Unpacking the Impact of School Culture: A Principal's Role in Creating and Sustaining the Culture of a School

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Abstract

The impact of school culture was examined beginning with an understanding of how culture is learned, passed on and changed in a school context. The staff, students and community create school culture. The investigation included examining factors that contribute to a school culture such as traditions, mission statements, values, assumptions, and the way in which the school is run. Leaders need to gain a feel for all of these factors and understand their role in sustaining and changing a school culture to benefit student achievement. Leaders in schools have a role in culture; it can be argued that the role of a principal in creating and sustaining school culture is essential. The way in which school leaders support teacher leadership and collaboration, view the importance of professional development, develop a common vision that involves students, teachers and community and communicate effectively will influence the culture of the school and the nature of the relationships within the school.

As you walk into a school you can feel the culture by the interactions with the staff, what you see on the walls, and how students treat each other. Culture is alive, ongoing, and amorphous, where the ultimate goal is how to make the school culture positive so that students and staff feel safe and learning is at the core. In my role as a vice principal I have taken many families on school tours. As I walk families down the hallways of the school promoting all the wonderful learning and opportunities that the school has to offer, in the end families always mention how they felt when they walked into the school and the first personal interaction they encountered. Parents' observed teachers interacting with students and with each other. They want their children to feel safe and enjoy coming to school every day. School culture directly effects student achievement. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) defined culture as "the social glue that holds people together" (p. 6). School culture is developed by "unspoken norms, which direct the things we do and the way we act" (Goldring & Knox, 2002, p. 33).

People within the schools have beliefs, traditions, attitudes and relationships that shape the culture. Who contributes to creating a school culture? How are these cultures established and can they be changed? Goldring and Knox (2002) suggested that there are three different levels of school culture: the first being the things that you can see such as the management and organization of the day to day running of the school. The second level are the values and foundational beliefs, which empower us to achieve high standards in the managing of the school. Values are seen through relationships with staff members and the symbols around the school. I know that at the beginning of each school year it is important to have staff reflect on their beliefs about what contributes to the success and culture of the school. Without a common goal for the school it is difficult to create a culture to support student achievement. The last level that is discussed is the sharing among staff regarding school life. Fullan (2010) suggested that leaders follow Herold and Fedor's (2008) key points for building a school culture:

- Careful entry to the new setting

- Listening to and learning from those who have been there longer

- Engaging in fact finding and joint problem solving

- Forthrightly addressing people's concerns

- Being enthusiastic, genuine, and sincere about the change circumstances

- Obtaining buy-in for what needs fixing

- Developing a credible plan for making that fix (as cited in Fullan, 2010, p.18)

 The above actions demonstrate a willingness to collaborate to deepen the effectiveness of the culture of the school.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) defined culture as "patterns of behavior that distinguish us from them" and "a set of behaviors that seem strange to new employees" (p. 6). For the students and staff who live these traditions, they form memories that will last a lifetime and the traditions will be a part of the school culture forever. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) suggested:

> Cultural artifacts are all around us in the trophy case, in the alignment of desks in classrooms, in the amount of time provided for lunch, in the types of student data we collect, in what we laugh at. Culture tells us when to be tense and when to relax and rewards us for acting appropriately, usually in the form of greater security, more self-esteem, or access to inside information. (p. 17)

School culture is a combination of the conversations and laughter in the hallways, the business of managing and monitoring, the environment in the school from the classroom to the gym and traditions that carry through from year to year such as the cultural potluck, science fair, project business and the many concerts that bring the former staff and students back to visit year after year.

Purpose

The purpose of my literature review is to further the understanding of the impact and influences on school culture. School culture is an important influence to the success of student achievement and motivation of staff. Gruenert (2000) stated "a preliminary step to shaping school culture is for leaders, be they principals or a leadership team, to become familiar with the concept of school culture" (p. 14).

Research Questions

I examined the following questions by digging into the research about leadership and culture:

1. How does understanding organizational culture assist leaders in creating and sustaining a positive school culture?

2. What impact does creating a positive culture have on student success and achievement?

3. What elements contribute to creating a school culture where students, staff and community feel a sense of belonging and know that learning is at the center?

