

CHAPTER 2

ESTABLISHING A LITERACY CULTURE IN SCHOOL

Culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin.

—SCHEIN (2004, p. 23)

The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them.

—SCHEIN (2004, p. 23)

What do visitors sense when they come into schools? Believe it or not, they sense something, but may not be able to articulate it. They may sense that this is a fun and lively place to be. They may sense that this is a serious workplace. They may even sense that this is a challenging school with a lot of problem areas. As principals, we don't like to think that such "sensing" is legitimate. Those who have studied school climate and culture, however, would tell us a different story. In fact, if these visitors, whether community members or school employees, were to share their observations and feelings, a picture of the school would begin to emerge. These feelings that visitors have reflect a piece of the school's culture. Every school has its own unique characteristics, and visitors can sense these by listening and observing.

School culture generally refers to the *long-term* and deeply embedded patterns of norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions (Deal and Peterson, 2002, 2003) that not only guide behaviors but also give a school its identity. Schein (2004) suggests that the term *culture* should be used for the deeper assumptions and beliefs that operate unconsciously and shape how individuals in that culture will respond. Visitors to a school often infer things about the culture by the way the school is decorated and maintained, by the manner in which everyone interacts (parents, students, teachers, staff, and administration), and by beliefs that are expressed by the staff.

Those like Schein (2004) who have studied school culture have found there are some common elements to a culture. There are strongly held beliefs and values. There are stories that are told that communicate what the organization is about. There are heroes and heroines within the organization whose accomplishments reflect those values. There are rituals and ceremonies that reinforce the values. Finally, there are key players who communicate the values to others in the organization, both through actions and through words.

The *climate* in school reflects school culture. School climate refers to the *short-term* changeable aspects of the school's physical and psychological environment. The climate of a school is evident when a visitor walks into the school. Do the students and staff greet visitors? Is the office staff inviting and friendly? Are there comfortable places to sit and wait for scheduled appointments? Are visitors welcome in classrooms? All of these aspects are a reflection of school climate. Many researchers have noted that school climate has a high correlation to student achievement.

School climate is complex, and there may not always be agreement about what contributes to school climate. Schools often identify different components that contribute to school climate . . . things they want to change. Some of these components obviously reflect the values of those in the school. Some frequently mentioned components include the appearance of the school, the relationships among staff members, the relationships between staff and students, the relationships between parents and staff, the ways in which decisions are made, the physical environment for learning, and the relationship between the school and community.

Researchers have identified a number of characteristics in effective schools that were climate- or culture-based. Some of the most frequently mentioned characteristics in these studies included the following:

- High expectations for all students, which results in an optimistic attitude for each student
- Student-centeredness that helps meet the needs of each student
- Focused mission, which provides staff with a sense of purpose
- Rewards and incentives for accomplishments of teachers and students
- A well-maintained physical environment that displays students' work
- Frequent monitoring of progress
- A high level of community support

In a study of secondary schools, Roueche and Baker (1986) found five key organizational characteristics in highly successful schools. While their study focused on secondary schools, their characteristics are pertinent to all levels of schooling. These five key organizational characteristics reflect the culture and climate of the school, with a particular emphasis on the principal's leadership.

- *Leadership by example* is prevalent, and staff members in these schools notice those actions. Principals in these schools often spend most of their time in the halls and classrooms, not in their offices.
- Principals in these schools perceive themselves to be *instructional leaders* and are committed to observing classroom instruction.
- The school is committed to effective *professional development* of its staff. Teachers in these schools are involved in planning and implementing the training that is offered.
- There is *accountability through evaluation*. Teachers welcome efforts to evaluate and improve their effectiveness.
- There is more *community involvement*, with more active parent associations and parents volunteering and visiting classrooms frequently. Similarly, staff members are encouraged to become involved in community projects.

ASPECTS OF ENVIRONMENT THAT AFFECT SCHOOL CLIMATE

The principal's role is powerful and essential in ensuring that a positive climate is built in the school. After all, climate can affect the morale, productivity, and satisfaction of staff. The components that many educators view as part of school climate can be grouped into four areas: the physical environment, the social environment, the affective environment, and the academic environment. (Best Practices Brief, 2004). Approaching school climate through these areas allows the development of a more comprehensive and cohesive approach to school environment.

The *physical environment* should be welcoming and conducive to learning. This category refers to all those items that include the physical and material aspects of school, including how well the building is maintained and cared for, whether the grounds and classrooms are clean, whether classrooms are visible and inviting, whether staff have ample textbooks and supplies, and whether students feel safe and comfortable.

The *social environment* is shaped by the types of communication and interaction at school. In a positive social environment, teachers are collegial and open in their communication process. Parents and teachers frequently work together as partners. Staff members are part of decision making and they are open to students' suggestions. They are comfortable with conflict resolution and expressing their opinions in a supportive and trusting atmosphere.

As principals look at their school, they may want to take note of the frequency and types of interactions among staff members, students, and parents. Are students and teachers engaged in informal conversations? Are parent opinions and suggestions valued and acted upon by staff members? Do staff members feel comfortable

disagreeing with each other, but in a positive and constructive manner? Do staff members talk with each other throughout the day and throughout the building? All of these observations can contribute to the social environment, which affects school climate.

The *affective environment* refers to those aspects of the environment that promote a sense of belonging. When the affective environment is positive, students, staff, and parents feel respected and valued. They feel that they are important members of the school community and that their input is respected and valued. In schools where there is a positive affective environment, there is a high degree of trust and respect among staff members. The staff and students are friendly to visitors and to each other. When staff members are talking, they are talking constructively about the people and events at the school. School events are well attended by the staff. This kind of affective environment contributes to a high degree of morale within a school. For the purposes of our discussion, we have combined the social and affective aspects of environment. This combination allows us to focus on staff and students without trying to differentiate which is social versus affective.

