



Shaping School Culture Beginning of the Year Activities

- Signing the mission statement: Draw up a large copy of your mission statement . Bring the staff together and ask each member to sign the statement with a different color marker. It can then be hung in the main lobby of the school and new staff members sign as they join the school. Students could also join in on the signing on copies posted in the classrooms.
- Distributing Symbols of the School and its Mission Statement: Symbols, mottoes, and logos that communicate common goals help build commitment and focus for the coming year.
- Ceremonies: Whatever ceremony is conducted, link it to the core educational values and mission of the school and the district.
- Storytelling: Storytelling is an excellent way of uniting staff together at the beginning of the year. Staff can come together in school or at a picnic to share stories of success, hope, and challenge. The stories bridge the gap between grade levels or departments as individuals share real stories of their professional worlds.
- Personal "contracts" for the year: To encourage personal goal setting, some staff come up with two or three goals for the year that they write in a self-addressed stamped envelope. These are sealed and then mailed out January 1st.

Questions to Ask Yourself about the Culture of Your School

- What are the patterns of culture in my school in relation to its rituals, traditions, ways of doing things, and its values and beliefs?
- What purposes seem to be served by these patterns of culture?
- How did these patterns of culture come to be?
- What can I do to reinforce or strengthen existing cultural patterns that match my vision of what the school can and should be?
- What can I do to reshape the culture to more closely match my vision?

SCHOOL TEAM INNOVATOR

Practical Strategies for Promoting School Improvement

School Culture: A Key to Improved Student Learning

by Joan Richardson

When Detroit's University Public School opened its doors for the first time in 1993, the school essentially had no culture.

Each 6th, 7th and 8th grader who took a seat on that first day had attended another school the year before. Every teacher had taught in another building. The principal and assistant principal had run different schools the year before.

"We had to create a culture from scratch," says principal Fred Borowski.

But, after living through a chaotic first year marked by numerous episodes of student violence, conflicts between students and teachers and between staff members, Borowski realized he had been wrong. "What we had was the clash of many cultures coming together," says Borowski. Every student had come in with their idea about how students should behave and learn and every teacher had their own ideas about how schools operated.

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*Cultures are built
through the everyday
business of school life.*
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"What we really needed to do was establish the University Public School culture," says Borowski.

So, in a very methodical way, Borowski and his staff set about to change the student and the professional culture of the school. Their goal was to improve student achievement by creating a peaceful school that valued student and adult learning and respect for others.

A school's culture is "the way we do things here." It's that undefinable feeling in a school that lets new students and teachers know what is important and how they are supposed to act.

"It's that powerful force that lurks beneath the surface of any organization, whether you're

talking about schools or businesses. It's an unwritten set of norms that are grounded in values. It spells out what's right and rude to do in that particular organization," says consultant Pam Robbins.

A school culture is transmitted in elements as simple as who sits where during a faculty meeting or as elaborate as how money and time are spent to support staff development.

"Cultures are built through the everyday business of school life. It is the way business is handled that both forms and reflects the culture," say Jon Saphier and Matthew King in their article, "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" (*Educational Leadership*, March 1985).

Saphier and King identified 12 norms of school culture that needed to be strong in order to create a healthy school culture. The norms were:

- 1 Collegiality:
- 2 Experimentation:
- 3 High expectations:
- 4 Trust and confidence:
- 5 Tangible support:
- 6 Reaching out to the knowledge base:
- 7 Appreciation and recognition:
- 8 Caring, celebration, and humor:
- 9 Involvement in decisionmaking:
- 10 Protection of what's important:
- 11 Traditions:
- 12 Honest, open communications.

If those norms are strong, then improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread, say Saphier and King. But, if those norms are weak, then improvements will be infrequent, random, and slow.

Although their article was written 11 years ago, Saphier said during a recent interview that he believes the same set of norms applies today. He now organizes all of his school improvement work around strengthening school culture.



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School Culture: A Key to Improved Student Learning

(Continued from page 1)

But, of the 12 norms, Saphier points to three — collegiality, experimentation, and reaching out to a knowledge base — that have the strongest correlation between changing the school environment and improving student achievement.

Saphier says educators often don't see the connection between a school's professional and student culture. "We underrate the capacity of adults working in harmony in the school to influence the practice and beliefs of students about the school," he says.

When faculty members begin seeing themselves as part of a cohesive unit rather than individual artists, Saphier says, a school develops synergy that promotes change. "When that happens, you end up working in the same direction but with more total power," he says.

"When you have these elements in place what you do is liberate the creativity and energy of the people in the building. You get them welded together

for children," Saphier says.

Robbins says most elements of culture are so interconnected that trying to change one element will affect other areas as well. By focusing school change efforts on one of the 12 elements, schools will see the ripple effect into other areas as well.

"Using time is a profound way to change a culture," says Robbins. "If you change the use of time, you will change the values. That will impact the stories they tell. It will change the rituals and ceremonies that go on."

Detroit's University Public School tackled changing its culture because of disruptive student behavior and low student achievement. Although the goal was to create a healthier student culture that would support academic learning, the faculty approached that by first transforming their professional relationships and by reordering how they used time in their school.

The school identified a work year for teachers that is different from the students' school year. Teachers begin their

work year four weeks before students and spend that time preparing themselves as teachers. Last year, they focused on learning how to work more effectively in teams. They continued throughout the year in an on-site staff development program run by a professor from nearby Wayne State University. This year, they are working jointly to learn how to improve students' social skills and writing across the curriculum.

HOW ONE SCHOOL CHANGED ITS CULTURE

University Public School's culture-changing experience included four key elements:

- 1 Reordering the school calendar. This change recognized that the teachers' work year is different from the students' school year. Teachers began work four weeks before students arrived for classes.
- 2 Setting aside an hour each day for assessments that the beliefs actually get spread, strengthened, and manifested," he says. ■
- 3 This aided teams in keeping better track of students which helped diffuse behavior problem and focus on low-achieving students.
- 4 Introducing on-site staff development to aid in creating professional teams in the school. This started in classes before the school year began and continued in weekly meetings with a professor from a nearby university.
- 5 Working together to develop consistent schoolwide and classroom practices and policies. For example, teachers worked together to write the school's discipline policy and then explained the policy to the parents of their students during a formal orientation at the beginning of the school year.

Saphier says giving teachers time to learn together is a key component of boosting collegiality at a school. "If we, as a school, all have something in common that we are experimenting with, it creates a safe common ground," he says.

Each UPS team meets for one hour every day to go over lesson plans as well as to share information about their classes. They seek each other's advice as they share stories about misbehaving students, learning successes, or challenges.

That regular time together has helped weave the staff into more cohesive teams whose members are comfortable sharing their experiences and providing feedback. Sharing information about students every day insures that teachers are more knowledgeable about kids' behavior and achievement. That means students are less likely to slip through the cracks. That attention enhances students' sense of belonging in the school which, in turn, tends to improve both their behavior and academic performance, principal Borowski says.

Saphier says the UPS example demonstrates that focusing on developing the professional culture within a school has paybacks in improved student culture.

"It's through doing the common work of planning together and making common

Resources for School Culture

"Building Professional Community in Schools," Sharon Kruse; Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk, *Issues in Restructuring Schools*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Issue No. 6, Spring 1994. Reviews critical elements of a healthy school culture.

"Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," Jon Saphier and Matthew King, *Educational Leadership*, March 1985. Identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture.

Transforming School Culture: Stories, Symbols, Values & The Leader's Role, Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Univ. of Oregon, 1995. Synopsizes research while offering numerous examples of schools' experiences with culture changes 800-438-8841. \$12.50 plus \$4 for shipping and handling.

School culture survey

COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR

This tool will help a school assess its culture based on the 12 norms of a healthy school culture identified by Jon Saphier and Mathew King in their article, "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," *Educational Leadership*, March 1985.

The facilitator should prepare individual sheets ahead of the meeting and distribute to participants.

After individuals declare their positions, the facilitator should collect the responses and tabulate privately. The cumulative responses should be shared at the next team meeting. The facilitator should then lead a discussion about possible implications of the responses. *In what areas is there already substantial agreement that the team is performing well together? What areas does this team need to work on? What are some strategies for improvement in that area?*

The professional staff in this school use their talents and knowledge to help each other with challenges and needs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school encourages and supports experimentation with new ideas and techniques.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school has high expectations for teachers and administrators.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Staff and students in this school trust and have confidence in each other.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Time and resources are available to support teachers to do their best work.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Teachers and leaders in this school reach out to a knowledge base to inform their work with students and with each other.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Good teaching is recognized and appreciated by the school and community.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school culture values caring, celebration, and humor.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

School leaders consistently involve staff in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

School administrators keep meetings and paperwork to a minimum in order to protect teachers' instructional and planning time.

