



Manual

SCI: School Climate Inventory

School class climate inventory in special needs schools

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Youth Expert Centre Leiden University of Professional Sciences

The Youth Expert Centre of Leiden University of Professional Sciences works together with Windesheim University of professional sciences and Amsterdam University (Forensic Science and Youth care) to improve professional youth care quality. The instruments are developed together with our professional partners and are free to use.

The Manual

The manual of the School Climate Inventory contains a theoretical background and tips for practical use. The introduction describes the starting points and the foundation for the development of this questionnaire. Subsequently, the structure of the questionnaire and the scales are explained and the reliability is mentioned. Next, the way of analysing and interpreting the results is discussed. This manual also contains reference scores for different populations to be used for comparison purposes. The questionnaire, both in Dutch and English, can be found in the appendix.

Introduction

Leiden University of professional sciences, Windesheim University of professional sciences and the University of Amsterdam work together to gain more insight in the learning climate in classrooms. The result is this validated instrument that measures the learning climate in special education classes in (semi) secure residential youth care (Beld, Van der Helm, De Swart & Stams, in press).

When children of ages 8-18 years in the Netherlands cannot live at home or in foster care, mostly due to severe psychiatric and behavioral problems and/or criminal behavior, they are treated in (secure) residential youth care facilities. The juveniles are required by law to spend 7-8 hours a day in education (Hair, 2005; Smeets, 2011). Special education programs structure the institutional days of these young people and should prepare them for a job or further vocational training or education. This structure supports treatment (Gordon & Weldon, 2003; Jancic, 1998; Jenkins, Streurer, & Pendry, 1995; MacKenzie, 2000; Wilson, Gallagher, & MacKenzie, 2000) by providing meaning and hope for a better life. Formal education is considered as a predictor of positive treatment outcomes (Christle, Nelson, Jolivet, & Riney, 2002; Christle, Nelson, Jolivet, 2003; Leone et al., 2003). Formal education can also reduce recidivism (Brunner, 1993; Pinker, 2011; Steurer, 1996; Vacca, 2008). Notably, Cho and Tyler (2010) also found that adult basic education in prisons proved to be associated with higher post release earnings and employment rates.

Formal education in (semi-)secure institutions is not without difficulties. The students, approximately 20.000 children and young people in the Netherlands (Van der Helm, 2011; Boendermaker, Van Rooijen, Berg, & Bartelink, 2013; Brancherapportage Jeugdzorg, 2010), enter institutions with substantial problems, often designated as 'importational problems' (Gover, Mackenzie, & Armstrong 2000). They suffer from substantial psychiatric, behavioral and/or social-emotional problems, including anti-social behavior. Also, a sizable portion of these students have a mild intellectual disability (MID), Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and autism spectrum disorders, which significantly impairs learning (Smeets, 2011). Finally, a lot of students in residential youth care have low self-esteem due to repeated failures at previous schools. Some of them have even not attended school for years (Van der Helm & Austmann, 2012). As a result of the complex and multiple problems and different backgrounds of many students, suitable education is hard to realize. Without education children are getting further away from a desirable participation in society that matches their learning potential and professional interest (Leone & Weinberg, 2010; Maras, Demetre, Moon, & Tolmie, 2012). This results in multiple problems, like unemployment, addiction and (recidivism of) criminal behavior (Linares-Orama, 2005; Parrish et al., 2001; Quinn et al., 2001; Rutherford & Nelson, 2005; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994; Zima et al., 2000). Research on the academic achievements of children in secure

residential youth care shows an extremely bleak picture (Bullock & McArthur, 1994; Linares-Orama, 2005; Quinn et al., 2005; Rutherford & Nelson, 2005) and for children in open residential youth care as well (Berrick, Needell & Barth 1994; Parrish et al., 2001; Education Coordinating Council, 2006; Sawyer & Dubowitz, 1994; Zima et al., 2000).

