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Paying Attention to School Culture

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Editorial

One of the most powerful instruments that has propelled our country forward and helped define and advance a sense of national identity and the concept of nationhood has been our school system. Spread across the length and breadth of our beautiful country, from Sibsoo to Sakten, from Lunana to Lalai, are our humble abodes of learning beckoning children from remote villages and far-flung valleys to receive the gift of learning.

Every morning, young Bhutan is on the move as hundreds of thousands of our children walk to school often for hours on the road, through the village path, across the fields, past the rivers, in jungle tracks beyond the last loop, in sun and rain, in heat and cold. They come from city mansions, town dwellings, peasant homes, roadside huts and often from boarding houses. It is sight at once uplifting, at once moving.

They all converge at their destination down in the valley or up the hill where their school stands. As the bell beckons, they hurry and scurry to get in line for the assembly. It is a special event. Prayers of invocation and benediction over, speeches and announcements made, the whole congregation comes together, body and soul, to sing the national anthem in front of the national flag. Bhutan becomes one. The mind rises. Heart expands.

All this is very precious for Bhutan to stay together as a nation. All this is very dear to our people to live together as a family. All this is very special for each child to grow up in an environment which celebrates him or her as a unique person as well as beckons him or her to be a part of a bigger reality.

True education is more than sharpening brains and skills and carving out a career for oneself. It is truly the building of faith and character, making the most of oneself as a human being by engaging one's positive and creative energies and the marvels of our mind and heart.

Quite apart from addressing the systemic and administrative need for the attendance and sorting of young people through the formal arrangement of schooling, places of learning worth the name carry a responsibility often too important for the know-alls to understand and appreciate. Our seats of learning must build that moral and intellectual capacity that gives them the authority to instruct and guide young people. The ideals and standards that schools and institutes create and implement truly decide the character and culture of the nation.

The experiences and the memories of our schooldays live with us for ever primarily because they are formed at the most sensitive and impressionable stage of our life. We become what we experience. Since schools occupy a most crucial part of young people's lives, it is only fair that their time is engaged in policies and practices that are honourable and supportive of life and learning. A blighted vision, toxic environment, an arrogant bully, a crude behaviour, could kill not only the desire to learn, but often even the desire to live.

Our country is going through unprecedented changes and is poised for ever newer experiences. It is, therefore, vital for our educators and students to learn to appreciate what it takes to build a school that aspires for the highest standards of excellence in professional and personal life, to build a society that is clean and just, to make a nation that takes pride in upholding integrity and self-respect.

The culture of our schools today will become the culture of our society tomorrow. To take our country forward to her rightful destiny as in the dream of His Majesty, our beloved

king, our schools and institutes must do some serious soul-searching and recognise where the rains started beating us.

Paying Attention to School Culture by Dr David Fulton, to whom I am deeply indebted, comes at a most appropriate time in the history of our education system when we are trying to reclaim some sacred lost ground and make our seats of learning also our seats of pride.

Thakur S Powdyel
Director

Paying Attention to School Culture

David Fulton

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Introduction

In Thakur S Powdyel's talk on the occasion of "Teacher's Day" in 2002, he spoke of the value and power of Bhutan's teachers. He also spoke of larger educational aims, such as educating not only the head but also the heart, and put teachers at the centre of this process. Speaking of children and their talents, he challenged teachers to "Let every flower blossom in the garden of our educational soil." That is a nice image. And it proves to be a helpful image as well.

For just as soil – the underappreciated and overlooked stuff of the earth – is the medium in which gardens grow and flowers flourish, the culture of a school is the medium in which children grow and their talents flourish. It is the soil of a school. The culture is the invisible medium that shapes attitudes, reinforces norms, and nurtures values and ideals. Schools that fail to deliberately shape their culture and harness its power are failing to tap into one of the great resources for school improvement and for transmitting values. The best thing about this resource is that it costs no money, something important to schools increasingly asked to do more with fewer resources.

In this paper, I shall discuss school culture: what it is, how to shape it, and some likely benefits of doing so. Some of the examples are drawn from Bhutan, others from America. But the basic principles behind them have relevance to schools in both countries. I will try to strike a balance between offering a theoretical discussion about school culture and providing practical tools for shaping it.

I begin by describing why school culture is a topic especially relevant to schools in Bhutan today and with a discussion of a school in Massachusetts that has an especially healthy school culture. I then point to research demonstrating the impact of school culture and present a definition of it. Since it can seem an overwhelming concept, I break school culture into eight categories, and describe each category briefly. I then argue that it is an important vehicle for nurturing values in students and is more effective than attempts to

do so through individual classroom lessons alone. Finally, I present five strategies to improve a school culture.

For two reasons, a discussion of school culture is especially relevant now for schools in Bhutan. First, the remarkable growth of student enrollment over the past thirty years – an accomplishment that should not be forgotten – has made it harder for schools to find qualified teachers. So while principals may feel powerless in this regard, and while they may not have the luxury of choosing from among five or six highly-qualified candidates for each opening, they *do* have some control over the shaping the culture of their school. A healthy culture raises the performance level of every teacher, whether they are brand new or highly accomplished veterans, and this impacts the overall performance of the school.

A second reason a discussion of culture is relevant has to do with the fact that new curricula, such as in English, are currently being introduced into schools. For these curricula to be most effective, each school must be able to "absorb" the reforms as intended. Only schools with a healthy school culture – where there is, for instance, resiliency and trust among staff – are able to make the most of reforms. I have seen world-class curricula rendered utterly ineffective because of a toxic school culture. Paying attention to school culture can be seen as necessary, then, to ensure that the investment in new curricula pays off fully.

Let's begin with a story about the power of school culture. Ron Berger, described as one of the best teachers in America, recently taught fifth grade in a small, rural school in Massachusetts. The school received no more funding than surrounding schools and was filled with children from fairly modest backgrounds. He and his colleagues created a culture that helped students to develop beautiful work, and to use their minds and hearts well. Though he has received numerous accolades, he freely admits that he can only take some of the credit. Much of the credit, of course, goes to the students themselves for creating such high quality work, but he also credits the power of the school culture that supported and reinforced his aims.