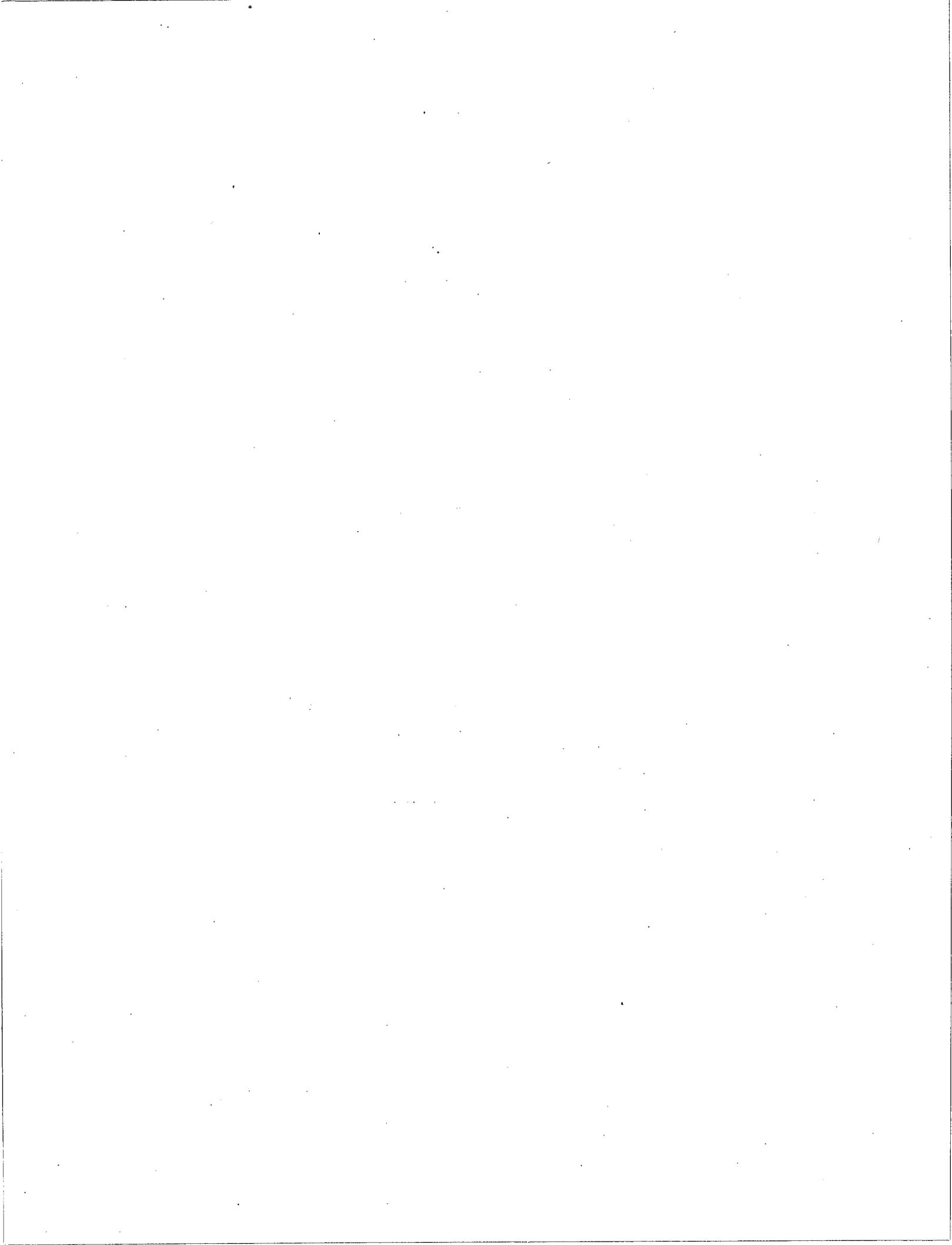
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

The school has traditions in both curriculum and recurrent events that are significant and known by all.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Honest, open communications exist among staff members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



Carol Fine and Lenaya Raack write in "Professional Development: Changing Times":

"Professional development must be based on these assumptions:

- Ongoing individual and organization development are required for school change
- Professional development must support both the inquiry into and the study of teaching and learning.
- Training, practice, feedback, individual reflection, and group inquiry all contribute to teacher learning.
- Professional development is critical to school development
- Effective professional development is primarily school-focused and embedded in the job.

Although district wide workshops are appropriate on occasion, most professional development should be school-based and should involve teachers in a variety of job-embedded learning activities. Through such activities as case discussions, study groups, peer coaching, action research, curriculum development, and joint problem solving, teachers form professional learning communities that lead to instructional improvement. This approach to professional development contrasts starkly with approaches in which teachers work in isolated, non-collegial settings where traditional and outdated assumptions are less likely to be challenged...

New approaches to professional development are essential as educators work to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices with research on teaching and learning. Such a shift is possible only if school faculties can rely on professional development opportunities that help them work as a unit, rather than as a collection of independent educators.

Before job-embedded professional development can flourish, teachers must be able to count on having regularly-scheduled times to meet, study, plan, and reflect together." (School Team Innovator)

"In Japan, teachers spend time making common lesson plans and talking about various methods for teaching difficult concepts," Shanker writes. "Then, after a lesson, teachers discuss what worked and what did not so that they can do a better job next time. Teachers here need similar time during the workday to focus on the problems of teaching and learning, to figure out how to deal with specific subject matter that is difficult for students, to plan lesson and examine their effect, to engage in ongoing experimentation aimed at specific improvements, and to observe and learn from one another." (Albert Shanker)

"If the trend today is to engage students as active participants in their own learning, to encourage group and cooperative projects, to foster critical thinking and problem solving, and to improve the transfer of learning, those same objectives should inform professional development..."

"In good schools, professional development is woven into the fabric of everyday life, into the kind of community that binds its members together. This is due in part to such practical matters as the way time is used and organized to allow educators to collaborate in joint work...Some schools promote educator learning as a natural and necessary aspect of daily work. Other schools operate on the assumption that little continued learning is needed once a teacher walks through the door.

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In most professions, there are at least two sides

To the job. You work with your patients or clients for part of the time, and you spend part of the time with colleagues discussing what went wrong in your work, what's going right how you did it, and how others have done it or fluffed it. This exchange of experiences, ideas, and problem-solving approaches provides a vital kind of professional development that most professional people take for granted.

The work life of American teachers is very different. They spend their days in classrooms teaching with virtually no time to learn from and confer with other teachers. They work in isolation in their classrooms and do their planning, grading, and thinking alone at home (Albert Shanker)

...(there is) a critical link between what happens to teachers and what happens to students. If schools and teachers are going to be successful in getting children to be more curious and more actively involved in their learning, then adults who teach them likewise will have to be actively engaged, he says.

"Inquiring classrooms are not likely to flourish in schools where inquiry among teachers is discouraged. A commitment to problem solving is difficult to install in students who are taught by teacher for whom problem solving is not allowed. Where there is little discourse along teachers, discourse among students will be harder to promote and maintain. And the idea of making classrooms into learning communities for students will remain more rhetoric than real unless schools become learning communities for teachers to," he writes. (Thomas Sergiovanni)

Teamwork, goals, and the judicious use of data are powerful forces for improvement, especially if combined, says Schmoker, a research analyst for the Amphitheater Public Schools in Tucson, Arizona, and author of Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement.

Teamwork addresses the social dimensions of improvement, he argues. Goals, in turn, give teamwork meaning and drive improvement. But data is essential in helping schools measure what they have achieved...

Schmoker argues that schools improve when purpose and effort are untied. "The kind of significant, sustained improvement that we need in schools will not occur in an isolated, freelance culture, where no one knows what anyone else is doing or what each other" operative goals are. That is a system in disarray," he writes.

"After a decade of reform, we have finally learned in hindsight what should have been clear from the start: Most schools and teachers cannot produce the kind of learning demanded by the new reforms – not because they do not want to, but because they do not know how, and the systems in which they work do not support them in doing so...

