



Caribbean Observatory of School Climate Pierre-Olivier Weiss

Base and partners

The Caribbean School Climate Observatory (CSCO) is a research programme within the scope of Focus Area 3 "Inequality and Variability of Access to Knowledge, Education and Mediation in the French Overseas Territories" of the Centre de Recherches et de Ressources en Education et Formation (CRREF). This program benefits locally from the support of the Réseau Canopé as well as different services and corps like the School office Inspectors and Principals. From a Caribbean perspective, the network created within the frame of the Linguistic Exchanges and Innovative Learning through mobility (ÉLAN - Interreg Caraïbe¹) is an important support to investigate and open grounds for different islands of the region.

Network of actors

On one hand, the Observatory aims at gathering a federation of researchers who study the phenomenon of *violence in school* and *school climate* (on diverse aspects: victimization, violence prevention, co-education, school life quality, inclusion, school justice, partnership practices, team strategy), especially within the Caribbean region. On the other hand, the aim is to connect researchers and professionals from the educative world to have a shared diagnosis on these questions. Finally, this networking aims at boosting the scientific production (and experimentation) in this field of research.

¹ <https://www.interreg-caraibes.fr/elan>

Missions: assess, diagnoses, compare

The Observatory has 7 main missions:

- 1) Gather available data at the Caribbean level on school climate and related concepts.
- 2) Help Caribbean schools, and more generally political decision makers to diagnose violence issues, incivility and assess the feeling of insecurity (or feeling of well-being) as well as assess school climate.
- 3) Initiate research in schools in Martinique and Guadeloupe and in other islands, especially English-speaking islands of the Caribbean: collect and analyse data.
- 4) Promote the comparison between different territories (on four geographic levels: the Caribbean, Mainland France, Europe and the World) while paying close attention to the sociocultural context and the diversity of educative politics.
- 5) Take part to the formal education and lifelong learning for professional from the educational world: intervention in academic and extra-academic training.
- 6) Broadcast scientific results in form of study days, symposiums, seminars, research reports and a dedicated website. The establishment of a resources centre with the publication and diffusion of knowledge using different supports (book collections, website, etc.).
- 7) Supervision of internships and research works for students (from Master level) with schools.

Organisation: direction and scientific independence

The head office of the Observatory is located at the Centre de Recherches et de Ressources en Éducation et Formation, Université des Antilles, Morne Ferret – BP 517, 97178 Abymes Cedex.

It is directed by Pierre-Olivier Weiss, Attaché Temporaire d'Enseignement et de Recherche at the Université des Antilles, doctor in sociology, attached to the Centre de Recherches et de Ressources en Education et Formation- CRREF- EA-4538.

The director surrounded by his team, decides in total independence, the scientific politics of the Observatory, decides of the researchs to initiate, partnership to be created, contracts with national and international institutions or schools and public organisms, organises publications and communication.

The Observatory has a Scientific Council composed of at least 10 members recognised for their competences in the field and experts used to violence issues and school climate.

The first members: Frédéric Anciaux (CREEF) ; Olivier-Serge Candau (CREEF) ; Marie-Paule Poggi (CREEF) ; Thierry Montanus (CPE, Académie de Martinique), Céline Guilmois (Assistant Director of the INSPE de Martinique, inspector), Leonard Robinson (Curriculum Officer - Modern Languages, Ministry of Education, Innovation, Gender Relations & Sustainable Development, Saint Lucia), Nathalie Méthelie (Director Réseau Canopé Martinique), Christophe Marquier (Inspecteur d'Académie - Regional Pedagogical Inspector, Establishments and School Life, Martinique).

Challenges, definition and perspectives: school climate and public education policies

Introduction

Today, one of the major challenges of public education policies is the improvement of school climate, a concept that has been popularized in France, but also in other territories. The first question lies in the very definition of the school climate and the manner in which it influences both the functioning of schools and more generally of education systems. School climate goes beyond the aggregation of individual well-being within a school because of the collective dimension (relationships between individuals) that this concept questions. **One of the aims of the progression of the school climate lies in improving the results of pupils, increasing their safety and the quality of life at work of the personnel of the educational world.** When we look at school climate, **it also seems necessary to understand how different actors can be mobilized to improve the climate: students, staff and parents.** In a world where speeches are sometimes disparate, and to objectify debates, victimization surveys (Robert and Zauberman, 2017) constitute an essential tool at the local, regional and national, and even international, scale. This type of data is therefore necessary **for the production of a shared diagnosis within a school establishment.**

