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The Impact of School Culture upon an Educational Institution

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Abstract

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, there are close to 100,000 public schools and over 33,000 private schools in the United States. Each of these schools have different mission statements, pedagogies, philosophies and purposes along with different types of students. These schools are led by a variety of leaders with different levels of education and leadership styles. Is there a common theme between the schools that are most successful at providing a holistic education for their students and creating a rewarding environment in which the respective faculties serve their students? What is the impact of school culture upon the learning and social outcomes along with the work environment? A great deal of literature deals with the topic of both organizational culture as well as school culture. The research demonstrates a strong relationship between a school’s culture and its outcomes. Those schools who have a positive culture tend to have positive outcomes and those schools with negative cultures are more likely to have negative outcomes among its students and staff.
The purpose of this literature review is to examine how culture influences all areas of a student’s schooling experience and how culture impacts all stakeholder groups within the school community. The culture of a school determines behaviors, attitudes, goals, and student outcomes and is the difference maker. In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate that the literature supports the idea that school culture is powerful and is the catalyst for school growth and mission-driven results. This literature review will examine the topic of school culture related to the following questions.

1. How does the culture of a school create such dramatic differences between schools that have similar missions, budgets and demographics?

2. Can the culture of a school have such a dramatic impact upon staff morale, student achievement, the social climate and ultimately the well-being of the students the school is designed to serve?

3. What impacts does the culture of a school have upon the spiritual environment of a school and ultimately upon the worldview that these schools are seeking to develop in their students?

4. Is there a particular type of collaborative school community culture found in Christian schools that ultimately lead students to adopt a Christian worldview and then live out their faith in a vibrant way in a postmodern culture?

In most communities within the United States, K-12 educational opportunities abound. Communities are filled with a variety of educational options including public, private, charter and Christian schools. Each individual institution has a unique mission to guide its operations, methodology, pedagogy and programming. Although there are many
philosophical differences found in each organization, each school ultimately exists to provide a mission appropriate educational experience for their students. In other words, they are in the business of educating students.

A prospective family, that enters the doors of several schools, will notice that each institution feels unique and that there are distinct differences imbedded within the experience. Some schools easily embrace new ideas while others are similar to schools from the 1960’s. Many schools feel welcoming and inviting and others feel cold and sterile. In some schools, you might see students and teachers actively engaged in lessons that are filled with creativity while teachers in other schools are seated behind their desk while students begrudgingly complete worksheets. Many teachers absolutely love their jobs while others long for every break and vacation and long for retirement. The retention rate of faculty is high in some schools while others struggle with constant turnover.

Christian schools are not immune to these same challenges, which are rooted in school culture. According to the Center for American Private Education, there are 25,932 religious affiliated schools in the United States. Of the 25,932 schools, 6,250 are characterized as evangelical, protestant Christian schools. (Council for American Private Education, 2019) In an examination of the mission statements of these schools, one would notice a “common language”. Table 1 demonstrates the most common terminology found the mission statements of 20 different schools in the southeastern United States.
Although there is much terminology that is common within the mission statements, it is safe to assume that the student experience within these 20 schools is quite different. Although the mission statement of each school serves as a guide to the philosophy and emphasis of the school there is one other factor that has great influence upon the spiritual, academic and social environments within each school.

Some Christian schools are thriving and growing, while others struggle to stay open from year to year. Academics and biblical worldview development are valued in some Christian schools while others seem legalistic and are seemingly focused on “sheltering” students from the world. Some Christian schools are thriving and are seeing great spiritual, academic and social growth in their students while others are merely going
through the motions of education. How is it possible that schools that seemingly look the same on paper are providing very different experiences for their students, faculties and parents?