He begins his book, *An Ethic of Excellence*, with a story of his students working diligently for over three weeks to build a playhouse with their kindergarten buddies. One weekend, watching students take great care in spacing the nails, installing clapboard and painting the trim, he pondered the power and the magic of this work:

The power of that Sunday was not about New England or a playhouse. It was not about gifted kids or clever teaching, or curriculum that should be marketed. There was a spirit, an ethic in the air that day. It was partly about the kids, the teaching, the curriculum, the school conditions, the community, but importantly, it was about all these things at once. It transcended these things. It was the *culture of the school* that encouraged these kids to volunteer, to work together, and to care deeply about the quality of what they did. It was the ethic that this school culture instilled. (Berger, 2003) [italics added]

How to build such an ethic? How do we instill a sense in our students of what high quality work looks like? Among other things, it comes from honoring a school-wide agreement about what counts as good teaching and learning as well as strategies to get there.

Berger was asked to bring several students and samples of their work to a meeting in Washington, D.C. with educational policy makers. The adults were astonished at the quality of the students' work. Some of them had never seen such care given to student projects or to student writing. Asked how or why they produced such high quality work, the normally articulate students had little to say and were baffled by the question. High quality work was all they knew. It was how things were done at their school.

In his reflections above, Berger neatly captures the twin impact of school culture: to promote the growth of academics *and* character. As he said, "[I]t was the *culture of the school* that encouraged these kids to volunteer, to work together, and to care deeply about the quality of what they did."[1] This point will shape another important theme of this paper: that values are best nurtured through the culture of a school, which should be deliberately shaped to promote shared values.

Producing high quality work and developing values such as caring and compassion is possible at all schools, but it requires a culture that supports these aims. It requires a culture with a tremendous amount of trust and goodwill among staff members, where

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[1] Arguably, the desire to produce excellent work could rightly be considered part of one's character. A growing number of theorists expand the definition of character education or values education to include academic qualities as well, such as hard work, perseverance, and a desire to produce excellent work. See Ron Ritchhart's *Intellectual Character* as well as Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson's *Smart and Good*.

teachers have the ability to develop and honor shared agreements around important aspects of their school.

I've observed that few schools harness their culture to the degree that it becomes a resource for reaching important goals. In fact, the culture at far too many schools works against them and becomes a drag on performance. At these "toxic" schools, teachers lack respect for the principal and tend to sabotage his or her aims. Or students become confused by the different expectations in every classroom. Or there is so little trust among teachers that they do not share their best teaching practices with one another. Morale is low, there is little joy in the school, and no one seems to go the extra mile on behalf of kids. In short, the culture pulls everyone down.

Research on the Impact of School Culture

Perhaps the best research on the impact of school culture comes from a study of schools in Chicago in the 1990s. Sociologists Bryk and Schneider looked at dozens of schools that were part of the Chicago reform effort, which decentralized power and gave more authority to schools. Roughly a third of the schools improved academically under the reform, a third stayed about the same, and a third declined. Bryk and Schneider hypothesized that a concept they call *relational trust* was a critical variable in the success of some schools. Relational trust captures a key aspect of school culture – the degree to which the staff trust one another, both personally and professionally. Among other things, this includes care among staff and a belief that each is professionally competent and has the best interest of children at heart.

The data confirmed their hypothesis. Academic performance at schools with high relational trust was higher than at schools with low trust, and more importantly, schools that improved relational trust also improved in academic performance. In other words, the researchers found that relational trust *predicted* academic improvement. On the other hand, they found that schools with persistently low trust had virtually no chance of showing improvement in mathematics or reading.

This intuitively makes sense. At schools where teachers trust both each other and the principal, an attitude of goodwill motivates members to go the extra mile for the students and for each other. In such an environment, teachers are more likely to collaborate on teaching and learning, and are open to feedback for improvement. There is more of a

"we" attitude at these schools, and a willingness to forego personal agendas for the sake of the larger good. This trust is particularly helpful with school-wide initiatives, such as a new curriculum, a new pedagogical style, or a commitment to nurture common values such as compassion (I will come back to this point later).

Other studies also connect a healthy culture and school improvement. For instance, after looking at longitudinal data on school reform, researchers from the Centre on School Organization and Restructuring at the University of Wisconsin-Madison noted that the importance of school relations is often overlooked:

> Human resources, such as openness to improvement, trust and respect, teachers having knowledge and skills, supportive leadership and socialization — are more critical to the development of professional communities than structural conditions…The need to improve the culture, climate, and interpersonal relationships in schools has received too little attention (quoted in Bryk and Schneider, 2002).

These studies suggest that energy put into improving school culture is often well spent.

Toward a definition of school culture

Before we go much further, we need to define what we mean by school culture. Just what do we mean when we say that a school has a healthy culture? Or a toxic culture? Visitors talk about being able to sense the culture of a school within minutes of their first encounter, but often can't describe exactly what it is that has made an impression on them. They talk of a certain "atmosphere" at the school, and might notice things such as a clean entryway, friendly staff, or engaged students. In a sense, a school's culture includes *everything* about it, from teacher morale to how clean the school grounds are, to the quality of instruction. However, to describe the culture of a school in terms as general as an "atmosphere" or to suggest that it includes absolutely everything about the school, wraps culture in such mystery and in such vague terms as to be impossible to analyze and therefore improve. After all, if you can't break culture down into identifiable parts, it is hard to know which parts are having a positive impact and which ones a negative impact. Below, I will introduce some categories into which we can meaningfully break down school culture.

But first a stipulative definition. In place of a heady, academic definition, I would define school culture simply as *what counts as normal at a school*.

There is more to this definition than first meets the eye. When something counts as normal, it means that it is sanctioned, officially or unofficially, by the institution. It is something – a practice, a value, a point of view – that is so embedded in an organization that its presence is barely noticed or seen as out of the ordinary. It is the set of practices that a new member to the school will likely conform to after six months on the job. They may enter with a different set of beliefs or practices (perhaps fresh from teacher training), but they will be overpowered by the culture.

Some examples. I visited a school this week and didn't see a soul until 7:35 for a 7:30 meeting. Not even the principal was there. Meetings start late so often there that this is considered normal.   At other schools, meetings start on time. It is part of the culture of the school. At some schools, it is considered so normal for trash to litter the school grounds that the students and staff barely notice any more. Elsewhere, trash looks out of place. In schools like Ron Berger's, students are so used to producing high quality work that they almost can't imagine doing otherwise. Low-quality work, of course, is the norm at many schools. In some schools, it is common to be agreeable during staff meetings and then the bash the principal out in the parking lot in private. Other staffs talk about things openly, even if it is painful. What has become "normal" at your school? Which of those things contribute to the success of your school, and which ones detract?

