SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS FOR LEARNERS AND TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY FROM SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: The climate that prevails in schools, including issues of violence and lack of trust, has major implications for learner and teacher performance and their well-being. National or global data on various dimensions of the school climate are important to inform policy. But these data typically cannot be used to inform behavioral change at the level of individual schools, both because most schools are not part of the surveys' sampling frame and because recommendations based on national-level data are often too generic to be of high value to specific schools. This paper discusses the experience of Catholic schools in South Africa with implementing low-cost survey instruments on the school climate with both learners and teachers. The initiative is part of the Catholic Institute for Education approach towards building peaceful schools. The paper presents the survey instruments and key results with the hope that this can encourage other school systems to adopt similar approaches.

Keywords: Violence in schools, trust, school climate, bullying, Catholic schools, South Africa.

Résumé : Le climat qui règne dans les écoles, y compris les questions de violence et de manque de confiance, a des implications majeures sur les performances des apprenants et des enseignants et sur leur bien-être. Les données nationales ou mondiales sur les différentes dimensions du climat scolaire sont importantes pour éclairer les politiques. Cependant, ces données ne peuvent généralement pas être utilisées pour orienter les changements de comportement au niveau des écoles individuelles, à la fois parce que la plupart des écoles ne font pas partie du cadre d'échantillonnage des enquêtes et parce que les recommandations basées sur les données nationales sont souvent trop génériques pour être d'une grande valeur pour les écoles spécifiques. Ce document présente l'expérience des écoles catholiques d'Afrique du Sud en matière de mise en œuvre d'instruments d'enquête peu coûteux sur le climat scolaire auprès des apprenants et des enseignants. Cette initiative s'inscrit dans le cadre de l'approche de l'Institut catholique pour l'éducation visant à construire des écoles pacifiques. Cet article présente les instruments d'enquête et les principaux résultats dans l'espoir d'encourager d'autres systèmes scolaires à adopter des approches similaires.

Mots-clés : Violence à l'école, confiance, climat scolaire, harassement, écoles catholiques, Afrique du Sud.

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Introduction

The climate that prevails in schools has implications for learner and teacher performance and their well-being. A clear example is that of violence[2] in schools, which remains ubiquitous and affects learners and teachers in profound ways (Wodon et al., 2021). It can have lasting negative effects on student and teacher performance in school, their health, and their trust in each other (Nayihouba and Wodon, 2023).

Multiple studies[3] estimate the prevalence of various forms of violence against children, including in and around schools, while also suggesting more forceful programs and policies to curb such violence. The studies tend to be based on national surveys[4]. Yet at the level of individual schools, administrators typically do not have practical ways to assess the extent of violence in their school, or measure more broadly the school climate and how it affects the well-being of their learners and teachers. Without data, including for trends over time, it is difficult for administrators and teachers to assess whether some approaches may be (more or less) beneficial than others to building peaceful schools[5].

Measuring the school climate is especially needed in countries such as South Africa. As noted by Baker et al. (2021), the country only recently emerged from the Apartheid regime. South Africa still suffers from high levels of inequality and violence, including high levels of violence in schools with dramatic negative effects on children. Corporal punishment remains widespread even though it is illegal since 2016. Children continue to experience trauma in schools. Yet current forms of pre- and in-service teacher training may not sufficiently equip teachers with the skills they need to manage classrooms with positive discipline. Violence is often on a sliding scale and may begin with minor resistance to rules in class and progress to antisocial behaviours. There is therefore a need for capacity development in classroom management by teachers. Yet in data collected for South Africa by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), one in seven teachers report a high level of need for professional development in student behaviour and classroom management, and two in five agree or strongly agree that they lose quite a lot of time because of students interrupting lessons (OECD, 2019). Beyond South Africa, the issue of a

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[2] The World Health Organization's 2002 World Report on Violence and Health (Krug et al., 2002) which follows an earlier consultation (WHO Global Consultation on Violence and Health, 1996) defines violence as *"the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against a person or group that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation."*

[3] See among others UNICEF (2014, 2017, 2019), Office of the SRSG on Violence against Children (2016), Hillis et al. (2016), Know Violence in Childhood (2017), UNESCO (2019), World Health Organization (2020), and Wodon et al. (2021). On violence against children more generally and the impact of the COVID pandemic, see for example Bhatia et al. (2021).

[4] The national surveys that can be used to assess violence in schools include the Global School Health Survey (GSHS), the Health Behavior in School-Age Children survey (HBSC), and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). See Wodon et al. (2021) for a discussion.

[5] On frameworks for interventions, see among others UNGEI. (2018) and World Health Organization (2019).

poor and possibly deteriorating school climate and lack of sufficient training for teachers in this area is global (Wodon et al., 2021; Nayihouba and Wodon, 2023). UNESCO (2022) notes that only a third of teachers surveyed reported that they received sufficient training on how to prevent and respond to school violence during their pre-service education and barely half said that their school provides adequate opportunities for in-service training in violence prevention and management.

To respond to these challenges, South-Africa's Catholic Institute for Education (CIE) launched in 2012 its Building Peaceful Schools program using a restorative justice approach[6]. As discussed in Baker et al. (2021), the initiative started with the production of an introductory DVD and book and the organization of various workshops on peace building, conflict management, and restorative justice. Starting in 2016, CIE also fielded surveys among learners and teachers to assess the school climate. In practice, the School Climate Survey for Pupils, later renamed the School Climate Survey for Learners (SCSL) aimed to assess learner-learner interactions, teacher-learner interactions, and the broader school environment. Later, CIE started to also survey teachers, with similar objectives. The surveys are not implemented to judge how well schools are doing with related carrots or sticks, but rather to find positive and constructive ways together with the schools to solve the challenges they face. For example, during discussions with individual schools, the emphasis is on each school's figures and at no point are schools compared to each other. The figures are not used for benchmarking purposes.

