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AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF SCHOOL CULTURE, TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN A SELECTED NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOL

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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JOSEPH TZE-KIN MAK

1998

Errata

to the thesis of Joseph Tze-Kin Mak entitled "An Ethnographic Study of School Culture, Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment in a Selected New Zealand Secondary School"

Page 36, line 1 The concept of culture has received increasing attention ...

Page 203, line 20 the senior school is concerned, with the new national qualifications

Page 244, line 8 I found the job allows me to have some input

Page 319, line 15 something to do with specificity and precision.

Page 331, line 1 How can we succeed in doing it?

Page 333, line 19 as a pat on the back

Page 360, line 8 There was one interesting point which was worth noting

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ABSTRACT

Mak, J.T.K. 1998.

An Ethnographic Study of School Culture, Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment in a Selected New Zealand Secondary School.

Ph.D. (Education) Thesis submitted to The College of Education, Massey University, New Zealand.

This thesis describes a study of the school culture of a public secondary school for girls in a New Zealand provincial city. The main aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between school culture and teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment in a New Zealand secondary school. The study sought to identify the elements of school culture which have an effect on teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In particular, the study also investigated the ways in which these cultural elements affect teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and the way in which the school culture can be shaped to enhance teachers' job satisfaction and to foster teachers' commitment.

The present research was an ethnographic case study in which the culture of one secondary school was studied by using the ethnographic research approach for cultural description and interpretation (Geertz, 1975).

With the emphasis on participant observations in the field as the main research technique, the study also employed both formal and informal informant interviews of people in the school and document analysis as data gathering techniques. The researcher spent a substantial period of time at a selected New

Zealand secondary school for a period lasting more than one school year in the field as a participant observer, observing the cultural life of the school as it took place in the participants' daily living in order to provide a "thick description" of this cultural life from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The concept of the interpretive paradigm (Morgan, 1980) was used to interpret the data which were gathered in the fieldwork phase of the study in order to discover the reality from the perspectives of the participants.

The concept of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was adopted in that there was no preconceived theoretical construct to be proved or disproved during the study (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973), but the study was guided by a selected group of relevant concepts constituting the conceptual framework for the research processes. This group of concepts included the concepts of culture, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, ethnography, interpretive paradigm, and grounded theory approach.

Four cultural themes were generated in the present study which related school culture to teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment:

1. Congruence of school values with teachers' professional goals;
2. Mediating factors enhancing teachers' identification with the school;
3. School values and teachers' need satisfaction;
4. Mediating factors enhancing teachers' job satisfaction

THEME ONE: CONGRUENCE OF SCHOOL VALUES WITH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL GOALS

The congruence of basic philosophy and core values of the school culture with the personal needs and professional values of the individual teachers is important for the development of teachers' commitment to the school as an organization. This congruence of school philosophy and core values of the school with the personal needs, professional values and expectations of teachers fosters teachers' acceptance for the school values and their identification with the school. And this teachers' acceptance of the school values and their identification with the school is an essential condition for the development of teachers' commitment to the school as an organization.

THEME TWO: MEDIATING FACTORS ENHANCING TEACHERS' IDENTIFICATION WITH THE SCHOOL

The processes leading to teachers' acceptance for the school values and their identification with the school are also mediated by a number of cultural factors: a strong and positive cultural leadership; a collaborative culture with participative decision making process; and the effective means of reaching cultural consensus which include wide consultation network and open communication channels.

THEME THREE: SCHOOL VALUES AND TEACHERS' NEED SATISFACTION

The degree to which teachers are satisfied with their job depends very much on the extent to which teachers' personal needs as a teacher at school are gratified and their professional goals and expectations of their job are met. Teachers' personal needs, their professional goals and expectations of their job as a teacher are influenced by their understanding of the teaching profession and their perception of the roles as a teacher. And, teachers' role perception is in turn affected by the basic philosophy and core values of the school's culture.

THEME FOUR: MEDIATING FACTORS ENHANCING TEACHERS' JOB SATISFACTION

The processes of need satisfaction and goal achievement in teachers, as stated in Theme Three, are mediated by a number of cultural factors which can be classified into two categories:

4(a) cultural relations which include: teachers' relationships with their students, supervisors and colleagues; and

4(b) other cultural factors which include: the organizational characteristics of the school, professional autonomy, recognition of contribution and achievement and the professional support and encouragement provided by the school leaders.

These four cultural themes provide answers to the following four research questions being addressed in the present study:

1. What are the elements of school culture which affect teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment?
2. How do these identified cultural elements affect teachers' organizational commitment?
3. How do these identified cultural elements affect teachers' job satisfaction?
4. What are the implications of these research findings for school administrators who seek to shape and sustain a school culture which enhance teachers' satisfaction in their job and their commitment to the school as an organization?

The study concludes with a cultural theory of teacher's job satisfaction and organizational commitment generated from the cultural elements which were identified from the data and the cultural themes derived from the data analysis in the present study. An examination of the methodology was also considered with some directions for further study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the cooperation and support of a number of people, and I hereby acknowledge my appreciation for their contributions.

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Finally, to my family who have provided the understanding and support, often under adverse conditions, I dedicate this thesis. To my children, Clarence and Clara, my warm thanks are noted for your understanding and patience when your dad was working "at Massey" "all the time" "day and night" instead of having sports with you over the weekends or sharing with you your favourite books and games in the evenings. To my wife, Barley, in particular, I present this thesis as but a small token in return for her infinite patience, understanding, support and care of so many aspects of family life.

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