Secure residential care in itself can have detrimental effects on motivation and mental health of students, which has been referred to as 'deprivational effects' (Gover, Mackenzie, & Armstrong 2000; see for an overview Souverein, Stams, & Van der Helm, 2013). Often, the high frequency of in- and outplacement, and changes in the classroom, make it very difficult to create a positive classroom climate. Some students are there only for a few days or weeks and are unexpectedly released or transferred (Smeets, 2011). As a result, they often lose motivation for (compulsory) education, since they expect to attend school only for a short period of time. Also teachers are often unable to meet educational needs of the diverse population, and educational levels tend to be generally low (Smeets, 2011). A lot of students get bored and display severe reactance, which can create negative interactions between teachers and students and among students themselves, often resulting in a deteriorating classroom climate and violence (Van der Helm, Van Genabeek, Stams, & Van der Laan, 2012). We conclude that appropriate education and training are difficult to achieve for those who are probably most in need of education. It is assumed that the classroom climate can play an important role in these difficulties as psychological, behavioral and psychiatric problems can interfere with learning (Van der Helm & Austmann, 2011).

Most research on classroom climate was done in regular schools. Already in 1948, Withall (1949) searched for a way to measure the social-emotional classroom climate. Withall suggested in his research that meaningful learning of students can only occur in safe, non-threatening situations, and that knowledge about the psychological atmosphere (i.e., learning climate) is very important. Research in regular schools also shows that the learning climate in the classroom is one of the most important factors influencing learning motivation of students (Steffgen, Recchia, & Viechtbauer, 2013). Later studies (Kuperminc, Leadbeater, & Blatt, 2001) examined the characteristics of the learning climate. One of the findings was that learning climate explains differences in the yields of cognitive learning among students and has an effect on their behavioral problems and social-emotional functioning. Bear, Gaskins, Blank and Chen (2011) conducted a study of existing measuring instruments for classroom climate and found five dimensions: Teacher– Student Relations, Student– Student Relations, Fairness of Rules, Liking of School, and School Safety. However, the study did not include studies on special education classes, with the associated complex problems represented by the students. The common antisocial behavior in the classroom in these institutions appears to be strongly correlated with learning disabilities and an impoverished learning climate (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Howes described that the learning climate is determined by the level of aggression and other behavioral problems in the group, the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the students and the complexity of the group (Howes, 2000). Steffgen et al. (2013) also found similar results. Steffgen et al. (2013) found in their meta-analysis that a positive climate was related to a decrease in behavior problems and violence (see also: Janosz, Georges, & Parent, 1998; Janosz, Thiebaud, Bouthillier, & Brunet, 2005). A review by Howes (2000) showed that children become more social competent while dealing with peers in complex social situations, which is very important for reducing aggression. In an unsafe classroom climate students have a primary interest in protecting themselves by gaining dominance and aggressing, which hampers the learning process in school (Van der Helm & Austmann, 2012). It is therefore important to gain knowledge on the learning climate in special education schools in order to achieve positive learning outcomes. Maras (2008), for instance, found perception of academic importance, academic effort and academic competence to be contingent on a good classroom climate (Maras, 2008). It seems that due to the severe and various problems students in special education classes experience, they need more than regular attention and support from their teachers (Seidel & Shavelson, 2007; Houser & Frymier 2009).

In general, for this special population in semi-secure residential youth care, there is a lack of instruments assessing the quality of learning climate. Existing Dutch questionnaires (like the School Questionnaire, SVL, of Smits & Vorst, 2008 and climate scale of Donkers, 2011) have been developed for regular education and require a relatively high level of reading ability, intelligence and

concentration, which often is lacking in students with MID and poor impulse control (ADD). The SVL, for instance, consists of 160 items, which is quite long for children in special education classes. Also the questionnaires do not take into account the severe behavioral problems of the students, especially extreme antisocial and disruptive behavior, which is often of major importance for special education class climate (Fraser, 2006; 2012; Myers III & Fouts, 2006).

