School Climate in the Perception of Teachers, Students and the Management Team: A Case Study on the Periphery of Brasília

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ABSTRACT *This article deals with a topic that has occupied the debates of researchers in the area of Education: school climate. For the methodological development of this research, we have adopted a qualitative-quantitative approach based on a case study. The data we present was collected during the year 2011. The field research was conducted in a public Elementary School on the outskirts of the Federal District. From the interpersonal relationships and school environment, we present a definition of organizational climate as a basic condition of instituting in schools a space for the integration of all school actors. In terms of theoretical references, we consulted authors such as Lobo, Bennis, Saldanha, among others. Based on the results, it was possible to identify a singular point of view of the management team, professors and students of a specific school in relation to the school climate of another. In short, a favorable school climate was a basic condition for the satisfactory performance of students. Thus, it was possible to conclude that school members (management, teachers, staff, parents and students) exert influence on climate and they must, therefore, be aware of possible issues in order to solve them as soon as they may arise in the school's environment.*

Introduction

Schools are learning environments par excellence (Castro Santander, 2008; Sifuentes, 2008). They are also organizations created to supply part of the human needs necessary for the development of the individual's essential skills, i.e., his abilities to learn, act and live with others (Delors et al., 1998). In fact, these skills will enable the student to become a citizen mindful of the exercise of his duties and rights (Castro Santander, 2008; Sifuentes, 2008). School education became a universal human activity necessary for the existence and functioning of all societies and, therefore, a right secured by law (cf., p. ex., Brasil, 2008).

In the words of Capanema (1996), this entity called school must articulate among its students and educational professionals, the capacity to work with curricular experiences and, therefore, pursue the insertion of community in ways that will help create the necessary autonomy to plan and develop pedagogical projects.

To achieve their objectives, schools, as organizations, have since the 1980's been strongly revamped and have attracted the interest of researchers in diverse fields of investigation. In fact, researchers are now aiming at understanding the operational aspects of schools, the structures and problems that might be preventing them from fulfilling their mission successfully. In this regard, we highlight the contributions of Etzioni (1975), Enriques (1997) and Nóvoa (1995), authors who have allowed us to understand the complexity of school organizations, guiding us to conceive them as living organisms strongly dependent on the surrounding environment and the individuals living in it – who, by their turn, are also a result of the organization's environment (Nóvoa, 1995; Morgan, 1996). All this synergy between the organization, the environment, and the individual ends up constituting the school's identity (Brunet, 1995), i.e, a climate that characterizes and differentiates it from others. In that respect, there are no ready-made recipes to be executed by school administrators (cf. Gomes, 2005).

According to Chiavenato (1999), organizations do not exist in a vacuum, nor are they alone or isolated in the world. This point of view corroborates with such authors as Duru-Bellat & Van Zanten (1998) who defend the idea that school climate is a result of particular combinations of different factors that express a set of functioning modes and pedagogical practices. Such reasons justify school climate as the main factor for the attraction and retention of students in schools (Néri, 2003).

In short, it is possible to see that, for its purposes, goals and means, schools are a special type of organization whose concept of climate gets even richer dimensions and is not to be confused with the climate of a company.

What is school climate after all?

Organizational climate is a recurrent theme in the literature when it comes to the efficiency of an organization and its search for excellence – whatever its nature.

Lobo (2003) clarifies that the term climate was transferred in the 1930's from meteorology to the labor domain, especially due to the link between people and the environment. The concern about the climate of organizations occurred particularly between the decades of the 1920's and the 1930's (Campos, 2002; Lobo, 2003; Abreu, 2007). Initially, it was not explicitly addressed, but only in an implicit manner through theories on work conditions and human behavior (Silva, 2003). According to Lobo (2003), the interest in the term climate is not restricted to the task of knowing in what it truly consits, but in discovering its implying factors of collective behavior. Research in this area started gaining preeminence precisely because of the term "climate" (Lobo, 2003). Subsequently, many investigations were conducted and ultimately wound up conferring great relevance to organizations in their search for goal achievement. For example, Lima (2002) and Abreu (2007) identified several investigations in this topic in Brazil, with a greater emphasis between the years of 1978 and 2013, as it is the case today both in business organizations and aca-

demic institutions (cf., p. ex., Campos, 2002; Silva, 2003; Oliveira, 2008; Pimentel, 2008; Gomes, Lira, 2010; Juliatto, 2010).