The objective of this paper is to present the survey instrument and key results at the level of participating schools, with the hope that this can encourage other school systems to adopt similar approaches. Two surveys are implemented by CIE every year in schools for which CIE has a supervising and support role. The first survey targets learners, while the second is for teachers. The surveys are conducted by CIE staff, and the information gathered is kept confidential with only aggregate results being released to the schools. Only CIE's Knowledge and Research Manager, working in the Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the organisation, has access to the datasets and full survey results.

[6] CIE reports on its website that that there are over 300 Catholic schools in South Africa, of which about 70 percent are public schools while the others are independent. Estimates from the Secretariat of State of the Catholic Church suggest a larger number of Catholic schools, but this may be due to definitional issues (see Wodon, 2022, on estimates of enrollment in Catholic schools across countries). As is the case for many other types of schools in the country, students in Catholic schools are struggling to learn, with World Bank estimates suggesting high rates of learning poverty (inability for 10-year-olds to read and understand a simple text).

For this paper, to illustrate what can be learned from such surveys, we report on data collected in 35 schools. The next two sections present the questionnaires for the two surveys of learners and teachers, respectively, as well as key aggregate findings. The following section explains how the data are used in practice for school-level planning. A brief conclusion follows.

Survey Questionnaire and Findings for Learners

The survey questionnaire for learners is short and fits within one page. Learners are asked about their gender (boy or girl[7]), their grade (0 to 12), and the language they speak at home (Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, or another language). Next, learners are asked three questions with various modalities for each question. Potential responses for all questions and modalities are not at all, once, twice, or more than twice.

- Learner-learner interactions: In section A of the questionnaire, learners are asked *"During the last week at school another learner ..."*[8] There are ten modalities for that questions: (1) ... said they would hit me; (2) ... helped me; (3) ... got me into trouble; (4) ... was nice to me; (5) ... was unkind to me; (6) ... talked about things I like; (7) ... hit me; (8) ... shared something with me; (9) ... made me do something wrong that I didn't want to do; and (10) ... spread rumors about me.
- Teacher-learner interactions: In section B of the questionnaire, learners are asked *"During the last week at school a teacher ..."*, with again ten modalities for that questions: (1) ... said they would hit me; (2) ... helped me with my work; (3) ... shouted at me; (4) ... was nice to me; (5) ... was unkind to me; (6) ... made me feel safe; (7) ... called me names; (8) ... laughed at me; (9) ... hit me; and (10) ... told me I did something well.
- School context: In section C of the questionnaire, learners are asked *"During the last week at school ..."*, with five modalities for that question: (1) ... I liked being at school; (2) ... my religion and culture were disrespected; (3) ... I was bored in class; (4) ... the school toilets were safe and clean; and (5) ... I felt scared. There are therefore in total 25 indicators for learners.

[7] In the Teacher Survey, an additional non-binary identification is provided, but when the SCSL survey was initially designed, that category was not included. In the administration of the surveys however, respondents have the option of leaving this response blank, and it is mentioned to them that this will be interpreted as non-binary.

[8] The choice of a one-week recall period is related to issues around generalized as opposed to specific memories of interactions. We specifically instruct learners to consider the last seven days and not to generalize their experiences. This is also helpful for triangulation purposes (sometimes a specific event shows up in the surveys and the feedback on results, and the school can then confirm it with reference to their reporting processes.

There are in total 25 items on the perceptions of learners about the school climate, but scales combining several variables and scores for each scale can be computed to highlight key findings. Six scales are created using the following variables[9]. For learner-learner interactions, the learner-learner positive score is computed from items 2, 4, 6, and 8 from section A of the School Climate Survey for Learners (SCSL), while the learner-learner negative score is computed from items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 10 from the same section. For teacher-learner interactions, the teacher-learner positive score is computed from items 2, 4, 6, and 10 from section B of the SCSL, while the teacher-learner negative score is computed from items 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9 from Section B. Finally for the broader school context, the context positive score is computed from items 1 and 4 from section C of the SCSL, while the context negative score is computed from items 2, 3, and 5 from that section.

The scores are computed from the survey data to take values between zero and 100. A simple approach is used to make the results as easy to understand as possible for all teachers and school leaders. If a learner answers "not at all" to a question, the response takes a value of zero. If the learner answers "once", "twice", or "more than twice", the response takes a value of one. This means that we do not differentiate in the scores between those responses[10]. Scores are then aggregated at the school level, divided by the number of respondents times the number of questions included in a scale, and multiplied by 100. This implies that scores at the level of schools take a value between zero and 100. A higher score for a positive scale is a good thing, while a higher score is a bad sign for a negative scale.

Results for individual schools are provided in Annex Table 1, with aggregate results across schools provided in Table 1 below. Overall, schools tend to score relatively well on the positive scales. The average score for the 35 schools is 87.0 for the learner-learner positive scale and 84.0 for the teacher-learner positive scale, although it is lower for the context positive scale at 72.8. Scores for the negative scales are lower, as expected, but not low, suggesting issues in the schools. The average score for the 35 schools is 36.7 for the learner-learner negative scale and 36.5 for the teacher-learner positive scale. The score is of a similar order of magnitude at 38.1 for the context negative scale.