Framing definition

The scientific research developed on the concept of school climate is very old and its contours have not always been well defined (Anderson, 1982). As noted above, the National School Climate Center (NSCC) is today an important resource for research. Some authors note that there is a glaring gap between these research findings on one hand, and state ministries of education, school climate policy, practice guidelines, and teacher training practice on the other hand (Cohen, McCabe, Micchelli & Pickeral, 2009). Literature is developed nationally in the French-speaking world (Debarbieux, 1996; Janosz, Geroges and Parent, 1998), Spanish-speaking (Ortega and Del Rey, 2004) and Anglo-Saxon (Benbenisthy and Astor, 2005; Cohen, McCabe, Micchelli & Pickeral, 2009). School climate is not limited to a safety assessment in schools. Variables such as commitment, motivation and even student pleasure should be considered. **The contextual approach currently seems to be a relevant approach for assessing school climate and thinking about it in its complexity and in a processual way, that is to say as evolutionary.** The school climate concerns all users of establishments. In this sense, it cannot be reduced to the study of only pupils (or students): the perception of the school climate by parents, by pupils and by adults of the establishment; the safety of teachers and the content of their relationships with their colleagues. In short, this knowledge, **a lever for action,** must reveal the proponents of improving the school climate through this set of interrelationships between students, staff and parents.

The National School Climate Centre defines school climate saying: "school climate refers to the quality and lifestyle of the school. School climate is based on the models people have of their school life experience and it reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, management and the organizational structure included in school life "(Cohen, McCabe, Micchelli & Pickeral, 2009: 182). The authors thus reveal 5 elements that make up the school climate:

- Relationships (respects for diversity; school community and collaboration)
- Teaching and learning (quality of instruction; social, emotional and ethical learning; professional development leadership)

- Security (physical security; emotional security)
- The physical environment (cleanliness, spaces, organisation of furniture, etc.)
- The feeling of belonging (to the community)

But other factors can also be included in school climate. According to the synthesis of the cited authors (Cohen, McCabe, Micchelli & Pickeral, 2009), it is interesting to include:

- The engagement of students and teachers in school activities
- Social reaction to risky behaviour (attitude of students and staff)
- The attention that the school pays to family life

We now know that taking an interest in the issue of living together and in school justice can allow, as an explanatory factor, to understand violence in schools (Debarbieux, 1999; Gottfredson, 2001; Ortega, 2001; Massé, Desbiens, Laharis, 2005).

The proposed research program

Seven major axes will be developed in the context of future research in the Caribbean and concerning primary and secondary education under the aegis of the Caribbean School Climate Observatory:

- 1) The search for victimisation in educational establishments, starting with Martinique and Guadeloupe (French territories of America), then on the other countries of the Caribbean starting with Barbados and Saint Lucia

- 2) School climate and its effects on learning: relationship between school climate and student success.

- 3) School climate and its effects on staff: relationship between school climate and the quality of working life (which ultimately affects the quality of education) : relationship between staff, perception of the school climate, relationship with hierarchy, management support, etc.

- 4) Relation between school climate, on one hand, and on the other, safety in schools and risky behaviour: updating and contextualising the known link between school climate and violence at school (stability of educational teams, feeling of belonging, etc.). Provide leads for the prevention of violence in schools: fight against depressive states, suicidal thoughts and victimisation. This axis also makes it possible to reflect on social norms in the school environment, the rules that govern behaviour at school and the social reactions that provoke school deviance (see in particular Sembel, 2015)

- 5) The effects of school climate on peer harassment (truancy, dropping out, multivictimation, school shooting, etc.)

- 6) The links between school climate, social and family environment: school climate must also be understood outside the school walls (ecology of school climate). School climate must also be linked to the « context »: take into account the parents' point of view (as well as their commitment and the way they support their child and more generally the social and partnership environment.

- 7) School climate and public education policies: on one hand, it is a question of refocusing questions relating to school « disorder » on the role of schools and their networks. On the other hand, we will be interested in this axis on the reception of public policies by the various

personnel of educational establishments, their effects on the school climate, and the reactions (perceptions) of the personnel vis-a-vis the institutional injunctions to the « improvement » of this climate (see MENESR, 2015 ; Debarbieux, 2015 : 22).

