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TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHER DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF A SINGAPORE MISSION SCHOOL

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Abstract: This paper presents a conceptual framework for effective teacher development in Singapore schools. In particular, the role of mission schools, which have attempted in the past to provide a well-defined moral and ethical basis for professional development and acculturation, is examined. One such mission school in Singapore was researched extensively to examine one type of school culture necessary for effective teacher development. The development of a teacher as a 'moral agent' pursuing the teaching profession as a 'moral craft' in a 'moral environment' (Zeichner and Liston, 1987; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992) is examined, with special attention given to the processes which serve to delimit as well as nurture personal growth. A dialectical socialisation process results from interaction between the unique Singaporean education system, the altruistic and moral ideals of the teacher, and the professional requirements of the vocation. This process is charted with reference to the development of teachers in the school. The framework is grounded mainly in North American studies related to classwork and personal growth, as well as the teachers' moral purpose, and collaborative learning contexts in schools (e.g. Fullan, 1991; Massey and Chamberlin, 1990). It has been adapted with reference to Singapore's unique conditions. Some recommendations regarding the development of a conducive culture and context for teacher development in Singapore are proposed.

Introduction

When one thinks of the development of the teacher in society, it is natural to ask what the main function of a teacher is, how a person is trained to carry out this function, and why anybody chooses to be trained for this in the first place. Society and culture may define a teacher by what the public perception of a 'teacher' is. Educators may define a teacher by what a teacher ought to do. The subject matter may define the role; a great moral teacher is viewed differently from a great chemistry teacher. A teacher may seek to meet any or all such definitions, thus in effect learning to play a role created by others.

Many researchers have examined these issues; a survey of the research literature shows three main types of models. Some are person-centred ('internal'), assuming that the individual's background (family and school), personal experiences, personal beliefs and responses to the environment are most important; some are society-centred ('external'), assuming that the forces of society are so pervasive and moulding that individuals have little choice in their behaviour and are transformed as society requires; some are procedural, assuming that anyone can become an effective teacher given the right vocational training. Some also consider both the dialectical relationship between individuals and society as well as the interplay between 'internal' and 'external' factors.

In this paper, the societal context is that of modern Singapore, a specific society with its own unique combination of societal forces and its own unique education system. The interaction between these elements is also unique, and hence a useful model for teacher development in Singapore must take that into account. It is, however, possible that since all human societies (and in

particular, the post-colonial ones of Southeast Asia) have elements in common, the solutions for effective teacher development that work in the Singapore context might also apply to other societies within the region.

Models of Teacher Development — A Brief Summary

Internal

Schön (1983) described the idea that a teacher receives feedback from his environment, thinks about it, and puts this thinking into his practice of teaching — an internal process. Schön came to the conclusion that the successful professional teacher is a '*reflective practitioner*': one who takes into account his unique interpersonal, economic, and sociopolitical environment; who develops solutions to problems and improvements to procedures based on his own thoughts. Schön presents the teacher as an '*artist*' dealing with unique human cases, not a mechanic dealing with a factory line.

Other researchers (e.g., Shulman, 1988; Fenstermacher, 1979, 1986) have differed. They have argued that the internal, tacit knowledge of the teacher is incomplete without 'technical rationality' — functionality which is based on accepted reasoning — and that a teacher should have objective as well as subjective justification for what he does. Korthagen and Wubbels (1995) showed that the reflective practitioner is a happier, better socialised teacher. Bengtsson (1995) concludes self-reflection makes teachers better at enhancing their own competence and teaching others how to do the same. Conle (1997) applied such concepts to the socialisation of teachers: to her, teachers learnt by reflecting on their circumstances and applying such reflection to working out a good fit between themselves and the environment.

Other researchers have considered the logical antecedents to the teacher's modes of thought and response — personal background and ongoing life experiences. Such researchers (e.g., Wright, 1959; Eddy, 1969; Lortie, 1975) have used psychological and social models to show how such antecedents contribute to a teacher's response to his environment, and subsequent development. Goodman (1988a) and Hollingsworth (1989) also found that the prior experiences of learning teachers define a mindset which is subsequently modified by further experiences in classrooms and the work environment.