On the whole, the school reform movement has ignored the obvious: What teachers know and can do makes the crucial difference in what children learn...

Standards for students and teachers are the key to reforming American education. Students should have the right to be taught by competent teachers and teachers should have the right to high-quality preparation, induction, and professional development." (What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future)

Teacher development must move center stage in school improvement, Sergiovanni argues. That means, he says management systems, organizational patterns, and teacher growth strategies must:

- Recognize individual differences among teachers
- Encourage teachers to reflect on their own practices
- Give a high p[priority to conversation and dialogue among teachers
- Provide for collaborative learning among teachers
- Emphasize caring communities
- Call upon teachers to respond morally to their work.

“Teaching will not become a learning profession until the vast majority of its members become change agents capable of working on their own sense of purpose through inquiry, competence building, and collaboration (Michael Fullan)

“Sergiovanni stresses the need for a school community to come together around shared values and ideas because “real schools” are managerially loose and culturally tight. That means, he believes, that the change process must be norms based rather than rules based. Such approaches emphasize professional socialization, shared values and purposes, collegiality, and natural interdependence.

“...New approaches are need to connect teachers to one another through in-school teams and cross-school professional communities that tackle problems of [practice over time...”

Ongoing professional development can be incorporated into teachers' daily work through joint planning, research, curriculum and assessment work, study groups and peer coaching...”

“If we pay attention to supporting knowledgeable teachers who work in productive schools, American education need suffer through no more dead-end reforms.”

(What Matters Most: Teaching for



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Tools For SchoolsTM

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 publication
 supporting student
 and staff learning
 through school
 improvement

Student learning grows in professional cultures

By Joan Richardson

An article in a professional publication describes how a variety of schools have used study groups to explore topics of interest to teachers. Two teachers reading the article react quite differently.

One says, "Great idea. The teachers in my school would love to try that. How would we get started?"

Another groans. "That might work in your school but it would never work in my school."

Each teacher has just identified an element of the culture in her school.

Culture is, simply, the way we do things around here. No teacher needs a handbook to know "what's right and what's rude" in the school in which she works. Students, teachers, and parents may not be able to define a school's culture, but they know what is important and what is expected in that school.

In their upcoming book, *Shaping Culture: The School Leader's Role*, Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson describe culture this way: "Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have been built up over

time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges."

Every church, business, community, even every block in your neighborhood has its own culture. Schools are no different. A school's culture may support teachers who try to improve their teaching or it may ridicule anyone who tries to stand out from the

crowd. It might encourage teachers to work on projects together or it might punish anyone who seeks such collegial support. The culture may encourage teachers to set high standards for students or it may send a message that "these kids can't be expected to do much better."

Why does culture matter? For that, Kent Peterson has a very

simple answer. "In study after study, where culture did not support and encourage reform, it did not happen. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of culture and its relationship to improved student learning. You have to have the structures, a curriculum, appropriate assessments — all of that. But if you don't have a strong and healthy school culture, none of the rest will matter," he said.

In their 1985 article, Jon Saphier and Matthew

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the coming year. These are placed in self-addressed envelopes and mailed back to each writer in the middle of August as a way of reminding what each had hoped to accomplish.

- ▶ Have a storytelling contest. One school gathers for a contest of the most bizarre, surprising, or personal stories that have happened during the year. Awards are given for the best told, the funniest, the most caring, and so forth. These bring people together to feel the challenges and joys of the year.
- ▶ Recognize heroines and heroes. Every school has someone—staff, volunteer, support person—who has exemplified the best that the school has to offer. Recognize those who have

given their best for the sake of students. This engages everyone in celebrating the special contributions that all can make.

End-of-the year ceremonies are times to gather together around shared values and traditions. They can strengthen the sense of community and reinforce positive aspects of the school culture. The end of school ceremonies help bring closure to the year and provide a link to the coming year.

This column is prepared by Kent D. Peterson, Ph.D., Senior Training and Research Specialist for this Center and Professor of Educational Administration, University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has written extensively for both scholarly and practitioner publications and worked with schools and leadership institutes across the country. His current book is The Leadership Paradox coauthored with Terrence Deal.

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Building School Culture at the End of the Year

(The seventh in a series on Schoolwide Projects.)

The end of the school year is always a challenge to teachers and administrators, yet it is an excellent time to build school culture. While some are feeling the end of a wonderful year, others are glad they will be able to have a new class and new opportunities. Too often schools complete their year with a flurry of administrivia, paperwork, and packing. Rather, schools should end with a focus on the purposes and values that motivate staff.

Like the end of any experience that has taken energy, time and effort, people have a heightened sense of awareness, attention, and concern. This makes it a perfect time to bring people together to celebrate the successes, mourn the losses and acknowledge the mistakes, and to look to the coming year as a chance for renewal and opportunity.

Different schools do this differently, but without some positive, communal closure, the school year can simply end with the last car exiting the parking lot. Here are ways some schools celebrate the end of the year:

- ▶ Give funny awards for mistakes, goofs, and to those who've tried to improve their work. In one elementary school, there is an award given for the funniest or biggest faux pas a teacher has made in trying a new instructional technique. The "Golden Banana" award both supports the teacher who tried something new and recognizes that not everything is going to work as planned.
- ▶ Have a ceremony to recognize those who have been helpful, collaborative, or collegial. In

another school, faculty give recognition to other staff and administrators who have been helpful, collaborative, or supportive. A committee from the school picks a large group to honor during the last day on campus—awardees are each given a coffee cup with the school logo on it.

- ▶ Have a potluck where everyone brings a dish of food and a story to share. The food livens the spirits and the story of a funny incident, success with a student, or a technique that worked helps bring some closure to the year and celebrates the work of staff.
- ▶ Provide an opportunity to reflect on the coming year. In some schools staff, community, and administrators develop a theme for the new year. The theme is shared with the school before the end of classes and hats, T-shirts, or banners are made and given to each teacher. Staff discuss how they will reinforce the theme at a meeting at the end of the year.
- ▶ Review the plans for the year and milestones achieved. In many schools, the end of the year is a time to look back at the many things that have been accomplished (the milestones passed) in classrooms, the school council, or with particular goals. In addition, it is a time to commit to the plans for the coming year and the role everyone has to play in them.
- ▶ Share hopes and dreams for the coming year. In one school everyone writes a letter to themselves that describes the hopes and dreams for

their professional worlds. Teachers could also develop stories of what they would like their classes to be like and how they would like to link to the needs of students. These fictional accounts are hopes and dreams for the year, motivating while being fun. Like storytelling in villages and tribes, these oral histories or shared dreams can motivate and enliven transitions from summer to the school year.

► Personal “Contracts” for the Year

Some schools bring their staffs together around barbecues, picnics, or pot luck dinners. Some use this as an opportunity to share summer experiences, talk about the coming year, or discuss new curricula. To encourage personal goal setting, some staff come up with two or three goals for the year that they write in a self-addressed stamped envelope. These are sealed and given to a valued colleague who is to mail the envelope January 1st. It reminds staff of their commitments and hopes for the year, then provides a reminder half way through.

► Opening Day Ceremony

To build community spirit and motivate staff and students alike, some districts have a major

Opening Day Ceremony. It may vary year to year, but there is always music put on by someone in the district (musicians have included teachers, administrator, custodians, and students). Short speeches from several different groups in the district address how they will serve the mission of the district. Participants share in food carefully selected for quality and meaning (one district serves pie ala mode, with the pies from a famous bakery in the community). At the end, there is always a special event—once a hot air balloon had the year’s theme written on it.

Whatever you do at the beginning of school be sure it is a meaningful, well organized, and professional event. Fill it with meaning and purpose as well as playfulness and humor. As staff, students, and administrators are making the transition to the new year, help them reconnect to the values, hopes and educational mission of the school.

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SCHOOL TEAM INNOVATOR

Practical Strategies for Promoting School Improvement

April 1996

Collaborative Culture Supports Improvement

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Teamwork Benefits Baltimore Students



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Developing a more collaborative culture helps to provide a foundation for needed change, improvement, and renewal in urban schools. While no single approach can address all the challenges facing urban educators and the children and families they serve, all stakeholders benefit when a school has a collaborative culture that promotes the continuous renewal of instructional methods and curricular offerings in an atmosphere of collegiality and shared mission.