The final aspect of school climate is referred to as the *academic environment* that promotes learning. In a school that has a positive academic environment, there are high expectations for all students and all students are expected to succeed. In this environment, teachers monitor the progress of their students regularly and make adjustments in their teaching accordingly. When assessments are conducted, the results are shared with students and their parents on a regular basis. In a school where there is a strong academic environment, the achievements of students are positively reinforced in both public and private ways.

The Physical Environment

Look around your school through the lens of a parent or community member. Often, the first place the visitor comes is to the office. For many visitors, this is the only place that they visit. What does the office look like? Is there a welcoming place that visitors report to? If they have an appointment, can they sit comfortably and read material while they wait? Is it clear where the restrooms are if visitors need to use them?

The rest of the school is important as well. Is the school kept clean? Is there litter in the restrooms, hallways, stairwells, or classrooms? Are there signs indicating where various classrooms and grade levels are housed? Are the hallways decorated with a variety of student work? Can visitors look into classrooms, or have teachers covered door windows with paper, as though they are hiding something? If there are elderly visitors (as often happens in many districts with retirement communities), is the building easy to negotiate?

The outside of the building is also important. Are the school grounds attractive and well-maintained? In some schools, children maintain school gardens that are planted by members of local garden clubs. In other schools, parent volunteers

help with planting seasonal flowers and bulbs near the entrance. Each of these small steps communicates to the visitor that this is a special place for children.

These are only some of the ways that the physical environment reflects the climate in a school. As authors, we have visited hundreds of schools and found that a brief walk through the school with a principal can reveal whether the principal cares about the physical environment. Some principals walk through the school and ignore the little signs of decay: the crumbled pieces of paper in the halls, the curled-up student work that has been hung in the hall for too long, the lack of soap in the restrooms. The principal who stoops down to pick up a piece of paper in the hall or who stops a teacher in the hallway to complement the display of student work is sending a much more powerful message than any written memo can ever send.

The Social and Affective Environment

How do principals nurture a positive social and affective environment? Think about all the opportunities that principals have to set the tone for this environment. Many principals make a practice of greeting their *students* at the beginning of each day, as soon as they come off the bus or walk into the building. Finding a central place to stand and greet students is not difficult, takes no more than 10 to 15 minutes, and sends an important message: “I’m glad you’re here and I care enough about you to be here to greet you.” In one school we visited, the principal not only greeted students, she made it a point to make comments to several students as they came into the building, noticing a new jacket, a book in their hands, or a conversation with their teacher. These comments became this principal’s special way to promote a relationship with students. Some additional ideas for promoting positive relationships with students include the following:

- Make it a practice to invite small groups of students to the office for lunch. Make the lunch casual and conversational. One principal made a point to schedule these lunches so that every child in the school had the opportunity to have lunch with the principal.
- Consider rewarding students who have had good days with a book reading at the end of the day. Each teacher could send one student during the last thirty minutes of school once a week.

Another principal made it a daily practice to be in the office when *parents* picked up their children. This was an important time for the parents to see the principal and to have informal conversations about the day or the events in school. During this time, parents also got to see the principal more informally. This informal meeting allowed an exchange of ideas that built relationships over the course of the year. Other ideas for building relationships with parents include the following:

- Consider calling parents when their child has done something positive: perhaps he shared something with a classmate, perhaps she helped someone on a project; perhaps he improved in a subject. Calling parents for positive things lets them know the principal cares about their children. Often the only time they hear from us is when their child has done something “wrong.”
- Ask faculty members to call parents after the first week of school, just to share something positive about each child.
- Consider sending occasional postcards to parents to notify them of something positive that has happened. One principal sent postcards out once a month to the parents of two children in each classroom. The postcard may have noted that the child read a book exceptionally well, had done well on a test, or had behaved well in the cafeteria. Over the course of the year, each child's parents received one such postcard from the principal.

Promoting relationships among *staff* is of equal importance to ensuring a positive environment. While many might talk about social events to promote these relationships, the quality of daily interactions among staff is much more important than monthly social events. How can this relationship be promoted?

Many schools have committees that help promote a sense of collegiality within the school. The types of committees can vary, depending on the needs of the school. There can be committees for home–school relations, school discipline, school climate, and school improvement, to name a few. These committees should include all staff members, not just faculty. Perhaps the teacher's assistant who has strong community connections might know just the right way to get parents more involved.

It is important that committees are given the authority to make decisions along with a budget to implement some decisions. In one school, for example, the home–school relations committee decided that they wanted to send postcards to the parents of every student who showed improvement in reading on their report cards. That committee had a small budget and spent it on postcards, as they believed this small act would have a big effect on the students in the school. They were right.

In addition to empowering staff through committees, it is important for the principal to let the staff know that they are valued. This can be done through a public “thank-you” at faculty meetings or in school newsletters as well through private notes placed in staff mailboxes. Sometimes the expressions can be done in a 1-minute exchange in the hallway. These expressions of appreciation are an important way to let staff know that the many things they do to make a difference in the school.

Finally, the daily interactions with staff throughout the school are important. Once principals know the staff, they learn enough about them to have brief but

meaningful conversations. Every staff member has a story to tell, as they all have their own lives and all the challenges that come with these lives. Principals who know enough about their staff can ask one staff member how her son is doing while another staff member might be asked about his new house. Brief conversations—but meaningful.

