right there and then that this isn't right, you should not do this.

I feel that if a teacher is not doing his job, he should be aware in some way. Some principals will come right out and say, "You are doing wrong." Some of them will try to put pressure on you, give you the duties that you really don't desire, like watching the front hall or some silly thing like that. They have their different ways of communicating, but I don't really think that that's as good as if a person would come right down and tell you.

When problems arose, the principal was sought after as one who was



concerned. He was there to help.

With this principal, you can go in any time you wanted to with a problem. He always had time for you. It's kind of like your kids-- you always have time for your kids. If they have a problem, you stop what you are doing and help them solve their problems. . . . You never felt like you were ever intruding upon his privacy or he had more important things to do.

An unthinking or callous communication from a principal can sabotage that caring relationship. One teacher recalled how a year began on a sour note:

There were a number of new staff members one year, and the letter that we received that first year was simply, "School will start such and such a time," essentially "Be there." At another high school, some of the teachers that had transferred got a cordial letter of greetings.

Principals then strongly impact on climate by caring for their school and staff.

#### Recognition

Teachers indicated that when a principal recognized their achievements, it helped create a positive climate. Recognition is a powerful way to boost morale and increase satisfaction. As one teacher explained:

Our principal uses his faculty meetings a lot of times when he lets us know the good things that we've done and the positive things that are going on. He tries to keep it real upbeat. Last year he picked seven or 10 teachers that got certificates for outstanding contribution in and out of the classroom. Not only teachers, custodians, clerical staff, and they certainly need the boost as much as any of us do.

Several teachers expressed feelings of pride when their achievements were recognized. This had a powerful influence on climate.

He would help the teachers, but he knew what was going on in the classroom. He would praise you in front of the kids, and he would also make mention of it in front of other staff members. A lot of times he would write a letter and a copy would be put in your file too.

### Pride

Pride means showing others that the principal has a high opinion of her school. It means attending events and talking to others with admiration and respect. Pride may be seen when a principal is as Edmonds (1979) observed "quietly everywhere."

During lunch periods, she was there, talking to the kids, talking to the teachers, and showing general interest in the people. She had a lot of pride in the system and what she did. She was just a leader that exhibited that at all times.

Pride can be infectious. The principal who is proud of his school can rally the troops with a pep talk. One teacher summed this up:

In his own way, he gives a pep talk. He'd say teachers are doing a super job and kids are really responsive. He's kind of like a coach. Your team's down and you've got to pick them up a bit.

A principal who is proud of her staff and school shows it in many ways. It is seen in daily conversation and personal involvement. Pride is an important part of the climate picture.

### Final Thoughts

The principal appears to be a driving force in shaping a school's climate. Teachers react positively to his or her daily behavior. When a principal shows support, caring, recognition and pride, it makes a difference. Principals set the tone for the school when they back teachers up, are trusted and are seen as genuinely concerned for teacher

growth and school achievement. It is important for principals to be aware of the pivotal role they play in shaping school climate and how their behavior makes a difference.

## DISCUSSION

Research into effective schools and student achievement often indicates a strong linkage with school climate. While we know much about climate components and their importance in educational effectiveness, little has been reported concerning how climate develops. The perceptions of teachers regarding climate formation is a particularly neglected area. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of "typical" secondary education teachers in an attempt to describe how teachers view school climate and make some assumptions as to dominant themes and factors which affect climate formation.

Qualitative research methods were used to conduct the study. The researcher conducted personal interviews with 32 teachers from six secondary schools in a midwestern city who were randomly selected from 200 volunteers. Interviews were held over a 3-month period during the 1986-87 school year. Interviews were taped, transcribed, coded and later analyzed to determine if common themes existed in teachers' perceptions of school climate. Further analysis led to assumptions as to how these themes developed and affected climate.

## Limitations

Several limitations in this study should be indicated. Since the random sample was taken from a self-selecting group, some bias could have entered the sample. The sample was derived from one public school system, which may limit the generalizability of the conclusions to other schools. The constraints of sample size also limit analysis of

subgroups.

Due to limitations in the schedules of the respondents, interviews were occasionally cut short. Also, because of the concentrated nature of the interviews, it was difficult to build a level of rapport which might have led to a greater degree of candor from the subjects.

It should be noted that analysis of the voluminous data was made by one individual. Sifting through several hundred pages of transcribed conversation is a complex undertaking, one which necessitated limits in what could be adequately presented and discussed.

