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The Impact of an International Unit on a School Culture

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a single site case study that investigates the impact of an international unit on the organisational culture of a Catholic Girls College in the city of Christchurch, New Zealand.

Four main data collection procedures were employed in this study to obtain relevant material useful for describing the school culture and for identifying any apparent changes to the organisational culture between 1996-2002. Statistical searches, document searches, on-site observations, and interviews occurred at various times throughout the school year. Incoming data was analysed to search for emergent themes consistent with the literature. Results from the study relate to identifying demographic patterns, describing the school culture, examining and describing the cultural change process and describing the corresponding impact on the culture elements of this school community.

Two basic directions underpin this study. One is concerned with the intangible and tangible manifestations within the school culture that have been subject to change, and the other with the implications of change on the members of the school community. The examination of cultural elements was aligned with the framework of school culture provided by Beare, Caldwell & Milliken (1989). A school culture model is provided to give insight into the main cultural characteristics of Villa Maria College. A second culture model, the Change Wave Process Model is introduced as an analysis framework for a selection of cultural change examples applicable to the development of the international unit at this school.

This study has revealed that a school is a culturally unique learning organisation that is directly, indirectly or unconsciously changed by people for the purpose of providing positive impacts on the people and the organisation as a whole. The major outcomes from this study indicate that the development of a new international unit at Villa Maria College has produced a number of positive and negative interactive forces that have in various ways impacted on the organisational culture.

The changes that have occurred since 1996 as the international unit has grown and became established have affected the composition of a number of cultural elements that lie at different levels within the school organisation. The surface manifestations that are obvious in physical features or human interaction patterns have been further enhanced as new staff roles and responsibilities, rituals, ceremonies and symbols have been introduced with the formation of the international unit. The subsurface manifestations such as the values and the underlying assumptions of the school have also been subjected to change though to a lesser degree. A broadening assumption base has appeared in the most recent decade as the school has introduced new policies and programmes in an attempt to meet the standards set down in the national policy and curriculum frameworks relating to the education of international students. As a result key values such as equality, social justice, appreciation, tolerance and respect have been openly expressed and accentuated with the introduction of this new group to the school.

The study concludes with an action-based model that encourages members of the various cultural units of this organisation to be involved in ongoing critical cultural evaluation activities that enable members of the school to inspect cultural change processes in the future.

CONTENTS

Title Page	I
Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	III
Table of Contents	V
List of Tables and Figures	VIII
Definition of Terms	IX
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Thesis Background and Rationale	2
1.2 Research Problem	7
1.3 Research Aims	7
1.4 Research Questions	8
1.5 Outline of Thesis	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Culture: An Elusive Concept	10
2.1.1 The Search for Common Culture Strands in an Educational Context	11
2.2 Linking Subculture to Culture	17
2.2.1 Subculture in Education	17
2.2.2 The Unit Culture Concept	22
2.3 The Cultural Change Process	23
2.3.1 The Effectiveness and Improvement Focus	24
2.3.2 The Teacher Focus	28
2.3.3 The Relationship Focus	30
2.3.4 The Leadership Focus	31
2.4 International Impact	32
2.4.1 Tangible Aspects Subject to Change	34
2.4.2 Intangible Aspects Subject to Change	38
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	41
3.1 Research Site	41

3.2 Research Participants	42
3.3 Research Design	42
3.4 Limitations of the Case Study	44
3.5 Strengths of the Case Study	45
3.6 Theoretical Approach Underpinning the Case Study	47
3.6.1 Critical Theory	48
3.7 Ethical Considerations in Relation to the Research	50
3.8 Fieldwork: Data Collection and Analysis	52
3.9 Culture Models	58
3.10 Concluding Remarks	59
CHAPTER FOUR: THE SCHOOL CULTURE	60
4.1 A School Culture Model	60
4.2 Concluding Remarks	88
CHAPTER FIVE: THE CHANGE PROCESS	90
5.1 The Change Wave Process Model	90
5.2 Unit Culture Development	97
5.2.1 Demographic Patterns	98
5.2.2 Analysing the Change Process	102
5.3 The International Unit Culture	128
5.4 Features of the Cultural Change Process	131
5.5 Concluding Remarks	135
CHAPTER SIX: THE IMPACT	136
6.1 Tangible Aspects Subject to Change	136
6.1.1 Enhanced Physical Environment	136
6.1.2 New Symbolic Matter	138
6.1.3 New Behaviour Patterns	142
6.1.4 New Language Networks	152
6.2 Intangible Aspects Subject to Change	154
6.2.1 Broadening Underlying Assumptions	154
6.2.2 Heightened Values	156
6.2.3 Beliefs Remained Unchanged	158

6.3 Issues Requiring Ongoing Attention	158
6.3.1 The Need to Value Peoples Efforts	159
6.3.2 Providing Professional Development Applicable to School Change	160
6.3.3 New Needs Require New Resources	162
6.3.4 Curriculum Concerns	163
6.3.5 Allocating Appropriate Levels of Entry for the International Student	165
6.4 Concluding Remarks	167
CHAPTER SEVEN: PRAXIS	168
7.1 A Model for Effectiveness Evaluation and Improvement	168
7.1.1 The Cultural Collaborative Effectiveness Model	169
7.1.2 Evaluating School Effectiveness	173
7.1.3 Taking Charge of Change	176
7.2 Concluding Remarks	179
CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	180
8.1 Summarising the Answers to the Research Questions	180
8.1.1 Question One	181
8.1.2 Question Two	186
8.1.3 Question Three	189
8.1.4 Question Four	192
8.1.5 Question Five	193
8.2 Methodological Limitations of the Study	195
8.3 Research Effects on People	197
8.4 Suggestions for Future Research	198
8.5 Concluding Remarks	200
APPENDICES	202
BIBLIOGRAPHY	227

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of School Effectiveness Features	27
Table 2: Research Timetable 2002	57
Table 3: Symbolic Examples	75
Table 4: Ritualistic Examples	85
Table 5: Ceremonial Examples	87
Table 6: Villa Maria College International Unit Composition 1996 - 2002	101
Table 7: The Impact of the International Unit on the School Culture of Villa Maria College	187

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Assessing and Developing School Culture	5
Figure 2: Villa Maria College School Culture Model	62
Figure 3: The Change Wave Process Model	92
Figure 4: Number of Secondary Foreign Fee Paying Students 1993-2000	100
Figure 5: Villa Maria College International Unit Development Time-line 1996-2002	103
Figure 6: Cultural Collaborative Effectiveness Model	170

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms, which are used throughout this study, may require further elaboration:

International Student: a permanent resident or fee-paying student of Non-English speaking background that requires ESOL instruction.

Local /Domestic Students: a permanent resident New Zealand student who speaks English or Maori as a first language.

International Unit: a group of professional educators and international students that work closely together to achieve educational, social and personal goals in a school.

Unit Culture: a group of people who are related by a set of shared social characteristics, that belong to or are associated with (as an attached unit), an organisational group that shares in a common set of social characteristics (some of which may differ from the smaller unit).

Cultural Unit: a well recognised group of people referred to regularly in an educational context – administrators, teachers, students, families, that hold other associated fractional groups that contribute to the wholeness of an organisation.

Co-nationals: individuals of the same nationality.

Cross-cultural: involving more than one culture.

NESB: Non-English-Speaking Background. This term is used in New Zealand when referring to students and others who are from a language background other than English. NESB students include specific ethnic groups, new arrivals/immigrants and New Zealand-born NESB students.

ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages. This term is used in New Zealand when making reference to resources or programmes for NESB students or to those people who work with NESB students.

FFPS: Foreign Fee-paying Students.