Culture Defined

If culture truly is a difference maker, it is important to have a thorough understanding of how culture is defined and the role that it plays within an organization. The word culture is derived from the Latin word “colere” which means cultivating, growing or tending (Liderlik, 2019). According to Hofstede (1997), culture is the “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another” (p. 46). In essence, culture is the way an organization thinks and acts. Culture is also defined as the framework that a group can use to solve problems. (Grunert & Whitaker, 2015) The work of Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) describes the important distinction between culture and climate. The climate of the school typically deals with the what, while the culture deals with the why. This important distinction describes why many school initiatives are destined to fail before they are ever implemented. Gruenert and Whitaker further describe this point by saying, “Climate is around us, but culture is part of us.” (Grunert & Whitaker, 2015) It is much easier for teachers to describe what it is that they do, than to tell you why they do what they do. Most teachers could easily describe their daily routines, their curriculum and the interactions that they have with their students, but they might struggle to substantively tell you why they do what they do. The “why” of any organization is deeply tied to the culture and not the climate. Senek (2009) claims that knowing your why is the only way to be
successful at accomplishing your mission both in the short-term and more importantly in the long-term. This principle also is applicable to both one’s personal and professional lives. As Christians, our “why” is found in I Corinthians 10:31 that exhorts us “to do everything for God’s glory.” As Christian educators, it is crucial that we understand and embrace our calling of teaching and leading children, as we know that God is glorified as we invest in the leaders of tomorrow.

The culture of any organization sets the tone for how the mission of that organization will be accomplished. Organizational culture “refers to a set of common values, attitudes, beliefs and norms, some of which are explicit and some of which are not.” (Brown, 2004) David (2018) provides another definition of organizational culture as “what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, the languages and symbols, the procedures and routines, and the definitions of success that make an organization unique.” Inside of an organization, “subunits” or subcultures may exist within particular departments or teams and those groups may have their own set of rules, routines and cultures. How these subunits view their relationship with each other have a great impact upon the culture of an organization. (Cansoy, 2017) Subunits can at times help promote the mission of the organization, but they also have the ability to divide the team and distract from the mission. Careful attention should be given to negative subunits as they may be a powerful influence with an organization. Culture may even be invisible, but “it is the glue that binds the organization together.” (Teasley, 2017) The greatest tests to this invisible culture are changes in leadership and change in general. In those moments the invisible culture will likely emerge. (Teasley, 2017)
Organizational culture can often be ignored in organizations that are comfortable with the status quo and this is quite typical in schools. Schools have a tendency to become like traditional factories and may not be aware of innovations that can help them develop much stronger outcomes. Many people are not aware of the culture within their organization until it is challenged or threatened. (Davis, 2018) This lack of cultural awareness is common in schools and it shines bright particularly when there are changes within the leadership of the school. Cultural awareness can be created by utilizing assessment tools such as the School Culture Survey (Grunert & Whitaker, 2015). School leaders can also obtain cultural information through formal and informal surveys. Organizational culture has been improved when the topic is assessed by employees and discussed regularly. (Davis, 2018) In many schools, culture is rarely discussed and less frequently measured. Culture cannot be imposed upon a school, but it is developed through the course of social interactions. (Roby, 2011) Roby (2011) found that if teachers are treated professionally and engaged in the conversation regarding change, they are likely to contribute positively to the culture. Culture must be carefully crafted within an organization and employees should be strategically placed in situations where collaboration can occur. Ultimately, schools must be intentional about developing, discussing and assessing its culture.

In a Christian school, culture includes “institutional norms, attitudes, social interaction, use of technology, and any other activity that fulfills the cultural mandate to subdue the earth and have dominion over it as found in Genesis 1:28.” (Drexler, 2007) The culture of Christian schools varies greatly based upon their missions, models and
associations. Ideally, the culture of a Christian school is reflective of a biblical understanding of education and is responsive to the biblical mandates on how to deal with conflict resolution, discipline, parent relationships and many other pieces that sometimes negatively impact school culture. Mills (2003) contends that culture is a powerful construct that helps us understand the human behavior of the stakeholders in an organization. In a Christian school, it is imperative to understand the behaviors of the stakeholders in order to grasp the culture and worldview connected to those behaviors. As Christians in an ever-changing culture, a strong understanding of the worldviews and behaviors of our culture and school’s stakeholders is critical in insuring that the school’s mission is achieved. Many Christian educational institutions at both the K-12 and collegiate levels have fallen prey to the idea that there are no absolute truth claims and are dabbling in postmodern relativism. (Drexler, 2007) The culture of a Christian school must be established on the truth of the Bible and on the person of Jesus Christ. (Mills, 2003) Without this sure foundation, schools will be tempted to build their culture upon the ever-shifting educational theories and viewpoints that may lead to institutional drift. (Schultz, 2003) Culturally relevancy is critical, but never at the expense of the gospel. Christian schools must find a cultural balance between learning how to think Christianly and then integrating these principals into students who will ultimately implement these values into their workplaces, communities, families and churches. (Drexler, 2007)