### Results

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions of school climate. Personal interviews with 32 high school teachers revealed five dominant themes which were powerful forces in shaping climate which may lead to further study:

1. The principal is the main force in shaping school climate.  
Teachers expected the principal to be supportive, caring, visible, sincere and concerned. When teachers perceived these qualities, a trusting relationship occurred which exerted a positive impact on climate. When these factors were negative, it had a negative impact on climate.
2. Interpersonal relations play an important role in school climate. Teachers often pointed to working relationships with their peers, the principal and office staff as important parts of climate. Teachers want a sense of camaraderie and

independence. Key leaders often emerge who influence the opinions and attitudes of the staff.

3. Parental support plays an important role in affecting school climate. Teachers see how parents impact on climate through how they abide by school policies, support student achievement, show pride in their school, and act as advocates for quality education.
4. Outside forces such as the School Board, central administration and local politicians are often perceived as having a negative impact on climate. Involvement from these groups was usually perceived as intrusive and irritating. Teachers felt that interference from outsiders hinders the principal's ability to lead, interferes with positive teacher/principal relations, and increases unnecessary paperwork.
5. Most teachers saw school climate as more negative than a decade ago. Opinions were divided on this topic, but more teachers felt increased apathy from students and parents. Changes in society have negatively affected climate as well as increased demands on teachers. Several teachers noted increased student involvement and enthusiasm.

#### Implications

This study has depicted the perceptions of how one group of high school teachers perceive climate. The results of this study indicate that several factors are commonly understood as having a powerful impact

on school climate: (a) the principal; (b) interpersonal relations with peers and principal; (c) parental support; and (d) outside forces. These factors are often cited in other research on school climate.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

This study helped illuminate the area of school climate as it is perceived by teachers. Teachers appear to agree on the importance of several factors in the climate equation. To those contemplating further research in this area, the following might be considered:

1. This study examined perceptions of a group of teachers in a midwestern city. Further research could examine variations between groups of teachers in several cities. The importance of city size, school size and locale could be explored.
2. This study found that the principal exerted a powerful impact on climate. Further research might examine factors which relate to the principal's personality, tenure in the position, and number of years with a school as they relate to school climate.
3. Data collected in this study were qualitative. Further research could replicate this study but quantify the data.
4. This study found several areas which affect climate. Further studies could examine more closely the impact of these areas including parents, teachers' lounge, staff relations, central offices, and teacher-principal relations.
5. Reasons for negative perceptions of outside sources could be expressed, and methods to change this could be developed.

6. Further research could examine means to help principals develop a positive climate through fostering positive staff relations.
7. Further study may help understand how parental support may grow or stagnate.



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Joshua and Sharon Winter, who spent many days and evenings with one parent instead of two.

And most of all, my wife Sally, who reminds me by her presence the importance of reaching for high goals.



APPENDIX A

INFORMATION ON THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH  
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

(Please follow the accompanying instructions for completing this form.)

87

1. Title of project (please type): A Study of Teacher's Perceptions of the  
Role of the Principal in Shaping School Climate

2. I agree to provide the proper surveillance of this project to insure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are properly protected. Additions to or changes in procedures affecting the subjects after the project has been approved will be submitted to the committee for review.

Jeffrey S. Winter \_\_\_\_\_  
Typed Name of Principal Investigator Date Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Campus Address Campus Telephone

3. Signatures of others (if any) Date Relationship to Principal Investigator  
Jim Sweeney 1/19/87 Manager

4. ATTACH an additional page(s) (A) describing your proposed research and (B) the subjects to be used, (C) indicating any risks or discomforts to the subjects, and (D) covering any topics checked below. CHECK all boxes applicable.

- Medical clearance necessary before subjects can participate
- Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from subjects
- Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to subjects
- Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects
- Deception of subjects
- Subjects under 14 years of age and (or)  Subjects 14-17 years of age
- Subjects in institutions
- Research must be approved by another institution or agency



5. ATTACH an example of the material to be used to obtain informed consent and CHECK which type will be used.

- Signed informed consent will be obtained.
- Modified informed consent will be obtained.

6. Anticipated date on which subjects will be first contacted: 2 1 1987

Anticipated date for last contact with subjects: 6 1 1987

7. If Applicable: Anticipated date on which audio or visual tapes will be erased and (or) identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments: 10 1 1987  
Month Day Year

8. Signature of Head or Chairperson Date Department or Administrative Unit  
Harry Hall 1/19/87 Prof Studies

9. Decision of the University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research:

- Project Approved
- Project not approved
- No action required

George G. Karas

APPENDIX B

89  
RESEARCH NEEDS SUMMARY FOR DISSERTATION

Proposed by: Jeffrey S. Winter  
Graduate Student, Iowa State University  
Phone: (515) 277-5566 (Des Moines)

Topic: Teacher's Perceptions of the Role of Principals in Shaping School Climate.

