An exploration of organizational climate in Greek high schools

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Academic Leadership Journal

An exploration of organizational climate in Greek high schools

Introduction

In the theoretical and research literature about school administration, organizational climate receives considerable attention. A major reason is that school climate is often represented as the heart and soul of the school and the essence of the school that causes teachers and students to love the school and to want to be a part of it (Freiberg & Stein, 1999). Another reason is that climate is often seen to be associated with school effectiveness. Furthermore, research has shown consistently that the principal of a school does not affect student achievement directly but does so indirectly by fostering a healthy climate in the school (e.g., Leithwood and Jantzi, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2001; Pellicer, 2003; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). Therefore, it is essential that school principals understand the nature of school climate and the climatic conditions that support student achievement.

In Greece, little is known about the organizational climate of schools. A search of the literature revealed only one study done in elementary schools (Kavouri, 1998). Although the literature about organizational climate in schools is extensive, the majority of the information is context-specific, much of it generated in North America and the UK. School administrators in Greece, as in other countries, should beware of acting on that information without considerable caution – the common practice of borrowing and lending information has proven to be problematic, (Brundrett, Fitzgerald, & Sommefeldt, 2006; Steiner-Khamsi, 2006).

The general purpose of this study was to explore Greek teachers’ perceptions of the organizational climates in their schools. More specifically, the purpose was to assess a sample of Greek schools for the presence of five climate qualities: supportive principal behaviour, directive principal behaviour, teacher engagement, distractions from the basic tasks of teaching, and the cohesiveness of social relationships. A related purpose was to explore whether teachers’ perceptions of school climate differ in relation to selected demographic factors.

This study is important for being the first to assess the organizational climate of State high schools in a Central Greece district. Second, climate has demonstrable influence on organisational effectiveness (Kanter, 1983; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; MacBeath, 2005); hence the results of this research could be an important source of information for researchers, educators, and policy makers at both the national and local levels, as they work to improve the Greek education system. Third, this study may trigger a series of similar investigations in other areas of Greece that could provide insights into how school climates compare within Greece and elsewhere, and possibly how climate relates to school effectiveness. Finally, the study may provide useful information about the OCDQ-RS as a research tool, particularly in its translation from English to Greek.
Theoretical framework

Organizational climate

The terms organizational climate and organizational culture frequently have been used synonymously and attempts to differentiate them have proven problematic – in the main because they overlap. Nowadays there is considerable consensus that the culture of an organization is only one part of the organization’s climate. Culture is often depicted as consisting of shared values and assumptions, whereas climate is defined by shared perceptions of behaviour (e.g., Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991).

To define organisational climate four points need to be emphasized: its referents, its location, its components, and its administrative importance.

First, the climate of an organisation is grounded in the relatively stable conditions that characterize an organization (Schein, 1985; Rafferty, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Those internal characteristics give the organization its distinct identity or atmosphere (Sergiovanni & Starrat, 2002). As early as 1967, Halpin characterized organizational climate as the personality of an organization. More recently Hoy and Miskel (2008) wrote:

[The] climate of a school may roughly be conceived as the personality of a school – that is, personality is to the individual as climate is to the organization (p. 198).

Second, the construct “climate” does not refer to a phenomenon in the objective world – it refers instead to the perceptions of members of the organization concerning the organization’s internal environment (Schneider, Wheeler, and Cox, 1992; Rafferty, 2003; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Ekvall and Ryhammar (1999) put it this way:

The climate evolves in the confrontation between the staff members and organizational realities [like] structure, policies, tasks, goals, strategies, leadership, resources, workload, technology, and staff characteristics. … The people in the organization are wearers and exponents of the climate. (p. 302)

Similarly, in reference to schools, Hoy and Miskel (2008) say climate is a function of the everyday collective perceptions of all participants – administrators, teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

Third, the climate of an organization is generally conceived as being multidimensional; that is, climate is seen as the product of interactions among classes of internal characteristics. For example, Tagiuri (1968) and Owens (2004) maintain that four clusters of factors contribute to organizational climate: ecological factors, milieu factors, social system/organizational factors, and cultural factors.

In the education field, Halpin and Croft (1962) did seminal research that eventually led to the identification of two clusters of climate factors: one set pertaining to the characteristics of a school’s teachers as a group, the other pertaining to characteristic behaviours of the school’s principal.