Philosophers like Polanyi (1958) have argued that the implicit commitments which guide people are based on frameworks of personal knowledge. Such frameworks or schemata affect (and even distort) perceptions because of the way mnemonic processes work; Ornstein (1991), summarised the situation as follows: memory is selective, memory is interpretive, and memory is integrative. In other words, we learn what we want, we see what we want, and we construct our models of the world based on that.

External

This kind of model is based on societal and organisational perspectives. Such models consider the roles society requires of a teacher, and how people are best moulded for such roles ('socialisation').

Goodman (1988b) found that not all teachers are able to move beyond the stage of critical compliance. A number adopt utilitarian perspectives based on external constraints — goals set by school, time available, administrative limitations and bureaucratic pressures. This first type of teacher fulfils the societal role of the 'standard-model' teacher. Stout (1989) showed that society perpetuates this role either tacitly or deliberately. Zeichner and Liston (1987) refer to such

compliant ‘standard-model’ teachers as ‘technicians’. They are adequate practitioners, but tend to approach teaching from a mainly technical/vocational point of view.

A second type of teacher is described by Shulman (1987), who writes of content-based pedagogical knowledge. This kind of teacher, the ‘pedagogue’, is an expert in a particular content-area (‘content’ of knowledge) and the means by which this knowledge is generated and imparted (‘form’ of knowledge).

A third, and more complex, role is that of the expert who also functions as a moral guide. Zeichner and Liston (1987) refer to this type as a sort of ‘moral craftsman’, who considers the ethical and moral implications of a given approach or body of knowledge.

The structures and processes which mould people so that they are prepared to adopt such roles are ‘agents of socialisation’. Human agents of socialisation, as summarised by Staton and Hunt (1992) include principals and other administrators, colleagues, mentors, supervisors, cooperating teachers, pupils, and even the parents of pupils. Massey and Chamberlin (1990), and Grimmett and Crehan (1992), describe how such human agents can ‘indoctrinate’ beginning teachers with a well-defined set of values and provide support for such teachers who are still finding their way in the new environment. They find that it is essential that teachers critically reflect on, and assess, the moral basis of the practices involved, and so find an effective solution to any differences in perspective. Early perspectives still provide a position to fall back on if the school culture is unconvincing.

Goodlad’s (1984) research in schools in the United States showed that, in general, teachers were reasonably satisfied as long as they were treated as professionals, but had an increasing sense of powerlessness over their circumstances. Most teachers left the profession because of frustration and dissatisfaction with work conditions.

The role of ‘external’ factors is therefore one which is important because it determines the effective scope of a teacher’s development by making some roles more appropriate and others less so. Such factors interact with ‘internal’ factors to bring about a teacher’s development, dialectical socialisation or departure from the profession.

Mixed Internal and External

This way of looking at things is exemplified by the work of Fullan and Hargreaves (1991). They assert that frameworks for understanding teacher development should consider four factors: 1) the teacher’s purpose, 2) the teacher as a person, 3) the real-world context in which teachers work, and 4) the culture of teaching. The first two can be considered ‘internal’ and the last two ‘external’.

To address the first factor, we define teaching as a moral craft, in which the teacher derives understanding of the teaching role from the moral purpose behind it (Zeichner and Liston, 1987; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992). The teacher is guided by internal values of some sort, which lead that teacher to value development in others, to seek to be an agent of such development, and to apply such values to the methods by which others may be developed. The research by Korthagen and Wubbels (1995) mentioned also showed the importance of the ‘moral/reflective craftsman’ to society — positive people with internal motivation appear easier to socialise.

To address the second factor, we see the teacher as a person with initial perspectives and views which affect subsequent development. Such perspectives provide a context in which the professional development of teachers may be understood (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Nias, 1989; Day, 1993; Kelchtermans, 1993).