Structure of the questionnaire

The SCI is partially derived from existing instruments (i.e., Klimaatschaal, Donkers, 2011, comprehensive School Climate Inventory, Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009, schoolvragenlijst, SVL, Smits & Vorst, 2008) measuring classroom climate. The questionnaire was adapted for specific use at a low cognitive level, for use with students with a mild intellectual disability and extreme disruptive behavior. Items were shortened and if necessary rephrased in a more simple way. An example was: 'The teachers pay attention to what we have to say and acknowledge our point of view', was changed to: 'The teachers listen to us'. We then gave the questionnaire to teachers employed in special education and asked them for advice regarding content and phrasing of the items. As a result of this review, about 30% of all items were rephrased and new items were added. In a test-trial in a Dutch youth prison in 2011, 26 pupils filled in the 40-item questionnaire and commented on the questionnaire. From this research we then drew up a final list of 27 items with 4 scales. Later, items were deleted and the scale *Growth* was added.

The definitive measurement consists of 23 items to measure school climate, rated on a five-point Likert-scale (1 = 'I do not agree' to 2 = 'I partially disagree', 3 = 'I neither agree or disagree', 4 = 'I partially agree' and 5 = 'I agree'). *Teacher responsiveness* scale (5 items) assesses professional behavior and in particular the responsiveness of teachers towards specific needs of the students. Paying attention to students, taking complaints seriously, showing respect and trust are important characteristics of teacher support. The *Disruptive behavior* scale (5 items) assesses the disruptive behavior in the classroom. The *Positive mutual bonds* scale (4 items) assesses mutual positive peer-behavior in the classroom. The *Classroom atmosphere* scale (4 items) assesses the degree to which students are able to work on their schoolwork in the classroom and the structure in the classroom. The scale *Growth* (4 items) measures the extent to which the students think they learn worthwhile things at school, that can help them in the future. A high score on the scales *Teacher responsiveness*, *Positive mutual bonds*, *Classroom atmosphere* and *Growth* give indication of a positive classroom climate and a high score on the *Disruptive behavior* scale is negative. Scores on this scales are recoded for the total score of the Classroom climate. High scores on the safety scales are an indication for high feelings of safety inside the school. Item 22 is not used in one of the scales, but can be used as a control variable.

The students are also asked to assess the different aspects of the classroom climate with a grade from 0 (= really bad) to 10 (= really good). The mentioned aspects of the classroom climate graded by the students are: teacher responsiveness, the things you learn in the class, the atmosphere in the class, the level of honesty in the class, the (integrity of the) rules in the classroom and the safety in the school. The students can also give an explanation or comment on their grade.

Reliability and validity

Validity

Validation of the measurement has taken place between February and May 2013 by Beld, van der Helm, de Swart and Stams (2013). The group consisted of 325 students in 6 high school in residential youth care facilities and 2 school in juvenile justice facilities. The construct validity is assessed with a CFA. Results showed a good fit to the data: $Chi-square = 426.45$, $df = 294$, $p = .01$; $NFI = .900$; $CFI = .966$, $TLI = .960$ and $RMSEA = .036$.

Convergent validity was supported by positive correlations between the scales of the learning climate and the grades for the different elements of the learning climate. Concurrent validity is supported by positive correlations between the scales of the learning climate and the academic importance, academic effort and academic competence, which are part of the 'about me' questionnaire (Maras, Brosnan, Faulkner, Montgomery, & Vital, 2006).

Reliability

For the reliability analyses of the SCI there is distinction made between two kinds of reference groups: schools of residential youth care facilities ($n = 657$) and schools for special education not connected to residential youth care facilities ($n = 389$). Validity analyses divided the SCI into five scales (table 1).

