

**Awareness of Socio-cultural Influences on Teachers and the Quest for Excellence**

Paper Presented to the International Congress of  
School Effectiveness and Improvement Researchers  
January 2006

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## Introduction

For many years administrators and others have grappled with the question of how to increase teacher effectiveness. In the United States the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002 ) addresses this issue by requiring that each state place “highly qualified” teachers in the classroom. However, teacher knowledge of “best practices” (Du Four & Eaker, 1998) does not always equate to better teaching and learning in the classroom (Hargreaves, 1991; Lieberman, 1995; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; Little, 2001; Schoen, 2005). This paper was inspired by similar observations of high levels of variability in the quality of the learning environments within schools that were not explained by differences in teacher education or experience levels (Schoen, 2005). This observation led to the consideration of other factors besides education level, and experience which might impact teacher effectiveness. A re-analysis of qualitative data in Schoen 2005 led to the assertion that social factors influence teachers to varying degrees, and can impact teacher effectiveness. This paper outlines three classes of social factors (psycho-social, socio-cultural, and socio-political) which may impact teachers’ decisions and practices regarding instruction

### Teaching as Both an Art and a Science

Teaching is both an art and a science (Eisner, 1994; Bolman & Deal, 1997; Deal, 1986; Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Du Four & Eaker, 1998). The science of teaching manifests itself in the application of established knowledge to produce desired effects, and the evaluation thereof. (Du Four & Eaker, 1998; Levine & Lezotte, 1990). Thus, findings of high correlations between teacher knowledge and measures of teacher effectiveness (Brookover, Beamer, Efthim, Hathoway, Lezotte, Miller, Passalacqua &

Tornatzky, 1984; Arbough, 2003; Schwartz, Mc Carthy, Gould, Politziner, and Enyeart, 2003) are not surprising. Proponents of teacher professionalization (Darling-Hammond, 1990, 1993; Khmelkov, 2000) stress the importance of teacher professional development as a means of enhancing teacher effectiveness.

The art of teaching involves individually navigating through the barrage of “ought to”s simultaneously inundating teachers from multiple directions (Fullan, 1993; Mc Carthy & Peterson, 1989; Mc Laughlin & Pfeifer, 1988 ) to arrive at a unique expression of how the job “should be” performed. In other words, teachers receive pressures and stimuli from various sources and they must prioritize this input and artfully process the demands in a way that they deem most appropriate. Those who emphasize the role of collaborative cultures in school improvement (Little, 1993; Lieberman, 1990; Bryk, Camburn, & Lewis, 1999) allude to the art of teaching and the importance of the social context in the practice of teaching. This paper assumes the perspective that effective teaching is the result of both a scientific application of knowledge and an artistic expression of teacher individuality based on an awareness of self and other in the social context of the school and class.

#### *Sources of Social Influences on Teacher Behavior*

Many of the forces acting upon teachers which impact job performance are social in nature (Argyris, 1964; Argyris & Schon, 1976; Schein, 1985 & 1992). Social forces are ever present but may be so taken for granted as to go unnoticed by members of a social context. In schools there are three basic sources of social influences over teachers. These include: Psycho-social influences emanating from within teachers (Argyris, 1964; Bandura, 1977 & 1999; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Fullan, 1993), socio-cultural influences

emanating from the culture of the school (Schein, 1992; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schoen, 2005), and socio-political influences emanating from the larger society (Scott, 1995; Jespersen, Nielsen, & Sognstrup, 2002). These social forces exhibit powerful controls over the way in which teachers perform their work (Argyris & Schon, 1976; Schein, 1985, & 1992; Schoen & Teddlie, 2005a). An awareness of ways in which these largely unseen forces influence teachers may be helpful to administrators wishing to implement school change initiatives.