What is school culture and what are the components of collaborative cultures? "The school culture is a complex web of norms, values, beliefs and assumptions, and traditions and rituals that have been built up over time as teachers, students, parents, and administrators work together, deal with crises, and develop unstated expectations for interacting and working together." Kent D. Peterson and Richard Brietzke write in *Building Collaborative Cultures: Seeking Ways to Reshape Urban Schools* (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1994).

In some schools, teachers still work largely in isolation and spend little time discussing ideas and problem solving, but in schools with collaborative cultures, teachers regularly work together to share knowledge and explore possible solutions to challenging problems. "In collaborative school cultures," Peterson and Brietzke write, "the underlying norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions reinforce and support high levels of collegiality, team work, and dialogue about problems of practice." As a result, schools with professional collaboration exhibit the following relationships and behaviors that support quality work.

- A richer technical language
- Complex problem solving and extensive sharing of knowledge

- Greater risk taking
- Increased willingness to discuss failures, mistakes, and disagreements
- Increased interdependence
- Dispersed leadership
- Increased job satisfaction
- More continuous efforts to improve the schools
- Improved student achievement

In schools with collaborative cultures, teachers also have opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning, engage in more team teaching and shared decision making, plan cooperatively, are committed to the improvement of practice, and network externally with other teachers, schools, and programs.

Teachers interact with each other by sharing complaints and anecdotes about their work, helping each other when asked to do so, and sharing resources, but the most extended form of collegiality involves joint work. When teachers are engaged in team teaching, collaborative planning, peer coaching, mentoring, and action research, they experience expanded opportunities to develop strong ties to colleagues and build more productive professional relationships. "Joint work is the highest and most extended form of collegiality," according to Peterson and Brietzke, but while joint work is critical in fostering collegial relationships, these other factors are also important:

- For collegiality to take hold, schools must have committed teachers who are open to change, willing to share concerns and ideas, and eager to learn.
- Schools must have organizational norms that overcome the isolation of teaching by supporting an open exchange of ideas and debate over issues.

School Culture: A Key to Improved Student Learning

(Continued from page 1)

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"When you have these elements in place what you do is liberate the creativity and energy of the people in the building. You get them welded together around the common goals that they have for children," Saphier says.

Robbins says most elements of culture are so interconnected that trying to change one element will affect other areas as well. By focusing school change efforts on one of the 12 elements, schools will see the ripple effect into other areas as well.

"Using time is a profound way to change a culture," says Robbins. "If you change the use of time, you will change the values. That will impact the stories they tell. It will change the rituals and ceremonies that go on."

Detroit's University Public School tackled changing its culture because of disruptive student behavior and low student achievement. Although the goal was to create a healthier student culture that would support academic learning, the faculty approached that by first transforming their professional relationships and by reordering how they used time in their school.

The school identified a work year for teachers that is different from the students' school year. Teachers begin their

work year four weeks before students and spend that time preparing themselves as teachers. Last year, they focused on learning how to work more effectively in teams. They continued throughout the year in an on-site staff development program run by a professor from nearby Wayne State University. This year, they are working jointly to learn how to improve students' social skills and writing across the curriculum.

HOW ONE SCHOOL CHANGED ITS CULTURE

University Public School's culture-changing experience included four key elements:

- 1 Reordering the school calendar. This change recognized that the teachers' work year is different from the students' school year. Teachers began work four weeks before students arrived for classes.
- 2 Setting aside an hour each day for teachers to meet with each other. This aided in creating a track of students which helped diffuse behavior problem and focus on low-achieving students.
- 3 Introducing on-site staff development to aid in creating professional teams in the school. This started in classes before the school year began and continued in weekly meetings with a professor from a nearby university.
- 4 Working together to develop consistent schoolwide and classroom practices and policies. For example, teachers worked together to write the school's discipline policy and then explained the policy to the parents of their students during a formal orientation at the beginning of the school year.

Saphier says giving teachers time to learn together is a key component of boosting collegiality at a school. "If we, as a school, all have something in common that we are experimenting with, it creates a safe common ground," he says.

Each UPS team meets for one hour every day to go over lesson plans as well as to share information about their classes. They seek each other's advice as they share stories about misbehaving students, learning successes, or challenges.

That regular time together has helped weave the staff into more cohesive teams whose members are comfortable sharing their experiences and providing feedback. Sharing information about students every day insures that teachers are more knowledgeable about kids' behavior and achievement. That means students are less likely to slip through the cracks. That attention enhances students' sense of belonging in the school which, in turn, tends to improve both their behavior and academic performance, principal Borowski says.

Saphier says the UPS example demonstrates that focusing on developing the professional culture within a school has paybacks in improved student culture.

"It's through doing the common work of planning together and making common assessments that the culture spread, strengthened, and manifested," he says.

Resources for School Culture

"Building Professional Community in Schools," Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk, *Issues in Restructuring Schools*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Issue No. 6, Spring 1994. Reviews critical elements of a healthy school culture.

"Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," Jon Saphier and Matthew King, *Educational Leadership*, March 1985. Identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture.

Transforming School Culture: Stories, Symbols, Values & The Leader's Role, Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Univ. of Oregon, 1995. Synopsizes research while offering numerous examples of schools' experiences with culture changes 800-438-8841. \$12.50 plus \$4 for shipping and handling.

Collaborative Culture Supports Improvement

(Continued from page 1)

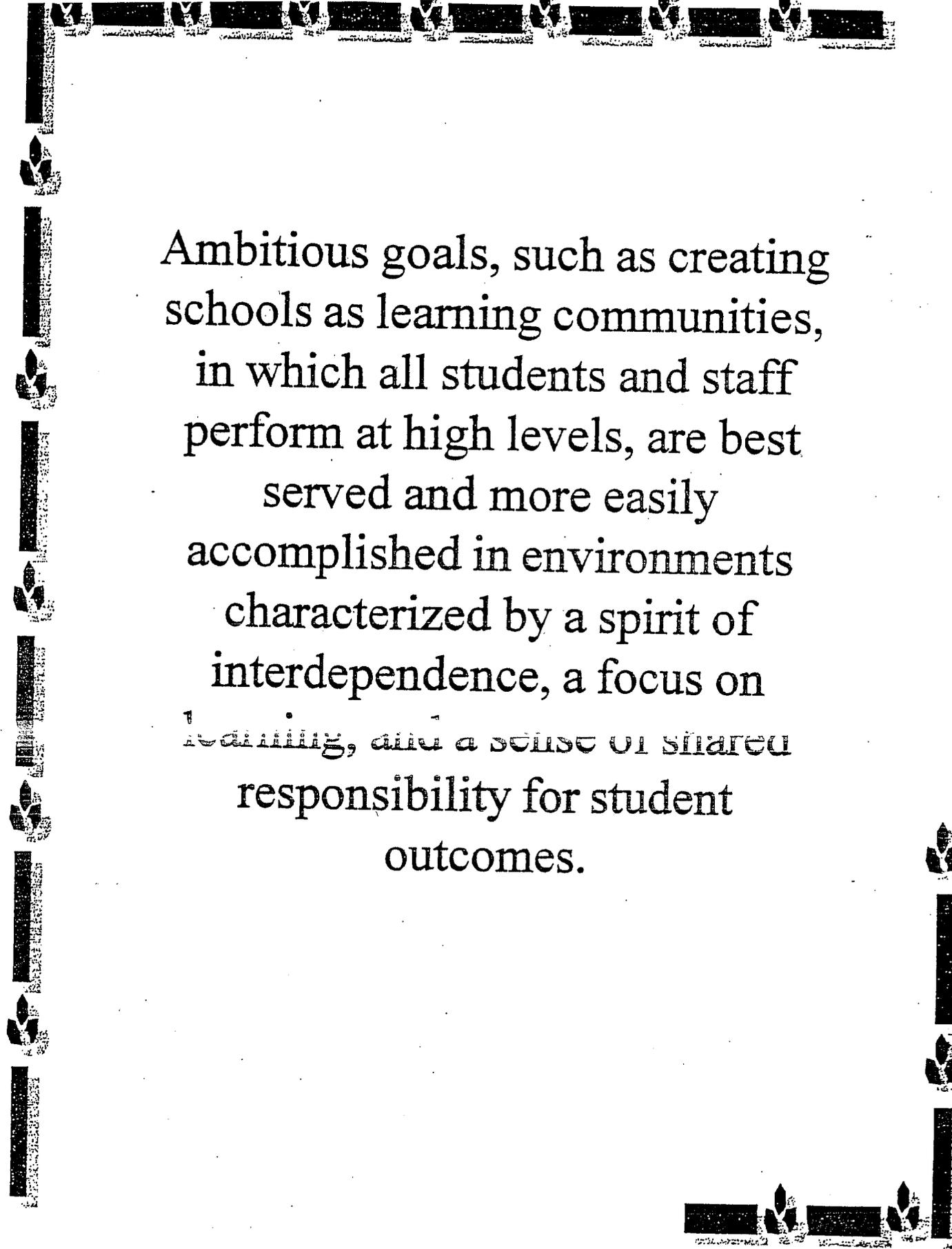
- Schools must support the development of reference groups, such as grade-level teams or interdisciplinary units that support collaborative practices and professional dialogue.
- Schools must make time available to teachers for meeting, talking, thinking, interacting, conducting research, and planning.
- Administrators must provide encouragement and support for teachers who are engaged in professional dialogue and team work.