4. How is a school culture that is conducive to learning created? How can culture be sustained or changed?

Significance of the Study

Schein (1984b) confirmed that culture is learned, passed on, and changed. Schools have beliefs, and traditions, and are guided by its members' attitudes and relationships; these elements shape the culture. Schein defined culture as having levels and interactions. The ability to create culture can be

done through artifacts and creations, values, and basic assumptions. Understanding the construction of culture is essential in building a positive school culture (Schein, 1984a). This meta-synthesis of the literature regarding school culture connects findings of prominent researchers in the field, such as Schein (1984a; 1984b; 2010), and provides some insights in how leaders can establish and maintain positive school culture.

Leadership plays an important role in establishing culture. It is essential to have a clear purpose with the focus being student achievement and safety. The purpose is followed by having a mission and vision that is a live and strong within the school. Being a leader means celebrating and empowering staff, students and community, making the school alive with what we are doing. Everything a leader does to improve culture depends on building those trusting relationships. Carpenter (2014) supported the idea that there are many influences that affect culture. "The purpose of [his] investigation was to explore supportive and shared leadership structures at schools as a function of school culture policies and procedures" (Carpenter, 2014, p. 683). Professional learning communities (PLC'S) are a part of the culture at the schools. A summary of what an effective school culture and effective PLC's were provided, Carpenter proposed that the elements of an effective school culture and effective PLCs include shared purpose and values, collaborative culture, engagement in problem solving and collective inquiry, and a focus on continuous improvement. A positive school culture emphasizes improving teaching and building relationships to have the largest impact on student motivation, engagement and achievement.

Methods

This research paper is a literature review. I critically analyzed portions of published peer reviewed works of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles. It is important to consider similarities in methodologies, philosophies, claims, choice, and interpretation of evidence. I examined how the articles differed and observed gaps in the research or areas that require further study.

Literature Review

Defining Culture

The culture of a school is very difficult to define - it is the feeling you get as you walk into a building. How can you define a feeling or even establish and maintain it? One common understanding though, is that the culture of a school is important. Gruenert (2000) stated "culture provides the context in which the whole education process occurs" (p. 14). There are many definitions of culture that are used to give organizations a better understanding of how culture is "learned, passed on, and changed" (Schein, 1984b, p. 3). Schein (1984b) defined culture as "a set of shared meanings that make it possible for members of a group to interpret and act upon their environment" (p. 14). In a school this would be directly related to the mission and vision of the school and community. It is what the school community, including the students, staff, and parents, believe is important to the success of all involved in the learning. Gruenert suggested that culture is defined by a collection of patterns in behavior, unwritten rules, memories, beliefs, and just the way things get done.

Schein (2010) stated that there are three levels of organizational culture. The first level mentioned is artifacts. Artifacts include the displays in hallways and showcases, the information posted throughout the building, and the guidebooks and handbooks that provide information on expectations and rules. Student work, accomplishments, and mementos of school milestones are artifacts that demonstrate pride in the community and its members. Information regarding learning initiatives and activities of the school council, the mission and vision of the school, and policies and procedures are additional artifacts of the school. When I think to my experiences in a school organization this would be the material that adorns the hallways and showcases. What are the things that make us proud to be a part of the school community? When you walk into the school where I have taught the last few years you see a kite hanging in the front entrance with the words *soaring to success*, our school motto. We have a star blanket activity

that our staff was a part of creating, hanging on the wall. The seven essential virtues are lined up around the kite. A television is displayed with pictures of the students involved in events that we are proud of and images of our mission and vision. The school community council and parent council have posters up providing information about the work they do to support the learning initiatives going on in our school. This is our culture.

The second level Schein (2010) suggested is espoused values. He explained these as the things that guide people in their work. Espoused values contribute to the development of normal standards of the organization now and in the future. The school organization has the strategic planning and the ministry goals to guide its work. Values sometimes are discussed and revised as new members come in to the culture. Goldring and Knox (2002) stated: "developing a shared vision is a leadership process that must include all contributors at the school site" (p. 33). A common vision and mission is essential to have a successful school culture. Staff need to feel a sense of ownership in the creation of this vision to make it a live and visible.

The third level that Schein (2010) described was the assumptions. Schein argued that in order to deepen our understanding of culture in an organization, as leaders we have to dig deeper into the underlying assumptions. Each new staff member brings their own assumptions of how a school should be run. Everyone brings with them past experiences that shape how they solve problems and react to situations, including the way teachers teach. Schein (1984b) described these assumptions as "how group members perceive, think, and feel" (p. 4). One could suggest that these include the traditions of the school. As a leader in the school organization it is essential to know your staff, where they have come from and be open to listen and learn.