Every day teachers make individual decisions regarding many aspects of their own professional practice. When teachers discover incompatibilities between their beliefs and actions, or the prescribed actions associated with mandated change, they must decide how to best navigate through these conflicting demands (Gold, 2002). Decisions about practice are made by individual teachers based on the factors they perceive as most important. Such decisions impact their effectiveness in the classroom. Although there are strong links between teacher knowledge and teacher effectiveness (Little, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1996; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997), decisions about practice can and are frequently impacted by subtle social forces despite teacher educational background or training (Schoen, 2005). This paper explores some of the social forces confronting teachers and ways that these social concerns may influence teacher behavior. Suggestions are made for recognizing social influences over teachers and utilizing them to maximize teacher effectiveness. Implications for successful implementation of school change initiatives are also discussed.

Psycho-social Influences: The Internal Guide Book to Good Teaching

Basic Assumptions and Theories-in-use.

In their classic book on professional effectiveness, Argyris and Schon (1976) differentiate between what they refer to as ‘theories-in-use’ and ‘espoused theories’. In lay terms this roughly translates to ‘what I do at work’ and ‘what I should do’. The first is basically a set of tacit if-then assumptions derived from practical experience which prescribe how to react in various reoccurring situations on the job. These are unwritten scripts we have observed or participated in, in the past which assist us in making on-the-spot or situational decisions.

Edgar Schein (1985, 1992) describes a similar guiding force over the behavior of individuals in organizations which he calls ‘basic assumptions’. Basic assumptions, like theories-in-use, are generalizations derived from past experiences of the individual which consist of internalized perceptions of the nature of persons or objects (including ideas) in the work environment and generalizations about how they relate to each other and the individual.

While basic assumptions are held by all individuals, they are covert and typically escape the conscious awareness of individuals (Schein, 1992). These conceptions held by individual teachers, hidden beneath the surface, exert a powerful controlling force over professional behavior. Schon (1983) says the same of theories-in-use, but stresses the importance of self-reflection in discovering one’s generalized assumptions or understandings and making them explicit. Only then can professionals evaluate the effectiveness of their practice and consciously change patterns of behavior.

#### *Espoused Beliefs.*

In addition to the basic assumptions held by individuals, each teacher has an internalized set of espoused beliefs or values which are derived from many sources.

These espoused beliefs differ from basic assumptions in that individuals formulate these ideas at a conscious level; they are the guiding values or principles that they aspire to. Espoused beliefs of the individual are essentially understandings about the ‘right way’ of doing things. Espoused beliefs may or may not be congruent with behavior or theories-in-use. Awareness of inconsistencies between espoused beliefs and personal behavior can create internal disequilibrium, and force individuals to alter either their beliefs or their behavior.

*Teacher Self-efficacy.*

Another factor emanating from within the individual teacher that is believed to impact teacher effectiveness is a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1977; 1999). This is essentially a personal feeling of confidence in one’s ability to perform competently. When school change initiatives are launched teachers may feel uncertain of their ability to teach effectively in this new paradigm. They then face a personal paradox: execute the program despite doubts about whether the students will actually learning as they feel they should, or continue to do what they are familiar and confident with. This anxiety brought about by doubts of ones own self-efficacy relevant to a new context or set of behaviors can contribute to a reluctance to accept new programs whole heartedly. Therefore, many teachers engage in a passive resistance which takes the form of surface level compliance. Such “compliance” is characterized by little substantive change in the day-to-day execution of routine responsibilities (Fullan, 1993; Schoen, 2005). This practice allows teachers to save face professionally, but avoid the insecurity associated with fundamentally altering established patterns of behavior.

Socio-Cultural Influences: School Culture as the Official ‘Unofficial Rule Book’

School culture is a catch all term that refers to the established ways of doing things that have evolved and prevail in a particular school (Schoen, 2005). School culture can be broken down into four separate but overlapping dimensions: I. The Professional Orientation of the Faculty, II. The Organizational and Leadership Structure, III. The Quality of the Learning Environments, and IV. The Student-centered Focus. Group norms exist within each of these dimensions and are exhibited at three levels of abstraction: artifacts which are easily seen but more difficult to decipher, a set of espoused beliefs collectively held by a majority of the faculty and often written in official documents, and commonly held basic assumptions, which are widely expressed in behavior, but difficult to articulate (Schein, 1992).