Addressing the third factor, Staton and Hunt (1992), in their review of teacher socialisation, concluded that although personal background is a strong influence initially, practical classroom experience transforms teachers' instructional and interpersonal approaches. They also conclude that new teachers who understand the nature of the profession, have better self-knowledge and a well-defined teaching philosophy become more successful teachers.

The last factor to be addressed is the 'professional culture', which includes a teacher's working relationships and interaction with school philosophy and culture. Whereas the real-world context provides a sort of general outline, daily interactions with others (with their own beliefs and motivations) will shape a teacher's professional thinking and perception (Hart and Adams, 1986; Schempp and Graber, 1992).

The Local Context — Singapore

At this point, an overview of the demands of Singaporean society on its general population, the ethos of the nation, should be given. 'Demands' is perhaps too exaggerated a term, but it effectively describes the weight of social norms and traditions in an Asian society. The best way of defining these in such a context, therefore, is to look at the words and directives of the 'founding fathers' — such as Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Keng Swee. The People's Action Party, their political party, has been governing for about 40 years, having come to power in 1959.

As far back as 1966, Lee had defined his agenda for the nation's soul. Reflexes of group thinking had to be built to ensure the survival of the community even if it meant a reshuffling of values (Lee, 1966). Singaporeans had to be loyal and patriotic, good soldiers ready to defend their country, filial, respectful to elders, law-abiding and responsible, tolerant of Singaporeans of different races and religions (Lee, 1979). Lee's priorities for the nation have always been clear, and in the preface to his memoirs, he mentions his hope "that they [the modern generation of Singaporeans] will know that honest and effective government, public order and personal security, economic and social progress did not come about as the natural course of events" (Lee, 1998).

The general tone is one of socioeconomic pragmatism and the subordination of individualism and individual values to the good of the nation. However, this could lead to less useful outcomes. Lee's fellow 'founding father', Goh, pointed out two widespread areas of weakness in the Ministry of Education: the cult of obedience and the cult of secrecy (Goh, 1981). To him, the former entailed unquestioning obedience to superiors while demanding the same of subordinates; the latter entailed subordinate officers being denied access to documents on grounds of secrecy, without justification.

These and many other examples show Singapore to be very much like a modern-day version of the 'Machiavellian' city-state. There are some obvious similarities between Singapore's political philosophy and that of the Renaissance philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527). According to Machiavelli (1514), a government could only be perfect if it governed by exact and well-defined laws, the equality of every citizen before the law could be guaranteed, and every citizen had the right to have an occupation. The ruler of the state had to be able, ruthlessly, to maintain unity and order and resist chaos — regardless of religious beliefs, sectarian ideas, and individual rights. Machiavelli advocated a Republic ruled by those most adept at seeking and obtaining success and power for the state, with citizens having a place in government. Security of the state was paramount, and moral entanglements and religion should not be divisive factors in public discourse. Being a man of his time, he assumed that leaders should be well-educated, well-read men of broad interests and cunning perception. They would see no difficulty as being insurmountable given the will and the effort.

All this is in agreement with Singapore's 'founding fathers'. Collective unity despite potentially divisive factors, citizen participation, a basis in the equal rule of law, aims of national prosperity and progress — these describe present-day Singapore as well as they describe Machiavelli's city-state. Singapore is not fully 'socialist' or 'democratic' or even 'Confucianist' — it is above all 'pragmatic', adopting whatever works from a wide range of systems and philosophies.

To analyse the effect of such an environment is no simple matter, but a few observations can be made after considering the available literature on the teaching profession in Singapore as a whole. Ho (1989), in a review of the existing literature on teacher development and education in Singapore from 1968 to 1988, pointed out the dearth of research in the area of teacher development at that time. He could find only two studies concerning the motives for entering the profession: Lau (1968) and Soh (1983).