Table 1. Reliability and structure of the scales of the learning climate

Scale	Items	Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	
		Non-residential	Residential
Teacher responsiveness	10, 11, 12, 13 and 14	.908	.927
Disruptive behavior	5, 6, 7, 8, and 9	.889	.885
Positive mutual bonds	1, 2, 3 and 4	.848	.874
Classroom atmosphere	15*, 16*, 17* and 18*	.751	.763
Growth	19*, 20, 21 and 23	.788	.858
Total learning climate	1 till 21 and 23 (recode: items 5 till 9 and 15 till 19)	.891	.894

* Items need to be recoded

Scoring the instrument

The instrument can be applied yearly to measure climate and safety or three times a year to monitor progress of interventions. Filling in the questionnaire takes approximately 10 minutes. Adolescents with a mild intellectual disability and sufficient reading ability are able to fill in the questionnaire. Scoring takes place anonymously and on class level in order to guard privacy. This manual contains data of reference groups of non-residential schools and schools in residential youth care facilities (table 2 and 3). The data was collected between January 2014 and January 2015.

Table 2. Data reference group non-residential schools ($n = 389$) and residential schools ($n = 657$)

	Non-residential					Residential				
	<i>n</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teacher responsiveness	378	1.00	5.00	3.83	.98	647	1.00	5.00	3.76	1.11
Disruptive behavior	375	1.00	5.00	2.80	1.18	647	1.00	5.00	2.16	1.08
Positive mutual bonds	375	1.00	5.00	3.84	.91	639	1.00	5.00	3.77	.99
Classroom atmosphere	377	1.00	5.00	2.73	.94	647	1.00	5.00	3.11	1.01
Growth	374	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.00	622	1.00	5.00	3.44	1.19
Total learning climate	337	1.18	5.00	3.48	.69	590	1.00	5.00	3.61	.72

Table 3. Grades for the elements of the learning climate

	Non-residential			Residential		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teacher responsiveness	369	7.4	1.81	637	7.0	2.28
The things you learn in the classroom	369	7.2	2.02	636	6.3	2.56
Atmosphere in the class	368	6.7	2.34	639	6.7	2.37
Honesty in the class	362	6.4	2.45	626	6.1	2.53
The (integrity of the) rules in the classroom	364	6.8	2.36	633	6.5	2.55
Safety in the school	248	6.7	2.28	630	7.4	2.44

By comparing the results of the analyses of the learning climate with a reference group, it is possible to place the results in perspective. It is suggested to use *Cohen's d* to measure the effect size of the difference between the mean scale scores and the scores of the reference group (Cohen, 1992). The difference of the means is divided by the standardized standard deviations ($Cohen's\ d = (M_1 - M_2) / \sqrt{[(\sigma_1^2 + \sigma_2^2) / 2]}$). *Cohen's d* can be simply calculated using a calculator on the internet (<http://www.danielsoper.com/statcalc3/calc.aspx?id=48>). The result is the effect size which gives an indication of the difference of the mean scale scores. The *d* can be both positive and negative. A *d* of 1.30 and higher or lower than 1.30 means a very big or very strong effect. A *d* between (-).80 and (-)1.29 means a strong or big effect. When the *d* is between (-).50 and (-).79, the *d* is quite strong or quite big and in between (-).20 and (-).49 means a little effect. When the *d* is between -.19 and .19 the effect size is minimal, so there is little to no measurable effect (Cohen, 1992).

The grades of students in a class can serve to control the scale scores. When the students are satisfied with the responsiveness of the teacher, they are expected to give a good grade for this element. When the grades and the scale scores are non-compliant, it is suggested to mention this in respect to the reliability of the results. The comments of the students can be included (anonymously) in the results if it is deemed relevant.

To process the results and to perform the analyses it is suggested to use the program SPSS. The scale score of a respondent consists of the scores of all the items of the scale divided by the number of items of the scale. The scale scores are therefore always between 1 and 5. The scale scores can only be calculated if the respondent answered all the items of a scale. Therefore the number of respondents for each scale can vary from the total number of respondents of the classroom or the test sample.