School culture is the primary means by which collective values are perpetuated; it exerts a constant influence over school faculty members to conform to accepted norms of behavior. Each school has its own distinctive culture, with norms of teacher behavior within each of the four dimensions of culture. The strength of prevailing norms varies from dimension to dimension within a school and between schools. Therefore, what is very important to teachers in one school, may be inconsequential for teachers at another school just down the road. The culture of the school can influence teacher behavior in a number of ways, and can have either a positive and/or a negative impact on teacher effectiveness

*Official Policy and Organizational Behavior.*

Teachers sometimes find themselves in a precarious place when official policy changes, but personal and school values do not. They are confronted with the task of finding a way to comply with new mandates without substantially changing old ways. A

recent study of school change in six elementary schools in the United States (Schoen, 2005) found that at schools resistant to change, teachers can be quite resourceful and adept at finding ways to adapt to new policies and programs without making any substantial changes to the way they function. The phenomenon is referred to as *the layering on effect*, in which an existing culture prevails through systematic passive compliance by teachers, despite implementation of programs or policies designed to change the culture. In these schools, the faculty goes through the motions of adopting the reform, but in actuality the teachers find creative ways of layering the new on top of existing norms. They artfully mold the new ways around the old, so that very little cultural change actually occurs.

Conversely, an effective school culture can coerce teachers to alter ineffective behavior by socially reinforcing positive instructional behavior (Senge, 1990; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996). Regardless of the specifics of the situation, the culture of the school exerts a powerful influence over teacher behavior by socially reinforcing one set of behaviors over others. This influence cannot be overlooked by would be reformers (Schein, 1985; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Halsall, 1998, Chrispeels, 1992; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hargreaves, 1994 & 1997) . Even the most theoretically sound and well funded reforms can fail when they neglect to address the social and cultural concerns of the teachers implementing them.

#### Socio-political Influences from Larger Society

##### *Institutional Norms* .

The final class of social influences on teachers' behavior, identified in this paper, are socio-political concerns gleaned from the larger social context, beyond the realm of

the individual school. The first of these is the subtle, but constant, awareness of institutional norms on school persons from governing boards, to administrators, teachers, parents and students. Schooling is a fairly standard and stable societal institution, and as such certain expectations and standards that have evolved in conjunction with it (Di Maggio & Powell, 1983). Some of these are regional in nature, such as the extent to which the state should assume funding for the programs and the training of teachers. Most however, tend to be more universal in nature such as roles and responsibilities associated with schools, and the relationship between student and teacher. While there is not as much research on the impact of institutional norms on the behavior of school personnel, the fact that they exist, is well accepted (Scott, 1995; Jespersen et. al., 2002; Di Maggio, & Powell, 1983).

Each individual, teacher, administrator or parent in the schooling relationship has had past associations with other schools, and has had the opportunity to formulate concepts about what it means to go to school and to teach school. These expectations are present, at some level, in any school context. Institutional norms in general, tend to provide some degree of stability and continuity across various organizations (i.e. schools) within an institution. In general the influence exerted by the institutional context tends to be of a conservative nature. For example, more traditional behaviors, which are routinely associated with the prescribed institutional roles, are reinforced, first, through past associations with schools who have adhered to these traditional practices, and secondly, through awareness that other schools still follow these established or “time honored” practices. Thus, institutional norms influence teachers to “stick with the tried and true” and can have a negative impact on any change effort that seeks to break with norms of

the institution at large. Examples of some reforms that have broken institutional norms are attempts at non-graded schools, year round schools, or schools that follow a non-standard curriculum. While these types of reforms can be successful, they are more difficult to gain and sustain popular support for, in large part, due to the influence of institutional norms; these ideas simply do not adhere to the mental image most people have when they think of “school”. Implementing programs outside of institutional norms may require substantially more time and effort to gaining public support, and extensive staff development to build faculty support from within the school. Without being convinced that this new way of functioning is substantially better than the traditional methods associated with the institution, there will be a tendency on the part of teachers to slowly gravitate back toward the norm.