Given this epistemological scenario, it is necessary to consider the existence of a plurality of information on climate elaborated by researchers. This information involves tangible and intangible elements, conferring, thus, certain complexity to the theme. Several metaphors are employed in the definition of climate and the most common are those which refer to geographical aspects. For Fleury and Sampaio (2002), the idea of organizational climate refers to the notion of meteorological climate and paints a momentary state or organization, since it can alter itself before a story, an event, or an internal or external rumor of an organization, altering the quality and property of the environment. In addition to the perceptions of that environment, some events greatly influence and impact the behavior of the organization's members. The internal environment in which members coexist relates to their level of motivation and satisfaction. (Tachizawa; Ferreira & Fortuna, 2004).

Saldanha (1989), for example, associates the organizational climate to the relationships established by individuals, their values and determinations of what is "good" or "evil" for them and the organization as a whole, allowing the satisfaction or not of their necessities and, for that matter, their ability to consider options favorable or unfavorable. (Bennis, 1972; Lobo, 2003).

In this fabric of relationships, Saldanha (1989) considers that one should take the human being into consideration, i.e., each human who makes up the organization is a living being endowed with sensibility, motivations, values and beliefs which intertwine in harmony with other beings, thus forming the psychological environment in which the individual develops and contributes to produce the psychological climate of the organization. From there it is possible to consider the organizational climate as a cultural aspect, an inter-subjective phenomenon that reflects the individual or collective mood prevailing in an organization in a given (cyclical) moment or for a period of time which, therefore, could allow for several microclimates to emerge inside the same organization (Luz, 1995; Brito, 2003; Lobo, 2003). This climate is a result of organizational cultures, their positive and negative aspects, their highly positive events and the facts that happen outside of them. However, internal events are reflected in a more intense and permanent manner in the organizational climate.

Thus, the organizational climate can be translated into what people generally refer to as "working environment": a psychological atmosphere which could be called organizational climate or organizational human climate. However, according to Luz (1995), this does not manifest itself only in the realization or omission of a work or activity: it is also felt in the air perhaps more so than acts – hence the metaphorical comparison to a perfume whose effects can be perceived without knowing its ingredients, although at times it might be possible to identify some of them. So it may be fair to say that there is a range of factors that influence activities undertaken by members of the organization and affect the perceptions that individuals have of others and the convivial atmosphere, i.e., the level of satisfaction of those members in what relates to the existing practices along with the organizational modes that confer the organization's own personality (Brunet, 1995; Lobo, 2003). Climate, perceived at the same time as a conscious and unconscious factor by different actors, characterizes the or-

ganization and conditions the behavior of its members. It is, so to speak, the organization's identity.

Climate as school identity

Nóvoa (1995) and Costa (1996) emphasize that each school consists of a specific climate, i.e., an identity that reflects what it has in its essence, both in relation to the developed work as in what relates to the nature of relationships established between its actors (cf., p. ex., Abramovay, 2005) and even to their events. More precisely, it can be stated that climate refers to the socio-psychological aspects of the school, actor motivations, perceptions, actions, relationships, behaviors, environmental conditions and everyday events. According to Casassus (2002), when the emotional climate is favorable, good relationships between students are established, fights and class interruptions do not occur and better results are achieved.

Given the above, climate began to play a leading role in achieving its objectives in the field of Education, whether through Elementary (cf., p. ex., Lira, 2010) or even Higher Education (cf., p. ex., Pimentel, 2010). This makes school climate a widespread idea. According to Brunet (1995, p. 129), for example, the climate of a school's organization is a polyvalent and synthetic concept. It is not possible to diagnose it based on a single dimension. Therefore, it is necessary for us to use all of its components: perceptions, actions, behaviors, environmental conditions and processes in order to define it.

In order to find common ground among the different concepts and to explore how the different school actors – the real ones involved – perceive climate in their environment, the researchers were concerned to discover the manners in which school climate emerges in the realm of the studied school. Drawing our cues from the above-mentioned authors, the study was conducted under a new conception: that there is a combination of factors that interlink and interact together in the school environment, determining an underlying pedagogical style relating to how each school performs its practices. This combination of factors, which is unique to each school, can be visually defined as a large web constituted of each element of a school's routine composing the environment. The energy, as a factor of permanence and attraction (Néri, 2003) hanging over this environment may manifest itself positively or negatively over its entities and, in integrating itself to all of the elements that make up that environment, shall constitute what is called school climate.