The final point is that many authorities posit that the climate of an organization influences how the members of that organization conduct organizational processes, such as problem solving, decision making, planning, communicating, coordinating and controlling, psychological processes of learning, identification, motivating, and so on. As a result, the climate of a school affects student achievement (Maslowski, 2001; Hoy, Tarter, & Bliss, 1990; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). However, it has been shown
that the leadership provided by a school’s principal exerts *indirect* influence on students’ achievements through the climate (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin, & Fullan, 2004). As Eckvall & Ryhammer (1999) put it:

Leadership has climate as a lever. (p. 308)

However, it remains to be seen whether extant understandings about organizational climate are valid for the schools of Greece.

*Instruments for assessing organizational climate in schools*

In regard to instruments for describing organizational climate in schools, three perspectives or filters have been adopted: openness, health, and citizenship (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 198). Here we are concerned with only openness.

This perspective, originated by Halpin and Croft (1962), is taken in the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). The three current versions of the OCDQ (for elementary, middle, and high schools) can be used to assess the openness of teacher-teacher and teacher-principal interactions. In each version of the OCDQ climate is assessed in terms of six dimensions: supportiveness, control or direction, hindrances, collegiality, intimacy, and engagement.

The OCDQ has been used extensively in various contexts, its psychometric properties have been tested thoroughly, and there is a rich body of research findings. For these reasons the OCDQ is an attractive instrument for the exploration of organizational climates in Greek schools.

**Method**

**Instrument**

For this investigation Hoy’s OCDQ-RS was translated into Greek. The translated questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of randomly chosen secondary high school teachers so as to eliminate difficulties in understanding the questionnaire items.

The questionnaire consisted of 34 items. These items allowed teachers to record their perceptions of the climate in their schools in terms of the frequency with which they perceived certain behaviours to occur. Teachers’ responses were recorded on a scale that ranged from 1 = rarely occurs, 2 = sometimes occurs, 3 = often occurs, to 4 = very frequently occurs.

The questionnaire items related to five dimensions of climate, two concerning leadership by the school principal, three concerning teacher interactions, as follows (Hoy, nd):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Behaviours</th>
<th>Supportive principal behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• motivates teachers with constructive criticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The internal consistency of the translated questionnaire was tested with Cronbach’s alpha and produced the following
values:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive principal behaviours</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive principal behaviours</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher engagement behaviours</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrations for teachers</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy of teacher behaviours</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the criterion alpha value is commonly set at 0.7 or better, three of the clusters of items (supportive principal, directive principal, and teacher engagement) have acceptable internal consistency, and the remaining two (frustrations and intimacy) have reasonable consistency but could do with some refinement.

In addition to the thirty-four questions relating to school climate, the instrument contained questions about the participants’ demographics – gender, age, total years of working-teaching experience, years of work/service at the current school, and location of the school.

Data gathering and analysis

Before questionnaires were delivered to schools in the Poseidon District (pseudonym), the Director (Principal) of each school was contacted by telephone to obtain permission for the survey. For the majority of schools, a researcher went to each school (widely dispersed through the region) to distribute and collect questionnaires personally – which was very well-received by the teachers. In the case of schools located on the islands of Poseidon Prefecture, the questionnaires were mailed.

Each questionnaire was accompanied by an explanatory letter. In the case of island schools, a postage-prepaid envelope for returning the questionnaire was also included.

Of the schools in the district, 86% participated. Four hundred and forty-four questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 67%.

The data were analyzed with SPSS Version 17 for means, standard deviations, frequencies, and analysis of variance.

Findings
Demographics of the participants

Table 2 presents the demographics of the sample.

Two features are of particular interest. First, two thirds of the teachers in this sample were in the 40-59 years range. This means that in the Poseidon district large numbers of teachers will be retiring in the not-so-distant future, even if the age for compulsory retirement age is increased (such legislation is currently before the Parliament of Greece). Second, as the distribution for experience affirms, this large group of teachers would take with them a great deal of experience. The net effect is that sustaining the quality of the teaching force in the Poseidon school system may be difficult, especially in its island schools.

