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# Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises

**Conducting a Book Study**

**TASSP**

**Dr. Kent D. Peterson**

**University of Wisconsin-Madison**

**1025 W. Johnson Street**

**Madison, WI 53706**

**[kpeterson@education.wisc.edu](mailto:kpeterson@education.wisc.edu)**

# Culture is a Powerful Force



**School culture influences  
how people think, feel, and act.**

**Culture is a key determinant of staff  
focus, commitment, motivation, and  
productivity.**

**Culture is a powerful force that exists in any organization in which people share some history. It develops as people work together, solve problems, cope with conflicts, achieve successes, and deal with tragedy.**  
**(Schein, 1985; Deal and Peterson, 1999)**

## Why a Book Study?

- **Introducing the Ideas of School Culture**
- **Developing a shared Language**
- **Understanding one's Cultural History**
- **Reading, Assessing and Shaping One's School Culture**
- **Developing Cultural Distributed leadership**

## Two Books

- Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises, (2009) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Jossey-Bass Publishers. (Deal and Peterson)
- Shaping School Culture Fieldbook, (2009) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Jossey-Bass Publishers. (Peterson and Deal)

# Shaping School Culture: Structure of the Book

- Concepts
- Cases
- Positive and Negative Culture
- Paradox and leadership
- Eight Roles of Principal Leadership
- A Deep Sense of Promise and Purpose

# The Shaping School Culture Fieldbook:

## Structure of the Book

- All the Core Concepts
- Reflective Questions
- Extensive Examples
- Positive and Negative Stories
- Concrete Group Activities

# Book Study Approaches

- **Small Group**
- **Whole Staff**
- **Departments**
- **Principals**
- **Districtwide**

# Know Your Staff Culture and History

- **Table Discussion**
- **Questions**

# Dealing with a Toxic Staff

- **Be Careful**
- **Touch Base with the Historians**
- **Know the Sacred Norms**
- **Find the Landmines and IEDs**
- **Start Carefully and Small**
- **Expand into more Sensitive Areas**

# Dealing with a Positive Staff

- **Read**
- **Discuss**
- **Relate to other Readings**
- **Do Activities**
- **Make action Plans**
- **Celebrate the Positive**

# Elements of Culture

- **Norms, Values and Beliefs that underlie thinking, feeling and acting**
- **Symbols and Artifacts that Communicate Meaning**
- **Stories that Herald Values**
- **Cultural Network**
- **Heroes and Heroines**
- **Rituals, Traditions, and Ceremonies**
- **“Culture is “the way we do things around here!”**

# Elements of Toxic Cultures



- **Negative Values and beliefs hold sway in toxic cultures.**
- **Sense of purpose is spiritually fragmented.**
- **Relationships are negative and destructive.**
- **The cultural network's most powerful members negaholics (Carter-Scott, 1989)**
- **The only heroes are anti-heroic.**
- **Few positive rituals, traditions, or ceremonies exist to develop a sense of community and hopefulness.**

**Deal and Peterson (2009)**

# Symbols and Artifacts in the School



- Communicate values
- Reinforce culture
- Build success through commitment
- Symbolize the mission

# “Walk the Halls and Talk to the Walls”



- Imagine you are new to the school. Walk outside and leave your “To Do List” at home.
- Now, walk through the school.
- What do you hear, see and feel? What messages are sent by what is on the walls and what is going on in the classrooms?
- What does this tell you about the culture?
- What should be kept and what should be changed?

# Ways of Reading Your Culture as a Group...



- **LIST SIX ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL.**
- **THINK OF A SONG THAT DEPICTS YOUR CULTURE.**
- **CREATE A METAPHOR... IF MY SCHOOL WERE AN ANIMAL, IT WOULD BE A \_\_\_\_\_ BECAUSE \_\_\_\_\_.**
- **CONDUCT A SCHOOL HISTORY.**
- **CONDUCT AN “EDUCATIONAL GARAGE SALE”**
- **INTERVIEW A SCHOOL’S STORYTELLERS.**