As leaders in a school organization we have to understand how culture exists. How can we as leaders foster or change these definitions of culture? Fullan (2008) argued that a school principal directly effects the school culture in a positive or negative way. Three main themes kept arising in the research about how leaders can promote a positive school culture where student achievement is at the center. Having and developing a clear purpose and vision is essential by using the strengths of the school community. Achieving this purpose happens by building authentic and trusting relationships with staff, students and families. Supporting teacher leadership through collaboration and professional development opportunities fosters relationships. School staff need to feel a sense of partnership and teamwork.

Common Vision and Mission

Part of building a positive school culture lays in creating a strong foundation based on a clearly stated mission and vision for the school and its stakeholders. In effective schools teachers' instructional practices are based on "best practice" not on what they are familiar with or what they have always been doing. Teachers share ideas and new teaching strategies in schools to improve in their own practice. This collegial form of teaching can give teachers a positive outlook on their job and help to make them less judgmental of others. It becomes less about the "me", but more about the "we". Jones, Stall, and Yorbrough (2013) believed:

> There are different perspectives about the visioning process and the role of the school leader in the process. However, we feel that the vision may originate within teachers or any staff members, but the principal has the responsibility in the facilitating, communicating, and providing the opportunity for growth. The principal must also be an instructional leader and curriculum leader. (p. 59)

Jones, et al. confirmed "the principal must create a culture and climate for change…all participants should have the opportunity to examine their thinking which can be achieved through forming study groups, visiting schools that have restructured or collecting data" (p. 59). Ownership of the school data that supports the purpose and mission is the key. All of the stakeholders, whether it be teachers, the School Community Council, or the students themselves, need to own the data and strive to improve achievement. Jones et al. noted "the shared vision 'sets the stage' for many aspects in the school community particularly aligned to the culture" (p.59). The vision is at the center of decision making. As a school leader it is important to model the vision. Fullan (2010) discussed a school focus as being a "one

page plan" (p. 25). School plans that communicate the vision should be clear and easy to follow so staff do not feel overwhelmed. It has to enhance what they are doing in their classrooms already or challenge them to reflect on their current practice and improve and be open to change.

Shared Leadership

Gruenert (2000) suggested that a "collaborative school has been identified as an effective context for student and teacher learning" (p. 14). There is an increased accountability being placed on teachers and principals. It seems to be a sign of the times, particularly in Saskatchewan at the moment. The managerial aspects of the principals job are important but not at the fore front. Leaders who are successful believe that the central purpose of education is grounded in teaching and learning. Effective principals are persistent and almost ruthless when it comes to enhancing student learning and staff professional development. Harris, Edmonson, and Combs (2014) pointed out:

> Essentially, if formal leaders create time, space, and opportunity for colleagues to meet, plan, and reflect, it is far more likely that distributed leadership will be viewed as genuine and will be sustained. By offering staff the opportunity to lead, by inviting their participation in decision making, and by providing the time for dialogue and discussion, greater distributed leadership capacity will be created. (p. 42)

Careful attention should be given to the nature of staff collaboration, the opportunities for continuous teacher learning, and the extent of professional development initiatives. In effective schools teachers' instructional practices are based on "best practice" not on what they are familiar with or what they have always been doing. Teachers share ideas and new teaching strategies in schools to improve in their own practice.

Distributing the leadership in an innovative way to all of the stakeholders, including students and their parents as well as teachers, can provide all with feelings of efficacy and worthiness; this practice deepens the stakeholders' personal investment and further promotes a common focus for the greater good of the school. Leadership practices that share power can create an increased motivation, genuine trust and promote risk taking, along with building a sense of community and efficacy among its members. Distributing leadership can be a risky business. The downfall to sharing leadership can be two-fold; first:

> It is impossible to gain unanimous support, approval and commitment from [all] staff. The danger is that some staff may be 'left behind' or be resentful and obstructive. As a part of their risk taking approach, Principals believe that the 'contagion effects' of committed staff and demonstrative success will bring some –but probably not all – negative or reluctant people 'on-side' eventually. (Dinham, 2005, p. 352)

Second, "[g]iving up control over key decisions becomes an increasingly high-stakes stance when the bottom line for accountability rests with the principal" (Lyons & Algozzine, as cited in Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008, p. 461). It may be impossible to gain full support, approval and commitment from reluctant teachers. Some principals have difficulty giving up control over key decisions when accountability ultimately rests with the principal. Sharing the leadership arguably is worth the risk when the gain to the overall school climate can be so positive. Not everyone can be good at everything all at once. It is recognizing your own strengths and weakness so personal improvements can be made. When gaps still exist, it is important that a leader can identify it and look for help from others. A school culture embodies collaboration, trust, professional learning and reciprocal accountability then successful teaching and learning can take place.