Perceptions of the elements of climate

In tables 3-7 the perceptions of the teachers are shown in terms of average scores for the sets of questionnaire items that constitute each dimension of organizational climate. In each case the items are arranged in descending order of means. Since missing data were ignored and responses ranged from 1 to 4, means are to be interpreted as follows:

Averages in the range 1.0 – 1.5 signify “Rarely occurs”

Averages in the range 1.5 – 2.5 signify “Sometimes occurs”

Averages in the range 2.5 – 3.5 signify “Often occurs”

Averages in the range 3.5 – 4.0 signify “Very frequently occurs”

Supportive principal behaviours

As Table 3 shows, most of the supportive acts by the principals occurred between “sometimes” and “often” (means = 2.42 to 2.54). The two exceptions were “The principal goes out of his/her way to help
teachers” which occurred sometimes, and “The principal sets an example by working hard him/herself” which was seen to occur often. The standard deviations indicate that there was a moderate amount of variation in the views of the participating teachers.

**Directive principal behaviours**

Table 4 shows clearly that generally the principals were seen as “sometimes” engaging in supervision of the controlling type. In this regard, as the standard deviations show, the teachers’ perceptions concerning these aspects of the climate in their schools did not vary unusually.

**Teacher engagement behaviours**

The means in Table 5 have two interesting general patterns. First, there seemed to be a noticeable difference in teachers’ engagement with one another and with students. Teachers in Poseidon secondary schools were seen as “sometimes” to “often” enjoying good collegial relations and affective states – they were seen as respectful of one another’s professional competence, mutually supportive, happy with their work, proud of their school, and of good morale. Students, on the other hand, were seen as less fortunate, only sometimes being trusted, or included in school governance. Second, the teachers were seen to be friendly with students often – but only “rarely” to “sometimes” helpful to students with individual problems. The standard deviations again indicate considerable consensus on this point.

The means in Table 6 are all in the lower half of the “sometimes occurs” range. It seems that Poseidon teachers were not much diverted from the task of teaching by a general pattern of interference by either administrators or colleagues.

---

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The principal sets an example by working hard himself/herself.</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal looks out for the personal welfare of the faculty.</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal is available after school to help teachers when assistance is needed.</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal uses constructive criticism.</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal compliments teachers.</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal explains his/her reason for criticism to teachers.</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal goes out of his/her way to help teachers</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The principal monitors everything teachers do.</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal closely checks teacher activities.</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal supervises teachers closely.</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal talks more than listens.</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal rules with an iron fist.</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal is autocratic.</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-principal conferences are dominated by the principal.</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are friendly with students.</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers respect the personal competence of their colleagues.</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers help and support each other.</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers really enjoy working here.</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers are proud of their school</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Intimacy of teacher behaviours**

The means in Table 7 suggest that there were two levels of intimacy in teachers’ relationships with colleagues. “Sometimes” to “often” teachers were familiar with the family backgrounds of their colleagues ( = 2.5), but only sometimes socialized with them ( = 1.9 to 2.1).

**Dimensions of climate**

We turn now to what the data say about the five general dimensions of climate, but first a note of caution. Indices computed from our data are difficult to interpret because we have not found comparative data for schools in Greece, and the normative indices provided by Hoy (nd) derive from surveys of teachers in high schools in New Jersey, the United States. We do present those New Jersey norms as a matter of interest, but caution strongly that they should not be generalized to Greek schools. Hoy (2010) has indicated that the OCDQ has been used in other countries but that comparative standardized norms have not been generated.

Note that the number of items varies from dimension to dimension – and that the possible totals vary accordingly; i.e., the subscale scores are not comparable directly. However, when these sub-scale scores were standardized (mean = 500, SD = 100), so as to allow comparison against Hoy’s New Jersey sample (Hoy, nd), the following scores were obtained:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher know the family background of other faculty members.</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers socialize with each other on a regular basis.</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ closest friends are other faculty members at this school.</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers invite other faculty members to visit them at home.</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To give meaning to these standardized scores, they can be compared against the following graphic –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have too many committee requirements.</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative paper work is burdensome at this school.</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned non-teaching duties are excessive.</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers interrupt other faculty members who are talking in faculty meetings.</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mannerisms of teachers at this school are annoying.</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine duties interfere with the job of teaching.</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
which, again, reflects NJ norms.