Scientific interest and research program

School climate: brief state of the art and contextualisation

Introduction

First, we need to specify that the issue of *school climate* partially covers the one of *well-being* in school. However, we need to clearly define how they differ. Let's mention that researchers have been working on school climate for a long time. 112 years ago, Perry (2008) was the first education supervisor to write specifically about how school climate affects students and the learning process. Practical research on school climate starts in 1950's when Hapin and Croft (1963) launched a systematic study tradition on the impact of school climate on learning and development of the students. This type of survey has also been encouraged by organisational research and studies on school's efficacy (Creemers and Reezigt, 1999). First studies on school climate used to focus on visible characteristics, like physical state and equipment of schools (Anderson, 1982).

During the last forty decades, educators and researchers recognised that complex set of elements constituted school climate. There is no consensus inventory on the essential aspects composing school climate. Nevertheless, and we will see it, academic writings suggest a definition we can rely on (Freiberg, 1999; Cohen, 2006) within the frame of this new programme.

Well-being also « refers to a degree of individual satisfaction, of students or staff, in different aspects of school life (educational activities, friendships, etc.) » (MENESR, 2015, p.3. As a result, well-being of school users and school climate are two concepts who can sometimes be placed next to each other. This latter concept cannot be reduced to the sum of individual well-being in the sense that it is more complex. Indeed, school climate integrates collective dimensions especially the content of the relationships between different actors (relational dimension), but also educational, safety dimensions etc. In short, a series of relevant indicators to define this school climate.

It is also all the difficulty in giving an accurate measure of the school climate.

Indeed, on one hand, we can only observe manifestations: number of violence and incivility acts, absenteeism, sick leave rate, victim rate, number of daily exclusions, etc.; all over a given period. On the other hand, we can also combine the different opinions of school users on this subject (sense of belonging to the school community, self-esteem, school performances, etc.) and eventually comparing one school to another on different territories.

To give a measure of school climate, it is necessary to break with preconceptions by moving from concepts to indicators. But we also know that even by relying on *a priori* objective indicators, opinions on the same subject can differ greatly from one actor to another. This is where scientific analysis comes into play, which can seek to understand what these discrepancies are due to, based on a series of socioeconomic and socio-demographic factors for example (profiles of respondents, characteristics of the establishment, etc.).

To these first elements gathering the measure of school climate and well-being at schools we must necessarily add a look to educative systems where disciplinary skills, entry into learning, students' success, etc. are without a doubt objects of discussion and can lend itself to correlative analysis.

Specific context(s) to explore

As economic trading and strategic advantages areas for European powers (France, Britain, Spain, and the Netherlands, especially) during three centuries, most of Caribbean islands share a slave and domination past, similar on some points. But this shared past should not overview the specific context in which each educative system, specific to each island, has been created. As such, the sociocultural context and the way it impacts school climate must be a subject of discussions in the so called ultra-peripheral territories. This distance from the « centres », to which are added all the debates about adaptation of the metropolitan system (Barthélémy, 2010) to the local situations in terms of disciplinary content for example (De Cock, 2018), can also be questioned. The socio-economic context is also part of the elements the Observatory should investigate because it sometimes reveals educational inequalities that are difficult to understand without taking it into account (Weiss, Butcher, 2019). Works directed by the CRREF for a decade will be a strong support to question the contexts and be able to describe the confrontations between internal context (of a learner) and external (of an environment). So the contextual approach seems promising to study the school climate from these different angles developed below.

How to measure school climate and well-being at school?

The measure of school climate: a double approach

In no case can the school climate be measured spontaneously, but only by multiplying the variables. Indeed, it is composed by a set of more or less hidden characteristics and will influence collective or individual well-being. In order to measure it in a synthetic way and given the multidimensionality in essence of the school climate, we can focus on at least four major factors of analysis and seek their correlations: victimisation (and multivictimisation) rates, peer relationships, educational climate, sense of security. In addition, we can try to understand school climate according to a certain number of variables (qualitative and quantitative), but it is also quite possible to study the influence of school climate on this set of variables.

Measuring instrument and survey tools

Before coming back particularly to victimisation surveys carried out in schools, it seems necessary to us to discuss quickly the genesis of this type of survey which probes victims as knowledge of delinquency and incivility in different areas of social life including the educational world.