The process of shaping a collaborative school culture is neither easy nor quick. It requires that members of each school study the existing culture to identify the aspects of the underlying norms and assumptions that serve the core mission of the school and the needs of students. They also must work to reinforce and celebrate those aspects that support development of a collaborative culture while changing those norms that work against collegiality.

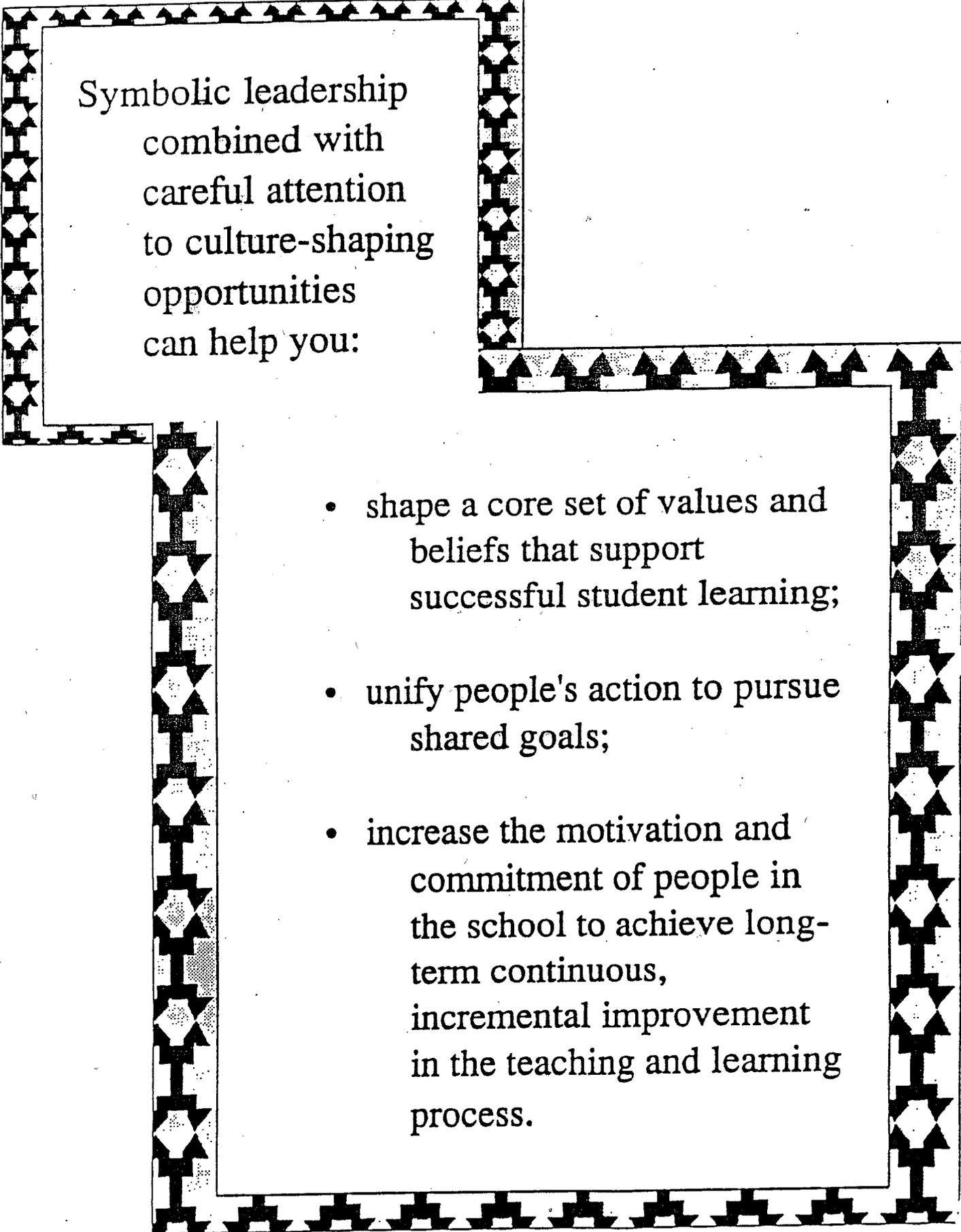
In addition, they must develop shared definitions of success and achievement by working out the answers to questions such as these:

- ❶ What is a successful school year?
- ❷ What is evidence of good relations with colleagues?
- ❸ What should students know and be able to do at the end of the school year?

Agreeing on definitions of success is important because what teachers and administrators view as the measures of success often determines which problems they try to solve together. ■



Ambitious goals, such as creating schools as learning communities, in which all students and staff perform at high levels, are best served and more easily accomplished in environments characterized by a spirit of interdependence, a focus on learning, and a sense of shared responsibility for student outcomes.



Symbolic leadership
combined with
careful attention
to culture-shaping
opportunities
can help you:

- shape a core set of values and beliefs that support successful student learning;
- unify people's action to pursue shared goals;
- increase the motivation and commitment of people in the school to achieve long-term continuous, incremental improvement in the teaching and learning process.

**To accomplish this task
you must be able to:**

- **understand and analyze
the underlying
purposes of your
school's culture;
and**
- **know how to shape
the culture through
symbolic actions.**

Strategies for strengthening culture

W What is culture?

An informal

understanding of the way

we do things around

here, i.e. what keeps the

herd moving in roughly

the right direction.

— Terrence Deal

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This process can be done as a follow-up to the activity on Page 3 or it can be done separately. This activity will help your staff determine its priorities and sharpen its focus on school culture this year.

TIME: 90 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape.

PREPARATION: Provide each staff member with a copy of the article, "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" by Jon Saphier and Matthew King (*Educational Leadership*, March 1985). The article identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture. Ask them to read it and reflect upon it before your scheduled meeting.

On the day of the meeting, post 12 sheets of chart paper around the room. Label each sheet of paper with one of the 12 norms.

Directions

1. Divide the faculty into 12 groups and assign one norm per group. (See Page 2 for the list of norms.) Ask them to share their ideas about this norm. Time: 5 minutes.
2. While still in the subgroup, have the members list as many suggestions as possible for strengthening that norm in the school. Time: 10 minutes.
3. Ask each group to explain the assigned norm to the entire faculty and provide an example of how it operates in the school today. Ask each group to limit its presentation to two minutes.
4. Then, ask the same group to post its suggestions for strengthening the norm in the school. Solicit suggestions from other group members. Post those as well. Time: 30 minutes.
5. When all norms have been explained and suggestions posted, distribute five stickers to each staff member. Using the stickers, ask staff members to vote for the norms they believe need the greatest attention during the upcoming school year.
6. Tally the number of "votes" given to each norm. Post the votes for staff members to see.
7. Type up the staff suggestions and share them with the school improvement team or other appropriate committee.
8. Set aside time at a school improvement team meeting to discuss each norm and select one or two suggestions for focused attention during the school year.

Developing cultural action plans

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This activity should be done by the staff group at your school that would consider cultural issues, such as a school improvement team, leadership team, or climate committee. At the conclusion of this activity, the group should have an action plan for every norm that your school has agreed to address this year.

TIME: 90 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape.

Directions

1. Before the meeting, use a sheet of chart paper to create one form for each norm your school has agreed to address this year. Post those sheets on the walls of the meeting room. Example:

NORM: _____

What steps will we	
When?	
Who will do this?	
What results do we want?	