Compared with New Jersey schools, then, on average the organizational climates of the Poseidon schools were perceived as featuring:

- An average level of impediments to teaching (teacher frustrations score = 500) in the form of interference by administrators and colleagues, as well as non-instructional tasks.

- Less than average levels of supportive behaviours by the principals (standardized score is 474.1 – about 0.25 SD below the mean) and intimacy of collegial relationships (standardized score is 467.4 – about 0.3 SD below the mean). Round about 60% of New Jersey schools would rate higher on these dimensions of climate.

- Less than average directive behaviour by the principal (standardized score is 449.4 – about 0.5 SD below the mean). In about 70% of NJ schools teachers would experience more directive supervision and tighter control of their activities.

- Low teacher engagement (standardized score is 367.4 – about 1.5 SD below the mean). The participants perceived poor morale, little pride in the school, little support of or concern for colleagues, and poor attitudes regarding students and their ability to succeed. Teacher engagement would be higher in about 80% of NJ schools.

One other score was computed – the general openness index for the school climate. This openness index is interpreted the same way as the subtest scores. For schools in the Poseidon district the Openness Index was 473. This is just a little below the average NJ school.

Differences associated with demographic variables

Analyses of the perceptions of sub-groups surfaced statistically significant differences in four aspects of school climate: the frequency of principals’ supportive behaviour, teachers’ engagement with the school and their work, the frequency with which teaching activities were frustrated and/or diverted, and the intimacy of teachers’ behaviours.

Some teachers in this sample attributed more supportive behaviour to principals than others.
Specifically, those teaching in rural schools (sig 0.00), those with 5-9 years of teaching experience (sig 0.01), those who had been in their current schools for 5-9 years (sig 0.01), those aged 30-39 (sig 0.05), and men (sig 0.05).

Two groups attributed more engagement in work and the school to their colleagues: men (sig 0.051) and the participants who had 10-14 years of teaching experience (sig 0.03).

One sub-group in the sample saw more frustrations for teachers – those who worked in urban settings (sig 0.03)

And finally, there was borderline evidence that participants in the 30-39 age-group saw more intimacy in their colleagues’ behaviours (sig 0.051).

**Discussion and implications**

To conclude, we advance three sets of observations about the implications of the imminent teacher retirement “bulge” for school climates, existing school climates, and further research.

**Effects on school climate of the retirement bulge**

The demographic statistics for this investigation indicate that large numbers of teachers in the Poseidon District will be retiring in the not-so-distant future. And this is likely to happen throughout Greece, which participated in an OECD survey of 25 countries that showed 25 per cent of primary and 30 per cent of secondary teachers were aged over 50 (OECD, 2005). Even the imminent changes in the pertinent Greek legislation to increase the compulsory retirement age for civil servants from 60 to 67, would only postpone the effects of this factor. In any case, there is little enough time to implement compensatory measures. Although there are many recently-graduated teacher trainees who have not been placed in schools, there is still some doubt about the government being able to replace retirees. Greece cannot seek a solution by looking to other countries for suitable candidates, for there are at least two major problems with this strategy. One is the language issue; to teach in the schools of Greece, a teacher must be fluent in Greek. Another is the distinct possibility that other countries will not have surpluses of qualified and willing recruits. Indeed, the aforementioned OECD survey of existing and projected supply and demand for teachers revealed that a number of concerns were consistently raised: diminished attractiveness of teaching as a career because teaching was seen as undervalued, with teachers’ relative salaries declining in most countries. Thus there was anxiety about adequate numbers of entrants and retaining effective teachers in schools. A second concern was high attrition rates, especially among new teachers.

Yet another problem is that an influx of new teachers would tax the capacity of school administrators, as well as rank-and-file teachers, to provide the climates that are needed to ensure successful induction and integration of new staff (OECD, 2005).

**Existing school climates**

**Principal Behaviours**

The findings regarding supportive and directive behaviours seem to indicate that the principals had
chosen to leave teachers to their own devices for much of the time, intervening only occasionally in the work of teaching and, instead, devoting themselves to administrative duties. This finding suggests that they saw their role as being primarily managerial (doing things right, following orders) rather than providing leadership (doing the right things). The designation normally used in Greece, Director rather than Principal Teacher, seems apropos. Perhaps this tendency is a result of Greece’s education system being highly centralized and bureaucratic. Perhaps it is also reinforced by their preparation for the principalship: many, many years of successful experience as teachers are required, with success often being defined by higher authorities as compliance with directives and “appropriate” political alliances (Athanasoula-Reppa & Lazaridou, 2008).