In a sense, building a school culture can be seen as redefining what counts as normal. It is resetting – or in some cases, strengthening – norms.   It does not cost money, but it does take effort.

Now back to identifying specific categories or aspects of school culture. The value of creating these (admittedly somewhat artificial) categories is to help evaluate and address specific aspects of a school culture, realizing that we can't address the entire culture at once.

If you were to visit, say, three schools and conclude that they all had a different culture, on what grounds would you make your claim? The following eight categories may prove helpful:

- *Teaching, learning, and assessment*: these are the practices and norms that surround the core business of a school: teaching children. These practices include how teachers teach (lecture-only, in small groups, student-centered, or a mixture of these), how they organize their lessons, how they respond to student questions, how they assess student learning, the kind of homework they give and how often, whether students are allowed to retake examinations, how enthused teachers seem while teaching, and at a very basic level, their core beliefs about how students learn.

  Another dimension of this aspect is the degree to which teachers agree on which practices are best for students. Of course, one would not expect – nor would it be desirable – all teachers in a school to teach in exactly the same way. However, weak agreement on these practices is not a good sign. It is profoundly confusing for students to move from one teacher who gives endless worksheets and accepts very surface learning to one who promotes creative thinking and deep understanding and from one teacher who assigns little homework to one who assigns three hours per night.

- *Relationships*: The quality of relationships makes up another crucial aspect of a school culture and can positively impact student performance. How well do the students get along with and support each other? How would you characterize the typical relationship between teachers and students? How well do the teachers work with each other? With the principal? How healthy is the relationship between parents and the school? Yale University psychiatrist James Comer states "There is no serious learning without serious relationship." The more students feel cared for and connected to, the more they will learn. Students will do almost anything for a teacher they feel cares about them. As *Trust in Schools* highlights, positive staff relations also promote student learning. Staff are more likely to work hard for the principal and for each other, to plan lessons and analyze student work collaboratively, and to support each other in difficult times, if relations among them are healthy.

- *Physical environment*: when visiting Bhutan this past summer, I met a principal who began shifting the culture by tending to the physical aspects of his school. Instead of tackling curricular and teaching issues first, he decided to make sure that the toilets were fixed, that the windows were repaired, that the campus was

relatively free of trash. This appears to be working, and he will work on staff collaboration around teaching issues next. In my view, he made a sensible choice, because how a school looks can affect how it feels to people and even how much students learn. A neglected physical environment can impact the collective pride of the school, and unfortunately sends messages to students – and to teachers – about their worth.

The physical environment includes, of course, classrooms, hallways, and libraries as well. At some schools, the library is so inviting that the books practically leap off the shelf, whereas other libraries feel like a dentist's office. Student work proudly hung on the walls and halls communicate that children are important here, whereas bare walls send a different message entirely.

- *Expectations, support, and accountability*: Another factor that differentiates the culture of schools is the expectations for student learning and student behaviour. For a variety of reasons, it has become the norm at some schools to expect relatively little from students. In some particularly toxic cultures, this is a function of a tacit agreement among the staff, because the less that is expected of students, then the easier it is on teachers. Things are very different at a school like Ron Berger's, where the staff are aligned in promoting high expectations. This is institutionalized through their teaching practice: students turn in multiple drafts of work until they have produced excellent work. As Berger says, students carry around in their heads an image of what good enough quality looks like, and it is the culture of the school – through hundreds of episodes of feedback from teachers – that helps shape that image. At far too many schools, the image in students' heads is one of mediocrity.

  But again, Berger's school is instructive, because it reveals that high expectations alone are not enough. After all, if raising the bar were all that was necessary, we would have solved our educational challenges long ago. (In our experience, raising the bar along results in some students reaching higher, but in many students simply giving up.) Support and accountability are also necessary. Students at his school are supported in the development of high-quality work by the instructional practices and attitudes of the teachers.   Teachers commonly begin projects by showing students models of excellent work from students in the past. This gives students a target to shoot for. Also, students are allowed to – requested to, really

– turn in multiple drafts of work and have it reviewed by their peers during class. This constructive feedback supports the development of excellent work. Finally, Berger provides opportunities to assess what students have learned and produced. This includes thoughtfully written examinations as well as more authentic assessments such as presenting to a panel of adults, or teaching what they have learned to other students, including younger students. At schools with a healthy culture, teachers do more than merely expect high quality work and ethical behaviour from students; they provide tools and structures to help them get there, as well as meaningful opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned.

- *Rituals, markers, and transitions*: Rituals and transitions are often overlooked, but nonetheless can contribute to a healthy school culture. At their best, rituals institutionalize important values of a school. An obvious example in Bhutan is the morning assembly. It institutionalizes the reciting of the morning prayers as well as the singing of the national anthem and thereby promotes spiritual values as well as loyalty to country. Weekly "social work" is another ritual; it promotes a commitment to the common good of the school. Having students stand up when an adult enters the room and when answering a question reinforces respect for teachers and adults.

At a school in Denver, a different student begins each faculty meeting by sharing what they think are the strengths and weaknesses of the school, their favorite subject, and what their future plans are. The staff can then ask questions or offer compliments. This ritual reminds the staff that students should be at the centre of the school, and that their voices should be listened to. I could imagine other questions as well, such as "Describe a memorable learning experience you've had this year," or "If you could wave a wand and change one thing about this school to increase how much students learn, what would you do?" Both questions could reveal much about the kind of teaching that really reaches students.

Also at this school, teachers grade student non-fiction writing in small groups during meetings to ensure that they agree what an A paper looks like, what a B paper looks like, etc. Over time, staff agreement on scoring has improved dramatically, as has a commitment to promoting non-fiction writing school-wide. This ritual not only promotes the value of collaboration among staff, it reinforces the belief student learning should be the centre of what they do as a staff. Partly

because of these rituals, faculty meetings at this school feel very different than those elsewhere: they start on time, they are focused, and they contribute to an obvious *esprit de corps* among teachers. What are the rituals at your school? Which ones reinforce key values at your school, and which ones detract from them?