Building and Maintaining Trusting Relationships

Every school requires a culture of trust to build relationships with staff and students. Building relationships is important ground work to move learning forward and is essential to have established before there is direct effects on student achievement. Fullan (2010) agreed that "if the leader comes on too strong, the culture will rebel" (p. 18). There are many ways to establish trust with staff. It is impor-

tant to find ways to listen to teachers. "Recent research has shown that rather than being 'strong' and decisive, effective leadership is intensely interpersonal, involving working with individuals and teams to 'transform' teaching and learning" (Dinham, 2004, p. 340). Northfield (2013) suggested that a principal could potentially have conversations with many of the staff members during the weeks prior to school, however the real work on developing trust begins when the students walk through the door into classrooms. Bryk and Schnieder (2003) believed that the most powerful relationship building happens in the day-to-day conversations in the hallway at break time. It is essential to get to know teachers beyond the school and classrooms. Northfield (2013) agreed that "taking the time and making the effort to purposefully engage colleagues in supportive fashion" will help earn and develop trust (p.418).

Trust and relationships are also built through the confidence that they have in the leaders management of the school. This management includes all the tasks that are required to help the school run efficiently. Leaders have many responsibilities in a school day and are looked upon to schedule, organize, manage time, budget, approve spending, and understand agreements and policies to support the rights of teachers, and the list continues. Leaders are required to find ways to support their teachers and get them resources to allow them to grow in the profession and be successful. Trust is also built in the many ways principals and teachers deal with students, whether it is passing in the hallway or in the way they deal with positive and negative behavior. Fairness is the first word that comes to mind and consistency is the second. A positive school culture and strong management is the pillar to an effective school. A positive school climate can only be built if all staff are on the same page, moving in the same direction. Through conversation and dialogue, the administrative team together with the staff, can build a school climate where they fix mistakes and repair relationships with children and adults.

There must be a consensus about expectation for student behavior and there must be a willingness to work together to enforce common rules and standards. Teachers often see discipline as what they deal with in their own classroom not what happens in the whole school whether it is in the lunch room or on the soccer field at recess. This view can lead to inconsistencies within the school when the perception is that teachers "do their own thing". Common understandings about discipline allow for a unified position that in turn creates a positive school culture. The most effective form of discipline would be to take a pro-active approach rather than a reactive one. It enables the students to take ownership over their own choices and decisions regarding behavior. Students must see the consistent enforcement of school expectations and realize that they will have to correct inappropriate behaviors. A pro-active approach to discipline allows for a positive school culture to flourish. Consequences should reflect the nature of the misbehavior.

Many researchers writing about building trust all have the same message about the huge impact that building relationships has to move a school forward and directly affect student achievement. Harris, Edmonson, and Combs (2014) suggested that building trust to achieve a positive school culture consisted of respect, recognition and risk. Harris et al. (2014) suggested that "leaders must be willing to reflect on their own character and whether they are respected" (p. 62). A key theme underlying respect is staff interaction. Leaders need to take a look at their staff, how are they treating each other, how the staff treat their students and the students in the whole school, and how students are treating other students (Harris et al., 2014). Additionally, recognition of accomplishments supports the development of relationships and respect. Recognition is taking the time to celebrate and "recognize others' contributions to the success of the school" (Harris et al., 2014).

Leaders have to support risk taking. Teachers need to know that they are supported to take risks when it comes to improving student learning. Staff have to see administrators take risks, whether it works out or fails you have to model a positive attitude showing that you can learn from mistakes. In conclusion, Harris, et al. (2014) considered that "trust is the answer to establishing the kind of climate and school culture in which teachers have the capacity to form relationships with students that result in personalized engaged learning" (p. 63). This statement reaffirms that relationships and building trust is the firm foundation upon which all other elements of school culture are built. This must be established

and firm before teachers can get on board with buying into your vision of the school and what you see as important to student achievement.