All of these suggestions assume that the principal is actively moving about the school and frequently interacting with students and staff. Other ways that principals promote a strong affective environment, one in which all members of the school community feel valued, include the following:

- Visiting every classroom every day, even if it is just for a few minutes
- Creating a suggestion box for students, staff, and parents
- Promoting more student cooperation through the use of cooperative learning strategies
- Promoting more teacher collegiality through team teaching, common planning times, and teacher exchanges
- Developing staff–student mentorship programs, in which each at-risk child has a staff member who mentors him or her
- Placing “cookie coupons” that can be redeemed in the school cafeteria in teachers’ mailboxes to recognize those who have done something above and beyond
- Providing staff development on issues related to cultural and ethnic diversity to promote an understanding of all cultures
- Arranging for substitutes and other resource teachers to cover classes in various teams to provide extended planning time
- Teaching a class or reading a book to a class for a teacher who needs extra time to work on a special project or to observe another teacher
- Holding lottery drawings at staff meetings, during which staff members have the opportunity to win a 1-hour break

The Academic Environment

How can a principal provide a strong academic environment? Among other actions we’ve described, the principal “walks the talk.” The principal who inquires about student learning when interacting with students is walking the talk of academic environments. The principal who inquires about a class that a teacher is taking is walking the talk of academic environments. What are some additional ways principals encourage a strong academic environment? The following list is a compilation of some of the observations we made in schools where there are strong academic environments:

- They attend the staff development that the district offers its staff, as well as attending as in-school staff development.
- They participate in readers' groups that are offered to staff at the school and in the district.
- They listen and talk to students about their work during their visits in classrooms.
- They listen and talk to teachers regarding their concerns about their students' achievement.
- They read special books to students rather than reward them with tangible treats.
- During their evaluation conferences with teachers, they ask questions in order to deepen their understanding of the lesson.
- They teach demonstration lessons for teachers, especially in their area of interest.
- Their newsletters and correspondence with teachers contain suggestions for a new teaching strategy or motivation technique.
- They meet frequently with the curriculum leaders in their school in order to learn as much as possible about the instructional needs in the building.
- They decentralize their budget to ensure that funds for instructional supplies are available.

There are several school climate surveys that are helpful for principals to use as they attempt to gauge the school climate in their buildings. One has been developed by the Alliance for the Study of School Climate at California State University in Los Angeles. Sample items are included in Figure 2.1. For the alliance's complete survey, visit www.calstatela.edu/centers/schoolclimate/assessment.

PROMOTING A STRONG LITERACY CULTURE AND CLIMATE

The principal has an exciting and demanding job. The principal is the one who teachers depend on to handle all the issues that occur during the day. Many times they want assistance with a smorgasbord of issues: discipline, instructional resources, parents, custodial needs, field trip requests, or equipment needs. Most often teachers do not ask to change the climate of the school, as they often view the climate as something that is intangible and intransient.

Yet the climate is changeable, and the principal has a critical leadership role in this area. In fact, the principal's leadership will play a pivotal role in the school's ability to establish a thriving literacy program. As a leader, the principal must

Directions: Please circle the item below that best describes the current state at your school in general. For each of the three performance levels there are three sublevels (high, middle, and low).

Physical Appearance								
Level-3			Level-2			Level-1		
High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
Welcoming to outsiders, the school projects an identity to visitors.			Some signage for visitors as they enter the building, but images compete for attention.			Little concern for the image of the school.		
Current student work is displayed to show pride and ownership by students.			Few and/or only top performances are displayed			Decades-old trophies and athletic records in dusty cases.		
Faculty Relations								
Level-3			Level-2			Level-1		
High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
Faculty commonly collaborate on matters of teaching.			Faculty are congenial to one another, and occasionally collaborate.			Faculty see other faculty as the competition.		
Leadership roles are most likely performed by faculty with other faculty expressing their appreciation.			Leadership roles are accepted grudgingly by faculty, and other faculty are often suspicious of motives.			Leadership is avoided, and those who do take leadership roles are seen as traitors.		
Leadership/Decisions								
Level-3			Level-2			Level-1		
High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
Vast majority of staff members feel valued and listened to.			Selected staff members feel occasionally recognized.			Administration is seen as playing favorites.		
Most of the staff has a high level of trust and respect in leadership.			Some staff have respect for leadership.			Most staff feel at odds with the leadership.		
Leadership is in tune with students and community.			Leadership has selected sources of info about the community and students.			Leadership is isolated from constituents.		

(continued)

FIGURE 2.1. Sample items from the Alliance for the Study of School Climate survey. From the Alliance for the Study of School Climate (2004). Copyright 2004 by the Trustees of the California State University. Reprinted by permission.

Learning/Assessment								
Level-3			Level-2			Level-1		
High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
Instruction/assessment promotes student locus of control, sense of belonging, and sense of competence.			Instruction/assessment is most often focused on relevant learning, yet mostly rewards the high-achievers.			Instruction/assessment is focused on bits of knowledge that can be explained and then tested.		
Instruction is dynamic, involving, learner-centered, and challenging.			Instruction is mostly based on relevant concepts but often appears to be busy work.			Instruction is mostly "sit and get."		
Attitude and Culture								
Level-3			Level-2			Level-1		
High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
Students speak about the school in proud, positive terms.			Students speak of the school in neutral or mixed terms.			Students denigrate the school when they refer to it.		
Most students feel listened to, represented, and like they have a voice.			Most students see some evidence that some students have a voice.			Most students feel they have very little voice when at school.		
Community Relations								
Level-3			Level-2			Level-1		
High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low	High	Middle	Low
School is perceived as welcoming to all parents.			School is perceived as welcoming to certain parents.			School is suspicious of why parents would want to visit.		
Community members are regularly invited to speak in classes.			Inconvenience leads to few community members speaking in classes.			The vast majority of community members have not seen the inside of the school since they went there.		

FIGURE 2.1. (continued)

be committed to improving the literacy climate in the building. What the principal says, and more important, what he or she does, will carry the school forward in this critical area. The principal plays a primary role by providing leadership, articulating his or her expectations, and supporting the staff and students on their literacy journey.