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[9] We are aware that the issue of a school's climate is complex and the division into positive and negative scores and their aggregation is just a first cut at analyzing the data. A different approach could include a theoretical framework based on a detailed literature review on existing school violence scales. Factor analysis could also be conducted to construct alternative weights. At the same time, for discussions with schools and especially young learners (for whom English is often a foreign language), the simple approach used here is easier to communicate. to complete it during a single lesson at school. We have conducted more detailed analysis of the data, to assess internal validity or reliability, but this is beyond the scope of this paper which is aimed at teachers and principals.

[10] We do however differentiate between scores during the feedback process. The reason for not differentiating in the aggregate scores for schools is to make the data easier to understand and not too overwhelming.

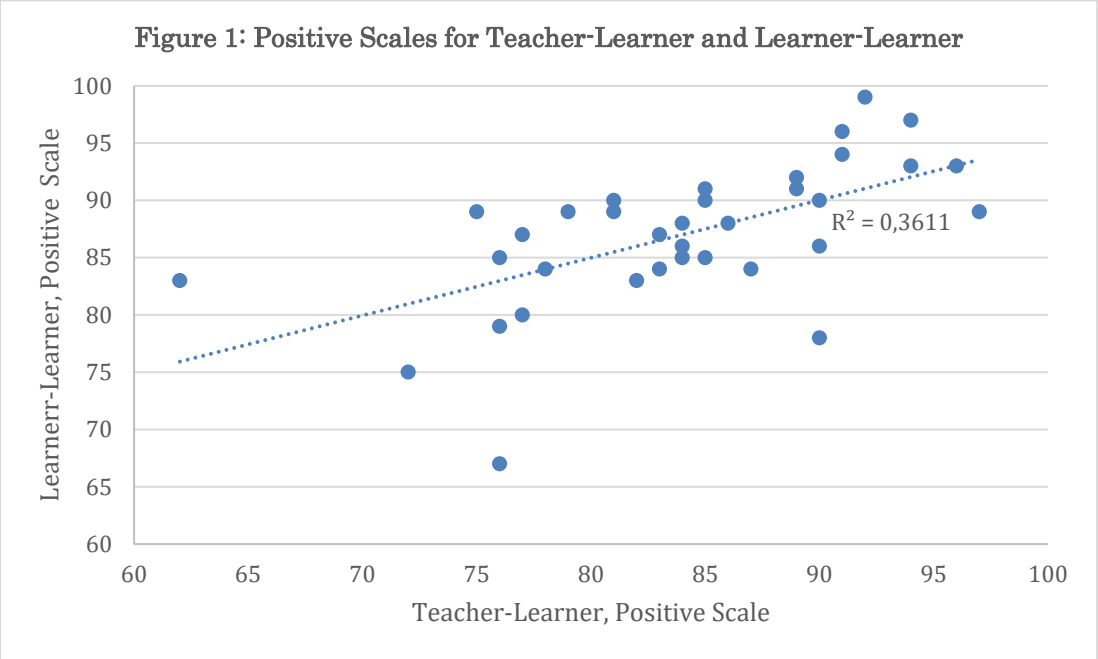
Based on the scores obtained for the negative scales, a colour scheme is used to signal areas for improvement. The colour red is used if the score for a negative scale is above 50%. The other colours are amber (scores from 30% to 49%), yellow (10% to 29%), and green (less than 10%). Details at the level of schools are available in Annex Table 1, but overall, Table 1 shows that three to five schools are coded red depending on the negative scale (learner-learner, teacher-learner, and context), with zero to three schools coded green. There are many more schools coded amber than yellow. This suggests that many schools have ample room for improvement across all dimensions or scales.

Table 1: Average Results for the Learner Survey Across Participating Schools (Six Scales)

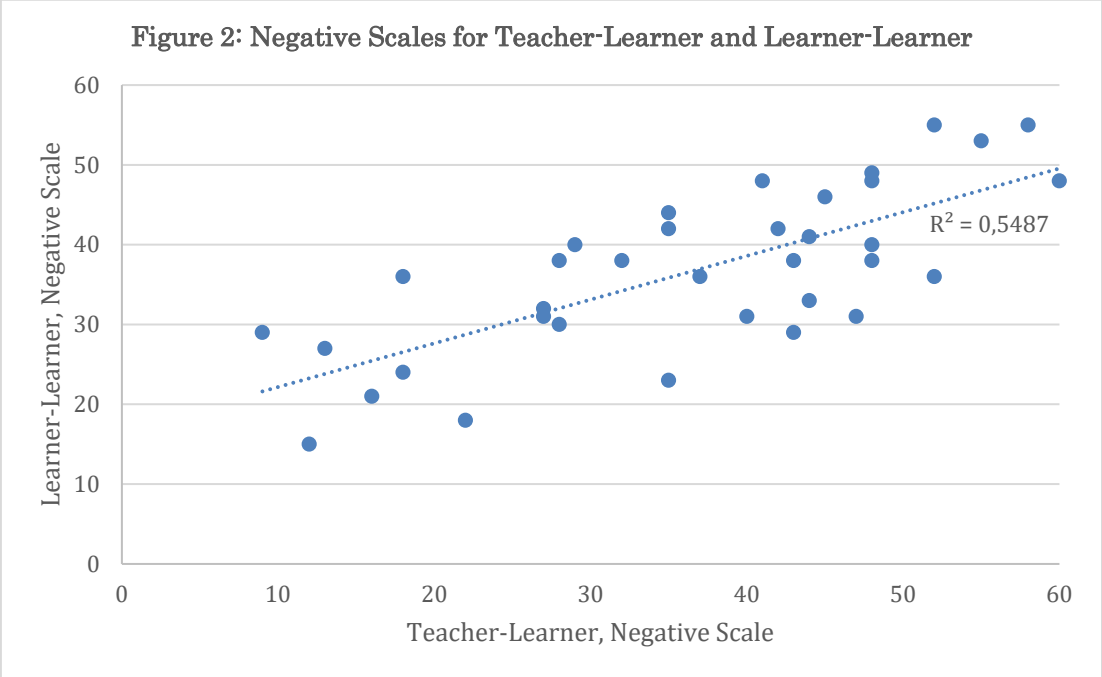
	Learner-Learner		**Teacher-Learner**		**Context**	
	Positive	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**
Average score (%)	87.0	36.7	84.0	36.5	72.8	38.1
Number of schools						
Red	-	5	-	5	-	3
Amber	-	22	-	19	-	28
Yellow	-	8	-	8	-	3
Green	-	0	-	3	-	1
All schools	-	35	-	35	-	35