These two studies, the latter a follow-up to the former, sought to profile the typical beginning teacher in the Singapore system as a baseline for future research. Another study (Institute of Education, 1980; 1982), on teacher objectives as viewed by lecturers in education, school principals and full-time diploma-in-education students at the end of their course, gave another interesting perspective. Principals placed high value on cooperation and reliability, but low value on adaptability, alertness and leadership ability (Institute of Education, 1980). Students rated effective human relationships, leadership ability and good judgement higher than principals did, while ranking reliability and cooperation lower. In most areas, student teachers agreed with their lecturers more than with principals (Institute of Education, 1982).

The late 1980s were very different. A survey of the history of educational reform in Singapore (Yip, Eng and Yap, 1990) characterised 1985 as a watershed year. Singapore's economic growth slowed for the first time since independence in 1965 and educational policy was reviewed with the aim of making the state more competitive.

While educational policy has evolved, Singaporean society has also become more affluent. The socioeconomic gap between the milieu of the late 60s and early 80s was fairly large, but that between the mid-90s and the early 80s is even larger. The economy has shifted towards service industries, and education has shifted along with it. The issue of survival in the 1960s and 70s led to the issue of efficiency in the 1980s and has recently given way to that of maximising ability. All this has brought about changes and conflicts in traditional perspectives. The government has in recent years seen fit to publicise its goals for the present day in *The Desired Outcomes of Education* (Ministry of Education, 1997), issued to remind education personnel of their official roles.

In Gopinathan's (1991) account of the educational history of Singapore, he summarises the relationship between state and education system as follows: 1) the government's massive investment in (and successful delivery of) education legitimises and perpetuates the type of government it is; 2) educational policy is seen mainly as a tool of manpower development for various economic, social, military and administrative ends; 3) educational policy is considered an out-of-bounds area for public involvement, as the views of professional educators and the lay public are only minimally solicited and otherwise considered only 'as a source of ideas' (p.282); 4) all this is made possible by the very high level of general support the ruling party has, and takes care to maintain (normally by economic means and measures).

Moral Agents, Agents of Change

An effective teacher, in the context of Singapore at the terminus between 20th and 21st centuries, must therefore be a successful and moral agent of change. This is so because the environment, one

of the determining factors of teacher development and growth, is itself constantly changing. The system which trains and prepares teachers to join the profession must encourage a flexible mindset which can handle change and chaos as inevitable and manageable. The teaching environment must be able to sustain professional growth and development. Finally, teachers need to maintain professional standards with a high level of ethical behaviour and moral commitment.

Fullan (1993) summarised the requirements for teacher effectiveness in schools. What is interesting is that he lists 'commitment to moral purpose' as the very first requirement. Morality and ethics are an area seldom explicitly mentioned in the context of education in Singapore. While teachers and students are exhorted to be moral and ethical, closer examination is seldom carried out. This is probably because Singapore seeks racial and religious harmony in its extremely multi-racial and multi-religious environment — and not everyone agrees as to the details of morality and ethics.

Some schools, for example, those founded in Singapore by various Christian religious missions (Roman Catholic and Methodist predominantly) have long taken upon themselves the burden of teaching the young to distinguish right from wrong by creed and by intellectual discourse. It is institutions such as these which are most likely to be in the business of inculcating consistent value systems of wide applicability and firm integrity.

These schools subsume the moral and ethical aspects within what they term 'the spiritual'. It is a dimension which encourages the propagation of a single philosophy within a culture permeated by the features of that philosophy. Hence such schools are able to provide and instill the 'evangelistic' acculturation described by Massey and Chamberlin (1990), as well as the moral purpose demanded by Zeichner and Liston (1987), and the necessary commitment to that purpose (Fullan, 1993). Potentially, they are sources of systems in which teacher development conforms to the theories of how a teacher is best developed — as a moral, reflective practitioner. The case of one such school is presented below.

Short Case Study: Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), Singapore

This case study was first presented in greater detail (with the school pseudonymously named as 'Faithlight Independent') as part of a larger study on teacher development in Singapore schools (Chew, 1999). The Anglo-Chinese School in Singapore is an institution dating back to 1886. Its current incarnation was found in that larger study to provide good developmental opportunities for teachers and to provide an environment conducive to positive teacher development. A brief summary of the larger study is presented here.