- *Student, parent, and faculty voice*: Some schools feel like schools; others feel like prisons. This is largely a function of the amount of both student and faculty voice nurtured there. This is not to say that students should be running the school; clearly this is the job of the adults. But students feel more connected to a school when they feel that they matter there and when their voice can be heard. This might mean regular student forums in which they give input on what is best about the school and what can be improved. At Hill Middle School in Denver, the administrators gather with eighteen students once a month to get their input on important school issues such as diversity, or bullying, or classroom learning.

  Or it might mean more student clubs after school where they develop leadership skills and can help address issues of the school community. Student nature or environmental clubs are becoming popular throughout Bhutan. Nurturing young leaders, and developing appropriate student voice will become increasingly important as Bhutan moves toward democracy.

  Schools can feel like prisons to teachers as well, and allowing an appropriate amount of teacher voice is also an important part of a healthy school culture. Do teachers feel comfortable approaching the principal with a position that might be unpopular? What if a teacher has an idea about how to improve the school – will he feel comfortable promoting it?

- *Leadership*: Strong leadership is central to shaping a healthy school culture. Leaders help define the vision and direction and are the "rudder" of the school. Author Douglass Reeves describes a principal's role as that of an "architect of boundaries." A good principal allows – and even encourages – creativity from students and staff within those boundaries, but will respond when behaviour is outside of these boundaries. In this role, she does not micromanage every decision a teacher or student makes, but holds those accountable who step outside the bounds.

Strong leaders also help a staff prioritize initiatives and ensure follow-through. I am presently working with a school that has a history of undertaking far too many initiatives, accompanied by weak follow-through on each. They will start something, and then it will gradually die out, and then they will start something else. It has become "normal" there to not follow through on commitments. This is at least partly due to weak leadership in setting priorities and ensuring follow-through.

In addition, a strong leader helps foster leadership in others. Except in very small schools, it is impossible for a principal to do everything by himself or herself. Nor would this be desirable, because empowering staff members fosters deeper investment in the success of the school. Some principals have formed a leadership team, composed of several teachers, that meets regularly and helps make important decisions. Other principals invest in parents or even students to take on important initiatives in the school.

- *Problem Solving*: How a school addresses problems says a lot about its culture. At some schools, it is considered normal to sweep problems under the rug until they become crises.   Other schools confront issues proactively, before they grow. Related to this, some schools take the time to get to the root issues of problems, whereas other schools choose to address only surface aspects. For instance, a child who chronically misbehaves in class may have deeper issues in his life, possibly including a learning disability, which is at the root of his behaviour. Some schools will take the time to try to figure this out – which will save them lot of time in the long run and which will ultimately be better for the child – whereas other schools will simply try to manage his surface behaviour.

At some schools, the principal tries to solve every problem by himself or herself. While the principal clearly solves some problems best on his or her own, other challenges are best addressed collectively. This collaborative approach not only fosters greater ownership in the school, but it often leads to more effective solutions.

For some challenges, students themselves can be enlisted as problem-solvers. For example, we have a problem in Denver wherein some students do not take the state examinations seriously and therefore score poorly, which reflects negatively

on the district and can even affect funding from the state. A group of 24 student leaders from the district is addressing this issue and is developing a campaign aimed at their fellow students to improve pride in the district and to take the state examinations more seriously.

Again, these eight categories represent somewhat artificial distinctions (since they comprise a single school culture), but they can be helpful in assessing specific aspect of your culture and deciding which areas to address. An assessment tool for each category is included in the appendix.

Character and School Culture

What is the link, then, between the culture of a school and shaping the character of students? This will take us into a larger discussion – which I think will prove useful – about different theories of how schools shape character.   'Character education' or 'values education' is an explicit goal for many schools in America and for those in Bhutan.

The most common method in schools in America is based – either implicitly or explicitly – on the theory that you can *directly* teach values through lessons. You might teach honesty by reading various stories or watching videos in which the main character engages in honest behaviour (or dishonest behaviour) and then hold a classroom discussion. Students might write stories about honesty, or responsibility, or even complete worksheets containing these terms

Particularly in America, many schools offer students rewards for acting in positive ways. A student "caught" being kind might be entered into a drawing for a prize. Other teachers give small gifts, such as a piece of candy, to a child who has been kind, or responsible, or honest, or whatever the valued traits at their school are. Many schools pick a trait of the month. February, for instance, might be honesty month, and the teachers may put up posters in their classrooms or in the hallways promoting the virtue of honesty. They may even choose to have a school assembly where students put on skits relating to honesty, or give out awards to students who have exhibited honesty.

The other dominant theory is that character is best shaped *indirectly*, largely through the environment and through opportunities for young people to authentically experience and

then develop desirable qualities.[2]   Stanford professor Nel Noddings has written extensively about the centrality of developing care and compassion in students and believes that this is best done by surrounding students with caring relationships, especially at school.   Teachers act as models of both giving and receiving care, and provide opportunities for students to authentically give and receive care.

Ralph Tyler, seen as the father of curriculum theory and assessment in America, agrees that what he calls "social attitudes" are best shaped through the environment.   In his classic book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, he describes four ways that social attitudes can be shaped, and concludes that the most common and most effective is through the environment of the school.   Though direct intellectual instruction is one of the four methods, he finds this less effective.   Instead, he encourages the adults in a school to align practices with desired school values:

> It is particularly possible for the school to develop a more unified school environment in order to develop attitudes. If the faculty examines the things that are taken for granted in the points of view of staff members, in the rules and regulations and practices of the school, it is often possible to modify those markedly so as to develop a more unified environment that will help emphasize social attitudes. (Tyler, 1949, p.77)

Tyler highlights the power of the school culture to nurture values and reminds us that it is the job of every adult in the school to do so.

On this view, character is "caught" through the environment instead of taught through lessons.   Children develop compassion by being immersed in an environment saturated with compassion.   They witness teachers treating colleagues and students with kindness and compassion; they have many opportunities to both express compassion and receive compassion from others; they read stories in which teachers highlight themes of compassion or kindness; and posters on the wall reinforce the importance of compassion.

Also on this view, students internalize a value most readily when what they cognitively learn about a value is reinforced by what they experience through the culture.   If a

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[2] Another approach to building character focuses on the development of emotional intelligence. This refers to the set of emotional skills that that help people connect with others, and control the "mental toxins" – as Matthieu Ricard calls them – that sabotage our thoughts and behaviour. A discussion of this topic will have to wait for another venue, but two now classic books on this topic are *Emotional Intelligence* and *Destructive Emotions*, both by Daniel Goleman.

student "experiences" kindness at school, she will be significantly more likely to develop this trait than through lessons and posters alone.