*Community Expectations.*

Local traditions indigenous to the community in which the school is located may also be a source of influence over teacher behavior. Schools do not exist in isolation from the rest of society, but are an integral part of it. Teachers are frequently members of the community in which they teach, or are at least familiar with local traditions. In general, teachers tend to be sensitive to community expectations and standards and adjust their practice accordingly. Examples might include community pressure for a school on or near a military base to implement very strict disciplinary policies, or schools with highly affluent or educated populations to offer enriched or accelerated content, or schools in inner city areas with high crime and drug use to offer counseling to students or weave a drug and violence prevention theme across the curriculum. Regardless of official policy and availability of programs, teachers are the ones on the frontline of delivering

educational services, and therefore classroom instruction is inevitably influenced by the specifics of the local context and traditions.

### Recommendations for Using Social and Cultural Forces to Enhance Teacher Effectiveness

The preceding section has described three sources of socio-cultural influences on teachers: 1) those internal to teachers, 2) those internal to the school, and 3) those derived from larger society. The extent to which these influences may be controlled or altered is believed to vary according to a number of factors including the strength of the cultural norm and the extent to which the individual teacher identifies with the social group from which the behavior is derived. Therefore it is impossible to predict with any certainty whether or not a particular reform attempt will be endorsed by an individual teacher or by groups of teachers; however, there are some guiding principles which may be of assistance to administrators or others interested in accomplishing planned change in schools.

Vygotsky (1978) claimed that knowledge is both socially constructed and interpreted. Therefore, it makes sense that alterations to the social culture of the school may have an impact on teacher learning and their interpretations of the value of the acquired knowledge. When embarking on school change projects, once a set of target behaviors or desired goals has been identified and articulated, it would be advisable to also identify school norms that contradict the new program and could stand to interfere with its ultimate success. Attempts to identify the source of undesirable behavior may be helpful because if the motivation behind the behavior (i.e. the reasons the behavior is maintained) can be identified and removed the chances of changing the behavior and

replacing it with a more effective one are improved (Bandura, 1977 & 1999). Thus, an awareness of the sources of social and cultural influences on teachers may be of use to those trying to implement school change.

### Psycho-social Considerations

Teacher Efficacy: The Can Do Attitude that Makes the Difference. Teachers sometimes cling to the “tried and true” because they are unsure of their ability to perform successfully within the new system (Loup, 1994). Self-efficacy is context specific (Bandura, 1986; Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 2005) which means that even teachers who have achieved a degree of success and appear to be capable and confident can experience doubt and be hesitant when faced with change. Low self-efficacy (Ashton & Webb, 1986) can make a difference in teachers’ willingness to engage in new behaviors and to accept change (Loup, 1994). Studies of effective (Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Reynolds, et. al., 2000 & 2002) and improving schools (Schoen, 2005) have established that teacher efficacy in these schools is high. Schools that have demonstrated sustained improvements in student achievement are characterized by faculties that have a confident “can do” attitude. Therefore, it stands to reason that school improvement efforts should be coupled with a concerted campaign to build both individual and collective teacher efficacy.

Rationale Building: Why it Works. Successful school improvement initiatives often include professional growth opportunities at both the level of the individual teacher as well as the organizational (school) level (Fullan, 1993 & 1999; Loup, 1994). Teacher training programs or seminars are not uncommon at the launching of a new initiative. Most such programs introduce teachers to *what* the initiative entails and *how* it is to be

implemented at the classroom level. These components are essential for program success, as teachers must clearly understand what is expected of them in order to execute it.

However, a frequently over looked component of such training programs is the *why*.

Teachers need to understand the rationale behind the new initiative. When they comprehend the intellectual framework for why this program or initiative is believed to be superior to other methods, this provides them with a level of motivation that otherwise may be lacking. Research on school change (NREL, 1990; Schoen, 2005; Schoen & Teddlie, 2005b) has documented the importance of teachers understanding the need for change. Teacher motivation and support for school change has been linked with successful school improvement. Yet, we still see school improvement initiatives launched without adequately explaining to teachers, the ones ultimately implementing the programs, why it is that change is needed.