School Leadership

Hallinger and Hack propose and support the idea that the learning climate of a school is largely determined by the culture created by the principal or academic leader of
the school. (Hallinger & Heck, 1998) Becoming a strong school leader is an arduous task that involves much trial and error, risk taking and the critical skill of becoming a change agent. (Kaufmann, 2007) School leaders have various levels of education and backgrounds and all those pieces contribute to their leadership style. A large amount of responsibility is placed upon the principal or head of school with smaller amounts of responsibility placed upon the teachers and other staff members. This typical hierarchy resembles the following diagram.

![Diagram]

*Figure 1*. The typically school structure/hierarchy

Most schools in the United States resemble this type of structure that places most of the decision making process in the hands of the administrator. Most school administrators are overwhelmed by the volume of their workload and work in isolation, as there may be no one else in their organization who can relate to their needs and problems. (Eckert, 2018) It is critical that school leaders network with others who can relate to the challenges and needs related to school leadership. School leadership can be a lonely profession if performed in isolation. If school leaders are seeking to build a collaborative
culture within their faculty, they themselves should model this behavior in the way they collaborate and engage with other educational leaders.

The leadership style of an administrator has a strong impact upon the culture of the organization and the ability of the institution to meet its goals. Liderlik, (2019) discusses the concept of a spiritual leader. The context of a spiritual leader described by Liderlik is different from what one might think of in the context of a Christian organization. This term is used to describe a leader who provides courage, strength and life to an organization. Although the framework of Liderlik’s work is not necessarily Christian, the terminology is biblical and appropriate for Christian leadership as well. The Bible exhorts believers to “Encourage each other daily” (Hebrews 3:13) and Proverbs 25:11 tells us that encouragement spoken at the right time is like golden apples. By definition, the word encouragement means, “to give courage” and this is exactly the type of leadership that Liderlik describes in his work. A critical part of school leadership is giving courage to students and staff, allowing them to take risk, to fail, and then helping them grow through those experiences. (Brown G., 2007) discusses the importance of administrators building strong relationships as he believes that relationships are the key to creating coherence which ultimately leads to a culture that is open to change. (Brown G., 2007) also believes that leaders can best align their practices to a biblical understanding of leadership in which the leader models the values desired in the school community while serving the people that make up the community and equipping the stakeholders to adopt and carryout the mission of the school. A school leader who does not give courage to others will find his
organization stagnant and filled with the concept of organizational silence. (Liderlik, 2019)

Organizational Silence

The work of Liderlik (2019), discusses the idea of organizational silence. Liderlik defines organizational silence as the members of the organization being afraid to go against the status quo of an organization even if they see significant flaws and weaknesses with the processes, initiative and culture. Typically, this has been observed as an adaptive attitude in which employees adopt the set of expectations and values that are entrenched within the organization. (Liderlik, 2019) Organizational silence inhibits growth and silences the promotion of new ideas, methodologies and philosophies. Schools are organizations of habit and change may be difficult for administrators, teachers, students and parents. The impact of organizational silence on culture is significant. Once an organization becomes complacent, change becomes more and more difficult and creates a stagnant culture. Perlow (2003) found that this “reign of silence” stems from an individual’s fear of expressing their difference with others and their tendency to avoid potential conflict at all cost. Liderlik’s study included administering the Organizational Silence Scale to over 2,700 public school teachers. This tool was designed to measure organization silence in the three distinct categories of acceptance silence, defensive silence and protectionist silence. The highest level of organizational silence discovered through the assessment was in the area of accepting silence. A teacher who accepts silence is someone who has a vision for change, but it unlikely to discuss their thoughts because they believe the organization is incapable of or uninterested in change. The research also
demonstrated a strong correlation between negative scores related to organizational silence and low scores in the perceived spiritual leadership as defined by (Liderlik, 2019). Another study by (Halim, 2018), studied organizational silence and specifically the level of organizational silence related to the demographics of the individual teachers. Halim’s work included 500 teachers and found that most teachers experienced moderate levels of organizational silence. The study also found a strong correlation between higher levels of silence and those who had taught for twenty or more years. Liderlik’s research also demonstrated that even in organizations with strong dynamic leadership, organizational silence still exists and that this concept is difficult to eliminate. (Liderlik, 2019) One surprising finding of Liderlik’s research was that no correlation was established between organizational silence and the academic success of the school. Collective leadership and collaboration may be the key to eliminating organizational silence.