The school has a strong sense of tradition and history. Founded by Methodist missionaries, it has over the years developed a reputation for producing alumni who are fiercely loyal, creative, independent and willing to serve. As a national institution, it has educated government ministers and senior civil servants, leaders in the police and armed forces, educators, church leaders, sportsmen and scholars of all kinds. The alumni form the largest organisation of the kind in Singapore, and they have a strong sense of common identity.

The school is also well provided for. Facilities are ample and the curriculum is broad. Its staff:student ratio is approximately 1:13. Numerous links to overseas organisations have established its reputation at an international level; it has alumni branches in the US, UK, Canada and other countries. Its board of management and board of governors comprise well-connected alumni who can call upon external support in many ways.

The guiding principles and moral values of the school are inculcated through daily devotional talks and other religious services; these principles and values are those of the Methodist founders and encourage a broad sense of vision, excellence in work, personal integrity, faith in God, and service to society (among others).

Staff induction and socialisation proceeds along appropriate lines; new teachers are inducted through technical and vocational briefings, but are also inducted informally by existing staff. Since the school milieu is a complex one, with complex interactions between inter-related processes and personnel, a new teacher is normally mentored more-experienced teachers. There is much informal interaction over meals and in other social contexts.

The average teacher is given a wide range of opportunities to prove himself. Over a period of 2-3 years, most teachers will have been offered a range of tasks not only in academic areas, but in extra-curricular areas, pastoral care, and school committees dealing with special events and programmes. Recognition is granted in many ways.

Staff who stay on for several years feel a sense of family: teachers here show a strong professional basis behind personal interactions and a strong personal basis behind professional interactions. The negative side is that those who leave after many years of service may be bitter or feel they have outlived their usefulness.

Internal staff surveys showed that most teachers in the school are very satisfied with their working conditions. However, a few are simply overwhelmed by the complexity of the school environment. Since so much of the system operates on an informal level as well as a formal one, those who by nature are less socially adept may find themselves unable to take advantage of the informal opportunities for collegiate support.

Over the years, the school has built up a large and effective talent pool as this system tends to favour teachers who have a capacity to cope with change and development on several simultaneous fronts. These teachers also generally possess a sense of pride in the school and a sense of mission which goes beyond the purely vocational.

At the same time, it is this acculturation which makes a teacher more likely to be promotable within the school. This is a form of reward for successful socialisation which benefits the school: only teachers who fit in well (in whatever way they can) will gain positions which enable them to socialise others. The eventual outcome is a remarkably homogeneous school culture propagated by a remarkably heterogeneous group of people.

In general, the majority of teachers in the school (55.4%) attributed their positive feelings for the school, and their work in the school, to the values and virtues they perceived as part of the 'spiritual philosophy' of the school. One could infer from this that the synergy between personal values and the school's philosophy leads to a better work environment and a more positive attitude — and hence that the degree of this 'coupling' should in part determine the effectiveness of teacher development.

Teachers also attributed their positive feelings to their colleagues (37.8%). This provides further support for the idea that one important element of effective teacher development is the collegiate environment.

A Conceptual Framework of School, Teacher and Nation in the Singapore Context

By looking at the various models of teacher development in the literature and Chew's (1999) findings concerning mission schools in the Singapore context, it is possible to construct a framework describing the various possible interactions between a teacher, a school, and the state.

To begin with, a teacher is basically a wielder of a technical skill. This skill is enhanced by reflective practice, and is supported by an ethical and moral basis. At a deeper level, the teacher is affected by his experiences, and even more deeply, by any strongly-held religious or spiritual beliefs.

A school can be thought of as an entity composed of students within an infrastructure. This is useless without a curriculum, normally supported by a set of values and norms which dictate the way the curriculum is delivered. Some schools have a long tradition or a well-developed culture which upholds these values, and some may have a spiritual mission or orientation which is responsible for the dominant culture.