Source: Authors, based on data from the School Climate Survey for Learners (SCSL). In this Table, all schools are weighted equally. That is, the average values are computed across schools, not across all respondents (i.e., smaller schools are given the same weight as larger schools).

There are correlations between the scores for the various scales, but also quite a bit of variation, suggesting that some schools may do better in some dimensions or scales than others. This is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2 that plot scores for the schools across the positive (Figure 1) and negative (Figure 2) scales for teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. One would expect positive (negative) interactions between teachers and learners to contribute to positive (negative) interactions between learners. The two Figures suggest that this could possibly be the case, but it must be emphasized that no causality can be inferred from these simple statistics. The relationship in Figure 2 between negative scales is slightly stronger than that in Figure 1 between positive scales. This could suggest stronger reinforcing effects in negative interactions. At the same time, R-squared values for the trendlines in the Figures are not very high, suggesting that even if there is a relationship between positive (negative) interactions between teachers and learners, a range of factors may be affecting the school climate, as one would expect.



Source: Authors, based on data from the School Climate Survey for Learners (SCSL).



Source: Authors, based on data from the School Climate Survey for Learners (SCSL).

Survey Questionnaire and Findings for Teachers

The survey questionnaire for teachers is a bit longer but fits within two pages. Teachers are asked about their age, gender, position in the school (Permanent, Relief, Teacher, Deputy, SGB, Head of Department, or Principal), and language (Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiZulu, isiXhosa, seSotho, seTswana, siSwati, tshiVenda, xiTsonga, Sign Language, or other). Additional questions are asked about teachers' qualification, the subjects they teach, the number of classes they teach by grade, and the average size of the classes they teach. Thereafter questions are asked in five areas:

- Teacher interactions: In section A of the questionnaire, teachers are asked *"During the last week at school another teacher or the Head of Department or the Principal..."* There are eleven modalities for that question: (1) … valued my work; (2) ... made me feel scared; (3) ... helped me; (4) ... made me feel uncomfortable; (5) ... shared resources with me; (6) ... ignored me; (7) ... had a good conversation with me; (8) ... undermined me; (9) ... cared for me; (10) ... discussed classroom experiences with me; (11) ... shouted at me.
- Learner interactions: In section B of the questionnaire, teachers are asked *"During the last week at school the learners (in general) ..."* There are twelve modalities for that question: (1) … helped me; (2) ... threatened me: (3) ... completed assigned work; (4) ... were rude to me; (5) ... respected me; (6) ... laughed at me; (7) ... thanked me for my help; (8) ... made me feel scared; (9) ... settled quickly into the lesson; (10) ... were physically violent towards me; (11) ... laughed with me; (12) ... were verbally abusive towards me.
- Parent or guardian interactions: In section C of the questionnaire, teachers are asked *"During the last term, I had meetings with parents or guardians..."*[11] There are four modalities for that question: In my interactions with parents or guardians over the last term, they... (1) ... complimented me; (2) ... made me feel scared; (3) ... talked about their child's progress with me; (4) ... shouted at me.
- School environment[12]: In section D of the questionnaire, teachers are asked *"During the last week at school..."* There are ten modalities for that question: (1) ... the staff toilets were clean; (2) ... there were enough desks for the learners; (3) ... there were enough chairs for the learners; (4) ... I felt safe on the school premises; (5) ... I felt safe in the classroom; (6)

[11] This is a longer recall period than for learners. This choice was made because schools have less frequent interactions with parents, especially if schools are residential. If the question was asked 'during the last week', scores would not accurately reflect the situation as in many cases there would have been no interactions.

[12] Questions are asked about the school environment because it can affect violence. For example, if toilets are dirty or in a poor state, this may contribute to a general feeling of a poorly run school or a lack of discipline and cleanliness, which can in turn contribute to a poor school climate. We are aware that these questions are very different from those pertaining to individual learners' perceptions, for example of feeling safe, and will explore in future (econometric) work whether we can disentangle effects from various variables on the perceptions.

... I had the resources I needed; (7) ... I felt part of a team; (8) ... I felt supported by the parents; (9) ... the staffroom was a welcoming place; and (10) ... I felt frustrated.

- Education Department Interactions: Finally, in Section E of the questionnaire, teachers are asked *"In my interactions with the Circuit, District or Provincial Education Departments over the last term..."* There are ten modalities for that question: (1) ... I felt valued; (2) ... I felt that my needs were met; (3) ... I felt stressed; (4) ... I knew about the meetings in good time; and (5) ... I felt prepared.

