Working Towards a Model of Secondary School Culture

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Abstract

Contemporary secondary schools in Canada and the United States are complex institutions whose organizational structures, program delivery mechanisms, and institutional community members combine to produce distinctive mini-societies within their walls. Replete with complex arrays of rituals, ceremonies, as well as traditions and founded on a variety of basic assumptions, these unique cultural entities have a profound effect on the individuals, and groups who inhabit them. Indeed failure on the part of individual inhabitants to comprehend and accommodate the cultural nuances of the organizations they dwell in has the potential to significantly diminish their prospects for success in those domains. Furthermore, many of the structures and rituals of secondary school life have developed into something akin to cultural icons that have proven to be remarkably resistant to change. This article, therefore, proposes a model of secondary school culture that is intended to serve as a potential starting point for the further examination of these complex institutions.

Introduction

The function of secondary education in Canada, the United States, and many other western nations has been significantly altered in the post Second World War era. In response to ever changing economic and social demands they have evolved into institutions of mass public education charged with the mission of preparing increasingly diverse student populations for life as citizens in democratic societies. For many adolescents, however, the role that high school plays in their lives exceeds even this broad mandate. As Boyer (1983) observed, "High school is home for many students. It is the one institution in our culture where it is alright to be young" (p. 38).

As a result of these increased societal demands and enhanced educational mission secondary schools have evolved into complex mini-societies each replete with their own artifacts, espoused value systems, and basic assumptions. Since adolescents are required to spend a significant portion of their teenage years in high school, the extent of success they attain within those institutions is inextricably linked with the degree to which they value school and the process of formal education, as well as the extent to which they perceive that their presence is valued by the institution they attend. Failure to accommodate what Hemmings (2000) referred to as the "corridor curriculum" can play a significant role in determining the degree of long-term success a student encounters during their high school years.

Furthermore, secondary school cultures do not form in a vacuum but rather are developed and nurtured within a framework imposed by a variety of tangible and intangible organizational structures. These include, but are not limited to, the institution's sense of purpose or mission, its various rituals and traditions, school size, internal organizational structures, program delivery among others. These factors not only serve to define the parameters within which secondary school culture develops and functions, but also have a significant influence over the actions of the constituent members of the school community. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to open the "black box" of secondary schooling as well as to propose possible lens through which these institutions can be critically examined.

Theoretical Framework

Smircich (1983) acknowledged that the idea of "culture", a concept borrowed from anthropology, has become increasingly linked to organizational studies as both independent and

dependent variables as well as serving as a foundational metaphor. Research into organizational behaviour, therefore, has become "inquiry into the phenomenon of social order" (p.341). Similarly, Meyerson and Martin (1998) state that "We take the position that organizations are cultures. That is, we treat culture as a metaphor of organization, not just a discrete variable to be manipulated at will" (p.31). In this vein educational research has developed a lengthy tradition of recognizing that schools are complex entities possessing distinctive organizational cultures. This perspective has lead to the development of a number of operational definitions that serve to clarify the essence of secondary school institutional culture.

Defining Secondary School Culture

As Deal and Peterson (1999) observed. "Parents, teachers, principals, and students have always sensed something special, yet undefined, about their schools-something extremely powerful but difficult to describe" (p. 2). This "something" has been defined by the aforementioned researchers in the following terms:

> School cultures are complex webs of traditions and rituals that have
> built up over time as teachers, parents and administrators work together
> and deal with crises and accomplishments. . .Cultural patterns are highly
> enduring, have a powerful impact on performance, and shape the ways
> people, think, act, and feel (p.4).

Furthermore, Schein (1997) contends that organizational cultures operate at several levels simultaneously. These include: (a) artifacts, those rites, symbols, ceremonies, and myths that serve to make organizational behaviour routine; (b) espoused values, systems of beliefs and standards that provide the basis for an organization's social behaviour and; (c) basic assumptions, those institutional practices that are so deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the group that to act in any other manner is unthinkable.

Finally, Barth (2002) provided an even more succinct definition of school culture when he stated that "A school's culture is a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in nthe very core of the organization" (p.7). Furthermore, a school's organizational culture has, in his view, more influence over the life of the school community than "the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teachers, and the parents can ever have" (p.6).

Secondary Schools as Cultures

All three of the levels of organizational culture identified by Schein (1997), as well as by Detert, Lois and Schroeder (2001), are readily observable in the contemporary secondary school. Adherence to formal curriculum documents, codes of student conduct, timetabling, and other administrative practices, constitute the artifacts of secondary school culture and serve to make daily life in these institutions routine.