The dissertation which I have undertaken is a study of how teachers perceive the role of the high school principal as a major influence in the shaping of the climate of a school. It is widely understood that climate affects virtually every aspect of a school including academic achievement, and morale. School climate is to be understood here as the product of shared beliefs, values and meanings as expressed by people in a school. Shared beliefs can be understood as areas such as pride, esprit, and cooperation.

The purpose of this study will be to assist high school principals in the effort to create and maintain a positive school climate. This study will deepen ones understanding of how the principal, as the key person in the educational equation, affects the shared beliefs of teachers in a positive or negative manner. The study will also explore other factors which impact on school climate. The results of this study should prove valuable for principals and other persons who want to understand how teachers perceive climate whether it be positive or negative and will assist professionals in their efforts to foster a positive school climate.

The perceptions of teachers are a complex area and I have decided for a number of reasons that personal interviews would be the best data gathering technique. The adaptability of direct interaction will allow for much greater depth and clarity than one could expect from a written questionnaire. My analysis will describe patterns

if they emerge and yield descriptions which should be of value to school personnel and principals in particular. Summaries of the study will be sent to principals who agree to allow their staffs to participate in the project, or an oral presentation will be made to the principal's group if the group desires.

It is most important to note that teachers will be asked general questions which span their entire career. No questions will be asked about their current principal. Teachers must have a minimum of 10 years experience in order to participate in the study.

Subjects (respondents) for the interviews will be volunteers from among the secondary educational teaching staff of the Public Schools. Principals will be asked to explain or to allow me to give a brief presentation to their staff concerning this study and its parameters. Those teachers who wish not to be part of the study will let the principal know. From the remaining portion I will ask the principal to let me know which teachers have had less than 10 years of experience. These people will not be eligible for the study. Random selection will be made from the rest of the staff.

Some 25-35 respondents will be needed for the study. Interviews will last between one and two hours. Each teacher agreeing to participate in the study will indicate when they would like to meet whether it be before school, during free time (this may require two sittings), after school or another time. I will call the teachers to set up the interview times.

All interviewees will be treated according the professional ethics of an ethnographic type interview. Complete confidentiality

will be maintained. The names of principals, subjects, and schools will not be disclosed during or after the study. Tapes, when used, will be erased immediately following the completion of the study. Names and other identifying characteristics of respondents will be eliminated from my field notes as well. Tapes will be made only with prior permission of the respondent.

It is my expectation as a school administrator that this study will yield important insights and data regarding school climate and the role of the principal in shaping it. This is a little understood area which needs attention and I'm confident that this research will make a useful contribution to this field of study.

RESEARCH PROPOSAL ADDENDUM

From: Jeffrey S. Winter  
Graduate Student  
Education Administration ISU

Proposal: Teacher's Perception on How the Principal Affects School Climate

A request was made by the Human Subjects Proposal Committee for clarification or revision in several areas. Following are the appropriate changes outlined in this addendum.

1. Instructions to be told to the subjects:(Enclosed form to be given to principal. Subjects will be told the rationale and parameters for the study. They will be told by their principal that they may opt not to participate in the study. Forms will be available which read "Thank you but I prefer not to participate in the study on school climate." These forms will be signed and given to the principal investigator.

Candidates for the study will be chosen through a random selection method. Candidates will be told by the principal with a letter from me that this is a study on how teachers perceive the role of the principal in affecting school climate. The principal investigator will gather data through individual interviews with the teachers which will be arranged at a time and location which is convenient for the teacher.

It will be emphasized to the respondents that all interviews, records, names of people and schools and summaries will be given complete anonymity. Subjects will be taped by me with prior permission by the respondent. Tapes will be erased after the study and names will be deleted from the written data at that time.

Subjects will be asked about their impressions of school climate in general and not specifically about their present school or principal. Interviews will last approximately one hour.

2. Permission to conduct this study was requested of Dr. Executive Director, Secondary Education for Public Schools.

Enclosed is a copy of the relevant permission form.

I hope this information will satisfy the requirements of the committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey S. Winter".

Jeffrey S. Winter  
Graduate Student, ISU  
(515)277-5566

APPENDIX C





TELEPHONE

January 27, 1987

TO: High School Principals  
FROM: Mr. Executive Director  
Secondary Education  
SUBJECT: Research Project

Jeff Winter is conducting a study to determine the role of the principal in developing a positive school climate. We have given permission for him to arrange the details with each building principal.