2. Provide the group with the suggestions resulting from the activity on Page 4. Time: 10 minutes.
3. Ask each group to discuss the suggestions and select the ideas that they believe will do the most to improve that norm in the school. Time: 30 minutes.
4. Fill out each action plan. Time: 30 minutes.
5. Share the completed action plans with the staff and with the school's parents' organization.
6. Implement and monitor progress on the plan throughout the year.

*The only thing
of real importance*

that leaders do is

create and manage

culture.

— Edgar Schein,

"Organizational Culture

and Leadership"

Learning about school culture

*Stimulate your thinking about your school's culture
by reading some of these books and articles*

- *Assessing School and Classroom Climate* by Judith Arter. A consumer guide that offers educators help in choosing the best instruments for assessing school culture. Order document #ED 295 301 from ERIC Document Reproduction Services, (800) 443-3742 or (703) 440-1400, fax (703) 440-1408. Price: \$16.84.
- "Building Professional Community in Schools," by Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis, and Anthony Bryk, *Issues in Restructuring Schools*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Issue No. 6, Spring 1994. Reviews critical elements of a healthy school culture.

A copy of the report is available online at www.wcer.wisc.edu/completed/cors/issues_in_restructuring_schools/ISSUES_NO_6_SPRING_1994.pdf
- *Educational Leadership and School Culture*, edited by Marshall Sashkin and Herbert Walberg. Berkley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing, 1993. Examines the research on the nature of educational leadership and school culture and how they are related. Order by calling (800) 227-1540. Price: \$33.75.
- "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," by Jon Saphier and Matthew King, *Educational Leadership*, March 1985. Identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture. Check your local library for a copy.
- *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, by Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990. Examines the crucial role that principals play in developing and maintaining healthy school cultures. Order document #ED 325914. from ERIC Document Reproduction Services, (800) 443-3742 or (703) 440-1400, fax (703) 440-1408. Price: \$25.95.
- *Shaping School Culture: The School Leader's Role* by Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. Provides an in-depth look at the ways that real schools shape their culture. Includes many examples. Available November 1998. Order by calling (800) 274-4434 or fax (800) 569-0443. Price \$33.95.
- *Transforming School Culture: Stories, Symbols, Values & The Leader's Role* by Stephen Stolp and Stuart Smith, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1995. Synopsizes research while offering numerous examples of schools' experiences with culture changes. Order by calling (800) 438-8841 or fax (541) 346-2334. Price: \$16.50.

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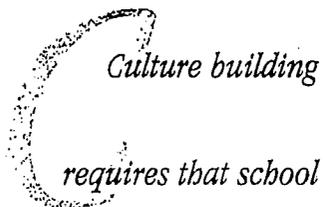
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August/September 1998

Evaluating your school's culture



leaders give attention to

the informal, subtle, and

symbolic aspects of

school life which shape

of each employee within

the system.

— William Cunningham

and Don Gresso

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This activity will help a staff assess its impact on the school's culture. Although this tool is presented here as an end-of-the-year evaluation tool, it could be easily modified and used as a beginning-of-the-year evaluation.

TIME: Two hours.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape.

Directions

- Using a sheet of chart paper, create one panel like the following for each of the 12 norms on Page 2.

<i>This is a strong and healthy norm at our school.</i>				
<u>COLLEGIALITY</u>				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

- Give each staff member 12 stickers and ask them to identify their beliefs about each norm by placing the stickers in the appropriate location on the chart paper. Direct them to use only one sticker per norm.
- When all the stickers have been placed, divide the group into 12 smaller groups (one for each norm) to discuss the results and present them to the entire staff.

If this activity is being done at the beginning of the year, ask the group to focus on answering this question: *What actions do we need to take to improve this norm in our school?*

If this activity is being done at the end of the year, ask the group to answer this question: *What evidence do we have to demonstrate the results we've achieved?*

- Reassemble the larger group. Ask one representative from each of the 12 smaller groups to present their ideas. After the presentation, allow time for additional comments from others who were not in that group. Time: 60 minutes.
- Suggestions from this activity should be shared with the school improvement team as they develop their action plans for the year.



The Paradoxes of Reform

(The sixth in a series on Schoolwide Projects.)

New Reforms

Currently, schools across the nation are trying to restructure, to make significant changes in the ways they teach and assess students, organize time, and govern schools. Whether schools are trying cooperative learning, performance based assessment, block scheduling or site-based shared decision making, leadership in those schools is facing new demands, new roles, and new expectations. These new demands require new ways of thinking and teaching about leadership by principals and teachers. One way of viewing reform is as a paradox (Deal and Peterson, 1994).

What is Paradox?

A paradox is a seemingly contradictory situation that runs counter to common sense or expected theories, but seems actually to be true (Deal and Peterson, 1994, p. 41). By understanding the nature of paradox the demands of reform may seem more understandable.

Paradoxes of Leadership During Reform

By examining, accepting and understanding the paradoxical nature of leadership principals and teachers can more easily engage themselves deeply in reform. Here are some of the central paradoxes of school reform efforts.

The Paradox of Reward: People don't work for rewards—Reward People.

It seems to be the case in schools that most teachers and administrators, once employed, do not seek

major financial or other types of rewards for their efforts. But they do seek meaning, purpose and recognition from colleagues and students; they seek recognition for their commitment, effort and energy. Schools do not set up reward systems to foster restructuring, but schools that don't recognize the special contributions of faculty find effort and energy disappearing. They don't work for rewards, but they are rewarded.

The Planning Paradox: Plans must always be revised—Plan carefully.

One of the great challenges in schools is planning complex changes. But as Louis and Miles (1990) demonstrate, the best laid plans must always be revised. It is useful to view careful planning as both a problem solving process and a community building process. It is useful to think through implementation of goals—to identify resources, people and time-frames to achieve valued ends. Planning is also used to communicate symbolically that change and improvement are important, collaborative, and necessary.

The Resource Allocation Paradox: Allocate resources equally—Distribute them where they are needed.

Here again leadership in school restructuring runs into old myths and traditions. Most schools distribute resources to departments, grade levels and classrooms in equal amounts no matter what the needs or opportunities. In more successful restructured schools, resources are being put where they will have the greatest impact on student learning and where they will foster more rapid and deeper changes.

Principals essential in shaping school culture

Ask Dr. Developer



Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask. (At least he thinks he does!)

Q *I'm a principal but, sometimes, I feel as if the teachers are steering the ship at my school. What is my role in shaping the culture of the school?*

A Teachers must play a crucial role in helping a school fulfill the vision of what a school wants to be, but the principal is an essential part of any change. Principals set the tone for their school every day, every week, and every year – from activities as small as picking up gum wrappers on the school grounds and their promptness in returning telephone calls to issues as large as sharing decision making and pursuing their own professional development.

In their book, *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, (see Page 7 for details), Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson identify six major ways that principals shape

- 1) Developing a sense of what the school should be and could be;
- 2) Recruiting and selecting staff whose values fit with the school's;

- 3) Resolving conflicts, disputes, and problems directly as a way of shaping values;
- 4) Communicating values and beliefs in daily routines and behaviors;
- 5) Identifying and articulating stories that communicate shared values; and
- 6) Nurturing the traditions, ceremonies, rituals, and symbols that communicate and reinforce the school culture.

Since leaders must be models of the changes they seek, take time to reflect about your own attitudes and actions. Do you have a personal vision of what the school should be? Have you communicated that vision to your staff? How have you done that? What stories and anecdotes about the school do you share with your staff, with others in the school district, with your friends, and with parents?

Network with other principals. Read the stories of other principals who have struggled to reshape their schools. Their stories will provide you with guidance —

work that you're doing.

Send your questions to Dr. Developer, 1128 Nottingham Road, Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230.

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Shaping School Culture

Shaping School Culture—at the start of the school year!

Each year over 2 million teachers and administrators return to their schools to restart the educational experiences of students.

The beginning of the school year is a powerful time to reconnect teachers, students, administrators and others to the mission and values of the school. These are times to convene the school community and reinforce the values, hopes, and dreams for the coming school year. Transitions are important times in the lives of students and educators. They need to be marked by traditions and ceremonies.

Schools across the country use a variety of ways to reconnect staff and students to the values and hopes for the coming year. Here are some of the ceremonies and traditions schools institute to signal values and mission at the beginning of the year.