Whatever the explanation, this tendency is unfortunate for at least three reasons.

A large accumulation of research now confirms school climate as a major factor in school effectiveness: more positive or open climates are associated with better outcomes for both students and staff (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Bulach, Malone, & Castleman, 1995; Sammons, Hillman, & Mortimore, 1995; Dronkers & Robert, 2008). Thus, if schools in the Poseidon district are representative of schools in Greece, weak school climates may have contributed to Greece’s poor showing in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – a worldwide evaluation of 15-year-old school pupils’ scholastic performance, first conducted in 2000 and repeated every three years since (PISA, 2010). In 2000, on reading literacy, Greece ranked 24th among 27 countries; in 2003, on mathematics, Greece ranked 24th among 27 countries; and in 2006, on science, Greece ranked 28th among 30 countries. Furthermore, in a recent analysis of those same data, Dronkers and Robert (2008, p. 571) found that higher scholastic achievements were indeed associated with better climates.

A second reason for concern is that the principals who were the foci of this research were not realizing their potentials for influencing events in their schools. Bouradas [Μπουραντάς] (2005) and Vail (2005), for example, have pointed out that a school’s leader must inspire staff by expecting and modelling cooperation in achieving the school’s objectives. In this connection researchers have found that successful school principals have a “passion for collaboration” – they make their schools better by actively promoting teamwork, networking, and collaboration through a climate of trust, mutual respect, and a shared belief that high standards can be achieved by both teachers and students (e.g., MacBeath, 1998; Leithwood and Duke, 1999; Southworth, 2002, Day, 2004). These factors are all elements of school climate and culture. In contrast, by adopting a managerial role, school principals contribute to maintenance of the status quo and miss opportunities for improving students’ educational experience by developing healthy school climates (Eckvall & Ryhammer, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, Earl, Watson, Levin, & Fullan, 2004; Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006).

A third reason is that teachers with supportive principals who address both their professional and socio-emotional needs are more likely to adopt a spirit of collegiality and show higher professional commitment (Sergiovanni, 1990; Reihl & Sipple, 1996). In this connection we are somewhat puzzled by the finding that the principals were seen as not providing enough acknowledgement of the teachers’ work in either face-to-face interactions or in the community. Normally this would be of concern because, as Vail (2005), for example, has noted, principals should foster positive morale and team spirit by publicizing teachers’ accomplishments in the school’s community. Yet, despite this apparent shortcoming on the part of the principals, the participating teachers enjoyed good collegial relations,
affective states, and morale. One might speculate that they were not concerned about the approbation of the community.

One implication of these findings is that it may be beneficial in Greece to accord school staffs a greater measure of professional autonomy and, at the same time, devote more resources to educating prospective principals about the potentials of the role and the contributions they could make to their students’ and staff’s lives. Recent research by Athanasoula-Reppa and Lazaridou (2008) indicated that this would be received well: The recently-inducted Greek and Cypriot principals they surveyed valued an ethos of cooperation and collaboration in the school and community, preferred empowering over policing, and preferred developing over maintaining (p. 84). As to the kinds of knowledge that training programs should provide to meet the needs of the contemporary principal, Lazaridou’s (2008) research identified four categories – knowledge of the organization, knowledge of people, knowledge of tasks, and tacit knowledge. Further, her participating principals flagged knowledge about leading people as most important. This category included knowledge of competing interests, self, personal strengths and weaknesses, and – most important, they said – working with people.

This, in turn, leads to the conclusion that the current system in Greece for preparing and appointing principals will have to reduce the considerable attention now given to knowledge of laws for education (knowledge of the organization) so as to make room for other kinds of knowledge, especially knowledge about managing human resources. The need for this is highlighted by the finding that there was a low amount of domineering behaviour in principal-teacher conferences (Table 5), which might lead to speculation that a more formative or developmental approach was being used by the principals in one-on-one supervision. However, this was not the case in the secondary schools of Poseidon Prefecture: the principals were seen as sometimes giving the reasons behind their criticisms of teachers and only sometimes going out of their way to help teachers (Table 3).