On the issue of safety and well-being, the objective of social sciences is to produce objectified knowledge. This scientific production is then based on methods applied, or adapted, so as to correspond to the object of study. That way, the ordinary work of the sociologist is to construct precise objects in order to implement methods of investigation which make it possible to clarify the functioning of the thematic in question. To do this, there are basically two main sets of techniques: quantitative and qualitative methods. We should come back, not in detail, but quickly, to the development of these tools which the social sciences claim to use.

As a collective research programme, the sociology of crime develops in the United States after the First World War. The Chicago School is composed by researchers who made decisive contributions to the sociology of delinquency (Thrasher, 1927; Wirth, 1928; Landesco, 1929; Sutherland, 1937; Shaw & McKay, 1942). Its research programme was expressed in its most accomplished form by Edwin Sutherland in the 1920s, whose contributions to crime still have a strong heuristic reach today.

Qualitative methods, almost absent from the American scientific landscape between 1940 and 1950 due to the predominance of functionalism and the rise of quantitative methods, regains their full force from the 1960s.

The methodological heritage of the Chicago School will have repercussions in France from the 1960s to 1970s. Many studies will develop in the following decades on very varied subjects with the creation of several sociological research centres, of which the best-known today is the Center for Sociological Research on Law and Penal Institutions (CESDIP), specialised in delinquency. From the mid-1980s, the State initiated several sectors of research into delinquency through the establishment of structures and organizations with, for example, the creation of the French Observatory of Drugs and Drug Addiction (OFDT) and the Institute National Institute for Advanced Studies in Security and Justice (INHESJ). This period was marked by a strong use of quantitative data in the context of public procurement "in connection with the growing place of statistics and" expertise "in public debate" (Desrosières, 2014, quoted by Mucchielli, 2014, p. 42). Within this profusion of research on knowledge of the crime, victimization surveys will take place. We will see how this instrument can be used to gain knowledge of schools on issues of victimization, feeling of well-being and more generally the school climate.

In France, the public debate is fuelled by an almost unique statistical source: police and gendarmerie statistics. However, researchers have developed surveys in the general population, privileged tool in the social sciences. The genesis of surveys on victimization and feelings of insecurity is to be sought in the United States, where security concerns date back to the 1960s with the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (Katzenbach Commission). It is in 1965 that the first operations of statistical counts of victimisation (Victimisation studies), independent of the various federal administrations, appeared. They will continue while improving their samples every five years from 1973. Thus, we reverse the focus in order to position ourselves from the point of view of the victim and we quickly notice that the reported victimizations are far superior to those recorded by the police services. This is the quest for the famous black number of delinquencies. Following the start of North American studies, social science researchers in France became involved, albeit belatedly, with this method of investigation (Zauberman, Robert, Beck and Névanen, 2013).

The victimization survey then becomes the main measurement tool based on samples to which the survey technique is applied. We are trying to gauge "a social phenomenon that has traditionally been measured only through administrative data" (Zauberman, 2015, p. 8). The 1980s, under the influence of American research, marked a major turning point when the two conceptions of the feeling of insecurity were analyzed separately (fear for oneself or one's loved ones, whether or not related to previous victimizations vs. concern for a social phenomenon). At this time, the work on fears is gaining momentum. In schools, we talk more easily of well-being or feeling of security without it really changing what we are looking for or the way we look for it (aggregation of several variables).

Based on the observation that each administration applies filters (and schools, secondary schools and high schools are no exception: see for example the movement *#pasdevague*), we are looking for new indicators offering the possibility of getting as close as possible to actual delinquency. This research is based on surveys applied to a representative sample whether it is local or national, and even international. If the first investigation was carried out in the mid-1980s, it was only a decade later that their regular implementation took place. This is the case with INSEE in its Periodic Surveys - which lasted until 2007 - on household living conditions (EPCVM). With the arrival of the National Observatory of Delinquency and Criminal Responses (ONDRP) in the field (Robert and Zauberman, 2011a; Robert and Zauberman,

2011b), INSEE is producing an exclusive victimization study called “Living environment and security (CVS)”. In addition to this national study, a survey has been carried out every two years since 2001 in the Île-de-France region. We also have available the "Health Barometer" study conducted by the National Institute for Prevention and Health Education (INPES) since 1992. Based on these lessons, they will be applied at the local level where the Regional Observatory on Delinquency and Social Contexts (ORDCS) takes up and develops similar surveys on the Marseille region in municipalities of different sizes (Mucchielli & Raquet, 2016; Allaria, Mucchielli & Weiss, 2016) and on three university campuses (Weiss, 2018).