# Conduct a School or District History

- Major Events
- Key Formal and Informal Leaders
- Ideas about Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment
- Key Successes and Challenges
- Rituals, Traditions, and Ceremonies
- Students, Community, and Locale
- Major Events and Changes
- People and Personalities
- Clothing, Hairstyles, Music of the Time

# Positive Informal Network



- **Gossips**
- **Spies, Counterspies, Moles**
- **Heroines and Heroes**
- **Storytellers**
- **Compasses**
- **“ Keepers of the Dream “**
- **Navigators**

# Toxic Informal Network



- **Anti-Heroes and Anti-Heroines**
- **Pessimistic Storytellers**
- **Rumor Mongers**
- **“Keepers of the Nightmare”**
- **Negaholics and Naysayers**
- **Prima Donnas-Prima Donalds**
- **Space Cadets**
- **Martyrs**
- **Deadwood, Driftwood, Ballast**
- **Saboteurs**
- **Rogue Pirates**
- **Resource Vultures**

# Making the Informal Network Effective



- Know who resides in each role.
- Provide stages for storytellers.
- Recognize heroes and heroines
- Use Gossips to pass information
- Work to decrease the negative impact of hostile roles.

# Language of the Culture



- What programs, people, and events have special names?
- How do these keep your culture vibrant and interesting?
- What are the acronyms for programs or places?
- Write a Dictionary of key words. (For unit, district, or school)

# Stories and the Culture



- **Stories are the foundation of a culture.**
- **Stories communicate purpose, reinforce success, and maintain traditions.**
- **What are the history, myths, and stories of the culture?**
- **Discuss the key stories to tell newcomers and reinforce the culture.**

# Types of Celebrations

- **Welcoming Staff**
- **Beginning of Year**
- **Fall Solstice**
- **End of Winter Break**
- **Spring Fever**
- **Ethnic Events**
- **Recognition Ceremonies**
- **Retirements**
- **End-of-Year**
- **Large and Small Successes**

# Elements of Ceremonies

- A special and value-linked purpose
- Symbolic clothing and adornments
- Symbols, signs, banners, flags
- Stories and sagas
- Music
- Appropriate setting
- Food and drink
- Special language and tone
- Message of hope and recognition

# Map Your Ceremonies and Celebrations Over the Year

# Analyzing Ceremonies and Celebrations

**As you examine your “map,” what are the core values and beliefs communicated in the ceremonies and celebrations? Are new messages needed?**

**Are new ceremonies or celebrations needed to be scheduled?**

# Conducting an Educational Garage Sale

- **Purpose**
- **Stations of the Sale: Museum, Not For Sale, Repair Shop, Reclamation Station, Garbage Can, Toxic Waste Hauler**
- **Individuals list items to go in each station.**
- **Discuss the lists and make an action plan.**

# Culture Shaping Roles



- Anthropologist
- Historian
- Visionary
- Symbol
- Potter
- Poet
- Actor
- Healer

(Deal and Peterson, 2009)

# Research on Organizational Culture

**Effective Schools Research (Edmonds)**

**Shaping School Culture (Deal and Peterson)**

**School Reform Literature (Fullan)**

**Professional Learning Communities (DuFour)**

**Good to Great (Collins)**

**Balanced Leadership (Marzano et al)**

**Execution (Bossidy et al)**

Dr. Kent Peterson is a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. He was the founding director of the Vanderbilt Principals Institute, Director of the National Center for Effective Schools, and a principal investigator for the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools. Over the past two decades he has studied school leadership and the professional development of leaders. His research focuses on the realities of principals' work, school culture, and effective leadership. This research is being used in a variety of leadership academies in the U.S. and internationally. He has co-authored several books with Terrence Deal including **The Leadership Paradox**, (1994), **Shaping School Culture: Pitfalls, Paradoxes, and Promises 2<sup>nd</sup> edition**, (2009), and the **Shaping School Culture Fieldbook 2<sup>nd</sup> edition** (2009). Over the past several years he has conducted workshops for ASCD, NSDC, NASSP, and for numerous state and national associations, districts, corporations, and educational organizations.