

Teachers' perspectives on school climate in three alternative schools

School climate refers to the set of perceptions and lived experiences shared by all members of a school community, students and adults alike, regarding the **quality of relationships**, the **sense of justice and security**, the **teaching and learning processes**, and the **institutional environment** (Cohen et al., 2009 ; Lewno-Dumdie, 2020). It constitutes a framework that strongly influences students' academic achievement and well-being, but also that of teachers. A school climate perceived as positive is closely associated with **greater professional satisfaction** (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016), **a heightened sense of efficacy**, and **reduced exposure to stress and burnout** (Collie et al., 2012).

INTRODUCTION

Most studies on this topic focus on traditional public schools, where teachers often face tensions between institutional expectations and the realities of daily classroom life.

Reuter (2023) offers a different analytical framework by exploring alternative pedagogies, where education professionals often find **renewed meaning in their work, greater coherence between their values and their teaching practices**, conditions that could foster a positive school climate.

This connection between alternative educational projects and teacher well-being offers valuable insights into the relationship between school climate and professional identity.

METHODOLOGY

- **Three alternative schools** in French-speaking Switzerland: Montessori, close to nature, active methods
- Stand out through their educational approaches focused on student autonomy, cooperation, and personalized learning. Similar motivations were identified in a study of seven other teachers in the region, who associated alternative schools with **pedagogical freedom, stronger alignment with their values, and a focus on students' learning and development over institutional constraints** (Marschall & Reymond, 2018).
- **Semi-structured interviews** with 11 teachers, complemented by one collective interview in each school.

RESULTS

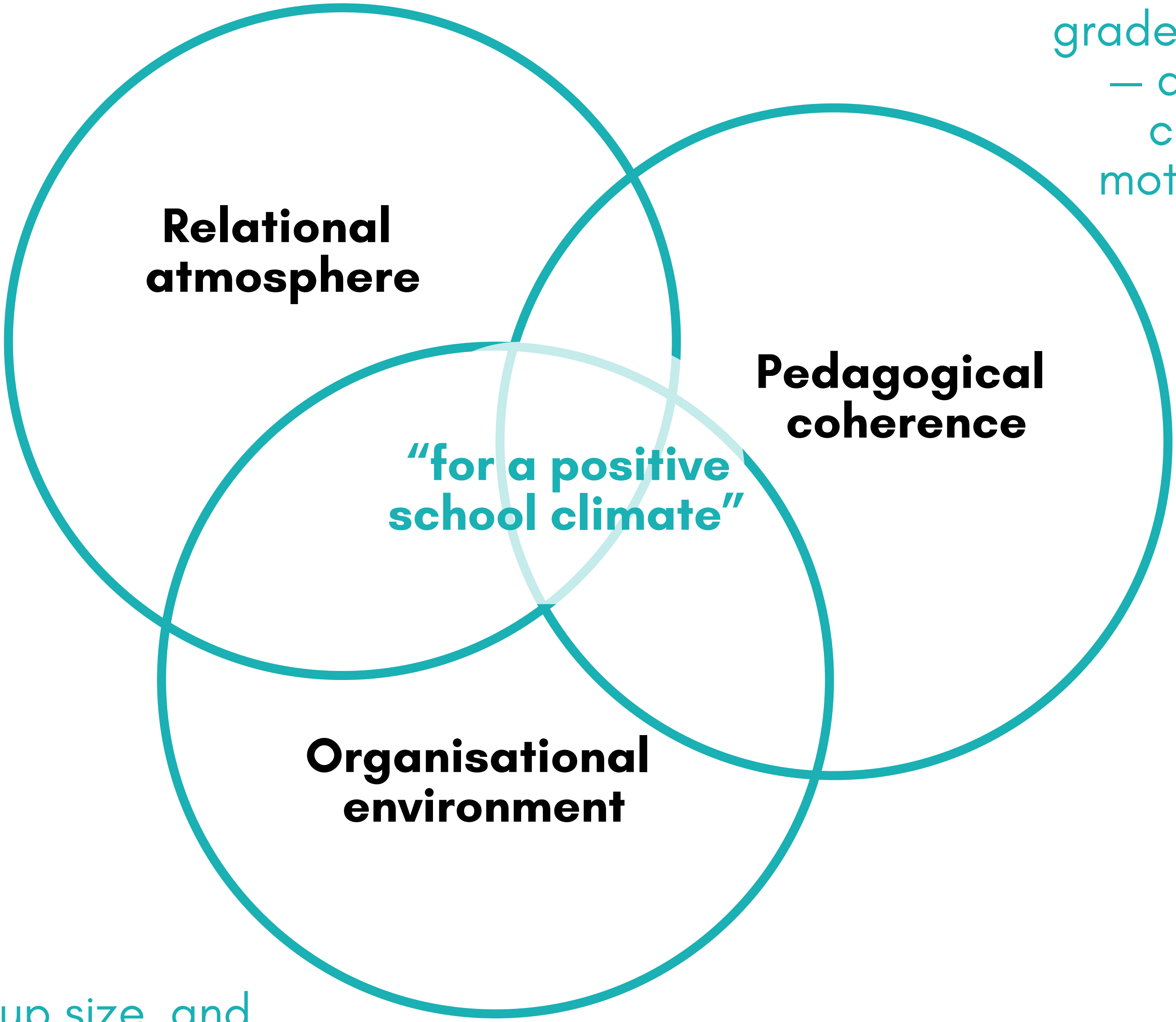
Built on trust, empathy, and emotional safety, both among adults and between adults and students. A supportive and respectful team culture radiates to the children, fostering openness, belonging, and mutual respect.

Educational choices — autonomy, absence of grades, mixed-age learning, collaborative projects — directly shape the emotional and relational climate. These approaches foster intrinsic motivation, cooperation over competition, and respect for individual learning rhythms.

*"If the adults feel good in a **supportive**, focused team, the children feel it too."*

*"You have to **feel safe** and not threatened — we are all human beings with our feelings."*

*"True **communication** means saying what is okay and what is not, with sincerity and respect for each other."*



*"Here, children are **active** in their learning — it's a freedom with limits."*

*"**No grades** means students dare to show their mistakes without fear."*

*"**Collaboration**, not competition, creates a better atmosphere among students."*

Physical spaces, daily rhythm, group size, and adult-student ratios have a direct impact on stress levels, relationships, and the overall tone of the school. A calm, well-prepared environment supports both learning and well-being.

*"Having **space** means the children are less tense with each other."*

*"A **smaller number** of students changes everything — you can really see each child."*

*"Being **outdoors** gives more freedom and makes the day less stressful for everyone."*

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