While general ways to improve climate have been discussed in an earlier section, this section will focus on the *literacy* culture in school. By making a conscious effort to improve the environment for literacy, principals will be enhancing the opportunities for students so that more students can be successful.

Provide Leadership

The principal is expected to walk the talk, or to lead by example. The staff looks to the principal for guidance and support. If principals demonstrate a commitment through their actions, the staff will notice. In fact, the principal's role in literacy leadership is so important that a group of leading reading experts met with the Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI) in Philadelphia in 2001 to discuss it. These experts identified nine areas of content knowledge necessary for principals providing literacy leadership:

1. *School culture*: understanding what culture is and their role in changing it
2. *Craft leaders*: knowing the leaders in literacy instruction who provide fresh ideas and useful models
3. *Children's literature*: reading quality children's literature and sharing their love of reading with staff, students, and parents
4. *Instructional models*: taking the lead to ensure that staff members understand the complexities of models of reading
5. *Curriculum*: knowing the district's literacy curriculum and making sure teachers can deliver it in a meaningful way
6. *Options for organizing time and space*: being aware of how various uses of time and space affect instruction
7. *Assessment/content standards*: using assessment data with staff and parents in a meaningful way
8. *Special interventions*: examining how support is provided to struggling readers
9. *Knowledge and research*: knowing where to find information on what works and why

As principals consider their own leadership in this area, they may want to think about the steps that they can take to demonstrate their commitment to staff members.

➤ A first step is to learn as much as possible about literacy. Principals should read some of the leading thinkers and practitioners in the field. A wealth of information can be found at the website for the International Reading Association (www.reading.org). Additional information can be found at the ERIC Clearinghouse (www.reading.indiana.edu) as well as at the website for the National Reading Panel (www.nationalreadingpanel.org).

➤ Consider attending professional development sessions that are geared towards the development of literacy. These sessions are often offered at district, state, and national levels. Subscribing to literacy journals such as *The Reading*

Teacher, which is filled with practical teaching strategies, is another way principals can learn more. When staff members see that their principal is interested in literacy, they will view the principal as someone who is truly committed to promoting literacy.

- Assess the school's current culture for literacy. What are the cultural norms at the school? Is there acceptance of the status quo? Or are staff members continually striving to improve their own understanding of literacy learning?

- Learn who the key players are in the school. Deal and Kennedy (2000) suggest these key players are sources of expertise that leaders should tap. Who are the longtime members of the school community? Who are the storytellers who can tell about past events? Are there gossips who keep track of all the activities and goings on? And finally, who are the underground staff who negotiate between various cliques in the school?

- Look for a variety of signs in the physical, social, affective, and academic environment. Is there a lot of student work displayed? Does it show evidence of students' reading and writing experiences? Do staff members participate in literacy staff development and/or readers' groups? Are there enough trade books (both fiction and nonfiction) in classrooms? Do children choose to read during their free time? Do they read at transition points during the day? The principal may want to spend time with the reading specialist or literacy coach while walking around the school and assessing various aspects of the literacy climate (see Figure 2.2).

- Invite staff members from other schools and districts to visit the school and provide feedback on what they notice as strengths and needs.

- Spend time in classrooms observing literacy strategies in all subject areas, not just in reading classes. By doing this, principals will gain insight into the professional needs that staff may have as well as knowledge about how and what students are learning in these classrooms.

- Consider beginning a "principal's choice" program, in which principals select one children's book a month to distribute to teachers. Inside each book is a message that explains why the book was chosen. Teachers then read the book to their classes, providing a schoolwide literacy discussion with an important message.

After they spend some time learning more about literacy and also observing the culture in the school, principals are in a better position to address ways to strengthen this culture from a knowledge and research base.

Provide a Physical Environment That Celebrates Literacy

In schools where there is a great deal of support for high levels of literacy, there is a greater chance that students will be more successful and teachers more motivated.

The Physical Environment

- Children's work is displayed throughout the school, including hallways and offices.
- Student work is rotated routinely in order to ensure timely materials displays.
- Books and other reading materials are readily available in reading corners in all classrooms.
- Books and other reading materials are available for students and parents in the office and clinic.
- The principal's office exhibits students' work and children's literature.
- The principal's office is easily accessible to staff.

Strongly agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly disagree**

The Social and Affective Environment

- There are ample recognitions of students accomplishments throughout the school year.
- The principal frequently recognizes students when entering classrooms.
- The principal is actively engaged in promoting literacy.
- There are celebrations of literacy during the school year.
- There is a collaborative culture that builds on the expertise and talents of staff members.
- There is adequate time for staff to collaborate with each other on literacy issues.
- Staff members are frequently involved in decision making.

Strongly agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly disagree**

The Academic Environment

- There is a literacy leadership team that involves personnel in assessment and planning.
- Large blocks of time are provided for literacy instruction.
- Instructional time is protected from unnecessary interruptions.
- Common planning time is provided to all teams.
- Literacy is supported in all curricular areas.
- There are ample books, both fiction and nonfiction, throughout the school.
- A variety of meaningful professional opportunities about literacy are routinely provided throughout the year.
- There is enthusiasm throughout the school community for the school community of learners.

Strongly agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly disagree**

FIGURE 2.2. Survey of literacy climate.

From *A Principal's Guide to Literacy Instruction* by Carol Beers, James W. Beers, and Jeffrey O. Smith. Copyright 2010 by The Guilford Press. Permission to photocopy this figure is granted to purchasers of this book for personal use only (see copyright page for details).

The physical environment, as mentioned earlier, plays a vital role in establishing a positive climate in school. Principals should talk with people in the school community and look at their school with a dispassionate eye if they really want to assess the climate. What artifacts in the physical environment would communicate a strong value for literacy?