*Instructional Support: On-going, On-the-job, Focused, Individualized* . Even when teachers understand and accept the need for change, and are provided with the tools to implement changes (extensive training as to *what* they are to do and *how*, and have the necessary materials in hand), there is no guarantee that the program will be executed as intended. The main two obstacles, at this point, are teacher efficacy for change, at the individual level, and school culture at the organizational level. Both of these can be addressed through on-going professional development at the school site.

Teacher efficacy may be enhanced through providing a system of non-threatening in-class instructional support which allows teachers to: 1) observe and/ or team teach with another person with knowledge of the new program, in their own classroom, 2) plan a lesson collaboratively, be observed teaching it, and receive feedback from someone

proficient in the program, 3) receive training in professional reflection (Schon, 1983) and be required to keep a private reflective log pertinent to experiences with the new initiative, and 4) be allowed time periodically to converse with colleagues who are trying to implement the new initiative (Sparks, 1994; NSDC, 1995).

It must be emphasized that teacher observations in the early implementation phase of the program be only for the purpose of instructional support and not for formal teacher evaluations. Otherwise, teachers may be reluctant to open up to supervisors and may feel inhibited to experiment with new things. When teachers realize that a period of trial and error is natural and expected, and they are being assisted rather than judged, then a genuine growth in knowledge and skills can be expected. In this manner, even the most hesitant teachers can gain both competence and confidence. Studies of school effectiveness (Teddlie, 1993; Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Brookover, et. al. 1984; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Levine & Lezotte, 1990) have established a positive relationship between teacher effectiveness and teacher efficacy.

### *Soci-cultural Considerations*

More is known about how of social factors associated with the culture of the school influence teacher behavior than the other two realms of social influences. Many researchers have asserted that school culture exhibits strong controls over how teachers perform their work (Halsall, 1998; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schoen, 2005; Schoen & Teddlie, 2005b). School culture is a normative concept which is elusive in nature. It essentially functions to provide school identity and continuity through a system of unwritten unofficial standards of conduct among school people (a term inclusive of not only personnel, but students, parents and others routinely a part of “the scene”). These

standards prescribe for school people the “correct” or socially acceptable way of doing things at this school. This code of conduct is rarely verbalized, but is perceived from the actions of others, particularly those with high status, popularity or social standing in the group. The cultural code in effect says, “This is who we are and how we do things”; those who adhere strictly to its dictates are accepted as insiders or members.

Not all norms of behavior in a school’s cultural code are equally sacred (Rossman, Corbit, & Firestone, 1988; Schein, 1985 & 1992). Some things are profane and can be ignored by members with little or no notice by other members. Other aspects are more sacred because they are strongly tied to basic assumptions strongly held by the group. Violation of sacred traditions can bring with it harsh social sanctions for teachers who choose not to conform, but to act out of the box. Hence, school culture exerts a strong controlling force over teacher behavior. Noted educational researcher, Robert Halsall (1998) even goes so far as to assert that “unless the issue of school culture is addressed, school improvement will never be achieved”.

*The Four Dimensions of School Culture.* Research on school culture (Schoen, 2005; Schoen & Teddlie, 2005a) has described four dimensions of school culture: I. Professional Orientation, II. Organizational Structure, III. Quality of the Learning Environments, and IV. Student-centered Focus. Of these dimensions, the first two have the strongest impact on student achievement and probably exert the most influence over the way teachers think and act in their school setting. In this section, a brief description of each of these dimensions will be provided, followed by suggestions for how each dimension of school culture might be manipulated so that it influences teachers in directions most likely to yield effective teaching behavior. For the purposes of this

discussion the dimensions of school culture will be considered separately, though in actuality, they all act collectively as a whole entity to influence the day-to-day behavior of teachers and the operation of the school.