Collective Leadership

Although the research supports the idea that the learning climate is largely impacted by the academic leader of the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), could it be that the collective leadership of the school actually is the factor that makes the greatest impact? Eckert (2018) proposes that leadership is the work that actually occurs and not the individuals, personalities and roles that drive an organization’s mission. If collective leadership is not developed, initiatives may never reach maturity and it is likely that they may change with every leadership transition. With the increasing complexity of schools, developing collective leadership is critical to insure that the mission of the school is achieved, as there is more work to be accomplished than one person is capable of
completing. (Eckert, 2018) Research has promoted the idea of the school leader as a charismatic coach, but could the school leader’s job description be more accurately aligned with that of an architect? (Weiner, 2017) Weiner proposes the idea than an architect is focused on creating the plan and the right conditions for something to be constructed and perhaps that is a more accurate description of a school leader. (2017) Leaders must be intentional about developing collective and collaborative leadership within their schools if they truly want to accomplish anything of lasting significance. Ultimately, this allows the leader to do perform his job at a higher level and may lead to less burnout and a longer tenure for the leader.

In a task-oriented culture, where teachers are more focused on accomplishing their personal goals, little collaboration occurs and overall school goals and objectives are diminished over time. (Cansoy, 2017) Schools that focus on creating a support-oriented culture, where there is an emphasis on personal relationships, collaboration and school-wide initiatives, are schools where there is strong teacher leadership. (Cansoy, 2017) This study demonstrated a strong correlation between the leadership style and emphasis of the principal on determining the culture of collaboration among the faculty. Could it be that the best leadership model that could be implemented in our schools completely reshapes our thinking and creates a shared form of leadership? Eckhert, (2018) purports that the following leadership equation could drastically change the culture of our schools.

Administrator + teacher + student leadership = collective school leadership

Starting in the 2000’s, much emphasis was placed upon Professional Learning Communities as a result of the Obama Administrations Race to the Top program (Crow,
A professional learning community is a grouping of teachers who have a shared purpose working together to accomplish specific initiatives. In some states, this became part of the annual evaluation and certification process. Professional Learning Communities were created to emphasize collaboration among teachers. Crow (2008) states that PLC’s “require intention, a focus on learning, a focus on results, a commitment to collegiality, and a willingness to reshape a school’s culture.”

What started as a fad must now be a point of emphasis for school leaders as they create schedules and build programming to ensure that teachers have adequate time to collaborate. (Battersby, 2015) Particularly in small Christian schools, the workload requires that teachers prepare for multiple classes and sections, serve as leaders of extracurricular activities all while having less than one hour a day of built-in planning time. With this type of schedule, it could be challenging for teachers to plan together, to collaborate and develop a culture of professional learning. School leaders will need to take a creative approach in how they utilize their faculty, how they utilize time/schedules and intentionally create time for planning and collaboration to occur. In an environment where this does not occur, everyone will suffer from the long-term effects. (Drexler, 2007) A strong collaborative environment is key to insuring a strong faculty culture within the school.

“There is probably no sphere of life in which collaboration is more necessary than in the field of education…Education is most successful when all the stakeholders are working together toward a common end.” (Young, 2007)
It is imperative that the students, teachers and parents are working together for the benefit of the school’s mission and ultimately the students of the school.