The results of victimization surveys suggest reading a number of data, the most common of which are "prevalence" and "incidence". Prevalence is the proportion of people affected at least once by one type of victimization during the reference period (most reliable indicator). The incidence measures the volume of victimization suffered in the population (dependent on information on the number of incidents suffered).

In general, these surveys focus on visible damage to property and people (assaults, thefts, degradations, discrimination, etc.). The aim of the CSCO project is to allow comparisons between territories and with other available sources designed as a means of ensuring correspondences or divergences and possibly revealing trends. In short, "a film says more than a photograph" (Zauberman, 2015, p. 11).

Of course, to study school climate and well-being at school, scientific literature shows that complementary methods such as ethnographic methods (including observation) can also bear fruit.

In order to circumscribe our object, we searched for the available data concerning the population which interests us particularly in this CSCO research program: users of schools, colleges and high schools in the Caribbean. One might think that in the long term, the CSCO will also be able to investigate university campuses (and thus accompany the Observatory of Student Life in the French Antilles).

Available data: a brief overview and the observation of a scientific vacuum in the Caribbean

Several major national and international surveys are currently available and will serve as references in the work carried out by the Caribbean School Climate Observatory (CSCO).

First, the Department of Evaluation, Prospective and Performance (DEPP) has already reflected on the issues of well-being and school climate (see in particular the exploitations made by Grisay & Meuret, in the 1990s). During the 1990s, the DEPP carried out surveys on "school life" and "life in society" as well as on working methods. A little later, the research turns to the phenomena of school violence represented by the "SIVIS and victimization surveys" where the school climate is questioned. Subsequently, surveys carried out by the International Program for the Monitoring of Student Achievement (PISA) and by the Teaching And Learning International Survey (Talis) internationally as well as "student panels" at the scale issues include questions about student well-being in school. In 2012, at the instigation of the DEPP and the rights defender, a call for projects entitled "Equal opportunities at school" was launched, the main focus of which is the question of well-being.

The quality of life of teachers has been studied by the MGEN foundation, showing particularly a difference in perception between those of the public and the private, to the advantage of the latter (Billaudeau, Gilbert, Lapie-Legouis & Vercambre-Jacquot, 2014). Teacher-pupil relations, undoubtedly essential to guarantee a peaceful school climate, can have a negative effect stemming from professional practices (humiliation of disruptive pupils, instrumentalization of the "good" pupils). What about the Caribbean region?

Two major research centres will provide undeniable support for data and research protocols. First of all, it is the International Observatory for Violence in Schools (OIVE, originally European Observatory) created in 1998 at the initiative of Eric Debarbieux and Catherine Blaya. The data collected, as well as those accumulated by the European Observatory on School Violence, include several lessons on which the OCCS can draw. Then we have at our disposal the surveys developed by the National School Climate Center (NSCC).

In addition, self-reported studies are also often used to study violence in schools, in several countries (for example, Debarbieux, 2004, on victimization surveys in France; Lecocq, Hermesse, Galand, Lembo, Philippot, Born, 2003, in Belgium; Peretti-Watel, 2001, for the use of SRD surveys). The self-reported method has also been a tool for studying the link between school failure and juvenile delinquency (Lagrange, 2001; Lagrange 2002).

To conclude, the almost total absence of data available on a regional scale - even if sometimes the French territories of America can be included in national surveys (Bellarbre, Kerivel and Khieu, 2018) - constitutes a scientific vacuum damaging to the understanding of school climate and the consideration of the context on these issues. We also know that Guadeloupe has recently been trying to launch Local School Climate Surveys (ELCS) on the voluntary establishments of the academy (Académie de Guadeloupe, 2017: 20). If other Caribbean islands have tried to deal with the school climate, especially in secondary school, it is only in a very peripheral way (for Barbados, see for example Marshall, 2015).

This inventory convinced us of the need to create this Observatory (CSCO) which will have the advantage of making up for the lack of data and offering a regional and contextualized comparison.

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