If you have questions, please call my office.

ct

APPENDIX D

MEMORANDUM

96



TO: and

FROM: Jeffrey S. Winter, Graduate Student, Iowa State University

RE: Research Project

DATE: January 29, 1987

I want to thank you all for agreeing to allow me to conduct my dissertation research in your schools. I'm confident that many educators will benefit from the results.

Following is a summary of the project and the procedures. You may wish to use this to explain the project to your staffs. I am happy to come and explain any of this in person as well and am available at 277-5566 to answer questions.

Project Summary

Research in the areas of effective schools and school achievement has indicated the importance of climate and the leadership of the principal in determining educational outcomes. Most past research, however, has used surveys and questionnaires as the primary data gathering tools. I am initiating a study of how teachers perceive the role of the principal in affecting school climate. However, rather than short answer questionnaires, I will speak with teachers directly to gain an understanding of this area in a comparatively unique manner. Through one-on-one interviews I hope to begin to describe and give examples of how climate impacts on the educational system as viewed from the teachers point of view. The study will focus on but not be limited to the role of the principal.

Teachers who agree to participate in the study will be asked open ended questions from over the span of their career. No questions will focus specifically on anyone's present teaching situation or on the present school principal. Interviews will last approximately one hour and will be arranged at the convenience of the teacher; before school, during free time, after school or other times.

Complete anonymity will be maintained with no names of teachers, schools or principals to appear in the study and all such records will be destroyed immediately following the study. Interviews will be taped for my later referencing but this will be done only with the subject's prior consent.

For this study I will need some 5-8 teachers from each High School. Respondents need only to be classroom teachers with a minimum of 10 years experience. From the available population I will make a random selection. For those of you who do not wish to be candidates for the study your principal has been given a form which states, "Thank you but I prefer not to participate in the study on school climate." These forms will be available in your school office. They will be collected in an

envelope and given to me. This study will involve your time for the interview and there is a possibility of one follow-up interview if time runs short. In most cases a one hour interview will be the extent of your commitment.

The results of this study will be shared with your principal and has broad implications for this critical area which affects all schools. I hope I receive your support and I thank you for your time.

98  
PROCEDURES

1. Read, explain, or hand out the enclosed summary to your staff.
2. I am available to answer any questions. 277-5566 is my work number.
3. Enclosed are forms which those who opt out may sign. Please put them in an envelope and I will pick them up or call your Secretary to have them sent to me. Put a time limit of one week on filling out these forms although anyone may opt out at any time.
4. I will call you to request a list of classroom teachers with an indication of those who have not reached 10 years experience. I ask that you cross off the names of those who have less than 10 years classroom experience.
5. After I obtain the list of teachers and the green slips I will contact the teachers and begin the interviews. With your permission, if the most convenient location for the teacher is to conduct interviews at the school I would like to do so. Please let me know if this is a problem and I will gladly arrange the interviews elsewhere.
6. Upon entering the school building I will check in at the school office and introduce myself to you if we haven't yet met.

APPENDIX E

100  
MEMORANDUM

TO:

FROM: Jeffrey S. Winter, Graduate Student, Iowa State University

RE: Research Project

DATE: January 29, 1987

I want to thank you for agreeing to allow me to conduct my dissertation research in your school. I'm confident that many educators will benefit from the results.

Following is a summary of the project and the procedures. You may wish to use this to explain the project to your staff. I am happy to come and explain any of this in person as well and am available at 277-5566 to answer questions.

Project Summary

Research in the areas of effective schools and school achievement has indicated the importance of climate and the leadership of the principal in determining educational outcomes. Most past research, however, has used surveys and questionnaires as the primary data gathering tools. I am initiating a study of how teachers perceive the role of the principal in affecting school climate. However, rather than short answer questionnaires, I will speak with teachers directly to gain an understanding of this area in a comparatively unique manner. Through one-on-one interviews I hope to begin to describe and give examples of how climate impacts on the educational system as viewed from the teachers point of view. The study will focus on but not be limited to the role of the principal.

Teachers who agree to participate in the study will be asked open ended questions from over the span of their career. No questions will focus specifically on anyone's present teaching situation or on the present school principal. Interviews will last approximately one hour and will be arranged at the convenience of the teacher; before school, during free time, after school or other times.

Complete anonymity will be maintained with no names of teachers, schools or principals to appear in the study and all such records will be destroyed immediately following the study. Interviews will be taped for my later referencing but this will be done only with the subject's prior consent.