This key theme of relationship building is emphasized throughout Fullan's (2008) six secrets of change. Leaders can use the ideas and reflect on these ideas of how to create positive change and empower the staff of a school. The first secret is to love your employees, the focus is for your employees to learn continuously and find meaning in their work. Relationships to their coworkers and the company as a whole are essential. Second, Fullan stressed the importance of connecting to peers with purpose. Leaders are to provide good direction while pursuing its implementation through peer interaction and learning. Building capacity in staff is the third secret discussed by Fullan. This suggests that staff need to feel appreciated by giving them leadership roles and supporting their professional development through opportunities to learn and gain resources to improve teaching. Learning is the work. The fourth secret to implementing change is learning external aspects of the job. Fifth, Fullan (2008) stated that transparency is of utmost importance; systems will learn with feedback based on a clear display of results and continuous access to practice and implement learnings. Teachers need to be involved in the decision making process. The last secret is systems learn. Two dominant changes are knowledge and commitment. Teachers have to see their work as authentic and relevant. These six ideas are connected to the examination of culture and the many factors that influence the culture of a school.

Implications for Research and Practice

The implications of ignoring the importance and factors contributing to culture are frightening. Gruenert (2002) claimed that "if things don't change it is because existing culture did not allow it… shaping school culture is not for the timid" (p. 17). This statement means that as professional leaders in a school we must learn and live the culture of a school community. We must understand the importance of developing a strong vision and make it visible to create an environment of trust and respect and support collaboration among teachers. Fullan's (2008) six secrets support the ways I believe culture is achieved with the staff at a school. As a leader I have to find ways to hear my teachers, provide resources and support when needed, find ways for teachers to grow and be successful, use a team approach, and take responsibility. MacNeil, Prater & Busch (2009) stated that "strong school cultures have better motivated teachers" and successful leaders "focus on improving the school's culture by getting relationships right between themselves, their teachers, students and parents" (p. 78).

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) noted, "culture provides a school's identity and image-its brand" (p. 17). When I think about what school culture means to me as a leader I think of the schools that I have experienced. The last school that I was at had a motto, soaring to success. Students could visualize the kite that hung in the skylight as you walked into the school. It was on our letter head and in the newsletter. The biggest impact of this is at the year end assembly when the students and staff come together to celebrate the learning and growing for the school year. The music to "Let's Go Fly a Kite" from Mary Poppins begins to play, the students and staff are all on their feet and the singing begins. I believe that you can feel school culture and this is proof that it brings learners together.

Building trusting relationships is a large part of my leadership style. As I am looking forward to completely my Masters, I will be going back into a vice principal role and in a few years applying for a principal position. I feel it is important to unpack the leadership role in establishing a culture conducive to learning. The culture of a school impacts the students, staff and school community. I will eventually be a new principal, walking into a school with an existing culture established. It will be essential for me to respect what is already working and be in tune to what needs changing. At the Principals' Short Course last summer, Vicki Moore spoke about being new to a school and that when coming into an already established culture you must have your eyes and ears open and keep your mouth shut. This speaks to me as being respectful, appreciating the culture, and understanding that change is not always accepted or appreciated.

My experience with creating a shared vision was within the school Data Team consisting of teacher leaders that represented all of our school Collaborative Inquiry Teams, our two school resource teachers, English as an Additional Language teacher, the principal, and the vice principal. Our work the previous year left us feeling like we did not have a clear vision or a focused and targeted learning goal. We felt that the statement on our school's improvement plan was too broad, that staff were not using the same language, and there were gaps in the alignment. An opportunity came for us to visit another school and learn about the work they have been doing using data walls and targeting student achievement. This learning inspired us to bring the excitement back to our school and present it as a leadership team. The power of a leadership team was crucial to getting the teachers to find this tool of collecting data useful and how important it was to be more data driven and focused on student achievement. Literacy is a main priority in our school and aligns with the provincial goal. At our school all grade one to three teachers used a reading assessment so the transition to creating a data wall to track our students' achievement was smooth. I was a part of the grade one and grade two collaborative inquiry team. We created a data wall where we could see where students overall are according to the reading assessment (Fountas & Pinnell, 2016). This not only informed our practice as we continue to share instructional strategies and attend professional development opportunities with a focus on reading and writing. It also allowed us to put tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3 interventions in place for our struggling students such as Roadways to Reading, Leveled Literacy Intervention and resource teacher support groups where specific reading strategies were targeted. As a team we had many celebrations and struggles throughout the year. Our biggest conversations centered on those students who were exceeding expectations and how can we keep them motivated and engaged as learners. What can we do as teachers in classrooms with such a large range of needs and levels? We knew these students required enrichment and to be challenged. I believe strongly these conversations were directly the result of creating the data wall. Our grade four to eight teachers created a data grid and used a quick reading assessment to check for student comprehension, fluency and grade level. They found that fluency was a struggle and had students read aloud to each other. The improvements were a celebration of learning and from this data our school resource team implemented a middle years Roadways to Reading group. Our teacher Librarian started a book club that provided students an opportunity to read together and learn from each other.