Methodology

The methodological choices were directed to address the quantitative and qualitative descriptive-analytic nature of the data, which was based on a case study. The adopted perspective is a model that can be seen as an empirical investigation that researches a contemporary phenomenon inside its real life context. Yin (2005) establishes as an orientation that the method, or technique, according to the adopted conception of case study, can be used in qualitative investigations as well as in quantitative ones. In Castro's (2006) understanding, both approaches to the research – qualitative and quantitative -, are the most complementary ones. According to this author, the methodology has the function to indicate the path to the researcher during the investigation, helping him reflect and impelling him towards looking at the world from a different perspective, i.e., a curious, inquiring and creative point of view.

The research was conducted between October 2011 and

March 2012. In what relates to the quantitative approach, questionnaires were distributed to students in the 9th grade, to the management staff and the teachers. The questionnaires were composed of open and closed questions. As to the composition of the qualitative data, we aggregated the analysis procedures with documents and in loco (on-site) observations and interviews with the management staff and three professors from distinct areas. The data were organized in an Excel spreadsheet and were presented in the form of graphs, tables and charts, all of which intended to reach the goals that were set for the research.

The school context
The choice of the school presented in this paper was mainly due to the National Reference in School Management Award conceded to them by the National Council on Education Secretariats – CONSEAD [NCES]. The Blue School meets the needs of the Initial and Final years of Elementary School as well as the Education of Youth and Adults. The school is situated at the outskirts of the Federal District and is about 38 Km from the center. The city has a population of around 160 thousand inhabitants, among whom 31,0% are students (Distrito Federal, 2010). Out of the student population, the majority (85,2%) declared to be students at public schools.

The school, which is walled, pleasant and clean, is opened during the afternoon and evening periods and serves the needs of 1.100 students who live in the same region. As far as the physical characteristics are concerned, the school has 16 classrooms, a sports court, a computer room, toilets adapted for Students with Special Needs [SSN], a literary hub, a library and suitable areas for teachers, staff and management.

Sample characterization
The sample was composed of 92 students from three classes in the 9th Grade of Elementary School. All students attend classes in the afternoon, being that 40 of them (43,48%) are male and 52 (56,52%), female. Half of the students (50,0%) reported being 14 years old, i.e., half of them were behind the grade they should be in. Regarding the management staff, we counted with the participation of the Principal, the Deputy Principal, the Pedagogical Supervisor, the Administrative Supervisor and two Coordinators. All of them had as their highest university diplomas, post-graduate degrees. As far as the years of experience in the profession are concerned, two of them (33,3%) worked in the area for about 11 to 15 years and the others, (66,7%), worked for more than 15. Out of the 25 teachers involved in the research, 23 (92,0%) were women and two (8%) were men. The majority of teachers (14), a number that represents 56% of the total, reported being between 40 and 49 years old. Regarding the semi-structured interviews, the research counted with the participation of the teachers in distinct areas of knowledge (Portuguese Language, Mathematics and Geography) and the school's Manager.

Results and discussion
The findings presented here are suggestive and should not be generalized. The results meet the perceptions of those involved (teachers, students and the management staff) in the Blue School in what relates to the favorable climate resulting from the following elements: interpersonal relationships and school environment.

A. Interpersonal Relationships
According to Comellas (2007), interpersonal relationships are an important aspect to be cared for at school since, for the majority of students, it constitutes the most important place for coexistence after the family. According to the author, the school needs to be aware of such particularity and teach students to coexist, despite the differences that might arise in the group. Abramovay, Calaf & Cunha (2009), effectively conceive interpersonal relationships as one of the reasons that turn schools into references to students. Lira (2010), corroborating with the authors, points out that interpersonal relationships serve as a thermometer indicating the quality of the climate for which management and teachers should be aware of in order to cope with conflicts as soon as they arise.

Leaders
The in loco observations in School A allowed us to perceive a friendly relationship between the management staff, teachers and students. Inside the collective meetings – in which the researchers were present –, it was possible to observe that a dialogical relationship existed. In this case, one can understand that the management staff and its leaders were able to influence the effects of an appropriate school climate addressed towards learning and, especially, towards mutual understanding. Both the directors invite and stimulate teachers to participate in the collective decisions of the school and the teachers, in their majority, respond to this call with suggestions and, at the same time, demonstrating cohesion in the decisions undertaken by the group. In our interviews with teachers, we noted a coherent discourse on the speeches of interviewees. In the following excerpt, the teacher emphasizes the issue of respect among colleagues.