Principals can take some simple steps to create a physical environment that shows that literacy is valued and supported in the school. Some of these steps require coordination so that responsibilities are shared. If, for example, you decide to increase the displays of student writing throughout the school, you may want to assign a different team for each month of the year, to ensure that student work is rotated routinely and writing is current.

➤ Every hallway in the school should have children's writing displayed not only at the eye level of adults but also at the eye level of children. It's important to remember, though, that the eye level of a kindergarten student is different from the eye level of a fourth grader. Some principals have had hanging strips installed at lower eye levels in the hallway to help with this. As students wait in line or transition from one class to another, they will have a ready source of reading material in front of them.

➤ Consider exhibiting writing in the cafeteria and in hallways outside the major resource rooms (gymnasium, art room, music room) as well. The writing should be mounted on construction paper or some colorful paper that draws attention to the displays.

➤ Classrooms should have book corners filled with trade books (both fiction and nonfiction), comfortable pillows and seating, as well as writing materials. In one school where one of the authors was a principal, an anonymous donor funded these book corners after the principal had spoken to a civic group about the importance of books in classrooms. Finding a source of funding these book corners can be a challenge, but the search may turn up some surprising results.

➤ The school office should have student work displayed so that visitors see it firsthand. Often, visitors never make it much further into the school than the office. Consider various ways that displays can be presented: on doors, on the front of counters, on bulletin boards, and near seating areas. Such displays say more about a school culture than any one person can convey.

➤ Be sure that there is plenty of reading material for children and adults in the office. Having comfortable chairs and tables filled with children's books, magazines, and original student books sends the message that this school takes literacy seriously. Consider asking each class to compile a collection of student writing into a book that can be shared in the office space.

➤ The principal's office should be accessible to the staff. Consider these questions: Are the doors open or closed? Do staff members feel comfortable walking

into the principal's office to ask a question, share something positive, or share a concern? Where is the desk placed in the office? When students, staff, and parents come into the office, they should see evidence that the principal is a reader. Display children's literature visibly in addition to professional books.

➤ Look at all the areas of the school as potential places for books and other reading materials. The school clinic, for example, could have books for children to read as they are waiting for a parent to pick them up. The art classroom might display stories composed by students to accompany the display of art work. The physical education teacher might have students write directions for exercises and physical activities and post these on walls. And, of course, the principal's office itself should be replete with student work mounted and displayed on the walls.

Provide a Social and Affective Environment That Promotes Literacy

As mentioned earlier, the social and affective environment should promote a sense of community in which all members—students, staff, and parents—feel respected and valued. It is equally important to develop this positive environment around literacy experiences, so that each student, staff member, and parent knows that this is a school that values literacy. This value should be conveyed in all aspects and all places of the school day.

Principals and teachers should look for a variety of ways to use books and other reading material as a way to *celebrate the accomplishments* of all students. These celebrations do not need to be extensive or expensive.

➤ In a school where one of the authors was the principal, teachers identified one student in their classroom each week to be the “outstanding citizen” of the week. While the prior practice had been to give each citizen of the week an ice cream sandwich party, the principal (new to the school) decided to read a book to them instead. Over the course of the year (36 weeks), all children in the school had the opportunity to have this special time with the principal. As the children went back to their classrooms, they were given a small token (a pencil or a bookmark) and a letter that went home to their parents.

Go into classrooms and read to students when they achieve something particularly noteworthy. For first graders, it might be the 100th day in school; for third graders, it might be learning the multiplication table; for fifth graders, it could be a social studies test they had all passed.

➤ Many schools have principal's challenges, where the principal encourages children to read a certain number of books. Once the students reach that mark (usually a relative high number), the principal agrees to do something special. Sometimes that something is unusual, such as sitting on the roof of the school or a dunking in the water booth at the school fair. Other times, though, the reward for students can be less daring. Students respond to a variety of activities.

➤ Consider holding an authors' conference to celebrate your students' writing. During an authors' conference, students throughout the school are given an opportunity to share a book they have written as well as engage in a variety of literacy activities throughout the day. They may, for example, make marbelized book covers in one activity while in another activity they may hear from a local writer.

➤ Hold a "book character" day during which students dress up as a character from one of the books they have read during the year. On that same day, community members can be invited into the school to share their favorite books with classes.

➤ Have a door-decorating contest for your offices and classes in which all doors are decorated as a book. At some point in the week, allow classes to view the decorated doors.

A positive affective environment is usually accompanied by a *collaborative environment* in which staff members feel they are part of a team and not just another "cog" in a wheel. More important, in a collaborative environment, staff members accept responsibility for the success of all students in their school, not just those in their class. In a collaborative environment, staff members work with each other on meaningful tasks (such as on the schoolwide committees mentioned earlier), have opportunities to participate in decision making, freely share ideas, resources, and supplies with fellow staff members, engage in professional networking outside of the school day, and view their school as a place of renewal or purpose. Often times, in this type of environment there is more risk taking and experimentation. In one school, teachers frequently received mini-grants from the local Chamber of Commerce because they were encouraged and supported for taking these risks.

These collaborative cultures do not happen without the leadership of the principal. The principal has to find ways to create time and a place for collaborative planning. The principal also must walk the talk by making decisions in a collaborative manner. Some ways to accomplish this include the following:

➤ Provide time during the day for committees to meet regularly. One principal provided this time on a quarterly basis and enlisted the help of retired teachers to cover classes while the committee members were in meetings. At another school, the grade level team arranged to cover the teacher's class while her committee meetings were held. There are countless ways time can be provided, if time is valued.

➤ Involve grade-level teams in student placements for the subsequent year. One principal held 2 days of meetings with grade-level teams to accomplish this. During each day, there were three 90-minute meetings: kindergarten, grade 1, and grade 2 teams, for example, met on day one; grade 3, grade 4, and grade 5 teams met on day 2. Four substitutes were hired for each day and rotated through each grade level while the teachers from that grade level were in the student placement meeting.