*Cultural Dimension I: Professional Orientation.* The Professional Orientation of the faculty entails norms regarding the emphasis and value that is placed on the acquisition of professional knowledge and the development of greater instructional skills. Successful school improvement is associated with a strong Professional Orientation in the faculty (Louis, Kruse, & Associates, 1995; Schoen, 2005). From an administrative standpoint, it is possible to have an impact on these norms through a rigorous program of on-going, on site, group professional development that addresses the why, what and how of any change effort as well as providing an interactive forum for discussion of the problems encountered with implementation (Darling-Hammond, 1990 & 1993; Chrispeels, 1992; NSDC; 1995). However, to be maximally effective, whole faculty professional development needs to be coupled with the individual level instructional support services (described in the previous section). When professional development genuinely meets both the specific needs of individual teachers and the collective needs of the school organization, then teacher beliefs and basic assumptions may begin to change and come into closer alignment with the school goals (Fullan, 1993).

Professional development, in this context, becomes a very integral part of the work life of teachers, who then begin to take initiative for their own continued learning. Over time, norms of autonomy give way to a more collaborative culture as a spirit of teamwork is built and nurtured through focused, on-going, collective professional development (Little, 1982; 1990; & 2001; Lieberman, 1990; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Studies of school culture indicate that norms of behavior are strong controlling forces over the way teachers perform their jobs (Schoen, 2005). One possible implication of this may be that change initiatives may have a much greater chance of success if programs are implemented school-wide rather than being piloted by a select few. When the entire school is at least introduced to the *why*, *what*, and *how* of the new program, even if they were not directly involved in teaching it, then those implementing the initiative at least have the benefit of moral support from colleagues. This may reduce feelings of isolation that can occur when teachers are working independently without the benefit of a collaborative community. In cases where the targeted change is specific to a particular subject area, professional development for the whole faculty could focus on aspects of the philosophical framework that are more general in nature, such as the principles of teaching and learning embedded in the new initiative. These are broad enough in scope that they have practical utility to all teachers. Including all faculty members in the training has a unifying, rather than a splintering effect on the entire faculty. This school wide approach to introducing a new program may be superior because inherently provides teachers with a network of social support (Vygotsky, 1978) rather than the burden and anxiety of going it alone against the flow of the mainstream of their school's culture.

*Cultural Dimension II: Organizational Structure.* Dimension II of school culture is The Organizational Structure of the School. This involves the formal and informal leadership that has evolved at the school and the typical processes by which the school executes its business and day to day routines. The primary mechanism of social control within this dimension is the attitude and actions of key influential people in the social

network of the school. If the principal or a number of high status teachers or other personnel let it be known that they are not in favor of a program, policy or practice, then other teachers often follow their example of passive resistance. This can spell death to new initiatives, as teachers have demonstrated great capacity for surface level compliance without actually making any real substantial changes (Fullan, 1993; Schoen, 2005).

It may be possible to circumvent such occurrences by identifying key people in the informal social structure of the school and assigning them leadership roles in the implementation and/or oversight of new programs. These people are usually easy to identify because they are held in high regard by the other teachers and may sometimes be sought out by the others for advice on school matters. Assigning them an official position may send a message to the rest of the faculty that the program has their endorsement and may thereby decrease the likelihood of resistance. This form of “positive peer pressure” can be effective if teachers are well selected and trained. It also helps if they sincerely believe in the initiative.

Time is another important consideration (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003) in Dimension II of the school culture (i.e. the school’s organizational and leadership structure). In order to participate in enhanced professional development, collaborative planning, and personal reflection teachers’ work time must be structured to allow for these activities. When initiatives are implemented and appropriate time slots are provided for these activities, that sends a message to teachers about the importance of this particular program. Time is a valued commodity by both teachers and school administrators; that this is given high enough priority that time is scheduled for these activities also increases the chances that it will be accepted into the culture of the school. However, time for collaborative planning

does not automatically insure that this time will be used effectively for intended purposes (Lieberman, 1995; Hargreaves, 1991). Without guidance or structure, some teachers may not be sure of what they should be doing during their allotted collaborative planning period. Rather than leaving teachers to find their way in the dark (Stacy, 1992), it is advisable (Schoen, 2005) that structure be provided to teachers in the initial phases of implementing collaborative planning and reflection. This makes it more likely that the allotted time will be spent in productive ways.