There are in total 42 items on the perceptions of teachers about the school climate, but as for learners, scales can be used to combine variables for ease of interpretation by teachers and school leaders. A total of 12 scales are defined. The teacher-teacher positive scale is based on items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 10 from section A of the school climate survey for teachers (SCST). The teacher-teacher negative scale is based on items 2, 4, 6, 8 and 11 from that section. The learner-teacher positive scale is based on items 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 from section B of the SCST. The learner-teacher negative scale is based on items 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 from that section. The parent-teacher positive scale is based on items 2 and 4 from section C of the SCST. The parent-teacher negative scale is based on items 1 and 3 from that section. The PED-teacher positive scale is based on items 1, 2, 4 and 5 from section E of the SCST, while the PED-teacher stress is from a single item, namely item 3 from that section (PED stands for Provincial Educational Department and by extension the Circuit and District authorities). The psychosocial positive scale is based on items 6, 7, 8 and 9 from section D, while the safety positive scale is based on items 4 and 5, and the physical positive scale is based on items 1, 2 and 3. The frustration scale is based on a single item, namely item 10 from section D.

As mentioned earlier, those scales are simple aggregates, and further testing is needed on their validity, but for discussions in schools, they have the merit of being easy to explain, including to learners. As for learners, all scores are normalized to take a value between zero and 100 following the same approach. Again, as for learners, a higher score for a positive scale is a plus. For a negative scale, a lower score is better. The same colour scheme is used to categorize negatives, with the colour red used if the score for a negative scale is above 50%, and so on for the other colours. Results for individual schools are provided in Annex Table 2, with aggregate results across schools in Table 2 below (this is done for 33 schools as data were not fully available for all 35 schools).

Overall, for teacher-teacher, learner-teacher, and parent-teacher interactions, the scores tend to very good, ranging from 87.8 to 91.4 on positive dimensions and from 8.8 to 18.9 on negative dimensions. The story is different for PED-teacher interactions. While the score for positive dimensions is good at 90.1, there is a very high score for negative dimensions at 65.3, leading to

many schools categorized as red in that dimension. This scale is based on a single variable: whether teachers feel stressed in their interaction with officials beyond the school (Circuit, District, or Provincial Education Departments). On average in a typical school, almost two thirds of the teachers feel stressed in these interactions. On the other dimensions, namely psycho-social well-being, safety, and physical environment which are all measured on positive scales, the scores tend to be lower than for teacher-teacher, learner-teacher, and parent-teacher interactions, but better than for stress from PED-teacher interactions. The average scores range from 61.5 to 83.0 for the positive dimensions, with an average score of 23.6 for frustration as a negative dimension. Overall, as for learners, it seems fair to say that many schools have ample room for improvement across several of the dimensions or scales.

Table 2: Average Results for the Teacher Survey Across Participating Schools (Twelve Scales)

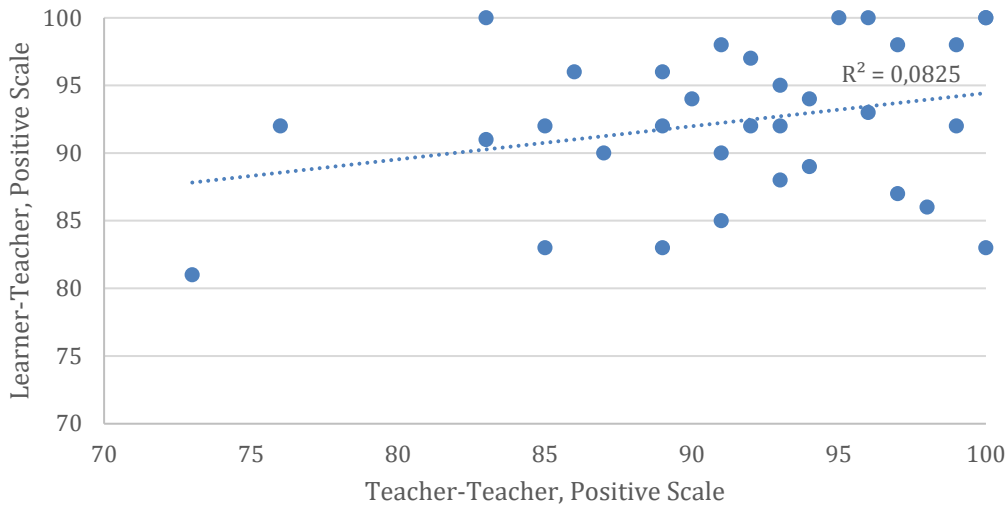
	Teacher-Teacher		**Learner-Teacher**		**Parent-Teacher**	
	Positive	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Positive**	**Negative**
Average score (%)	91.4	13.6	92.3	18.9	87.8	8.8
Number of schools						
Red	-	0	-	2	-	1
Amber	-	2	-	1	-	2
Yellow	-	12	-	16	-	5
Green	-	19	-	14	-	25
All schools	-	33	-	33	-	33
	PED-Teacher		**Other Dimensions (All Positive Except Frustration)**			
	Positive	**Negative**	**Psycho-social**	**Safety**	**Physical**	**Frustration**
Average score (%)	90.1	65.3	61.5	83.0	77.9	23.6
Number of schools						
Red	-	27	17	5	7	4
Amber	-	5	9	5	6	9
Yellow	-	0	0	0	0	8
Green	-	1	7	23	20	12
All schools	-	33	33	33	33	33

Source: Authors, based on data from the School Climate Survey for Teachers (SCST). In this Table, all schools are weighted equally. That is, the average values are computed across schools, not across all respondents (i.e., smaller schools are given the same weight as larger schools).