➤ Involve grade-level leaders in budget planning and budget choices. Many principals meet with grade-level leaders on a monthly basis. When it is time to submit the budget to the superintendent, these meetings can be instrumental in shaping the budget. As a result of this process, the principal may learn, for example, that more funds need to be set aside for purchase of “easy readers.” Or the principal may decide that it is important to allocate each team a budget to use during the year.

➤ Involve staff in hiring decisions. Often times, there is a team approach for hiring administrators at the district level, but not at the school level. In one school, the principal interviewed teacher candidates with the literacy coach and two representatives from the grade-level team. The interviewers shared the hiring decision, and everyone then fully committed to helping that new teacher acclimate into the culture of the school. This same principal, by the way, also worked with her secretary and another secretary in the district to interview clerical help; she worked with the head of maintenance to interview for a custodial position.

Finally, an important part of strengthening the affective environment for literacy is to reinforce literacy through an informal network. All schools have an informal network in which ideas and information are shared. The more staff members are encouraged to share ideas and information about literacy in these networks, the more embedded literacy will become in the school culture. The principal can participate in and encourage this sharing of ideas by telling a staff member about a new idea for teaching reading or by letting a staff member know of a special workshop being offered in a neighboring school district.

Build an Academic Environment That Promotes Literacy Learning

As we’ve seen, committees can be an effective tool for promoting a positive affective climate. Marzano (2003) states, “Leadership for change is most effective when carried out by a small group of educators with the principal functioning as a strong cohesive force” (p. 174). Marzano is not alone in his belief that leadership must be inclusive, with shared responsibilities among staff members. Fullan (1995) and Senge (1990) note that the culture of the school changes when there is team work.

Involving staff members in decision making is a key element of many effective organizations. High-quality teams work more collaboratively and are more willing to propose risks. Roueche and Baker (1986) note that “Departmental, committee, and task force work are important ways that principals achieve excellent results.”

Form a School Literacy Team

Cobb (2005) suggests that the implementation of *school literacy teams* provides a shared leadership vehicle for staff that can improve student literacy learning. Certainly the principal’s role is critical in the formation of a school literacy team. The

school literacy team generally consists of 10 to 12 staff members who represent the school population: classroom teachers, resource teachers, literacy coaches, media specialists, administrators, and other staff, such as teacher assistants. While teachers from every grade level do not need to be represented on the school literacy team, the team should include representative grade levels and/or subject area specialists in order to insure that planning is relevant for the entire school. Some schools have invited parents and other community members to serve on their team.

The team is led by the school principal. The team is tasked with reviewing multiple forms of school literacy data with the goal of identifying the needs of both students and staff. After reviewing the data, the team develops a list of students needing additional support as well as a plan for professional development for the staff. Finally, the team develops a list of recommendations to improve the literacy culture, presents it to the staff for feedback, modifies the recommendations, and then oversees the implementation of the recommendations.

In Chicago, for example, literacy teams provide up to 40 hours of staff development to subject area teachers and reading teachers. Through regular meetings, they are charged with establishing learning communities to discuss student work and literacy strategies.

Consider the Use of Literacy Coaches

Many schools and school districts have modified the roles of the reading specialist and/or Title I teacher to include literacy coaching. The International Reading Association (2004) has defined literacy coaching as something that provides “ongoing consistent support for the implementation and instruction components. It is non-threatening and supportive. It gives a sense of how good professional development is. It also affords the opportunity to work with students.” The role of the literacy coach has changed the reading specialist’s role to one who focuses on meaningful professional development to support the school’s literacy performance. For a more detailed discussion of literacy coaches, see Chapters 3 and 5.

Provide Large Blocks of Time for Literacy Instruction

Another major consideration for enhancing the academic climate for literacy is to organize the school schedule to ensure large blocks of time for literacy. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) emphasize the need for large blocked schedules for literacy instruction. There are a variety of ways to do this.

FOUR-BLOCKS MODEL One instructional model that provides larger blocks is the four-blocks model, which is a delivery system for teachers (Cunningham, Hall, & DeFee, 1998). The four blocks include a guided reading block, a self-selected reading block, a working-with-words block, and a writing block.

During the *guided reading* block, instruction is focused on comprehension. Children learn about typical story elements, such as character, setting, and plot. They also learn how to work with nonfiction text. All types of reading materials

are used: big books, basal readers, magazines, trade books, and selections from science and social studies texts. The teacher may use whole-class, small-group, peer, and individual instruction during this block.

During the block called *working with words*, children learn to read and spell high-frequency words correctly by learning the word patterns. Through a variety of activities, teachers not only work with the entire group, they also monitor and assess the progress of individuals. Some of the planned activities include making words and word walls. For example, when students engage in a “making words” activity, they might use magnetic letters to change the beginning or ending of words.

The *self-selected reading* block provides all children with time for reading their own books as well as time for read-alouds. During this block, children choose what they want to read and teachers provide opportunity for them to respond to their reading in various settings. Often, individual conferences about the books are also held with children.

During the *writing block*, children write. They may be starting a new piece of writing, revising or editing a piece of writing, illustrating their writing, conferencing about their writing with the teacher, or putting the finishing touches on their writing. The teacher usually provides a mini-lesson on some common element that might appear in their writing. The mini-lesson also provides the children with a model for writing. An author’s chair, a place where children share their own writing and respond to others’ writing, is also frequently provided during this block.

PARALLEL BLOCK SCHEDULING Parallel block scheduling is a scheduling system that is used to help reduce the student–teacher ratio in core academic areas such as reading. Discussed by Canady and Rettig (1995), this schedule was developed as a way to prevent students from missing crucial instruction due to pull-outs.