► Signing the Mission Statement

In one school staff come together around a large copy of the mission statement written in special calligraphy. Each staff member comes up and signs their name in a different color marker. This ceremony is not required, but staff feel a commitment to the precepts in the statement. In some schools the signed mission statement is hung in the front hall with new staff signing on whenever they join the school. Copies of the mission statement can be in each classroom—where students could sign on as well.

► Distributing Symbols of the School and Its Mission

Symbols, mottos, and logos that communicate common goals help build commitment and focus for the coming year. Distributing t-shirts with the school logo or motto at the beginning of the school year with a focus on the meaning and mission of the school can bring a staff together. Some schools have notebooks embossed with the yearly goals or the theme for the year. Other schools pass out hats with key slogans, hats worn during faculty volleyball games, festival nights, and at the end-of-the-year barbecue. These mementos help build community at the same time they reinforce the mission and values of the school.

► Ceremonies

Whatever ceremony is conducted, link it to the core educational values and mission of the district and school. Pay attention to details such as quality food, good speakers, carefully prepared performers, and visually pleasing surroundings. A carefully designed ceremony communicates quality and professionalism.

► Storytelling

Storytelling is an excellent way of uniting staff together at the beginning of the year. Staff can come together in school or at a picnic to share stories of success, hope, and challenge. The stories bridge the gap between grade levels or departments as individuals share real stories of

Note

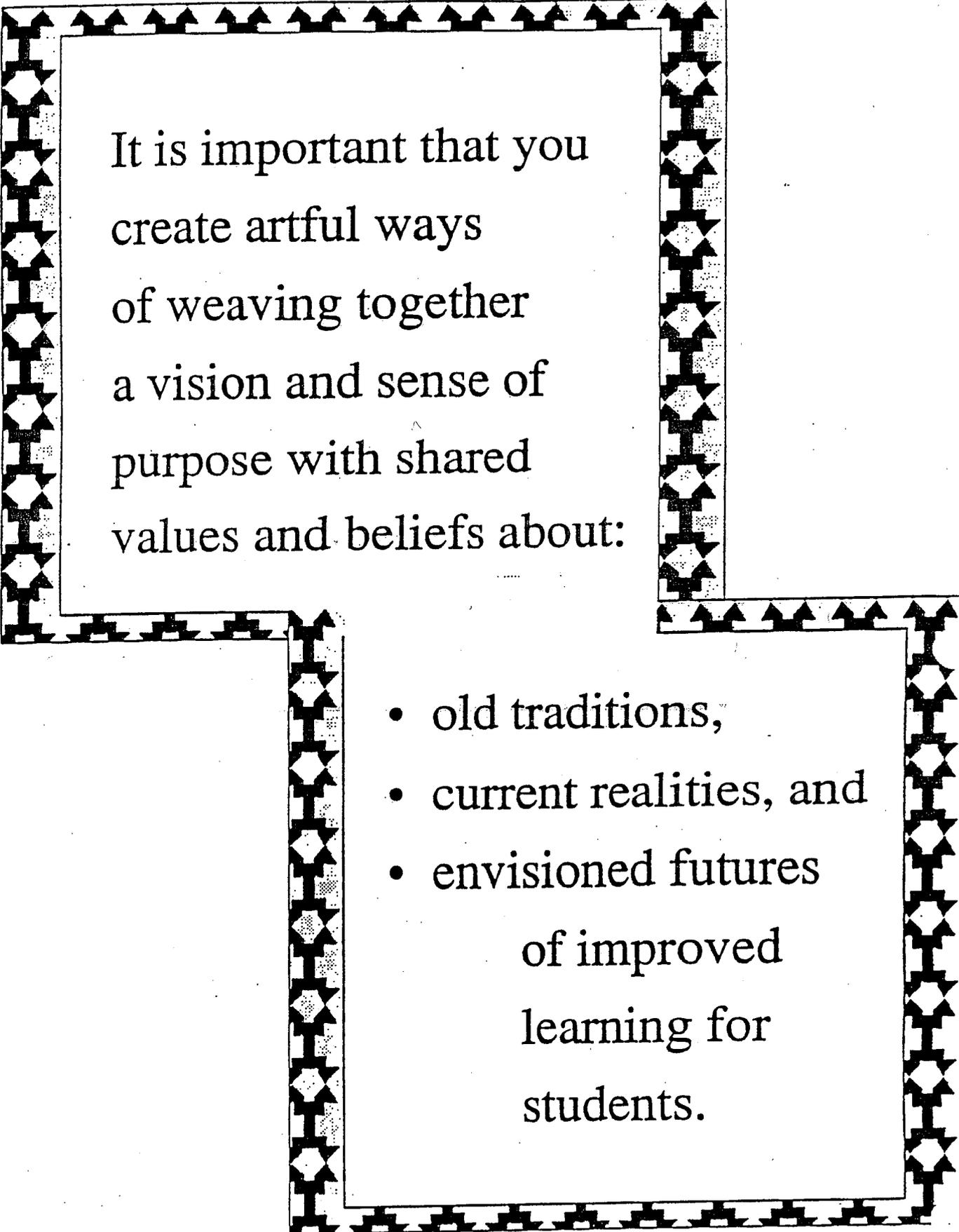
1. The authors thank Tim Hansen, Director of the American School in Abu Dhabi, for sharing this story.

Reflections

This space is intended to provide an opportunity for you to write in ideas that have been generated by this chapter, things you want to try, or adaptations of ideas presented herein.

1. Reflect on the school culture in your organization. What are the core values and beliefs? How are they depicted in traditional ceremonies, rituals, reward structures, artifacts, and stories? Are they consistent with the vision of the school? Why or why not?
2. Are there traditions or rituals in your school that are contrary to the values of the school? Why do you think this is the case? How might you transform them if need be?
3. Identify key "behind the scenes" staff members who play a
4. What insights or new questions do you have as a result of reflecting on the ideas presented in this chapter?

from: The Principal's Companion,
Pam Robbins & Harvey B. Alvy.
Corwin Press, 1995, pp. 23-40.



It is important that you
create artful ways
of weaving together
a vision and sense of
purpose with shared
values and beliefs about:

- old traditions,
- current realities, and
- envisioned futures
of improved
learning for
students.

SOME IMPORTANT TOOLS OF THE EFFECTIVE SYMBOLIC LEADER

The behavior of individuals in formal leadership positions in any organization is carefully observed and noted by subordinates.

What leaders do or do not do, what they say or do not say, how they go about communicating or implementing a decision have a great deal of symbolic impact on their followers. Whether intended or not, a leader's behavior is viewed by others as a symbolic communication of his/her values, priorities, or concerns. As such, that behavior has the potential for significantly increasing a leader's leverage. An effective symbolic leader understands the important symbolic nature of his/her behavior and consciously shapes that behavior to help accomplish whatever it is that he/she is trying to do.

TOOLS THAT FOCUS ATTENTION, CONVEY IMPORTANCE, EXPRESS BEHAVIORAL EXPECTATIONS, AND INFLUENCE ATTITUDES AND VALUES:

- Personally spending time and paying attention to priorities.
- Using metaphors to capture and convey the essence of priorities.
- Using promotions or other incentives to reward people who have demonstrated behavior consistent with the priorities.
- Asking questions that focus on issues related to the priorities.
- Allocating fiscal resources to projects that relate to the priorities.
- Creating special events that celebrate or honor various accomplishments related to the priorities.
- Allocating time in regularly scheduled meetings to discuss issues or to hear testimonials related to the
- Placing items on meeting agenda in such a way so as to highlight priorities.
- Conducting a regular meeting or event in a special setting to convey importance.
- Using routine communications vehicles (e.g., memos, daily bulletins, newsletters, etc.) to focus attention on priorities.
- Using routine processes (e.g., budget development, teacher evaluation, etc.) to focus attention on priorities.
- Recognizing that small, mundane achievements ultimately can lead to the accomplishment of larger priorities.
- Acknowledging contributing accomplishments that ultimately will lead to the attainment of priorities as "small-wins" that need to be celebrated.
- Telling stories and anecdotes that communicate themes that are consistent with priorities.
- Developing the roster of participants in important meetings to acknowledge those people who have demonstrated commitment to priorities.
- Consistently modeling in routine interactions the types of behavior that are expected of others.
- Structuring the communications and decision-making processes used in group meetings to reflect the types of behavior expected of others.
- Using some key words or a slogan during brief face-to-face interactions to remind others of priorities.
- Repeatedly utilizing a slogan to serve as a prime criterion for re-focusing individuals on priorities and for making group decisions consistent with these priorities.
- Developing and using a logo or other graphic that visually conveys priorities.