High schools also have highly developed systems of espoused values which pervade many aspects of their communal lives. While many of these values are openly acknowledged in documents such as school mission statements, and student handbooks, others are not and constitute what Dei (1996) referred to as the "deep curriculum" . This includes "not only stipulated and hidden school rules but also regulations that influence student and staff activities, behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, exceptions, and outcomes" (p.177).

Secondary schools also function according to the dictates of deeply entrenched sets of basic assumptions. Administrators, teachers, and students alike all harbour pre-dispositions as to how they expect their institutions to function and often find it incomprehensible that they could function in any other fashion. As Oakes (1985) observed, "Many school practices seem to be the natural way to conduct schooling. . . These beliefs are so ingrained in our thinking and behaviour-so much a part of school culture-that we rarely submit them to careful scrutiny" (p.5). These practices include, but are not limited to, how students are grouped for instruction, which pedagogical techniques are perceived as being the most effective with different students, and how individual students, and groups of students are allocated status within the school community. Along with espoused values and artifacts, these assumptions contribute to the very core of a school's organizational culture.

Additionally, many of the aforementioned aspects of secondary school culture have proven to be remarkably impervious to change. This resiliency may well be the product of two factors. First, and foremost, many of the nuances of secondary school life such as the lock-step movement of students to a system of bells or buzzers, the congregating in front of lockers, homeroom, and the clustering of classrooms by subject area have become something of cultural icons deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of a significant portion of the public. Secondly, as secondary school attendance emerged as an all but universal age norm , the high school experience simultaneously evolved into an adolescent rite of passage (Hoffman, 2002). As the National Association of Secondary School Principals (N.A.S.S.P. , 1996) noted, any

attempt to significantly alter the current format of secondary education would be viewed by many as an assault on the very essence of adolescence itself.

Overall, it is evident contemporary secondary schools have developed into complex social organizations. These institutions have a definitive impact on the way in which their community members negotiate the terms of their existence within their walls and directly affect students' engagement with the institutions they attend, as well as with the process of formal education.

Why Culture Matters

Phelan, Davidson and Cao (1991) commented that, "On any given day adolescents move from one social context to another. Families, peer groups, classrooms, and schools are primary arenas in which young people negotiate and construct their realities" (p. 224). As such, the degree of success a young person meets with when negotiating the terms of their daily existence within each of the above contexts plays a significant role in determining the degree of success they encounter in those domains. Furthermore, Goodenow (1993), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (O.E.C.D. , 2003). as well as Fredricks, Blumfled and Paris (2004) all suggest that secondary schools that engage their students correlate positively with such manifestations of academic achievement as enhanced grade-point averages, teachers' grades and retention rates. A connection can also be made between organizational culture and student engagement with the institution attended, an outcome that the O.E.C.D. (2003) states "deserves to be treated alongside academic achievement as an important schooling outcome" (p.9). Given the centrality of high school to the adolescent experience, as well as the impact that organizational culture has on the individuals, and groups of individuals who inhabit these institutions, a further understanding of the internal dynamics of secondary school culture is arguably desirable.

