



The informal learning of teachers: Learning climate, job satisfaction and teachers' and students' motivation and well-being



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ABSTRACT

This study set out to examine an integrative model in which teacher learning climate is associated with teachers' sense of work engagement, organizational commitment, and subjective well-being, via teacher job satisfaction as a mediator. Moreover, we assert that learning climate and job satisfaction impact student school engagement, thereby giving further validity to the importance of this subject in the educational system. Data were collected from a sample of 273 teachers and 1040 students from 23 elementary and high schools in Israel. As predicted, a multilevel mediation analysis reflected the positive indirect relationship between teacher learning climate and teachers' sense of work engagement, organizational commitment, and subjective well-being), which was mediated by teacher job satisfaction. In addition, the crossover process between teachers and their students was also confirmed, proving that teacher job satisfaction is a mediator in the positive relationship between teacher learning climate and student school engagement. The discussion highlights the role of teacher learning climate in promoting positive schooling outcomes among teachers as well as students.

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1. Introduction

The subjects of teachers' professional development and learning within schools have captured the attention of school reformers, policy makers, and education researchers as a possible mechanism for raising school effectiveness and student achievements (Brouwer, 2010; Hoekstra & Korthagen, 2011; Shulman, 1998; Woolfolk Hoy, 2008). By providing teachers with the tools and opportunities to grow, their performance at school will likely improve and, consequently, so will student outcomes (Borko, 2004; Dam & Blom, 2006). While formal teacher learning (e.g., external courses, formal training and professions) has been well researched in regard to school outcomes (Borko, 2004; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Hanushek, 2005), these studies yielded mixed findings concerning the extent to which formal learning opportunities for teachers facilitate change in either teachers' classroom practices or student outcomes (Borko, 2004; Hanushek, 2005; Mansour, Heba, Alshamrani, & Aldahmash, 2014). Recent studies indicate that teachers tend to perceive formal learning and training as irrelevant or ineffective (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

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Another form of teacher learning is *learning climate*, a less structured, inherent, and ongoing one, conducted on-the-job. Learning climate reflects a wide variety of activities and opportunities throughout the school life – inquiry, dialogue, collaboration, and a shared vision – through which teachers can create, acquire, and transfer knowledge, and engage in learning behaviors (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Desimone, 2009; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008). However, while learning climate has become fairly popular within organizational psychology research and practice (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016), the contributions of teacher learning climate have been given scarce attention by educational psychology research. This void in research is surprising given that schools naturally embed numerous opportunities for teachers to gain knowledge from colleagues, principals, and students; these spheres, however, are often not recognized as sources of learning-attainment.

This study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the contribution of teacher learning climate on teachers' job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, and subjective well-being. We propose an indirect relationship between learning climate and teachers' work engagement, organizational commitment, and subjective well-being, mediated by teacher job satisfaction. Moreover, we argue that teacher learning climate and teacher job satisfaction may potentially effect students' school engagement in a manner that has not been previously researched. By examining this process model, our study provides more insight on the benefits of teacher learning climate to positive schooling and the well-being of both teachers and students.

2. Teacher learning climate

Teacher learning climate refers to a wide range of less structured learning norms and activities in which teachers continuously expand their abilities in order to create valuable pedagogical results and encourage new and expansive patterns of thinking (Mikkelsen & Grønhaug, 1999). Such activities include creating continuous learning opportunities, promoting inquiry and dialogue, encouraging team learning, creating and cultivating a collective vision, and principal mentoring (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Marsick & Watkins, 2003). Doing so helps employees meet the organization's strategic goals and encourages continuous professional employee development which supports change, innovation, and long-term performance improvement (Eldor & Harpaz, 2016; Ellinger, Ellinger, Yang, & Howton, 2002; Jashapara, 2003; Joo & Lim, 2009; Marsick & Watkins, 2003; Selden, Watkins, Valentine, & Marsick, 1998; Senge, 1990; Watkins, Selden, & Marsick, 1997; Yang, Watkins, & Marsick, 2004).

Learning climate is translated into the educational system as the school's efforts to turn learning into an integral part of work and provide opportunities for ongoing learning and growth (Marsick, Watkins, Callahan, & Volpe, 2009); in other words, the school's efforts to create an environment which encourages inquiry and listening, feedback, collaboration and out-of-the-box thinking, an environment which encourages teachers' involvement in the collective vision of the school, an environment of principals who encourage learning and act as role models (Dam & Blom, 2006; Osborn, 2006). Therefore, in today's intense educational atmosphere of an ever-rising pressure for improved schooling, attention to teacher learning climate is critical for pursuing higher teacher outcomes. However, although school-embedded learning is gradually being perceived as a favorable notion, learning climate has never been examined as a standard component of the daily activities of teachers (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Kwakman, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Slegers, Bolhuis, & Geijsel, 2005).

2.1. The relationship between teacher learning climate and teachers' motivation and well-being

While learning climate typically focuses on the professional advancement of teachers, our study proposes its significance for the motivation and well-being aspects for teachers – given that it is a highly critical infrastructure for teachers' investing and producing quality results (Barnabe & Burns, 1994; Billingsley & Cross, 1992). Accordingly, our study focuses on the motivating effect of teacher learning climate in enhancing teachers' *work engagement* (defined as the high energy and a discretionary efforts invested in one's work; Macey & Schneider, 2008), *organizational commitment* (defined as the emotional attachment to one's organization, based on shared values and interests; Meyer & Allen, 1997), and *subjective well-being* (defined as an individual's broad range of assessment of his or her overall quality of life; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This argument is supported by the self-determination theory which views the self as an innate and growth-oriented entity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 2001). Individuals therefore experience an inherent need for freedom of choice and self-determination (i.e., autonomy), a need for genuine human connection (i.e., relatedness), and a need for effective and skillful action and social interaction (i.e., competence) (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory considers these three needs to be the 'nutriments' or conditions that are necessary for the individual's well-being and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Consistent with the self-determination theory's (Deci & Ryan, 2000) conceptualization of intrinsic needs, we consider teacher learning climate to be a resource mechanism that contains the three underlying needs: autonomy (e.g. creating continuous learning opportunities, promoting inquiry), relatedness (e.g. encouraging team learning, promoting dialogue), and competence (e.g. promoting inquiry, creating a collective vision), which leads to teachers' well-being (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers who perceive their school provides them a learning climate tend to feel valuable and appreciated for their insights, participation, and involvement in learning practices (Gagne' & Deci, 2005). Such a climate therefor symbolizes the teachers' natural desire for self-determination, self-accumulation, and building meaningful and satisfying relationships via a learning path (Deci et al., 2001). Previous studies which used the self-determination theory as a conceptual framework indicated that the satisfaction of autonomy, relatedness, and competence

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