There is the issue of respect among colleagues! It's really great! I think it is extremely important. I try my best to make coexistence with parents and students quite interesting as well (Teacher 1, 49 years old, afternoon shift).

In order to enrich and corroborate the importance of this discussion, we mention Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) as they contest the issue of apathy in the masses, a phenomenon that could emerge as a result of the disrespect in the capacity to participate. For these authors, the counterpart of this effect is to recognize the opposite, in this case, the self fulfilling prophecy concerning the manners in which teachers relate to their students. According to this prophecy, these are the expectations determined by reactions. In other words, the ways in which students are treated is the way in which they will respond at school.

Therefore, if teachers, parents and students are treated with respect and high expectations at school, they will respond positively to this attitude and the school climate, certainly, will be conducive to learning. A highlight to the respectful relationship experienced by a teacher at school can be confirmed:

Here at the school there is a relationship of respect among all of us. For sure! We teachers have freedom to expose what we think, to look towards alternative and better ways to work with management staff (Teacher, 40 years old, afternoon shift).

The Principal also attributed a climate of respect in the school's work:
The parent, several times, often changes from neighborhood in the city, but leaves his son here at school. Sometimes the son needs to cross a high traffic street, or live far away from home, but their parents prefer to keep them

studying here. I believe that this is a result of the work we develop with everybody here at school (Principal, 44 years old).

Proceeding with the issue of interpersonal relationships, teachers were asked about what they thought of the education offered at school, especially about the relationship among peers regarding the development of classroom subject contents:

Table 1: Teachers' opinions regarding the reality of school

Situation	Teacher opinion				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The education that the school offers to its students is greatly influenced by the exchange of ideas between teachers.	7 (28,0%)	15 (60,0%)	1 (4,0%)	1 (4,0%)	1 (4,0%)
The teachers at this school coordinate the content of subjects taught between different class grades	5 (20,0%)	14 (56,0%)	4 (16,0%)	1 (4,0%)	1 (4,0%)

Therefore, according to the teachers' opinion results, it is possible to affirm that (88,0%) of teachers agree that School A offers to its students an education based on the exchange of ideas between educators. It is also worth noting that a percentage of teachers (76,0%) "agree" that they in fact coordinate subject contents taught at different class grades. Hence, it was possible to perceive, both in on-site observations and the results on Table 1, which the researched school unit has a pedagogical routine in which a satisfactory climate is established. This positive perception of the school is, in fact, shared by the whole school community.

Another fundamental aspect for the development of a favorable school climate is the leadership of the management staff. In Carreira's (2005) understanding, the democratic profile of the manager has a preponderant role in the school's environment. According to Gomes (2005), it is up to the school's Principal to encounter the equilibrium between "centralization" and "decentralization" of administrative and pedagogical activities developed at the school unit in order to reach positive results both in the aspects related to the pedagogical part as well as on the ones referring to the well being of actors involved in the school's environment. Chart 1 displays the responses provided by teachers in Blue School, when asked to manifest their opinions about how management and teachers collaborate towards working satisfactorily in operating the school.

In short, the results revealed that for the majority of teachers (88,0%) of the school researched (A), both the management team and teachers collaborate to a satisfactory operation of the school. Lira (2010) points out that the

establishment of a trust pact between the management team and the school community is a decisive factor for the emergence of a satisfactory climate to occur in school (A).

Brito (2009) indicates that in schools where the relationship between members of the educational community (teachers, management, students and staff) is positive, a favorable climate in the working environment is established, generating positive results in the pedagogical process. When asked if the management staff and teachers had a friendly relationship with students, the majority of students, 74%, said "yes", as shown in Chart 1

Chart 1: Does the management team and teachers at this school have a friendly relationship with students?
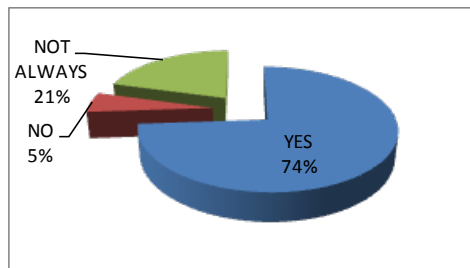
Source: Field Research

The percentage of students who consider the relationship of respect and care for them is quite significant and is evidenced in teacher interviews. Machado (2012) states that the results presented in Blue School are not limited to the students' academic performances, but are also extended to human dimensions and feelings of belonging, particularly when it comes to the expressive acceptance derived from the student body, admittin an unusual phenomenon in the school system – especially when it involves adolescents, as it is the case in this school.