Additionally, secondary school organizational culture impacts directly on the dual student outcomes identified by Lee, Bryk and Smith (1993): academic achievement and student engagement. While the former is defined in terms of student standardized test scores, it could be expanded to include other means of assessing student learning. Conversely, student engagement has been defined by the O.E.C.D. (2003) as consisting of "students' attitudes towards schooling and their participation in school activities" (p.8). Goodenow (1993) and Marks (2000), among others, suggest the existence of a limited, yet direct, relationship between the two outcomes with
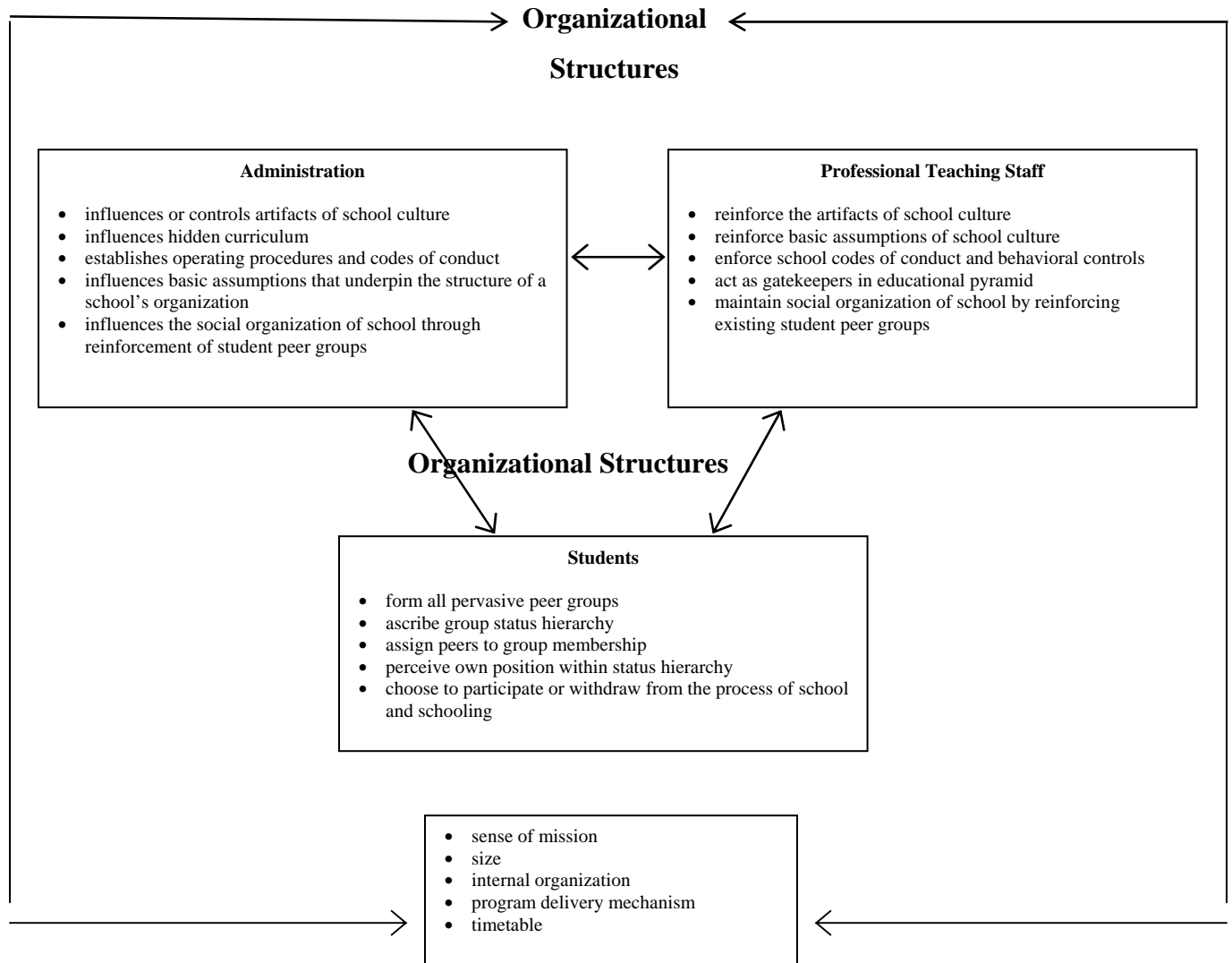
both being influenced directly, or indirectly by institutional culture. Therefore, a further understanding of secondary school organizational culture has the potential to lead to the adoption and implementation of policies on the part of administrators, at various levels, that might serve to enhance the aforementioned dual outcomes.

Finally, secondary schools, as societal institutions, have proven themselves to be remarkably resistant to change (Hoffman, 2002; N.A.S.S.P., 1996). In fact it could be argued that the basic organizational structure of the North American high school has not been significantly altered since the introduction of the Carnegie Unit in 1907 (Jenkins, 1996). As Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) observed, "Because of their size, bureaucratic complexity, subject traditions and identifications, and closeness to university selection, high schools have proved especially impervious to change. . . . (p.4). Without a lens through which to subject these institutions to in-depth scrutiny there exists a very real risk of the development of what Vaughan (1999) terms as "organizational deviance". This phenomena refers to a situation whereby what on the surface appears to be normal organizational function yields unanticipated negative consequences for members of those institutions (Newman, 2004; Vaughan, 1999). Simply stated, many organizational practices at the secondary school level are so deeply ingrained in the collective thinking of those involved that they are seldom submitted to close examination (Oakes, 1985).

Secondary School Culture: A Proposed Model

The model of secondary school organizational culture proposed below is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the following: (a) Schein's (1997) work on organizational culture; (b) Lee, Bryk and Smith's (1990) *High School Organization and its Effects on Teachers and Students*; as well as (c) Lee, Bryk and Smith's (1993) *Heuristic Model of the Organization of Secondary Schools.* The model seeks to identify the constituent components of secondary school culture, examines their respective functions and delineates the structures that form the parameters of organizational behaviour.