Practical use

The SCI is developed for special education in residential youth care by the Expert Centre Youth of the Leiden University of professional sciences, in co-operation with the Windesheim University of professional sciences and the University of Amsterdam. The questionnaire can also be used in schools for special education that are not linked to residential youth care facilities.

The SCI can be used in combination with the GCI, Group Climate Inventory, to measure the relation with the group climate in groups in youth care (Van der Helm, 2011). The questionnaire consists of 36 items divided into 4 scales: *Support*, *Growth*, *Atmosphere* and *Repression*. The GCI can be found on: <http://www.hsleiden.nl/lectoraten/residentiele-jeugdzorg/leefklimaat> and is free to use. There are versions available for children between 4 and 8 years old and a smaller questionnaire for children between 8 and 14 years old.

The SCI can also be combined with the SCWCI, School Class Working Climate Inventory, to measure the working climate of the teachers and to relate it to the learning climate in the school. The SCWCI can be found on <http://www.hsleiden.nl/lectoraten/residentiele-jeugdzorg/werkklimaat> and is also free to use.

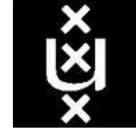
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Appendix 1 – SCI



Date of today: _____
Organization: _____
Unique code: _____
Class: _____

Study about the classroom learning climate in special needs schools

Contactperson study learning climate: Marjorie Beld mhm.beld@windesheim.nl

Hello,

For our study about the school classroom climate, we ask you to fill out the following questionnaire. With the results we can see how students experience the learning climate and use it to improve it in your school.

We ask you to complete the questionnaire. The questions are about your school and class. At the end are some general questions, where you can grade the topics with a mark. There are no wrong answers. Most questions are multiple choice, which you can answer by selecting the answer that you think is best. We also ask you to grade your school and class with marks. Take your time to read the answer categories and make your decision about the answer that best applies to you. Most of the times, your first impression is usually the best. Filling in the questionnaire will take about 10 minutes.

The results of the questionnaire will be analyzed and processed completely **anonymous**. This means the results will not be about you or can possibly be related back to you, but are about your class and school.

If you have any questions, you can contact the researcher or the project leader for the study in your school. In the last case, you can contact {name of the contactperson}.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

Hogeschool Leiden
Postbus 382
2300 AJ Leiden

Questions about your school and classroom

Mark the answer that fits your opinion best. There are no wrong answers.

1 = I do not agree

2 = I partially disagree

3 = I neither agree nor disagree

4 = I partially agree

5 = I agree

		<i>I do not agree</i>	<i>I partially agree</i>	<i>I neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>I partially agree</i>	<i>I agree</i>
1.	My classmates are nice	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I have friends in my class	1	2	3	4	5
3.	They like me in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I like my classmates	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Classmates kick and beat each other in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
6.	There is bullying in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
7.	There is arguing in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
8.	We call each other names in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
9.	we bully each other in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
10.	the teachers teach well	1	2	3	4	5
11.	The teachers listen to us	1	2	3	4	5
12.	The teachers help us with problems	1	2	3	4	5
13.	the teachers help me when I have difficulties with the lessons	1	2	3	4	5
14.	the teachers tell me when I do something good	1	2	3	4	5
15.	there is a lot of noise in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The classroom is never quiet	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I can't pay attention in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
18.	It is messy in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5

		<i>I do not agree</i>	<i>I partially agree</i>	<i>I neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>I partially agree</i>	<i>I agree</i>
19.	I'm on this school for no reason	1	2	3	4	5
20.	What I learn here is useful for my future	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I learn good things in school	1	2	3	4	5
22.	School is important for a good future	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I improve in school	1	2	3	4	5

Questions about your school and classroom – grades

It's about how you experience it. There are no wrong answers



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10



Really bad!

Really good!

	Give a grade for:	Grade:	Why do you think this?
1.	The support you receive from your teacher		
2.	The things you learn in school		
3.	The atmosphere in the classroom		
4.	The honesty in the classroom		
5.	The rules in the classroom		
6.	The safety at school		