A state can be thought of as an economic entity at a very basic level. For the state to develop further, social stability and integration must occur. This development is supported by common values and norms within society, which can be enhanced if the citizens share a common culture and ethos. In some cases, this commonality is strengthened by a common spiritual basis or heritage (for example, in Islamic countries).

Essentially, each of the three entities may be considered and understood in terms of five aspects or levels which show development. Each level is enhanced by the ones below it, and manifests itself more obviously than they do. This is shown in Table 1.

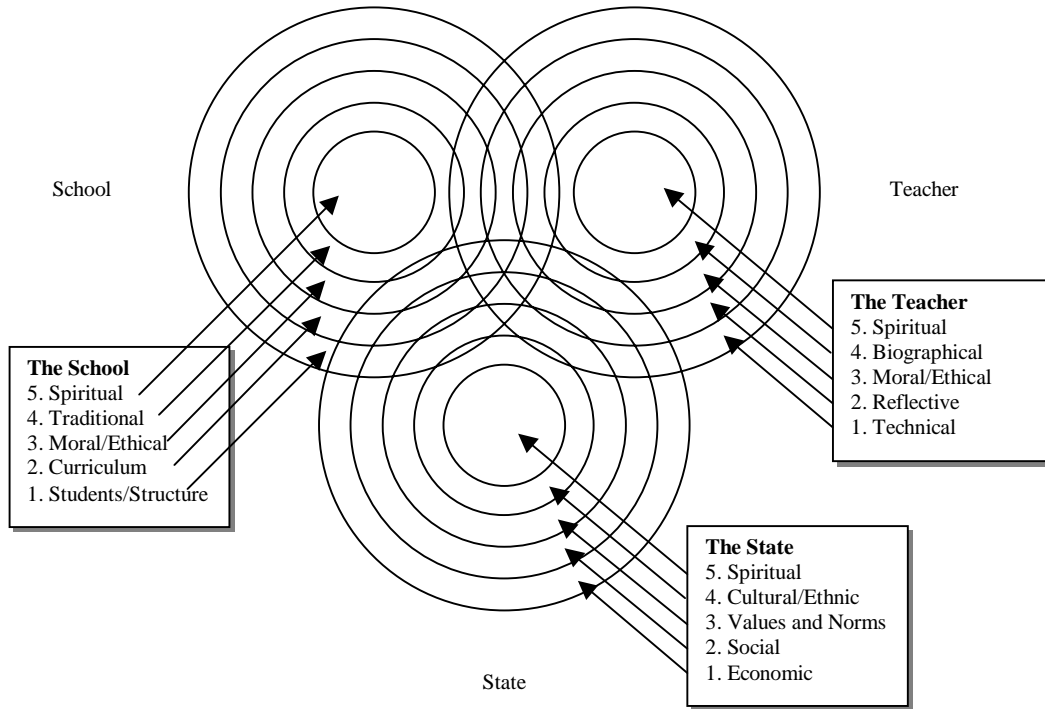
Table 1: Aspects of Development in Teacher, School and State

Level	Aspect	Teacher	School	State
One	Basic	Technical Skill	Students and Structures	Economy
Two	Developmental	Reflective Practice	Curriculum	Social Development
Three	Moral/Ethical	Ethical and Moral Basis	Values and Norms	Common Values and Norms
Four	Historical	Biographical Experience	Traditions and Culture	Common Culture and Ethos
Five	Spiritual	Spiritual Inspiration/Belief	Spiritual Mission/Orientation	(Common Spiritual Basis)

All these entities exist at least at Level One. However, the contribution of the deeper levels to the entity's development is not a constant. For example, an avowed multicultural and multireligious secular state such as Singapore should not show signs of Level Five — a common spiritual basis for its people — and this should also be true for a teacher who is an atheist or a school which is not founded on religious principles. Similarly, a school or state with a brief history is unlikely to be well-developed at Level Four.