School Improvement

There seems to be a strong connection between school culture and the ability of a school to continually improve. Wong (2019) identified several key elements that lead to creating an environment in which improvement can occur. Learning expectations for students, trust and respect, organizational learning and student support were noted as the most important factors in this study that impacted sustained improvement. Teachers of the high performing schools that have experienced sustained improvement rated their schools highly in the above factors while lower performing schools noted much lower scores in these same areas.

Many schools have a stagnant culture that does not consistently evaluate and assess its mission, practices and culture. These schools typically have underlying issues that inhibit growth in both its students and faculty, but feedback is rarely solicited and little evaluation occurs. (Headley, 2007) Typically, schools look at assessment through the lens of student achievement and focus little on time and energy on evaluating the leadership of the institution. (Headley, 2007) School improvement is unlikely to occur with substantive and thoughtful assessment and evaluation. The most valuable information is obtained through a structured and deliberate process that continually monitors and evaluates both the culture and the practices and programs within the school. (Lindahl, 2011) Again, culture is a major indicator in whether or not a school is even able to make substantive changes and improvements. The work of Lindahl (2011) also makes an interesting claim
that “A key problem of school reform, I would argue, is when the wrong strategies are applied to the wrong settings.” This quote supports the idea that the implications of school culture are far reaching and influence both the present and the future. Mallory and Reavis (2007) support the concept of utilizing democratic principles such as individual value, equality, freedom, civility; justice and engagement when creating school improvement plans as these democratic principles foster an inclusive evaluation and planning process. These democratic principles serve as the “glue” to help create lasting cultural, procedural, operational and academic changes. (Mallory & Reavis, 2007) Any changes that shortcut these inclusive democratic principles may be short lived and ineffective in bringing about lasting change.

**Student Achievement**

Significant research has been performed related to the effects of school culture upon student learning. Obviously, there are many factors that influence student learning and student achievement and culture is one of the most important factors. For example, research by (Young S., 2018) demonstrates that there was 2% drop in math and English achievement scores during years that significant turnover occurred. This same study reported that there was no variation based upon the size of the school or the age of the school. The researchers also sought to determine if whether the low scores caused teacher turnover or did the teacher turnover cause the lower scores, but there were no conclusive findings. (Young S., 2018) Also noted in this study were cultural issues such as administrative support, student behavior and collegiality that caused teachers to seek positions in other careers or other schools. One could safely assume that teacher turnover
could be a result of the culture of the school and thus the ultimate impact is upon student learning.

Similar research found a significant connection between the job satisfaction of teachers and student achievement particularly in the area of reading. (Banerjee, 2017) Students whose teachers demonstrated a high level of satisfaction scored slightly higher than those students whose teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their job. The same study demonstrated little to no difference between the math scores of the same teachers and students. These conclusions are reinforced in other works like (Borman & Dowling, 2008) who found that issues of retention and attrition are closely tied to the culture influences within the school and that attrition ultimate impacts student’s achievement.

In a unique study that researched student learning and the professional culture of the faculty, Weiner (2017) found direct correlations between a strong professional culture and a high level of student learning. The perceptions of both students and teachers demonstrated a strong connection between student engagement and the professional culture of the faculty. Utilizing a longitudinal study of 130,000 students and 90,000 teachers in New York City, Weiner examined the connection between sustained culture building practices and student success. This research supports the idea that changing culture takes a steady and intentional approach that allows healthy subunits to develop within the school that ultimately become the catalyst for lasting change. (Weiner, 2017)
Student Success

Is there a connection between the culture of the school and the behaviors demonstrated by the students? Seemingly there are some schools who have ongoing discipline issues while others schools have few issues. Marzano (2003) states that students will struggle with policies and procedures in the classroom if the teacher has not built a strong relationship with them. This principle is important in all school settings, but particularly in a Christian school environment. (Brown G., 2007) Teachers must go the extra mile to insure that student’s feel loved and accepted as image-bearers of Christ. As Drexler (2007) notes, “rules without relationship lead to rebellion.” In a report from the Commission on Children at Risk, researchers noted that the best method for dealing with many psychological and behavioral needs of adolescents was to build strong relationships with them. (Drexler, 2007) Christian schools must be intentional to develop a culture focused on grace and restoration, rather than legalism. Many schools have struggled with this balance and the result in many cases is that graduates reject or struggle with their faith because rules were elevated to a position higher than relationships and grace.