In fact, what they experience seems to trumps all other modes of moral instruction. Harvard professor Lawrence Kohlberg, the father of moral developmentalism (the idea that our moral reasoning develops in stages) and a strong advocate of democratic education, noted that most students experience schools as very undemocratic places: they have little voice in decisions that affect them, they feel intellectually passive in the classroom, and rarely mix with students different than themselves. Kohlberg believed that these experiences impact students' feelings and beliefs about democracy much more than the lessons about democracy they learn in social studies and government classes. To students (and perhaps people in general), what they experience is much more real than what they read about or hear from a teacher. With this in mind, Kohlberg created a model of *just community schools* in which students have an important role in the governance of the school and experienced democracy on a regular basis.

Though the direct teaching method is the dominant form of moral instruction in schools in America, I have seen little evidence – or research – suggesting that it is wholly successful. Of course, hearing stories of bravery or of responsibility cannot hurt, but alone they do not appear to be effective. Also, this approach alone does not seem to pass the common sense test. Ask yourself how you became a caring, compassionate, and responsible person (assuming that you are one!). It is unlikely because of specific lessons that your teachers taught you in school. It is much more likely a result of the culture of the family or community in which you grew up, or real opportunities to develop and exhibit these traits.

The direct teaching method comes with another significant risk. Often in America – and I spoke to a few principals in Bhutan where this is the case – only one or two people, usually the principal or counselor, are responsible for teaching these values education lessons. Whoever does the teaching, the end result is that the rest of the staff is "off the hook" from teaching values. That suddenly becomes someone else's job. This increases the risk I noted earlier: that students will experience school in ways that are inconsistent with the stated values of the school. Teachers who do not feel it is their job to promote shared school values are less likely to scrutinize their own behaviour and filter it though these values. I have seen teachers regularly yell at small children, though a poster promoting "compassion" and "respect" hangs on the back wall of their classrooms. This values dissonance, as it might be called, is profoundly confusing to young people.

Another risk of this approach is that students often find lessons boring and that they don't connect to their lives in any meaningful way. We certainly do not want to have students associate feelings of boredom and cynicism with subjects such as math or literature, but it would be particularly troubling – and ironic – for students to associate boredom and disengagement with developing values and living a good life. The image of a life lived well should inspire hope, joy, and great enthusiasm, not memories of dull stories or worksheets. I do not fault the curriculum developers here. Rather, I find it a somewhat hopeless task to create individual lessons around values such as respect and responsibility that are authentic and meaningful to students. Far better to immerse them in a setting pregnant with those values and to give them authentic opportunities to develop and express them.

An example. At an elementary school in Denver, the physical education teacher trains and supervises a group of older students (ages 8 – 10 years) who each "host" a station on the playground for younger kids. Stations include soccer (football), basketball, tether ball, and jump rope. These P.E.Aces, as they're called (from the word "peace") collect the supplies at the beginning of recess, set up the station, recruit younger students to play, teach or remind the students of the rules, and help settle any disagreements. They return the supplies at the end of recess. The younger students not only gain older "buddies," they have a safe and structured place to play games and learn new ones. And they may not be aware of it, but they are learning a lot from their older friends, including healthy ways to manage conflicts.

The older students love the real responsibility and the opportunity to feel like a leader. They also gain younger friends, many of whom look up to them as heroes.

The P.E.Aces programme is an authentic way to nurture qualities such as compassion, respect, responsibility, and to gain conflict resolution skills. P.E.Aces don't just read about responsibility – they practise it every day. They are in charge of getting and returning supplies, and for making sure the rules of the game are followed and that the younger students have a good time. (Incidentally, the school has not lost a single piece of P.E. equipment since the programme began five years ago.) The P.E.Aces do not just hear stories about compassion – they practise it every day. Every time they go out of their way to include a younger student in a game, or take the time to make sure they know the rules, or teach a student a new skill, they are practising compassion. They don't learn

conflict resolution skills through in-class simulations: they practise them in real life on the playground.

P.E.Aces may not be possible in this exact form in Bhutan, but it could be modified to fit before-school activities. It is an extension of the idea of having class leaders, which many schools there already do.

Another authentic strategy for building traits such as responsibility and compassion is by having older students read to younger students on a regular basis. Older students must take responsibility for learning the best strategies to teach reading to their younger buddies (which types of questions to ask, how fast to read, etc.) and for helping select a proper book. They naturally develop compassion in this setting simply because they are given an opportunity to express it. I have seen older students with "hard" exteriors soften up immediately when reading with their weekly reading buddies. In fact, a weekly buddy reading programme may be more effective in shaping character than all the values lessons that most schools teach. It is authentic, meaningful, and real to both the younger and older students.

Five ways to improve your school culture

I began by making the case that school culture is a hidden (and free) resource that can improve the overall effectiveness of a school. I defined school culture as the set of behaviours and beliefs that count as normal at a school and offered eight categories for understanding and analyzing a culture. I then described the dominant way that schools in America attempt to nurture positive character traits – through direct instruction with specific lessons – and argued that more indirect methods, through the overall culture of the school and by providing authentic opportunities to express and develop these traits, was far more effective. We now turn to some practical ways to harness the power of your school culture.

1. Measure it. At regular intervals

The only place to start improving your school is from where you are, and this requires collecting information about your culture. This is equivalent to a gardener or farmer regularly assessing the quality of his soil. You might find that some aspects of your culture are healthier than you thought, say, that teacher morale is higher than expected; or you

might find just the opposite. Whatever the case, you will be confident that you are starting from solid ground: where you are now.

Measuring your culture on a regular basis can head off problems before they turn into crises. For instance, we were asked to work with a school late in the year that had received a new principal that year. But by the time we arrived, it was too late. Because of miscommunication early in the year, the staff and principal were on different paths and the school was now in crisis. Extensive intervention proved unhelpful, and yet another new principal was brought in the following year. This was not good for the students or the staff. What if there had been ways to assess how things were going early in the year? I am confident that early signs of trouble could have been addressed, which could have averted the turmoil that followed.