Some of the benefits of parallel block scheduling include the size of the instructional group, reducing the interruptions for students during instruction, and providing more opportunities for individualized instruction. In this schedule, the teacher has fewer than 15 students at a time in his or her core reading block, and the remaining students in the class are scheduled for a resource period with a resource specialist in the school. One interesting finding of this schedule is that there is less disruptive behavior, primarily because there is less seatwork, during which children may be off task (Delaney, Toburen, Hooten, & Dozier, 1998).

As may be seen in Figure 2.3, Teachers A and B begin their class with an uninterrupted large block of time. During the next 50 minutes, Teacher A works with Group 1; Teacher B works with Group 3; and the extension teacher works with Group 2 and Group 4. Focused instruction could be a reading group, a writing workshop, or individual conferences with students. Since only half of the class is there at the time, the possibility of distractions is minimized.

In one school that used this scheduling, 2-hour blocks of literacy instruction were provided in the morning in grades K–2; grades 3–5 had their 2-hour block of literacy instruction in the afternoon. This 2-hour block allows the teacher to inte-

Teacher A	Large-group literacy (Groups 1 and 2)	Large-group literacy (Groups 1 and 2)	Focused instruction (Group 1)	Focused instruction (Group 2)
Teacher B	Large-group literacy (Groups 3 and 4)	Large-group literacy (Groups 3 and 4)	Focused instruction (Group 3)	Focused instruction (Group 4)
Teacher C	Focused instruction (Group 5)	Focused instruction (Group 6)	Large-group literacy (Groups 5 and 6)	Large-group literacy (Groups 5 and 6)
Teacher D	Focused instruction (Group 7)	Focused instruction (Group 8)	Large-group literacy (Groups 7 and 8)	Large-group literacy (Groups 7 and 8)
Extension Teacher	Focused instruction (Groups 6 and 8)	Focused instruction (Groups 5 and 7)	Focused instruction (Groups 2 and 4)	Focused instruction (Groups 1 and 3)

FIGURE 2.3. An example of a parallel block schedule.

grate reading and language arts and provide instruction that is deeper, as needed. During this 2-hour block, special education and other resource teachers were able to schedule their coteaching more effectively. More important, in a larger block of time, students had the opportunity to engage in authentic reading and writing activities.

Protect Instructional Time

Another important strategy a principal can use to ensure larger blocks of time is to ensure that *instructional time is uninterrupted*. One primary way principals can protect time is to decrease or eliminate announcements over the intercom system. Many schools allow announcements only during the first or last 5 minutes of school. Other strategies are varied and can include the following:

- Have a policy that does not allow noninstructional visitors to the classroom during teaching times.
- Do not schedule performances and other extracurricular activities during instructional time.
- Provide teachers with a sign for the door that lets drop-in visitors know when important literacy lessons are occurring. See Figure 2.4 for an example of what one principal used.
- Have your office staff screen all calls by saying, “Ms. Jones is teaching right now. May I take a message and have her call you when she is free?”

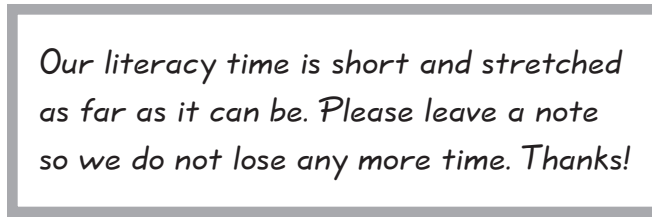


FIGURE 2.4. Sample sign for teachers' doors.

Provide Common Planning Time for Teachers in Each Grade

In order to provide a common planning time, principals need to create schedules that allow teachers within the same grade level to have the same noninstructional periods during which they can plan together. There are many ways this common planning time can be provided. Many schools provide it by ensuring that resource instruction, such as art, music, media, technology, and physical education, are provided at the same time to all students in a grade. Thus a team with four second-grade classrooms might have all their resource time at 1:00 P.M. each day, thereby providing classroom teachers with common planning time.

There are, however, other ways this time can be created. Whatever schedule is developed, teachers and staff must be involved in the decision-making process, as they are the ones most affected by the schedule.

- Resource teachers might agree, for example, to occasionally keep a group of students for two periods, allowing the teachers on the team to plan collaboratively for a longer period of time.
- Some schools have found that combining lunch time with a study hall or recess leads to a larger block of time for teachers. These schools often use parents to supervise this time, freeing up planning time for teachers.
- Some schools have scheduled their resource teachers for one day rather than throughout the week. In this model, second-grade classrooms would have a one full day of resource instruction a week with resource teachers, thus providing a full day of planning each week for classroom teachers.

Support Literacy in Every Area and throughout the Day

Supporting literacy in every curricular area throughout the day is known as "literacy across the curriculum." With this approach, students are learning literacy skills while learning other content, such as science, social studies, art, and music. The rationale for this approach is well explained by Moore, Moore, and Cunningham (2003). The key to ensuring that this instruction happens successfully is planning.

Specifically, teachers implementing literacy across the curriculum may have to be more flexible. For example, if they have an opportunity for writing in their science lesson, they may reduce writing time in the morning. In this approach, you may see books about math in the math center and books about science in the science center. It is not uncommon to see teachers making extensive use of children's literature in these areas. A third-grade classroom studying economics might have a bulletin board displaying important vocabulary such as *consumer*, *goods*, and *supplies*. Books in the center could include the *Berenstain Bears' Trouble with Money* by Stan and Jane Berenstain or Russell Hoban's *A Bargain for Francis*. A first-grade teacher studying seasonal climate changes might have books like *The Fall of Freddie the Leaf* by Leo Buscaglia, a story about the life cycle of a leaf.