As for the survey of learners, there are correlations between the scores for the various scales, but again substantial variation as well, suggesting that some schools do better in some dimensions or scales than others. This is illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 that again plot scores for the schools across the positive (Figure 3) and negative (Figure 4) scales for teacher-teacher and learner-teacher

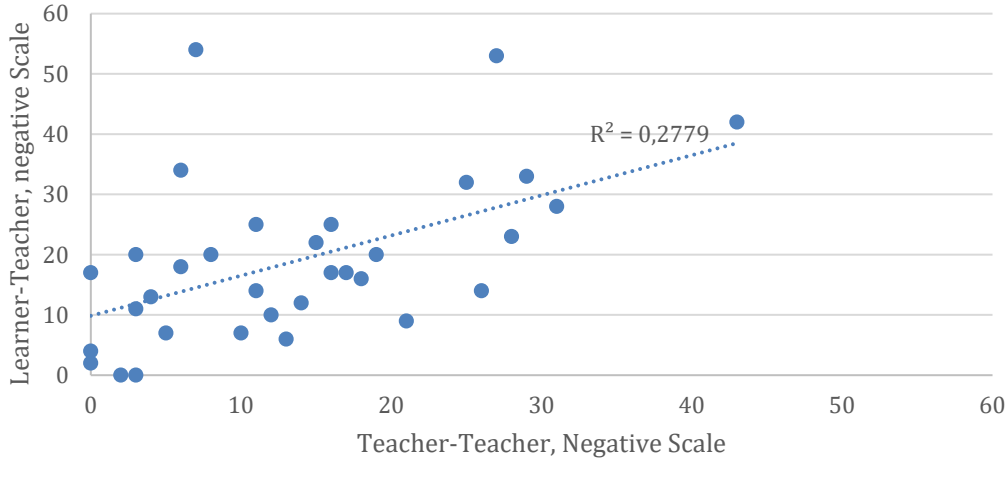
interactions. The R-squared values for the trendlines in the two Figures tend to be low, and indeed are much lower than for Figures 1 and 2. This points to the fact that collecting data across the different dimensions is useful to be able to consider tackling areas where a school may perform comparatively less well.

Figure 3: Positive Scales for Teacher-Teacher and Learner-Teacher



Source: Authors, based on data from the School Climate Survey for Teachers (SCST).

Figure 4: Negative Scales for Teacher-Teacher and Learner-Teacher



Source: Authors, based on data from the School Climate Survey for Teachers (SCST).

Using Key Findings for School-Level Planning

The school climate surveys for learners and teachers provide a rich array of information at the level of each individual school, including to assess trends over time in positives and negatives (while in this paper the focus has been simply on describing the latest year of data available, for most schools, data are available over time). How is this information used? The aim is to provide feedback in two steps during personal and group feedback sessions for learners, teachers, and the school leadership.

In a first step, the aim is to ascertain whether the results are indeed a proper reflection of the school climate and to add nuance as needed. When presenting results in schools, the specificity of the school is considered, based on where each school is located. Tailored (and thus more compelling) presentations are made to learners, teachers, and the school leadership on how the school is performing. For learners, results are shared through presentations of approximately 40 minutes per class-group, avoiding presentations to larger groups which might defeat the purpose of the feedback. Experience shows that learners tend to be very open to the discussion and frequently highlight both the positives as well as areas for concern[13]. For teachers, the process sometimes runs into challenges especially if there is distrust among staff (of each other, of the learners, or of the school leadership). It is then better to promote guarded acceptance instead of outright rejection of findings by teachers.

When discussing findings at the school level in this first step, based on the analysis of the surveys Green and Red Flags are identified. This is done each year, with multi-year data used when available in feedback sessions to assess trends. In the discussions, care is taken to elicit constructive feedback. Questions for discussion are phrased in the manner typical of the broader Building Peaceful Schools Programme of CIE. Rather than asking, say, “Why is this figure so high?”, “Who is doing this?”, or "Who is to blame?", typical questions instead might be “What is happening when...?”, “How do you feel about this?”, or “Is there more information you can add that would help to understand the situation?” Specifically, the Standard Operating Procedures for feedback of the surveys state that these questions should not be used during feedback. If they do appear, the practitioner is instructed to state something like “it may not be a helpful way to discuss this” or “this may not be a useful question in this process”. Where learners volunteer the names of people committing abuse, then other Standard Operating Procedures come into play (child safeguarding and the duty to report).

[13] In feedback sessions with schools over the 8 years since CIE began administering the surveys, there have been very few instances (lower than 5% of all feedback sessions, as measured through monitoring reports filled in by the practitioners) of learners being unwilling to discuss the survey feedback.

When running feedback sessions with learners, the blackboard (or whiteboard) is used to make all data visible, and the various items are explained as much as possible to make sure that learners understand what the data are suggesting. Learners are then asked questions with their responses written down. When similar questions are asked to teachers and other staff and to the school leadership, the learners' responses are discussed with them. Discussions with teachers and staff and any additional information are also recorded. The final discussion incorporates learner and teacher/staff responses in a focused session with the school leadership, who are then asked, "What response might the school undertake?" or "What would help to improve this situation?" The school leadership[14] decides on action points, which become monitoring and evaluation data points for CIE.

This all leads to the second step through which the feedback gathered is used to assist schools in planning for changes and improvements. School responses are based on the data being collected and the various group discussions, not on any collection of à priori and possibly unfounded assumptions or outmoded beliefs about what psychosocial interventions may or may not work. The approach ideally enables the leadership to take positive action to prevent harm in the schools. In other words, after the full feedback process is complete, considering the views of learners, teachers and the school leadership, the findings can be turned into action plans which are to be incorporated into the broader School Development Plan – a document submitted to the local circuit as part of the standard monitoring and evaluation of the schools by government. Integration into the School Development Plan ensures that actions will take place, including to prevent bullying and corporal punishment.