Regularly assessing your culture can help you identify and address "elephants in the living room." These are issues that are so obvious that no one talks about them. They are so obvious that after a while, people do not even *see* them. But left unaddressed, they can bring an organization down. In some schools, the elephant in the living room is that staff members are afraid to approach the principal with any bad news; elsewhere it might be that the third grade teacher shows videos all day and the students end the year having learned nothing. The health of a school's culture is usually inversely proportional to the number of elephants in its living room.

But as mentioned above, regularly assessing your culture also provides opportunities to celebrate what is working well. We have seen staff members give themselves a standing ovation when they looked at the data on their school culture. It is important to look at the root cause of the successes, so that those successes can continue.

In the appendix are two instruments that have proven useful for us. The first is the School Culture Survey. It only takes about 10 minutes to complete, but can yield valuable information. Shortly after a staff completes the survey, we present the results to them using a discussion protocol known as the World Café. A group of three or four members and a "host" look at the data and identify strengths, challenges, and patterns. The members then spread out to a new table, and the hosts remain at their original table. The new groupings then address the same questions, after the host has shared the highlights of the first conversation. After possibly a third round of discussions, the hosts share with the whole group major points raised during their discussions, and then the staff

prioritize issues to address. This process helps nurture a democratic voice among the staff and gets to the root of issues affecting the school. It can also highlight for a school practices that are working well. We encourage schools to take this survey twice a year to chart progress.

The second instrument is the Eight Gateways Survey, which helps a school identify the relative strength of each of the eight aspects of school culture described earlier in the paper. There are five questions within each category and by comparing total scores in each category, a school can make a more informed decision about where to begin shaping their culture. This does not mean that schools should necessarily first address the area with the lowest score. It might be better, for instance, to address the physical environment of the school before tackling more complex areas such as expectations, support, and accountability.

2. Agree on common values and on ways to nurture them

Common values hold every healthy organization together. This is true for companies, schools, and even countries. It is when members start to wonder what these shared values are, or when dominant behaviours – especially by those in leadership positions – contradict alleged shared values, that organizations start to lose effectiveness.

But let's begin with a positive case. Consider the Toyota Corporation. It is one of the most successful corporations on earth, producing cars of exceptional quality. One of the secrets of its success is a healthy corporate culture, defined by shared values. These values are reflected in their corporate creed, known as the *Toyota Way*:

> *We accept challenges with a creative spirit and the courage to realize our own dreams without losing drive or energy. We approach our work vigorously, with optimism and a sincere belief in the value of our contribution. We strive to decide our own fate. We act with self-reliance, trusting in our own abilities. We accept responsibility for our conduct and for maintaining and improving the skills that enable us to produce added value* (Liker, 2004).

Notice that this defines the "how" of working at Toyota: how to approach problems and work in general (with a creative spirit, vigour, optimism, and confidence). It is a daily reminder of how to think and behave. Of course, other things matter as well, such as how

the company recognizes and rewards employees for these behaviours, but this statement is a public announcement of what matters at Toyota.

Nearly every school we work with develops a similar statement of shared values, which we call a touchstone. In its most general form, a touchstone is a test for the purity of a substance, such as gold. Here, we use it as a test for how well both teacher and student behaviour is aligned with the shared values of a school. Key members of the school community, including students, staff, and parents, identify key values and then a small committee drafts a touchstone statement, which is approved by the school. Here are two examples:

The Cory Creed

At Cory we love learning and laughter.
We grow by trying new things and learning from our mistakes.
We embrace challenges with the courage to do our best.
We persevere.
We show respect for our community through caring, responsible actions.
We celebrate our differences and accomplishments.
At Cory we love learning and laughter.

The Place Way

At Place Middle School, we pursue excellence in scholarship and character.
We celebrate and honor each other by being respectful, honest, kind and fair.
We show our cultural appreciation for each other in all we do. We give our best in and out of the classroom and take responsibility for our actions.
This is who we are even when no one is watching.

The really important work begins after the school has developed their touchstone. The school brings life to these values and develops ways of identifying and even measuring behaviours that align with them. Some schools introduce their touchstone at an assembly, and then invite students and teachers over the next several days to sign a touchstone banner when they are ready to commit to live these values.

Some schools identify specific behaviours that reflect these values (as well as those that reflect just the opposite) and identify ways to promote these behaviours among students

and teachers. Strategies include integrating values discussions into discussions of literature, as well as more authentic initiatives mentioned above, such as weekly reading buddies. We encourage schools to regularly monitor the effectiveness of their touchstone. Otherwise, the touchstone can become merely a statement on the wall. When it is alive, it can guide everything from instruction to discipline, to the hiring of new staff.

3. Start with a small victory

As mentioned earlier, you cannot improve all aspects of a school culture at once. And we must take the long view; the culture at Ron Berger's school took years to develop, as it does at any school. Nonetheless, we must start somewhere, and it is wise to start small. One symptom of a less-than-healthy culture is a history of weak implementation of initiatives, which might include a new curriculum or a new discipline plan. Each time only some of the staff follow through on what is asked of them, confidence in the school's collective ability to follow through on shared goals erodes. To reverse this, we use a specific process, called the Shared Agreement Protocol, to help a school get a quick victory.

First, the staff decides on an issue, that if remedied, would have a positive impact on the school. The issue should be relatively small and easy to measure, such as the use of cell phones by students, or tardiness to class. Larger issues such as best practices for instruction should wait until later.

Second, the staff agrees on the remedy for the problem. This might mean a new policy banning the use of cell phones in class, or reaffirming an existing policy on what counts as tardiness. The remedy must include clear consequences. For instance, a staff might decide that after the third tardy, a student serves detention after school. Or that the teacher collects the cell phone from the student and returns it at the end of the week.

Third, the teachers draft a short script that each will read to his or her classes for three days in a row, and then publicly signs an agreement during a faculty meeting pledging to follow through on this initiative. This public signing is crucial, as it is a promise to your colleagues

Finally, the teachers read the script to all of their classes for three days in a row and then begin implementing the policy on the 4th day. Reading the script serves two important

purposes. First, it makes the new (or reaffirmed) policy abundantly clear to the students; and second, it showcases the unity of the staff on this issue. Students used to different expectations and consequences from each teacher will see that the staff is now on the same page. It is a resetting of norms.