Finally, these findings concerning principals’ behaviours also suggest that more academic training programs need to be developed. In Greece there is a dearth of programs to prepare educators for the contemporary demands and challenges of school leadership (Athanasoula-Reppa & Lazaridou, 2008).

Teacher behaviours

In one way, the data concerning teachers’ engagement were enigmatic. On the one hand they imaged a teaching force that was professionally respectful and supportive of one another’s competence. On the other hand, they also communicated a relationship vis-à-vis students that lacked one of the hallmarks of the professional: altruism, a highly developed sense of obligation to further the welfare of clients. They were seen as not very helpful to students with individual problems. These findings suggest that investigation of Greek teachers’ professionalism may be fruitful, to determine whether certain dimensions of their professionalization may need strengthening and thus to identify ways of improving how teachers are trained and certificated.

The finding that students were only sometimes trusted and included in school governance was not entirely unexpected. This has been documented often, for example by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990); Manning & Saddlemire (1996); Kuperminc, Leadbeater, Emmons, & Blatt (1997); Ghaith (2003); Finnan, Schnepel, & Anderson, (2003); and Kerr, Ireland, Lopes, Craig, & Cleaver, (2004). Nonetheless, this is a feature that should be investigated and, if possible, rectified. Given the complexity of contemporary schooling, participation in school governance
by all stakeholders – including students – has become essential. Furthermore, students’ active involvement in the organization of school life helps develop their sense of responsibility and appreciation of democracy, important elements in their preparation for citizenship (Saitis, 2002).

The finding that the schools’ teachers were seen as not being much frustrated by or diverted from teaching by the behaviours of administrators and/or colleagues is also somewhat unexpected. One possible explanation, as other research suggests, is that teachers may have become inured to the constraints of a highly centralized, bureaucratic education system (Athanasoula-Reppa & Lazaridou, 2008). An alternative explanation is that the education system in Greece may no longer be as highly centralized and bureaucratized as it once was. In Greece, which has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1981, education reform has been pushed by EU policies. One aspect of this influence has been a persistent call for fundamental transformations of education throughout Europe “to be driven forward by member states sharing experiences, working towards common goals, and learning from what works best elsewhere” (European Commission, 2008a, 2008b).

Further investigation of school climate

Finally we want to comment on what the OCDQ-RS reveals – and cannot reveal because of its genetics – about interpersonal relationships within the school community. The questionnaire provides a window on teachers’ social relationships with one another (the Intimacy set of items) and the degree to which they and their principals help and support one another (one item in the Teacher Engagement set, and the items relating to principals’ behaviours). However, The OCDQ-RS provides scant, incidental information about an aspect of school administration and climate that is now receiving a great deal of attention – to what degree and how the members of a school practice distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007; Leithwood, Mascall, & Strauss, 2009), dispersed leadership (McBeath, 2005), collective leadership (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008), or quantum leadership (Lazaridou & Fris, 2008).

Until fairly recently, research on leadership focused almost exclusively on “heroic” leadership:

The “hero paradigm” of leadership … emphasises the capabilities of one person to transform and improve an organisation. …The school leader is the gatekeeper of change. (Harris, 2003, p. 126)

As a result we know a great deal about the personal and behavioural characteristics of nominal leaders – individuals who have been invested by higher officers with the power to control those they lead. But little attention has been paid to how leadership flows from interactions among the members of an organization who do not have formally allocated leadership roles (Lazaridou & Fris, 2008). The significance of this is highlighted by such findings as those of Timperley (2007), who found that student outcomes improved most when teachers concentrated on “working together as a team to diagnose each student’s difficulties and helping the teachers concerned to develop strategies to accelerate progress” (p. 207, emphasis added). It is further reinforced by a consensus that student achievement increases most when leadership is shared by school teams, parents, and students (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Wright, 2008). The conclusion is that attempts to assess the organizational climate of schools need to include attention to the dynamics of interpersonal interactions at all levels, and the conditions that influence their potential to have leadership effects – to influence the directions that a group’s activities take. It would be futile to use the OCDQ for this.
Conclusion

This investigation has generated baseline data about school climate in Greek schools. Further investigations need to be conducted, perhaps paralleling this one initially but also looking at different aspects and effects of school climate, in a variety of situations, and using a variety of research approaches and instruments. Such investigations could contribute significantly to the improvement of schools in Greece.

References