The Christian school community stresses the restorative power of God’s grace and in individual lives and within the world community. In an age of cynicism and hopelessness, Christian school people focus on redemption, restoration, and “shalom” – as seen in history, as depicted in literature, as celebrated by the church. Because grace transcends the balance-sheet approach to life, cooperation comes before competition, service before self-interest. (Vryhof, 1989)
In an ever-changing culture and with students who are under great cultural pressures, Christian schools must be focused on building a culture of redemption, restoration and grace.

The work of Reno demonstrates that there are more reported discipline issues in schools with a high minority enrollment and lower socioeconomic status. (Reno, 2017) This study examined the connection between STAR math and reading scores and the behavioral interventions of students serviced by a tier two school. An interesting finding of this work was that teachers who have cultural biases may have unrealistic expectations for their students. If the demographics of the school have changed drastically over time, but the faculty culture for dealing with student behavior has remained the same, the amount of behavioral interventions may actually increase. (Reno, 2017) Additional training may be necessary to insure that all students are treated equally and fairly. (Reno, 2017)

Additional research demonstrates that student behavior is impacted by the culture found within a school. In the School Culture Survey, concerns such as student attendance and school suspensions were examined based upon factors such as degree status, years of experience and certification. (Ohlson, Swanson, Adams-Manning, & Byrd, 2016) The study found that teacher collaboration was the most powerful predictor of student behaviors. Examples of effective collaboration included shared cross-curricular planning, data-driven decision-making and subject-specific professional development. Areas of teacher quality such as experience, certification and degree status had no impact upon student behaviors such as attendance and suspensions. The recruitment and hiring
processes of many school focus largely on experience and degrees rather than determining whether a candidate will meet the collaborative needs of the culture. Research demonstrates that when a school’s culture is focused on academic excellence and prosocial development of students that expulsions will be greatly reduced. (Brown, 2004)

Further research examined three categories of schools, (Exemplary, Recognized and Acceptable) to determine the impact that culture plays upon student success and the overall success of the institution. (MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009) Schools received their designated rating based on the standardized testing results from their individual student body. Schools of each category were administered the Organizational Health Inventory to determine the culture and climate of each school. A strong correlation was found between the schools that scored high on the Organizational Health Inventory and those schools that were rated Exemplary and Recognized. Lower scores on the inventory correlated to the schools that were rated Acceptable.

Kingdom-Focused Culture for Christian Schooling

As mentioned previously, Christian schools take on many different shapes and styles. Should the overall culture of a Christian school be inherently different from its public and private school counterparts because of its faith-based approach to education? The work of Shultz (2003) focuses on a philosophy that incorporates three-fold approach to education involving the home, church and school. Fennema (2005) refers to this concept a “three-legged-stool.” These philosophies purport that in order for a child to receive a truly biblical education; all three entities must be appropriately and adequately involved in the education process of a child. This is a historical and traditional philosophy
that began with the Canons of Dordt, which declared the combined roles of the parents, school and churches. (Young, 2007) The biblical support for this philosophy rest is the following verses as Moses told the people to intentionally pass on the commands of God.

“Here, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words I command you today shall be on your hear. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 English Standard Version)

Ecclesiastes 4:12 supports the idea of the ‘three-legged stool” as the scripture states that “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” The home, church and school working together can be a powerful force that has the potential to influence the life of a student. When any one “leg” is weak or unengaged, there may be a higher potential for cultural influences to prevail.

Although in most cases, parents will not actually teach their own children the typical content of schooling, the parents are still accountable to God for the education of their children and the delegation of the process to others. Ultimately, the parents are biblically responsible for the education of their children and it is critical that the church and school work in a supportive role with the parents.
The church must also be actively engaged in equipping students with the truth of the Bible throughout its teaching and programming. The church bears the responsibility of teaching the articles of faith and the tenets and truths of scripture. (Young B., 2007) Although the teaching roles of the church and school may differ, they will overlap in many ways. (Young, 2007) The understanding and support of these differing roles is critical in insuring a successful partnership. The school must then balance all of these key participants and roles and seek to collaborate with each entity in order to expedite the spiritual, academic and social development of the students. (Schultz, 2003) Young (2007) proposes another model of the collaborative Christian school community in a model that accounts for other important influences such as God, government and community and their influences over the education process.