Once the policy has been implemented, the school should devise a way of measuring success. This could mean collecting data at regular intervals on the number of tardies or of cell phones seen in class, and then charting progress. This gives the staff the opportunity to celebrate success, or to make midcourse corrections if the data are pointing in the wrong direction.

Another important type of data to collect is on how well the faculty is following through on its commitment to this policy. This can be done quickly and anonymously by having each member answer the following two questions on a piece of paper (without their name on it) every two weeks: 1) From one to ten (ten = total compliance), to what degree have you been following through on the cell phone policy during the past two weeks? _____ 2) From one to ten (ten = total compliance), to what degree do you feel that the staff as a whole has been following through on the cell phone policy during the past two weeks? _____

Responses to both questions are averaged and charted on a poster. A trend line develops after about six weeks, which, can be a cause for celebration, or for making midcourse corrections.

Using this protocol, two schools in our disctrict cut the number of student tardies by 40% in about three weeks. This had added to staff confidence and has resulted in students taking other rules more seriously as well: they have got the message that the whole staff is on the same page. Using a protocol like this, dozens of schools across the country have reached similar results.

What is your next small victory, and how will you measure it?

4. Create opportunities for meaningful staff collaboration

Isolation is the enemy of a healthy school culture. Isolation not only cuts teachers off from crucial emotional and professional support from colleagues, it creates a splintered

experience for students: five different teachers can mean five different sets of expectations and five different approaches to teaching and discipline. At many schools, teachers resemble independent contractors more than members of a faculty with a common mission.

Therefore, any attempts to foster meaningful collaboration among staff can pay big dividends. I will mention two strategies. The first one is remarkably simple: having teachers regularly visit each other's classrooms. Even if each teacher visits a different classroom for only twenty minutes each week, the results can be impressive. Visiting teachers see new ways of presenting material or of interacting with students, and the hosting teachers now have a source of feedback. Also, regular visits from colleagues can create a healthy professional edge. I might make sure that I'm particularly well prepared for a lesson if I knew that a colleague would be visiting.

Schools can extend the benefits of this structure even further. Once trust is developed, teachers could pair up and request that their partner look for and give feedback on specific things during the lesson. For instance, a teacher interested in how he responds to girls versus boys might ask his partner to record how often he calls on boys versus girls, and how he responds to their answers. Or a teacher looking for strategies to reach specific students in a class can request this feedback.

A second strategy for fostering collaboration involves shared scoring of student work. At faculty meetings, each staff member is given a copy of student work (with the name crossed off) and then asked to score it from a 1 to a 4 or from an A to an F. In small groups, teachers give reasons for their scores, and degree of agreement across the entire staff is mathematically computed (total agreement would = 1.0). Over time, the staff charts the degree of agreement. The higher the agreement, the more likely that teachers are shooting for the same target.

Shared scoring of student work is a strategy commonly seen at "90/90/90" schools in America. At these schools, at least 90% of students are minority, at least 90% are from poverty, and yet over 90% scored proficient or above on state tests. These schools tend to focus on the shared grading of student non-fiction writing, since non-fiction writing is highly correlated with overall academic performance, including in subjects like math and science (reading and writing well certainly helps in trying to understand photosynthesis).

Shared scoring yields numerous benefits. First, it breaks down isolation and puts teachers in the habit of working together toward a shared goal (agreement on academic expectations). Second, it re-norms faculty meetings and affirms that the central value of the school is high quality teaching and learning.

5. Create a culture of celebration

Teaching is such a challenging business that it is easy to feel like we're not making any progress and that our challenges far outweigh our successes. To reframe things and affirm each other not only feels better than focusing on our shortcomings, it can make us a more effective school. I begin each class at the university this semester with a think-pair-share around the following question: "Describe a time this week when you felt effective as a teacher. What did you bring to that situation that contributed to the success?" The whole process of thinking of their response, pairing up and sharing with a partner, and then having a few share to the larger group takes only about five minutes, but it helps the students reframe their week.   These are new teachers – some of whom are in very challenging schools – but there is never a shortage of things to report on. A breakthrough with a child in math.   A Spanish-speaking student finally comfortable enough to speak English in class.   A student who used to never turn homework in is now so proud of his work that he shows up early to class to turn in his work.

And importantly, the teachers are reflecting on the resources at their disposal (both internal and external) that contribute to their successes: their patience, their listening and connecting skills, their sense of humour, their commitment to drawing boundaries and holding to them, or maybe the use of certain books in the classroom. By failing to recognize our successes, we are prone to feeling depleted and to developing the distorted view that we have no internal or external resources. It is easy to see how this attitude could affect our teaching.

There is no reason schools couldn't begin meetings this way: reflecting on successes, either our own or others'.   I have been to several schools that begin each meeting with some recognitions: "I'd like to recognize Barbara for the awesome job she did preparing her students for the play this week." Or, "I'd like to thank John for staying late after school with me yesterday to help me with my work." The mood of the meeting inevitably turns positive.

Other schools have used a more formal structure to affirm each other. The staff sit in chairs in a circle and spend about a minute affirming each person. Colleagues are invited to affirm the focus person and begin with the phrase, "I appreciate ___ because..." It might be because of how she relates to her students in such a positive way, or because she always brings a sense of humour to work, or because she has done such a fantastic job developing students' writing skills. The facilitator ensures that the group honours the time limit per person (you wouldn't want to spend five minutes on one person and only thirty seconds on another). I am consistently amazed by the power of this simple ritual. For some, it's the first time they've felt affirmed by colleagues. Others are surprised by who their fans are. It provides a safe and structured way to receive affirmations and share them with others. And as I said, it is more than a feel-good activity: it can improve staff morale and staff trust, which leads to improved collaboration and to more effective teaching.

I have no doubt that your staff can find activities better suited to your school than I have mentioned above in these five strategies to improve school culture. I am confident that if you can find ways to regularly measure the health of your overall school culture, determine and integrate shared values into the life of the school, score small victories that can grow into larger ones, create meaningful opportunities to collaborate, and develop a culture of celebration, that you will improve the culture of your school, which will invigorate the staff and benefit the students.

