

Introduction and Organization of the Fieldbook

This guide is designed to help you reflect on and hone leadership skills as you shape a better learning environment at your school where every child can learn. It may legitimate some of what you already know and are doing or add new possibilities. It also provides activities to develop cultural leadership, and it deepens and concretizes the concept of school culture by connecting it to the success of schools and students.

When gathering cases for our second edition of *Shaping School Culture*, we sought the best examples of a wide variety of cultural patterns and ways. These examples of what is possible piqued the curiosity of others. Over the past few years, interested leaders have asked us to help them learn how to read, appraise, and shape the culture of their school or district. Facing greater accountability, new curricular standards, and an expanded use of data in decision making, school leaders have often tightened structures. But the best leaders never forgot the central importance of their school's culture. Drawing on approaches we have used with thousands of principals, as well as new ideas from the leadership literature, we have distilled concrete ways to approach cultural analysis, review, and reinforcement. In this new edition, we have added more case examples, deepened the descriptions of the elements of culture, and expanded the set of strategies

leaders can use to nurture positive and transform toxic cultures. We have redesigned many of the activities and added new ones to enhance the repertoire of leaders. We have written a completely new chapter on the important topic of people and relationships, the informal network in schools. This chapter describes the positive and negative roles staff take on and how to work with them. This new chapter offers strategies for making the informal network a productive element of the school's culture.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This guide combines both active and reflective approaches for those who wish to invigorate their school's professional community, build trust and commitment, and return the heart and spirit to our schools. Underlying the chapters are three key processes for shaping cultural ways and traditions.

Leaders must

- Read cultural clues
- Review existing patterns and ways
- Reinforce or transform the culture

Initially, it is critical that leaders read existing cultural practices and ways to understand the key features of the culture. They need to revisit roots—the history of their district or school—and reconsider core features of the present. During this process, the leader is interpreting and intuitively identifying familiar ways that are positive as well as traditional baggage that is negative, depressing, or draining.

Second, leaders need to hold up existing customs against other possibilities. They need to identify positive, supportive norms, values, rituals, and traditions to understand the meaning of stories and to know the import of symbols. But they should also pinpoint cultural aspects that may be negative, harmful, or toxic. What positive things need more reinforcement? What time-honored but worn-out practices may need to be jettisoned?

Finally, leaders must work in a variety of ways to reinforce cultural patterns or else transform them. Even the best ways of life and meaningful rituals of a district or school need constant attention. In addition, moribund or negative features may need to be transformed, changed, or even shed. Both nurturance and change are part of cultural leadership.

THE FIELDBOOK'S ORGANIZERS: DISCUSSIONS, EXAMPLES, ACTIVITIES, AND CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

This book provides a wide variety of sources of information, inspiration, and suggestions. It can be read and used in a multitude of ways, either as a whole or in part. Each chapter begins with a discussion of the features of culture and the roles of symbolic leaders. These discussions are often followed by a set of illustrative examples.

Next, the book provides specific activities for individuals or teams that we call "Activities." Some are specifically designed as group activities, with suggestions for how to organize the session. Others are meant to stimulate reflection; in that case, the questions can become topics for dialogue or group brainstorming. These approaches have been tested and used with hundreds of educators.

Interspersed throughout the book are additional questions that we have titled "Crucial Questions," which provide the reader with ideas of interest to consider or to discuss with staff. These questions are useful for leaders to consider, but can also become the guiding topics for a staff discussion. Sometimes there are further suggestions for activities, reflections, and planning.