This process can work well, as illustrated by a female school principal from a primary school in southern KwaZulu-Natal, an area with few employment opportunities, high levels of substance abuse, and a general social malaise. She and her entire teaching staff had already been part of the Building Peaceful Schools Programme for four years when the SCSL and SCLT were introduced. At the end of the first feedback session, having heard that there were still instances of corporal punishment as well as other negative behaviours, she said: *"These are very difficult things for us to hear, but we have heard them, and we will work to improve them."* The following year, and every year since, the school has made efforts to improve on every aspect captured in the surveys, using the exact same instrument, the SCSL, followed up by feedback conversations. The school incorporated action plans into its School Development Plans, making sure for example that toilets are safe and clean, corporal punishment is eradicated, teachers do not shout in class, and learners

[14] The School Management Team consists of the Principal, the Deputy Principal, and Heads of Departments from throughout the school. Where the school has a functional School Governing Body, the representative from the parents may also participate. CIE itself has no authority to compel the school to act.

co-create classroom behaviour rules. As a result, academic performance has improved[15]. In the word of the principal, *"We are now the school of choice for trainee teachers, and our learners get prime place at secondary schools in the area because they know our learners are so good!"*.

Beyond action plans at the school level, CIE also presents regional estimates at the Principals' Forum meetings held each year, as a way of raising awareness of trends in the school climate in the regions. The data are also presented to the Ministry's Department of Basic Education at the national level. These presentations have occurred since 2016, and there have been numerous references to the data in the Department's circulars and other information-sharing activities.

Conclusion

National or even global figures on various dimensions of the school climate are important to inform policy. But these data typically cannot be used for behavioral change at the level of individual schools. The value of low-cost instruments such as those implemented by CIE is that they give an accurate and specific picture of what is happening at each school and allow for meaningful discussion that is informed by the local context[16], thus avoiding common risks with national datasets, including the risks of generalization, defensiveness, or outright dismissal of the data as irrelevant.

Maintaining anonymity when implementing the surveys and discussing findings is crucial, especially in situations where illegal or socially unacceptable activities are being surveyed. Protection of learners is also important in the feedback sessions, with learners more likely to give more detailed information about what happens once they have been reassured that their responses are anonymous. Learners tend, however, to be very open to indicating exactly which teachers are engaging in corporal punishment, as well as which learners are engaging in negative behavior. Likewise, teachers are more likely to be open in their discussions once they realize that those conducting the survey are not law-enforcement officials or in any way interested in prosecution. There have been very few instances of reprisal in the schools, despite the sensitive nature of the survey[17]. And this brings up the next point.

The surveys and the broader process should be conducted in a restorative justice approach. If this is not done, there may be a fear of punitive response which could limit the authenticity of the

[15] The school is under no obligation to share achievement data with CIE, but academic results were examined in situ and there was a correlation between improvements in the School Climate and the assessment results of the school. This remains anecdotal however, and further analysis across schools would be needed (providing schools provide their assessment data) to establish correlations more systematically.

[16] As another example of that approach in sub-Saharan Africa, see Opara and Wodon. (2022).

[17] Risks of reprisal are assessed based on school monitoring reports completed by the practitioners when they visit schools (at least once per term) and through regular independent external evaluations of the program.

surveys. For example, learners may fear reprisals from teachers and other learners, and teachers may fear reprisal from the school leadership or government. Added to this is the fact that leadership may fear reprisal from school governing bodies, external quality assurance structures, or law enforcement (since corporal punishment is illegal). In schools that have not been part of the broader Building Peaceful Schools Programme of CIE, and therefore may not have seen the restorative justice approach at work, concerns have been expressed about the surveys as to whether the data may be legally used, with some teachers concerned about losing their job. It should be clear from the start that this is not the aim of the surveys. In schools with a deeper understanding of the restorative justice approach, there is typically an acknowledgement of the generational trauma and years of state-sanctioned abuse and violence that have led to the point where violence is used to maintain order in schools. While CIE does not condone violence in any way, responding to the symptoms of that trauma is not as useful as responding to the underlying issues, and this is what the surveys and feedback process in the schools are about: how can teachers and learners find a place of peace within themselves and at the school.

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Annex Table 1: Ratings for Learners from the School Climate Survey

Schools (names deleted for confidentiality)	Learner-Learner Positive	Learner-Learner Negative	*Learner-Learner Rating*	Teacher-Learner Positive	Teacher-Learner Negative	*Teacher-Learner Rating*	Context Positive	Context Negative	*Context Rating*
	85	36	*amber*	85	52	*red*	76	39	*amber*
	84	23	*yellow*	87	35	*amber*	75	19	*yellow*
	87	38	*amber*	77	48	*amber*	70	46	*amber*
	80	36	*amber*	77	37	*amber*	73	39	*amber*
	91	29	*yellow*	89	9	*green*	73	53	*red*
	90	41	*amber*	81	44	*amber*	70	38	*amber*
	83	15	*yellow*	82	12	*green*	72	35	*amber*
	85	48	*amber*	76	48	*amber*	53	47	*amber*
	84	42	*amber*	83	42	*amber*	83	45	*amber*
	89	24	*yellow*	81	18	*yellow*	77	35	*amber*
	88	30	*amber*	86	28	*yellow*	88	39	*amber*
	87	40	*amber*	83	29	*yellow*	81	37	*amber*
	86	44	*amber*	90	35	*amber*	84	37	*amber*
	91	48	*amber*	85	41	*amber*	68	52	*red*
	92	31	*amber*	89	40	*amber*	85	31	*amber*
	93	21	*yellow*	96	16	*yellow*	73	13	*green*
	96	55	*red*	91	58	*red*	72	34	*amber*
	97	36	*amber*	94	18	*yellow*	61	41	*amber*
	90	55	*red*	90	52	*red*	76	47	*amber*
	89	38	*amber*	97	28	*amber*	85	33	*amber*
	99	27	*yellow*	92	13	*green*	87	30	*amber*
	93	42	*amber*	94	35	*amber*	81	39	*amber*
	94	32	*amber*	91	27	*yellow*	84	38	*amber*