Given the satisfactory evaluation of teachers in relation to the Principal, it was also interesting to grasp the viewpoint of the Principal with respect to teachers. In the following interview excerpt, the school's manager reinforces the existence of a positive school climate.

This day-to-day thing is in fact very valuable. We evaluate what was done and we try to improve it by calling collective meetings with the faculty. It is because of these meetings that everything is discussed, not only pedagogical, but administrative issues as well. And I think that our school is a very pleasant place for us to work. Sometimes we do have disagreements, but nothing that extrapolates. So, the number of agreements we are able to reach are a testimony of the mutual respect we have among people (Principal, 44 years old).

Therefore, if schools are a place where pedagogical practices must be developed and interpersonal relationships fostered into favorable conditions for the well being of its teachers and students, there is no denying that these conditions are present at Blue School.

B. School environment
The physical structure is also an important aspect for the establishment of a satisfactory climate at school, not only for students, but also for adults. Hearing from students, teachers and staff what kinds of factors are missing to make the school pleasanter is the right measure to renovate its environment. Lira (2010) was able to verify this in a

research about school climate.

In Blue School, an aspect contributed for a positive perspective of actors in relation to the school's climate: physical structure. In this aspect, the school has a pleasant appearance, visibly expressed in the cleaning and maintenance of the school's environments. Its classrooms are airy and the diverse projects developed within the school have adequate spaces for their effective progress. Clearly, the care and zeal for the well being of those who live there were values that materialized in each environment that was visited and whose effect was confirmed in the welcoming availability that seemed to be transmitted, as we can note from an excerpt of a teacher's interview:

One of the first changes that occurred here at school was with respect to the physical space. Today, we are more receptive, in all of the environments, right? Afterwards, the management team started working with everyone in order to give pedagogical support to the students and teachers. (Teacher, 35 years old, morning shift).

Still with regard to physical space, Piaget (1970) elucidates that school spaces can trigger decisive learning experiences and help form the individual's cognitive structures. Also, Ribeiro (2004) reinforces that this experience in enjoyable school places can contribute to the formation of effective ties that create a sense of identity and belonging.

- Besides the physical structure, it is worthy to know the students' participation in improving the school environment. We asked if the management team and teachers took improvement suggestions into consideration and we found that half of the students (72,8% of the total 67 students) answered "yes"; 19 students (20,7%) answered "not always this occurs" and only Five students (5,4%) answered "no". Therefore, we note that for almost all of the students, teachers and management develop a friendly relationship and their suggestions are taken seriously and are applied by the by management and teachers. Chart 2 represents the answers provided by students. It is understood, in this regard, that taking suggestions into consideration reveal the mutual respect, the appreciation and credibility over the capacity of a person to bother seeking solutions and interfering in issues that might be affecting the community negatively. These feelings boost the positive character of the environment into a favorable climate for relationships and, potentially, the relationships that assist students in their learning processes – which is, after all, the focus and final purpose of schools.

Chart 2: Student opinions on the use of suggestions provided to the teachers and the management team
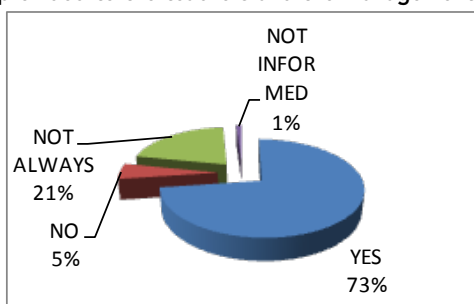
Source: Field research

Still in what refers to the school's environment, it is also important to establish a contract of norms that is important for human coexistence and cannot be imposed but con-structed with the participation of different actors. Among the listed factors, some deserve to be highlighted: good school infrastructure; active management team; physical and pedagogical resources available to teachers; low teacher turnover; respect and dialogue between teachers and the management team, between the management team and students and between parents and the management team; projects effectively developed by everybody and, finally, the involvement of the whole school community in the construction of a meaningful learning process for students.