The **12** norms of a healthy school culture

- 1 Collegiality
- 2 Experimentation
- 3 High expectations
- 4 Trust and confidence
- 5 Tangible support
- 6 Reaching out to knowledge base
- 7 Appreciation and recognition
- 8 Caring, celebration, and humor
- 9 Involvement in decision making
- 10 Protection of what's important
- 11 Traditions
- 12 Honest, open communication

Source: "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" by Jon Saphier and Matthew King (*Educational Leadership*, March 1985).

School's culture shapes student learning

Continued from Page One

King identified 12 norms which they said affected school improvement. (See column at left.)

"If certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread; if these norms are weak, improvements will be, at best, infrequent, random, and slow," they said.

Peterson believes schools must begin by identifying the norms and beliefs in the school. He suggests answering these questions:

What are the rituals, traditions, and ceremonies in your school?

Who are the heroes in your school?

What stories do you tell about your school?

What symbols, slogans, and images represent your school?

How do you recognize student achievement?

How do you recognize staff growth?

Next, identify norms and beliefs that the staff wants to reinforce or change.

Again, Peterson poses a series of questions to help a staff:

Do the daily actions of teachers and principals support your underlying core values?

Do the history and stories that are told about your school support your core values?

What rituals and ceremonies would reinforce the key values in your school?

EXEMPLARY SCHOOL CULTURES

Each of this year's winners of the U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Awards can point to a time when the school's culture began to shift. (See the fall issue of the *JSD* to learn more about these winning schools and districts.) Like other USDOE winners, Ganado (Arizona) Intermediate School principal Susan Stropko said she focused on cultural issues before trying to address issues of student learning. "I went in knowing the culture had to be changed. They were not feeling very heard or cared

about. Nothing was going to change in that school until that changed," she said.

At Ganado, the process began by having grade level teams talk about their frustrations over lunch once a week, a step that Peterson endorses. "People need a chance to believe things can get better, they need a positive path, and they need hope," Peterson said.

"These conversations were basically about everything that was wrong. There was real unhappiness. They needed some time to vent," Stropko said.

Stropko joined in those conversations. "I did not go off on my own. I sat there and I listened. I was trying to establish my own credibility as a listener and as an administrator who would value what I heard and would work to get teachers what they said they needed."

These staff conversations continued until the Christmas break. "It was only after all of that that we could talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the school," she said.

"Their own changes were harder to talk about than the changes they wanted me to make. Once they laid out what they wanted to achieve, then we found out what we wanted to learn in order to do that," she said.

Peterson said a school needs to identify its own culture and say openly that not everyone will like working in this school. "If you've been going along for years with established structures and an established culture, it's very hard to re-examine what you're about. There is pain in giving up things that are fun and being able to complain without responsibility is part of the fun for some people," he said.

"There are people who don't want to improve their practice. They just don't want to be helped all the time," Peterson said.

Schools that gain the reputation as a "work hard, play hard" school soon will be less attractive to staffers who don't share that attitude and, eventually, he said, the new culture will perpetuate itself.

Doing a history of your school's culture

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This activity will help a school staff understand its present culture and how that culture evolved. It can be used with a school that is examining its culture for the first time or a school that needs to update its understanding of the culture.

TIME: Two hours.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape. Optional: yearbooks, copies of school newsletters or annual reports, newspaper clippings about the school, etc.

Directions

1. Ask each member of the group to identify the decade in which they began working at the school: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, etc.
2. Divide the group according to the decades they identify. (Try to have at least three persons per decade. Put two decades together if necessary.)
3. Give each group at least one sheet of chart paper and ask members to identify the school's history for each decade. Consider: Who were the school leaders – both formal and informal – during that decade? What were the crises and the challenges of the decade? What were the school's successes? What were the prevailing ideologies? What were the main curriculum features at that time? How was the school schedule organized? What clothing, music, and hairstyles were popular at the time?

Give each group 20 to 30 minutes to reminisce and jot down the key events.

4. Ask each group to post its decade's history on the wall. Arrange the decades in chronological order along the wall.
5. Ask the group to reflect aloud about the themes and patterns they see in these lists. Record these on a separate chart. Time: 60-90 minutes.

*U*nderstand the culture
of the school before

trying to change it.

— Michael Fullan and

Andy Hargreaves,

"What's Worth Fighting For?"

Working Together for

ADVOCACY SUBGROUPS

■ DESCRIPTION

The Advocacy Subgroup process provides a forum for two alternative solutions of comparable quality to be adequately considered.

■ APPLICATION

Use this process when the team is about equally divided on two options. Although your team has carefully researched the options, positions have become entrenched and further information is needed to help the team reach consensus.

■ TIME REQUIRED

One hour to ninety minutes.

■ GROUP SIZE

Ten to fifty participants.

■ MATERIALS

Copies of handout materials that either subgroup may wish to distribute to the other subgroup.

■ PROCESS

1. Clearly identify and place in writing, where all group members can see them, the two alternative solutions or choices.
2. Assign team members to advocacy subgroups.
3. Give advocacy subgroups time to prepare their position and supporting rationale.
4. Have each subgroup present and elaborate its position and rationale to the group. Each group should present its information in the same structured format. If one group is using "bells and whistles" for its presentation, then the other group should do so also.
5. Have an open discussion in which subgroups argue their points of view and refute the other positions. Each position should be critically evaluated, with ^{fears,} ~~doubts and objections freely expressed.~~ In effect, each subgroup is a "devil's advocate" in criticizing the other positions.
6. An alternative is to have each subgroup present the position or choice to which they do not subscribe. This perspective-reversal can ensure that each subgroup listens carefully to the other presentations and comprehends their rationales completely.
7. Synthesize arguments until a consensus is reached.

Adapted from David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson, *Leading the Cooperative School*, Edina, Minnesota: Interaction Book Company, 1989.

Debate

FIST - TO - FIVE

- 5: Go for it!
- 4: I agree and will help
- 3: Agreement with reservation
- 2: Agreement with reservation and need more clarification. I will support
- 1: Not in total agreement, but I can live with it. Won't block it but would appreciate modifications.

FIST: Disagree. Cannot support

FIST-TO-FIVE

■ DESCRIPTION

Fist-to-Five is a quick process for determining how close to consensus a group may be. Participants hold up five fingers for total support and agreement or a fist to indicate total disagreement. There are other choices in between indicated by different numbers of fingers.

■ APPLICATION

Use this process any time during discussion or other group processes to determine if agreement may be close.

■ TIME REQUIRED

Ten to fifteen minutes.

■ GROUP SIZE

Five to twenty-five participants.

■ MATERIALS

Chart paper or overhead on which to write the meaning of different combinations of fingers.

■ PROCESS

1. Teach group members the following hand signals:
 - Five fingers: Go for it! Five fingers means you wholeheartedly agree with this decision/idea/goal/option and will be a leader in the implementation process.
 - Four fingers: I agree and will help. Four fingers means you agree with the decision/idea/goal/option and will do whatever you can to assist in implementation.
 - Three fingers: Agreement with reservation. Three fingers means I agree but have some doubts about the whole thing. I'm in a total quandary and neutral.
 - Two fingers: Agreement with reservation and need more clarification. I will support the proposal.
 - One finger: Not in total agreement, but I can live with it. I won't work to block the proposal if adopted, but I'm not going to be totally supportive either.
 - Fist raised: Disagree. I cannot live with this idea/goal/option, but here is an alternative or a modification that I can live with. If you adopt this proposal, I may have to block it.
2. Display a copy of what each hand signal means where all participants can see it.
3. Clearly state the proposal that is under consideration.
4. Ask for participants to show a "fist to five" to indicate their level of agreement.
5. Pay special attention to the participants who showed one fingers, two fingers, or a fist. Ask these individuals, "What part of our current proposal do you object to?" Very often, there is one small glitch (more staff development is needed before we can implement; the time lines are too fast; or I'm afraid I will fail) that can be remediated without losing the entire idea.
6. Continue with discussion or other group process.