90	31	*amber*	85	47	*amber*	62	21	*yellow*
78	31	*amber*	90	27	*yellow*	93	18	*yellow*
88	48	*red*	84	60	*red*	68	36	*amber*
89	38	*amber*	75	43	*amber*	62	44	*amber*
83	33	*amber*	62	44	*amber*	43	47	*amber*
75	40	*amber*	72	48	*amber*	77	51	*red*
67	53	*red*	76	55	*red*	62	40	*amber*
89	38	*amber*	79	32	*amber*	62	44	*amber*
84	46	*amber*	78	45	*amber*	69	48	*amber*
86	29	*yellow*	84	43	*amber*	56	41	*amber*
79	18	*yellow*	76	22	*yellow*	70	33	*amber*
85	49	*red*	84	48	*amber*	76	45	*amber*

Source: Compiled by the authors from the School Climate Survey for Learners.

Annex Table 2: Ratings for Teachers from the School Climate Survey

Schools (names deleted for confidentiality)	Teacher - Teacher Positive	Teacher - Teacher Negative	*Teacher - Teacher Rating*	Learner - Teacher Positive	Learner - Teacher Negative	*Learner - Teacher Rating*	Parent - Teacher Positive	Parent-Teacher Negative	*Parent - Teacher Rating*
	96	14	*green*	93	12	*green*	100	4	*green*
	97	0	*green*	98	2	*green*	95	0	*green*
	99	16	*yellow*	98	17	*yellow*	100	13	*green*
	87	8	*green*	90	20	*yellow*	93	10	*green*
	93	10	*green*	92	7	*green*	82	16	*yellow*
	91	18	*yellow*	98	16	*yellow*	90	0	*green*
	90	15	*yellow*	94	22	*yellow*	92	13	*green*
	89	28	*yellow*	92	23	*yellow*	84	10	*green*
	99	5	*green*	92	7	*green*	100	4	*green*
	91	19	*yellow*	85	20	*yellow*	70	0	*green*
	94	4	*green*	94	13	*green*	81	0	*green*
	93	11	*green*	95	14	*green*	93	10	*green*
	92	17	*yellow*	97	17	*yellow*	86	0	*green*
	93	0	*green*	88	4	*green*	88	0	*green*
	91	7	*green*	90	54	*red*	84	46	*amber*
	73	27	*yellow*	81	53	*red*	90	0	*green*
	98	6	*green*	86	34	*yellow*	100	0	*green*
	100	3	*green*	100	20	*yellow*	100	0	*green*
	96	11	*green*	100	25	*yellow*	100	50	*red*
	100	2	*green*	100	0	*green*	50	0	*green*
	95	0	*green*	100	17	*yellow*	100	0	*green*
	89	21	*yellow*	96	9	*green*	50	10	*green*
	76	13	*green*	92	6	*green*	100	0	*green*
	83	3	*green*	100	0	*green*	75	0	*green*
	94	12	*green*	89	10	*green*	95	15	*yellow*
	86	16	*yellow*	96	25	*yellow*	85	4	*green*
	85	26	*yellow*	83	14	*green*	84	3	*green*
	85	43	*amber*	92	42	*amber*	100	0	*green*
	100	3	*green*	83	11	*green*	83	0	*green*
	89	25	*yellow*	83	32	*yellow*	82	23	*yellow*
	97	31	*amber*	87	28	*yellow*	92	30	*amber*
	83	29	*yellow*	91	33	*yellow*	88	15	*yellow*
	92	6	*green*	92	18	*yellow*	86	16	*yellow*

Source: Compiled by the authors from the School Climate Survey for Teachers.

Annex Table 2: Ratings for Teachers from the School Climate Survey (Continued)

Schools (names deleted for confidentiality)	PED-Teacher Positve	PED-Teacher Stress	*PED-Teacher Rating*	Psycho-Social Positive	Safety Positive	Physical Positive	Frustration
	94	36	*amber*	87	100	91	8
	87	57	*red*	83	95	90	38
	97	50	*red*	58	83	67	17
	83	50	*red*	83	92	92	0
	100	0	*green*	76	100	88	0
	95	50	*red*	64	94	83	0
	88	60	*red*	65	84	74	0
	93	55	*red*	61	85	34	7
	100	36	*amber*	90	97	90	13
	91	62	*red*	54	53	89	0
	81	62	*red*	66	95	88	32
	94	82	*red*	68	98	64	22
	92	80	*red*	63	91	94	40
	94	33	*amber*	81	100	100	0
	79	90	*red*	27	71	84	25
	86	100	*red*	24	25	48	60
	85	100	*red*	42	50	100	50
	100	80	*red*	71	100	100	50
	86	100	*red*	50	84	92	67
	95	67	*red*	94	100	100	17
	100	100	*red*	83	100	100	33
	80	100	*red*	39	100	93	0
	92	100	*red*	72	68	70	20
	83	60	*red*	48	100	81	25
	96	44	*amber*	60	89	76	11
	91	46	*amber*	47	83	47	21
	84	59	*red*	57	87	61	35
	81	75	*red*	38	63	93	50
	92	50	*red*	70	100	94	0
	94	60	*red*	61	48	43	23
	84	75	*red*	40	79	35	30
	84	73	*red*	48	72	55	40
	93	62	*red*	59	54	55	44

Source: Compiled by the authors from the School Climate Survey for Teachers.