The degree to which the three entities experience synergistic coupling must depend on the degree of consonance between the factors on each level. A state without a consistent Level Four or Five is hardly likely to drive the development of a teacher or a school by appealing to a shared history or spiritual basis. On the other hand, a teacher or principal whose biographical experience is consonant with the traditions and culture of a school is likely to be more fruitful within that school — and if he has spiritual beliefs which are consonant with the mission of the school, this is likely to enhance the synergy even more. A representation of how the three entities may interact through their various levels is given in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Diagram showing how synergy and interaction may occur between teacher, school and state



From the diagram, it may be seen that the simplest interaction occurs when the three are touching only at Level One; i.e., the State provides economic support for basic teacher training and deploys these teachers to a structure containing students — something which might not be considered education at all. The teacher is unlikely to develop quickly. On the other hand, if the three entities can interact well at all five levels, the teacher will probably be well-socialised into a useful role and developed effectively within the context of school and state.

Conclusion

An effective teacher in the Singaporean context appears to be one who can produce excellent academic results, handle any sort of responsibility and adapt quickly to change. The teacher should be reflective and able to make sense of events and experiences in the school context. Further effectiveness comes from the quality of interaction between the school environment — resources, members, intangibles — and the teacher. From the case of the Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), it would appear that schools might be more successful in developing effective teachers if the following factors were present or enhanced (if already in place):

- a stable moral and ethical environment, supported at the highest levels of management and with clearly-enunciated principles;
- processes and personnel able to maintain corporate culture and values, and to transmit these to new personnel;
- long-term goals as well as short-term plans for staff and students;
- guided autonomy and creative outlets for teachers;

- available facilities and encouragement for creative expression;
- a wide range of developmental opportunities in all areas;
- a rewarding and supportive culture for those willing to 'fit in'.

It is also possible to see that while some of these features of school environments do indeed encourage teacher development in a general sense, not all teachers respond in the same way to them. These features may have negative as well as positive effects. In particular, with reference to factors in the previous list, it may be said that:

- a stable environment with an established culture helps teachers to acclimatise and be socialised with the help of existing staff and time-tested processes; however, this may be over-conservative and stifle a few forms of creativity;
- long-term staff development goals and a wide range of opportunities provide for teachers to discover their strengths and talents, and to actuate their potential; however, if the range is too broad and the goals too ambitious, this may result in confusion or a sense of being pressurised;
- a rewarding and supportive culture for those willing to 'fit in' helps induction of teachers into a specific school culture and speeds their effective development in a specific context; however, it raises the question of what happens to those who do not fit in, and perhaps the question of whether those who do can be effective elsewhere.

Perhaps the best way of looking at these factors is to consider the values of the organisation and the values of the individual as deeply-held sets of beliefs and precepts. For organisations such as mission schools, these organisational values have the emotional resonance one normally attributes only to familial and cultural traditions. Just as it is with people in a family or culture with a long history of clearly-defined traditions and practices, so too is it with teacher development in a mission school: as long as there is 'coupling' between the organisational values and the teacher's personal values, the teacher will be able to tap the assets of the organisation to experience synergistic growth.

Clearly, therefore, a school which actively encourages a teacher to adopt values consonant with the organisational values is one in which the potential development of the teacher within the school context is superior. Conversely, a teacher who works in a school which has organisational values similar to his own will develop more effectively within the context of such a school. The greater the consonance, the more synergistic the coupling between the individual and the organisation.

Schools should therefore adopt practices of the sort which establish a sense of spiritual 'tradition' and 'heritage' equivalent to those which produce emotional resonance in familial and cultural contexts. As with such familial and cultural practices, the longer the exposure, the greater the sense of belonging and empowerment — provided that these practices are seen as enriching to the individual, and that the individual feels part of the larger social unit. From the case of the Anglo-Chinese School (Independent), the means by which teacher development can be best enhanced would seem to be through processes which systematically create a familial context and then seek to inculcate organisational values which individuals can respond to on a personal level.

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