For this study I will need some 5-8 teachers from each — — High School. Respondents need only to be classroom teachers with a minimum of 10 years experience. From the available population I will make a random selection. For those of you who are willing to participate in this study, please sign the form which says "I would be willing to participate in the study on school climate" and place it in the envelope which is available

in the office. This study will involve your time for the interview and there is a possibility of one follow-up interview if time runs short. In most cases a one hour interview will be the extent of your commitment.

The results of this study will be shared with your principal and has broad implications for this critical area which affects all schools. I hope I receive your support and I thank you for your time.



APPENDIX F

103  
PROCEDURES

1. Read, explain, or hand out the enclosed summary to your staff.
2. I am available to answer any questions. 277-5566 is my work number.
3. Enclosed are forms which those who opt out may sign. Please put them in an envelope and I will pick them up or call your Secretary to have them sent to me. Put a time limit of one week on filling out these forms although anyone may opt out at any time.
4. I will call you to request a list of classroom teachers with an indication of those who have not reached 10 years experience. I ask that you cross off the names of those who have less than 10 years classroom experience.
5. After I obtain the list of teachers and the green slips I will contact the teachers and begin the interviews. With your permission, if the most convenient location for the teacher is to conduct interviews at the school I would like to do so. Please let me know if this is a problem and I will gladly arrange the interviews elsewhere.
6. Upon entering the school building I will check in at the school office and introduce myself to you if we haven't yet met.

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Definition of "school climate": The product of shared attitudes, beliefs and values as understood by the people in a school. Areas such as pride, esprit, and cooperation are part of the school climate. (Check for understanding between me and respondent.)
2. Think back on some instances when you experienced a positive, neutral, or negative climate. These questions will relate to what a principal does to affect the climate. Remember, your responses may relate to any point in your career.
3. Looking back on some times when you experienced a particularly positive school climate. Describe it. Describe the situation. How did the principal impact on this? Specific examples.
4. Looking back on some times when you experienced a particularly negative school climate. Describe it. Describe this situation. How did the principal impact on this? Specific examples.
5. How significant of a role do you feel the principal plays in the shaping of school climate?
6. What other factors have a significant input on school climate?
7. What causes a spirit of cooperation or common sense of purpose for a staff? Impact of a principal?
8. How do parents and community affect school climate? Impact of principal?
9. Have you ever seen a climate change from positive to negative? Neutral to positive? etc. What caused this transformation?
10. Have you seen a "crisis" in a school where climate was affected? What was role of principal in the situation?
11. How do the rules for a school affect the climate? Role of principal.
12. Have you noticed a change in climate over the past 10-20 years? How? What?
13. How much need is there for individual contact with teachers from the principal?
14. Do key people or a staff influence climate? How does the principal react to this?
15. Is there ever a school "theme" for the year? Does this impact on climate? Does the staff work together to solve a problem - truancy, drug use, etc.
16. Are there issues of student-student relations or racial/minority issues which affect climate? How is principal involved?
17. How does principal affect climate through interaction with teachers? Staff/faculty meetings.

APPENDIX H

General Summary of Responses

The factors identified in the study resulted from an analysis of the frequency and quality of responses.

Interview transcripts were coded according to factors listed in the table below. Responses were coded according to frequency of responses with attention given to length within the transcript and quality of response which includes vividness and powerful use of adjectives. Particularly poignant responses or those which appeared to summarize the views of many others were quoted in the final Journal Articles.

The following table indicates general responses to the questions posed. Numbers show the total number of respondents who indicated that this area exerted a strong influence on school climate.

Table H-1. Frequency of factors identified in interviews by respondent

Factors	Respondents
1. Principal as important shaper of climate	31
2. Principal as provider of support for teachers	29
3. Principal as provider of recognition for teachers	16
4. Consistency of policy enforcement by principal	21
5. Candor (openness) between principal and teacher	11
6. Respectful treatment of teacher by principal	19
7. Principal's general support for the school	8
8. Collegial support among staff	31
9. Close personal relations among teachers	19
10. Key leaders among staff	13
11. Cliques as a negative force	9
12. Lounge as a positive force	7
13. Lounge as a negative force	8
14. Outside influences (school board, politicians, central administration)	18

Table H-1. (continued)

Factors	Respondents
15. Parental support	21
16. Changes in climate over past decade are positive	6
17. Changes in climate over past decade are negative	13
18. Factor which causes a "good day" - students	28
19. Factor which causes a "good day" - other	3