I reflect on the experiences that I have had with parental involvement when thinking about shared leadership. I have been fortunate to be a part of a school where parents and community members played a large role in school culture and student achievement. The School Community Council supported our learning initiatives and supported the administrative team in creating our school's A3. They supported our learning by putting on events to support our work with Literacy such as a Reading Olympics and Math Learning Night. Community sees this as support from parents in the goals that are set for their children around learning. Parent Council was another strong voice and shared leadership in supporting school initiatives but from a fund raising lens. They raised money that directly supported resources for teachers and students. Each meeting would begin with a school report where they heard of all the celebrations and events happening in the school. During the School Community Council meeting we shared school data and had conversations around what our Collaborative Inquiry Teams were learning and how they are supporting student achievement. These dedicated parent groups were our advocates in the community, promoting and enhancing our school culture.

My experience with some principals has been that it may be easier for them to ask for forgiveness then to ask for permission which again promotes taking risks. The way I see it is this: if what is "best for kids" is placed in the highest regard, then in the end it was all worth taking a leap. Happy teachers who want to come to work every day make for happy and content student learners. What a wonderful world teaching could be! There does not have to be any complex or unattainable goals if leaders could follow the suggestions that I have stated up to this point. Students could be achieving at higher levels, teachers could be enjoying their jobs and the parents and community could feel confident that their children are getting the best educational experience possible. Attention to the many details that create a supportive school climate is a dimension of the principal's role that fundamentally promotes learning within the school. The work of teachers and students is enhanced when they feel supported and are not distracted by the needs unrelated to teaching and learning. Principals can send a very strong message to the entire

school community about the importance of teaching and learning if they are actively supporting its teachers. When I reflect on my own experiences I can relate to the softer leadership style when thinking about shared leadership. I feel it is important to draw on the knowledge and experiences that happen every day in our classrooms from the teachers.

Conclusion

In all the articles that I have read while considering and reflecting in the topic of the principal's role in creating school culture one main theme kept arising from the piles of professional readings and books. School culture is essential. The main purpose of school culture is so that when the community, staff, and students walk into the school, they have a clear picture of what the vision is for the school and the achievement of their children. I am the leader of the school and my beliefs and vision should be clear. It will be evident in my words, actions, and interactions. The walls will be welcoming and inviting portraying our school traditions and celebrations. My research discussed the many opportunities school leaders have to change and enhance school culture, not an easy task by any stretch of the imagination but well worth the time and effort that I will have to put into it. I believe that the information presented in the readings were relevant to my practice because it allowed me to reflect on my own beliefs and draw on the experiences that I have had in a leadership role. The connections that I feel to school culture are strong. It encompasses all my beliefs about effective leadership.

I have to develop strong lasting relationships and trust first by understanding the school, watching, and listening. I also see the power of having a vision and sharing it with the staff. I know what my beliefs are and I ensure that the staff hear it through my words and see it through my actions. I also have to know and accept the teacher's beliefs. Once a strong vision is in place, I will seek out the many leaders that I will have on staff to form and establish a distributed leadership environment where all staff feel that they can contribute ideas and take risks in their learning journey. Shared leadership includes staff, students, parents, and community. This is my school, a place where we learn and respect each other. In the day to day business of managing a school, culture can get lost and not be at the front and center of what we strive to achieve every day in schools. As a leader it is important to bring staff back to who the school is and what the beliefs are. This connection is what drives a school forward.

Together the students, staff, parents, community, and administrative team need to work hard at building positive and authentic relationships so that morals and values, culture and climate, innovation and sharing, change and support, and environment and achievement can be supported. Relationship is the key.

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