Conclusion

I began this paper with a quotation from T S Powdyel.. I borrowed his metaphor by likening the culture of a school to the soil in a field: it is the stuff out of which beautiful things grow. Instead of rice and potatoes, we cultivate the hearts and minds. And just as rice and potatoes absorb the nutrients in the soil – be they plentiful or scare – our children absorb the values and rise to the expectations resident in our school culture. It is my hope that this paper has raised a few questions and presented a few tools that prove helpful to you, and that you see with new confidence that your school culture can serve as a resource for the growth of students and staff alike.

APPENDIX: I

School Culture Survey

This 10-minute survey is designed to identify strengths of your school culture as well as areas to be further developed. All responses will be anonymous, and results will be shared with school staff. Thank you for taking the time to provide this valuable feedback.

1. This school is heading in the right direction.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

     1   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*

2. I like working in this school.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

     1   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*

3. We are effectively moving students toward meeting our nation's educational goals.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

     1   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*

4. The principal fosters constructive dialogue.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

     1   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*

5. Our school fosters student engagement in academic learning.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

     1   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*

6. I feel safe speaking to the principal – either in public or in private -- about school issues, including those that might be awkward and/or unpopular.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

     1   *2*   *3*   *4*   *5*

7. Our school effectively engages parents/guardians.
Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |

8. The staff have a voice in decision making.

Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |

9. As a staff, we follow through on things we commit to.

Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |

10. We are "on the same page" regarding priorities for school improvement.

Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |

11. We work together effectively to reach our common goals.

Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |

12. The staff in this school trust each other.

Strongly disagree   *Strongly agree*

| | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* |

13. What do you like best about working at this school?

14. What is the important issue facing the school?

15. The first thing I would do to improve the school is…

APPENDIX II

The Eight Gateways Assessment Tool

Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Rate your school on the following criteria related to teaching and assessment. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

Questions:

_____ 1. There is wide agreement among teachers in my school about what constitutes high-quality teaching and learning.

_____ 2. A large percentage of teachers in my school engage in high-quality teaching.

_____ 3. Groups of teachers meet regularly to look at student work to improve teaching, learning, and assessment.

_____ 4. There are structures in place (e.g., visiting each other's classroom, critical friends circles) for teachers to receive feedback from each other on their teaching.

_____ 5. Assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, portfolios, presentations, etc.) are used in a balanced way both to enhance learning and to verify learning.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Relationships

Rate your school on the following criteria related to quality of relationships. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neutral

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. The students feel cared about in this school.

_____ 2. The tone of voice between students and staff is respectful, appropriate, and at times even lighthearted. There is little or no yelling at students in the halls or classrooms.

_____ 3. Staff care for and support each other, both professionally and personally. Humour and laughter are evident in staff meetings, classrooms, and halls.

_____ 4. The staff and administration generally enjoy a healthy and productive relationship.

_____ 5. Parents generally enjoy a healthy and productive relationship with the school.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Problem Solving

Rate your school on the following criteria related to problem solving. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neutral

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. My school tends to approach issues proactively instead of reactively.

_____ 2. At my school, we tend to get at the root of problems instead of just treating symptoms.

_____ 3. My school tends to approach problems and issues collaboratively (when appropriate) instead of having the principal try to solve everything.

_____ 4. My school enlists students as problem-solvers, when appropriate, to address issues.

_____ 5. My school faces challenges with confidence.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Expectations, Support, and Accountability

Rate your school on the following criteria related to expectations. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. The vast majority of teachers in my school hold high academic expectations and this is evident through their rigorous instruction.

_____ 2. The vast majority of teachers in my school hold high character expectations (e.g., they discourage cheating and insist on respectful behaviour).

_____ 3. My school effectively communicates high expectations to parents.

_____ 4. Mechanisms are in place to provide timely and effective feedback to a teacher or staff member who is not "carrying their load" (e.g., not expecting much of kids academically, not fulfilling playground duty).

_____ 5. Teachers strive to stretch each child, regardless of their present level of performance, and recognize that some students will take longer to learn certain concepts.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Voice

Rate your school on the following criteria related to voice. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. The school has effective structures and processes, such as student council and other student groups, which provide opportunities for students to be heard by teachers and administration.

_____ 2. The school regularly solicits feedback from students about what is working and what can be improved at school and in specific classrooms. Especially at the elementary level, students have an opportunity to shape classroom norms, etc.

_____ 3. There is a school-wide commitment to using teaching strategies that develop student voice. These might include service-learning, book fairs, Socratic teaching, and providing appropriate choice about books and projects.

_____ 4. Teachers and staff are invited, when appropriate, to provide input on important school decisions. Generally, there is healthy and productive communication between staff and administration.

_____ 5. Parents express an appropriate degree of voice at school, including serving on committees.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Physical Environment

Rate your school on the following criteria related to physical space. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. My school is safe, orderly, and welcoming.

_____ 2. My school's/institute's physical environment, including the classrooms, hallways, and library, is deliberately shaped by teachers and students to inspire learning.

_____ 3. My school takes advantage of its surrounding physical environment, such as the neighbourhood, the larger city, and state. (For example, our fourth graders do a year- long study of the ecology of a pond in the park across from our school.)

_____ 4. Student work is prominently displayed in classrooms and hallways.

_____ 5. Our school deliberately creates unique physical spaces (a welcoming entrance-way with coffee, a parent work room, a peace garden, a welcoming faculty room, etc.) that communicate who we are.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Rituals, Markers, and Transitions

Rate your school on the following criteria related to marker, rituals, and rites of passage. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = neutral
4 = agree
5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. We have meaningful markers, rituals, rites of passage, traditions, and celebrations at my school.

_____ 2. Through our rituals and traditions, we recognize excellence in both academics and character.

_____ 3. My school allows outdated rituals and traditions to gracefully die and is open to forming new ones as needed.

_____ 4. My school has initiation rituals that introduce new staff and families to the school's values and traditions.

_____ 5. My school has ceremonies that honour and support its vision (e.g., annual student arts festival, parent appreciation breakfast).

_____ TOTAL SCORE

Leadership

Rate your school on the following criteria related to leadership. Add up scores at the bottom.

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree

3 = neutral

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

_____ 1. The principal sets clear boundaries and grants us creativity within those boundaries.

_____ 2. I have confidence that the principal is an effective "rudder" of this school, keeping us heading in a healthy direction.

_____ 3. The principal effectively helps the school set priorities.

_____ 4. The principal ensures effective follow through on initiatives.

_____ 5. The principal empowers others in the school to be leaders.

_____ TOTAL SCORE

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Acknowledgements

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