*Figure 2. Collaborative School Model (Young B., 2007)*
In this model (Young B., 2007), God has granted certain levels of authority to each entity found in the temporal realm. The family is placed as the center as God has ordained in the Bible. All of the other temporal entities function through the parents or in coordination with the parents. This diagram paints a great picture of all of these separate entities working together while all are operating under the authority ordained by God. (Young B., 2007) Although there are many plausible models that will build a collaborative school community, schools and leaders must be intentional about pursuing whatever model that best aligns with their mission and philosophy. Christian schools have a unique opportunity to truly impact students for eternity and the culture of each school will have a high-level of influence upon accomplishing that goal. The research performed by the Cardus Group (2011) was designed to evaluate and improve Christian education. The purpose of the study was to better inform parents of their educational options, to give school leaders key insights into the outcomes of Christian education, to give donors the information needed to understand the value proposition of supporting Christian education and to assist policy makers in understand the value of Christian schooling and ultimately its graduates. The Cardus Educational Study sought the answer the following foundational question.

“To what extent are the motivations and outcomes of Christian schools aligned in academic, spiritual and cultural domains?”

The results of the Cardus study found that Christian school graduates are more likely than non-religious school graduates and catholic school graduates to be actively engaged in a local body of believers, give regularly to their churches and other charitable causes, be more prepared for social relationships such as marriage, serve their local communities. In
the academic realm, Christian school students performed lower than their Catholic school peers, took fewer AP classes, and were not admitted to the same tier of prestigious academic institutions. (Cardus, 2011)

This study demonstrates that the cultural influence within the Christian school are good at accomplishing the spiritual and social goals, but that there continues to be needed work in the area of academic growth and learning.

Limitations

A plethora of information and research exists related to organizational culture, which helps develop a basic understanding of culture. Additionally, a large amount of work has been done related to the implications of culture upon most areas of schooling. Many books have been written imploring leaders to engage in the work related to evaluating, building and maintaining a strong school culture. (Drexler, 2007) (Eckert, 2018) (Grunert & Whitaker, 2015) (Kaufmann, 2007)

Unfortunately, little work has been specifically related to the culture of Christian schooling. Although much of the research performed applies to all school settings, it could be helpful to have research that specifically targets the culture and cultural implications of Christian schooling. Although many authors have written books related to philosophy and methodology, little research has been performed to see the true implications of culture within the Christian school context. The work of Cardus (2011) is helpful, but is broad in nature. The Association of Christian Schools International is in the data analysis stage of a
major study entitled “The Flourishing School Culture Initiative.” This study is designed to:

1. Identify the elements of school culture that contribute to the school’s flourishing and:

2. Develop a robust roadmap to flourishing based on empirical research in Christian schools.

(ACSI, 2019)

The information found in this research study be the answer that many Christian schools have been looking for related to school culture. Moving forward, it would be helpful for more meaningful research to be conducted related to the culture of Christian schooling. Additionally, continued research in the implications for culture school will be needed as our culture; students, learning environment and pedagogy continue to evolve.

Conclusion

As noted in the literature, the culture of a school has a tremendous impact upon many areas of the school. How did the literature answer the questions proposed in this review?

1. **How does the culture of a school create such dramatic differences between schools that have similar missions, budgets and demographics?**

Although there is much written regarding organizational culture and school culture, a limited amount of information exists that compares both culture and demographics, missions and budgets. The most relevant works in this area related to socioeconomics and their impact upon student behavior and student learning. Ultimately, the socioeconomics of a community do have a strong impact upon school culture, as there may be higher
turnover among the teaching staff and fewer financial resources to build a robust program. More research on this topic would be helpful particularly in the private school realm as there can be a great variance among the budgets of schools due to the demographics of the school community. Research in this area could provide valuable information for decision makers and stakeholders of private and Christian schools.