Build the Supply of Trade Books, Both Fiction and Nonfiction, in Your School

The availability of books in your school is essential in order to develop an academic culture that enhances literacy. Books should be everywhere: in classrooms, in offices, on desks, and in common areas. Children's ready access to books will pay off when you see them walking in the school with a book in their hand, so enrapt in the story that they cannot put the book down.

Every classroom should have an extensive classroom library. As mentioned earlier, one of us received an anonymous donation from a community member to supply our book corners. Other sources can be found through mini-grants from the local Chamber of Commerce or through parent donations.

Support Professional Development

As a principal, you are responsible for your staff members' professional growth. How you approach this area is critical to your school's academic environment. Professional development should not be something that is done *to* teachers but something that is done *with* teachers. Staff development is best when it is planned collaboratively with teachers and when there is a provision of ongoing support and resources.

How you and your staff decide to approach staff development is important. Some of the best staff development in literacy will do the following:

- Respect the capacity of teachers and principals
- Reflect best research practices
- Enable teachers to develop further expertise in literacy strategies, content, and technologies
- Require substantial allocation of time and other resources

Principals must find time for staff development and be creative and flexible in their approach. Here are some possibilities for finding time:

➤ *Modify the school calendar* to periodically release students early so that teachers can participate in professional development activities during the regular school day. Some schools, for example, have an early-release day on one Wednesday a quarter. The daily schedule on the remaining days is adjusted to compensate for the time students are not in school.

➤ *Use a common group of substitutes on a regular basis.* Some principals may bring in four substitutes for 2 days in order to provide over an hour of release time for each team (see Figure 2.5).

➤ *Use common planning time* to allow for professional development during the school day.

When developing plans for staff development, there are alternatives that should be considered to the simple one-shot workshop.

➤ *Action-based research* requires teachers to design and pursue investigations. By collecting and analyzing data, teachers gain insights that can change their classroom practices. In an action-based research, teachers share the results with colleagues.

➤ *School visits* are an excellent way for staff members to learn a new approach or strategy. Tremendous learning occurs when teachers and staff members view the implementation of a new approach firsthand. Staff members at the host school will offer a different perspective if they have been using the strategy for a while. School visits should also provide time for the visiting staff members to ask questions and discuss what they have observed.

➤ *Peer coaching* is a strategy that can provide one-to-one assistance to teachers. The relationship is developed through common planning of lessons, classroom

Day One	9:30-11:00	11:00-12:30	1:00-2:30
Substitute One	Grade 1 - A	Grade 2 - A	Grade K - A
Substitute Two	Grade 1 - B	Grade 2 - B	Grade K - B
Substitute Three	Grade 1 - C	Grade 2 - C	Grade K - C
Substitute Four	Grade 1 - D	Grade 2 - D	Grade K - D
Day Two			
Substitute One	Grade 3 - A	Grade 4 - A	Grade 5 - A
Substitute Two	Grade 3 - B	Grade 4 - B	Grade 5 - B
Substitute Three	Grade 3 - C	Grade 4 - C	Grade 5 - C
Substitute Four	Grade 3 - D	Grade 4 - D	Grade 5 - D

FIGURE 2.5. The use of four substitutes during the school day.

observations, joint development of materials, and strategizing to meet students' needs. Joyce and Showers (1996) report that the act of observing another teacher is a powerful professional development experience, regardless of whether there is verbal feedback.

➤ *Study groups* can be organized around a particular topic. A group of teachers might want to learn more about reading workshop. They would gather books and materials to read and discuss their reading in a study group. Leadership for the group can be rotated or assigned to one individual. In addition to reading and discussing current literature about the topic, study groups typically visit other school sites and attend conferences or classes to gather additional information.

➤ *Staff retreats* are often held at the beginning of the year. An uninterrupted session allows staff the time to develop goals and plans strategies based on their needs. In addition, staff morale is often boosted by these sessions, as is the sense of a learning community.

More information about professional development is contained in Chapter 3.

Spread Enthusiasm for the Community of Learners within the Larger Community

Visitors can sense when there is a community of learners within a school. The climate is palpable, with evidence from many sources visible in the school. A school that has a positive academic climate shares its values and experiences with visitors who come into the school:

➤ Ask visitors to write down their favorite book as they sign in. Later, classes can graph the favorite books of visitors to the school.

➤ Have a staff bulletin board that shows a photograph of each staff member reading their favorite book.

➤ Consider a student bulletin board showing photographs of students reading their favorite books.

➤ In one school that participated in a local United Way campaign, the organizer held a lottery for those who had contributed to the campaign. Lottery prizes included a variety of professional books and were awarded in random drawings. These drawings were conducted when community members from the United Way were present.

➤ Hold a "Good-bye Book" day during which the oldest students in your school say good-bye to their favorite books by reading them with the younger students in your school.

➤ Hold elections for the favorite book of the semester. The elections can be organized by grade level groups (kindergarten and first grade, second and third grades, fourth and fifth grades), with the results shared on an informative bulletin board.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of school culture and school climate in this chapter has emphasized four important aspects: the physical environment, the social environment, the affective environment, and the academic environment. After a general discussion about these four aspects, we described in detail suggestions for building a culture of literacy. Several ways to create a physical environment that supports literacy were discussed, including the importance of student work displayed at eye level and ample books and reading material throughout the school. Ways to create a social and affective environment to support literacy included a variety of recognition programs, schoolwide celebrations, and the establishment of a collaborative culture. Finally, the academic environment was discussed, with the need for principal leadership paramount.

LOOKING AHEAD

The culture in your school communicates to everyone in your community: students, staff, parents, and community members. As you attend to the culture, the need for professional development will become paramount. By offering quality professional development, a school principal can begin to change the culture significantly. Our next chapter will focus how to build a professional development program that supports literacy.