Among the projects developed at School A, the researchers had the opportunity to observe classes in literature called "Literary Cabin" and to witness the project entitled "Shared Classes", a project geared towards students in 5th grade. One of the functions of this project is to prepare students for the school dynamics of the final years of Elementary School and therefore minimize the possible student integration and adaptation issues in a reality that, for him, will be different from the previous ones. According to the school's Principal, students are prepared to deal with the diversity of teachers that they will have from the 6th grade onwards, which is confirmed in this interview's excerpt:

The student starts identifying himself better in the future grade. He will have more teachers in the 6th year: each professor has his own way of working. So the student learns the different dynamics of the final years of Elementary School, very early on (Principal, 44 years old).

Another project mentioned in the interviews by one of the teachers was called "Continuous Remediation" and was developed in the later years of Elementary School. The project had the effect of reducing student failure rates. According to the teacher, the project established an average passing rate that went from five (5,0) to six (6,0). In addition to these activities, the students were also bimonthly evaluated. In the project, these evaluations were shared and divided into two knowledge areas: humanities and natural sciences. Each teacher then works his content in an inter-related way with the selected bimonthly project or he must make his students interact with them every two months. The bimonthly evaluation is constituted of a unique exam. At the end of two months, the grade of this evaluation is summed up with the student's average in each of the courses. This strategy can be confirmed in the words of the teacher:

The school has created a Continuous Remediation Project. Because we have projects and, each two months, each professor does his own activity, develops his activity based on these projects and at the end, we make up an unique evaluation, as if it was an exam and, at that moment, we have a larger participation from all teachers (Teacher 1).

In an attempt to advance the understanding of that which is perceptible in a closer contact with the school, the researchers also tried to pinpoint issues that could influence the institution of learning in the organization. Through the use of answered questionnaires, the researchers observed that the data reveals an occurrence of some issues that happened at school and, also, it was possible to evaluate the gravity and extent of these issues.

The results showed that the most serious issues to be faced by managers are: lack of resources (33,3%), lack of administrative and teaching staff (33,3%) and disciplinary

problems, largely caused by students (50,0%). It is known that there is no perfect school – all of them have problems. However, in the words of teacher (P2), it is possible to identify the efforts that the management team and teachers do to ensure that the problems are no greater than the solutions found by all school members:

This school, for me, of all of the ones I worked before, is the best because, a lot of things I think about doing are actually done over here! Of course, no school is perfect! Do we have problems? Yes we do! But, you know, of all of the schools I've been to in the past, this one is by far the one I feel most supported. That's what I think. Oh! Yes! (Teacher 2)

In short, despite the existence of major problems, these do not affect the appropriate school climate conducive to satisfactory performances identified in the school's organization, discipline, rules for coexistence, mutual respect and positive attitudes between students, staff and the management team. All of these factors contribute to make Blue School a pleasant and welcoming place to study and work. Through this set of reciprocal expectations shared by the educational actors in the school's space, it was possible to observe images, gestures and positive actions, and understand how internal processes collaborate in creating a school environment in which the predominance of a satisfactory mood among social actors does exist.

Final considerations

In which ways is it possible to establish a satisfactory school climate at school? This has been a recurrently asked question among managers and school staff. In School A, it was found that interpersonal relationships were developed through mutual collaboration, respect and dialogue between all social actors. This process of listening to different actors, accepting suggestions and, above all, sharing responsibilities, resulted in a pleasant environment which, in turn, led to a climate of collective well being.

It is worth noting that in School A there is an establishment of clear disciplinary rules which are collectively constructed on the basis of problem solving dialogues – whether they are conducted by students, professors, management or other actors in the school's environment.

Therefore, there is no prescription destined to organizational spaces of any kind, listing the ingredients or indicating a unique combination for the establishment of a positive climate since, returning to the initial idea of this work, each school is unique. Therefore, Machado (2012) elucidates that it is up to each school to set its own path – which is also unique –, striving to encounter proper ingredients and the appropriate ways to combine them. It is only through the articulation of management styles with the social identities of its actors that there will be adjusted possibilities to make it pleasant and overcome its challenges, which does not preclude it from executing successful project experiences with respective adaptations. After all, the merit lies not in "inventing the wheel", but in equipping oneself with mechanisms that would set the wheels on the trails of success. As highlighted by Lira (2010), paying attention to climate signals through their diagnoses among different school actors is of paramount importance for the management of results one seeks to achieve.

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