2. **Can the culture of a school have such a dramatic impact upon staff morale, student achievement, the social climate and ultimately the well-being of the students the school is designed to serve?**

A plethora of works dealt with this important question and the overwhelming theme was that culture has a dramatic impact upon staff morale and student achievement. The research repeatedly demonstrated that a stable, engaged and supported faculty created the best environment for student learning to occur. Limited research was found related to the social climate, but the available research noted again that schools with a stable, engaged and supported faculty typically had fewer discipline and behavioral issues than schools with greater turnover and a poor culture.

3. **What impacts does the culture of a school have upon the spiritual environment of a school and ultimately upon the worldview that these schools are seeking to develop in their students?**

Although this topic is of great consequence and interest to those in the Christian school community, there is little to no completed research in this area. The Flourishing Culture Initiative, created by the Association of Christian Schools International, which is currently
in the data analysis phase, will provide great insight into this crucial topic. It is vital that Christian schools identify specific targets that will insure the proper culture exists for spiritual formation and growth. The work by Cardus, (2011) is helpful in showing broad Christian school outcomes, but more specific insight related to cultural distinctives is needed.

4. Is there a particular type of collaborative school community culture found in Christian schools that ultimately leads students to adopt a Christian worldview and then live out their faith in a vibrant way in a postmodern culture?

Again, the Flourishing Culture Initiative will be helpful in determining if there is a specific philosophy, mission or type of school that better supports the development of a biblical worldview. The research by Cardus (2011) demonstrates the value of Christian education related to many of the spiritual outcomes that Christian schools desire, but it does not necessarily distinguish the characteristics or philosophies that are leading to those outcomes. Although there are many strong Christian schools in the United States who are seemingly producing spiritually strong and equipped graduates, it would be helpful for school leaders to identify research supported distinguishing characteristics that have led to these strong outcomes.

Anyone who has been a part of a school community as a student, parent, teacher or administrator has experienced the results of both positive and negative cultural elements. As the literature has demonstrated, the power of culture is significant within any organization but especially within the context of a school. In order for schools to
effectively fulfil their missions, schools must become more intentional about evaluating, developing and maintaining a culture that supports its mission. Are there practical steps that school can take to insure the ongoing process of building and establishing culture?

Some practical suggestions include the following. Schools should utilize evaluation tools to evaluate school culture. Self-created surveys and evaluations may be useful as they can be tailored to the specific mission and core values of the school. Many other assessment and evaluation tools are available for this purpose. In order to establish an accurate cultural snapshot, all stakeholder groups (parents, students, staff, community, etc.) should be included in the process.

School leaders must intentionally and strategically design professional development opportunities focused on school culture. This may include team building activities and other opportunities that build good will among their faculty and staff. These types of activities may be the springboard for collaboration to occur.

A collaborative leadership model should be utilized within the school. How this takes shape within each school will be different based upon the mission of the school and the type and age of students that the school is designed to serve. This may be accomplished within grade level teams, departments or other creative groupings that best serve the school. Collaboration must include more than just collaborative planning, but should also include some policy-related matters and other areas of the school that have influence upon the school culture. Teachers must ultimately feel that they have a voice in the decision making process as many of the decisions that are made ultimately impact them and their students.
Special attention must also be given to the student culture and the feelings and ideas of the students must be valued. A special emphasis should be given to providing teachers training and resources to insure that they are developing strong relationships with their students that allow each student to be actively known by at least one staff member within the school. Schools may want to reevaluate how they deal with discipline and behavioral issues as there are impactful consequences to the school culture when dealing with discipline concerns. Too much grace can lead to an environment without constraint and boundaries. Too little grace can lead to an environment in which students are afraid to make a mistake and can lead to a culture that is focused on outward conformity rather than real transformative change. This is especially true within the environment of a Christian school.

In conclusion, the research has demonstrated that schools that are focused on building a strong and supportive culture will have more positive outcomes than those that do not. These positive outcomes are far-reaching as they impact so many different areas of the school and ultimately the students and community that the school is designed to serve. Likewise, a negative school culture will also have far-reaching consequences that will ultimately impact the students and school community. So what makes the difference among the 133,000 schools within the United States? Why are some schools successful at achieving their mission while other struggle? The ultimate difference is culture and school leaders are ultimately charged with the stewardship of this valuable resource.
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