*Cultural Dimension IV: Student-centered Focus.* Dimension IV of the school culture is the Student-centered Focus. In schools that truly value student achievement and believe that every child can succeed if given the right opportunities and assistance, a number of mechanisms are in place to monitor and track student progress and to identify needs as soon as possible. These schools constantly review the effectiveness of existing programs and have on-going communications between administrators, classroom teachers, special service teachers, and parents to identify or anticipate areas of need for individual students or groups of students. Teachers at these schools are innovative and resourceful in providing services to facilitate the maximum achievement of each and every student, not just special needs students. They are responsive to trends in student achievement data *and* perceived weaknesses verbalized by teachers, students, or parents. The trademark characteristic of schools with a strong Dimension IV is that the faculty is creative and finds ways to get things done, one way or another.

A school culture with a strong Student-centered Focus exerts considerable social pressure on administrators, faculty members and parents to do their best to serve the needs of individual students- it is the norm. These teachers rarely accept no for an answer

and are quick to point out to others alternative things to try in various situations. In schools with a strong student-centered focus, teachers who are perceived as ineffective by other faculty members tend to either change their modus operandi or don't end up staying on faculty very long (Schoen, 2005).

*Cultural Dimension III: The Quality of the Learning Environments.* Dimension III of school culture is the Quality of the Learning Environments in the school. This dimension of school culture seems to work as a mediating variable between the other three dimensions of school culture and student achievement; it is believed that more effective faculty behavior in the other three dimensions, especially Dimension I, tends to have an impact on the mean quality of the learning experience in which students are routinely engaged in during classroom instruction (Schoen, 2005). In other words, in school cultures where there is a strong Professional Orientation in the faculty, an Organizational Structure with strong leadership that prioritizes teacher collaboration, and a strong Student-centered Focus, the norm is better classroom instruction, which collectively translates to higher student achievement (Schoen & Teddlie, 2005b).

Thus, the four dimensions of school culture collectively exert a strong influence over teacher behavior in a number of ways. School culture can significantly contribute to or detract from teacher effectiveness. There is evidence that school culture can be manipulated in positive directions by a visionary leader at the school site who can motivate and inspire teachers to engage in more professional behavior. School leadership can facilitate structural changes which influence the social climate of the school and ultimately impact the culture of the school. Implementing mechanisms for greater teacher leadership, restructuring time to allow for increased collaboration, providing for routine

on-site program evaluation, and facilitating the acquisition of new instructional knowledge and skills in teachers are examples of structural changes that may alter the social structure of the school and could lead to increases in effective instructional behavior (Reynolds, et. al. 2000 & 2002; Sashkin & Egermeier, 1992; Schulman, 1987; Senge, et. al. 2000; Newmann, 1996). Establishment of a highly effective school culture can take considerable time, 3-5 years by some estimates (Fullan, 1993), but is worth the effort since school culture is believed to be strongly tied to both teacher effectiveness and school improvement (Halsall, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; Sarason, 1996; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Schoen, 2005, Schoen & Teddlie; 2005a & 2005b; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Once firmly established, school culture then tends to become self-perpetuating, constantly influencing teachers, and other school people to function in socially acceptable ways within its dictates. Thus, effective school cultures can continue to be a positive influence over future generations of teachers.

### Conclusion

While there is evidence that teachers may be influenced to some extent by social factors in the performance of their work, there is still much to be learned about ways these factors impact teacher effectiveness and the extent to which social factors may be manipulated to increase the likelihood of effective practices in the classroom. The observations and recommendations presented in this paper were derived from case studies of school culture, which is believed to be a major source of social influence over teachers. This paper has presented a framework that classifies sources of social influences over teachers into three classes including psycho-social, socio-cultural and socio-political. This framework may be useful for future investigations of teacher effectiveness

and school improvement. Specifically, qualitative studies of teachers participating in school reform projects are needed to assess the validity of this framework and to acquire insight as to which of social forces are most influential and how social forces work for and/or against planned change initiatives. At this time little is known about how socio-political concerns, such as institutional norms, impact teachers because few if any studies of institutional norms have been conducted in school settings. It is hoped that this line of research may help provide an awareness of the social factors that impact teachers and may ultimately be useful in facilitating greater success with future school reform efforts.

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