Figure 1

Secondary School Culture: Constituent Parts and Functions Model

→ **Organizational** ←

Structures

Administration	**Professional Teaching Staff**
• influences or controls artifacts of school culture • influences hidden curriculum • establishes operating procedures and codes of conduct • influences basic assumptions that underpin the structure of a school's organization • influences the social organization of school through reinforcement of student peer groups	• reinforce the artifacts of school culture • reinforce basic assumptions of school culture • enforce school codes of conduct and behavioral controls • act as gatekeepers in educational pyramid • maintain social organization of school by reinforcing existing student peer groups

Organizational Structures

Students

- form all pervasive peer groups
- ascribe group status hierarchy
- assign peers to group membership
- perceive own position within status hierarchy
- choose to participate or withdraw from the process of school and schooling

- sense of mission
- size
- internal organization
- program delivery mechanism
- timetable

Many of the institutional structures that define the parameters of secondary school culture are tangible in that they are concrete in nature, and thus readily observable. These include school size, internal organizational structures such as departmentalization, timetabling practices, as well as program delivery mechanisms such as course streaming, to name a few. Others, such as an organization's sense of mission, its various rituals and ceremonies, and various long standing traditions are more nebulous in nature, but none-the-less play a significant role in defining the parameters of institutional culture.

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Examining the Intangible

As Deal and Peterson (1999) wrote, "Every human group anchors its existence in a unifying myth that originates the group's worldview. Schools with strong cultures are no different" (p.23). In their view organizational mythology is situated at the very centre of an institution's existence and serves as "its spiritual source, the wellspring of cultural traditions and ways" (p.23).

Moreover, secondary schools are replete with an astonishing array of rites, rituals, and ceremonies that serve to provide for a commonality of experience, mark significant events in the life of the institution, and strengthen the bonds between members of the school community. In becoming an all but universal age norm, the high school experience serves to provide adolescents with both societal rites of passage that mark specific points in their lives, as well as rites of intensification that are group orientated and are designed to foster social cohesion within the institution (Hoffman, 2002). These include, but are not limited to, the sponsorship of a variety of extra-curricular activities, pep and spirit rallies, formal social events such as the Prom, and that culminating rite of passage the formal graduation ceremony at the end of four years.

Additionally, both tradition and symbolism play important roles in the formation of the parameters that serve to define an institution's culture. Traditions, according to Deal and Peterson (1999), are "significant events that have a special history and meaning and that occur year in and year out" (p.41) and serve to provide community members with a "foundation to weather challenges, difficulties, and change" (p.41). They include ceremonies marking special occasions, events that reinforce institutional values, and rites that provide individuals and groups with a connection to the whole.

Finally, symbols "represent intangible cultural values and beliefs. They are the outward manifestation of those things we cannot comprehend on a rational level" (p.60). Within organizations symbols serve to unify and provide direction to its members. At the secondary school level they include, but are not limited to, institutional mission statements, displays of students' work, trophy cases, and mascots. As Deal and Peterson observed, "attachment to shared symbols unifies a group and gives it direction and purpose" and "tampering with symbols of importance is like playing with fire" (p.60).

Overall, many of the structures and practices that serve to form the parameters of secondary school culture are intangible and not readily observable to the casual observer. None-

the-less they constitute the core of what Dei (1996) and Hemmings (2000) referred to as the "deep" or "corridor" curriculum and their role in the creation and maintenance of institutional culture cannot be underestimated.

Structures

While many of the aforementioned aspects of secondary school culture are intangible in nature and therefore are difficult to quantify, others are more concrete and structural in nature. These include school size (Lee, 2000; Lee, Smerdon, Alfred-Liro & Brown, 2000), internal organizational structures (Siskin, 1991; Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1992; Stoldosky, 1993), and curriculum delivery mechanisms (Damico & Roth, 1991; Yonezawa, Wells & Serna, 2002; LeTendre, Hofer & Shimizu, 2003). Each of the aforementioned aspects of secondary school organizational structure plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of the institutional culture of the organization as a whole.

Size

The matter of secondary school enrolment is, according to Lee, Smerdon, Alfred-Liro and Brown (2000), "an important ecological feature of any educational organization" (p.148). Moreover, the aforementioned researchers have identified two predominant streams of inquiry regarding school size. The first, primarily sociological in its focus, examines the impact of enrolment on a variety of other institutional characteristics, while the second, heavily influenced by economics, is primarily concerned with the potential costs and benefits of increased school size.

Lee et al. (2000) and Lee (2000), for example, suggest that while larger schools may enjoy the benefits associated with economy of scale such as being able to provide students with greater curriculum diversity and specialization, these effects may not be as beneficial as they may appear at first glance. Expanded program specialization has a tendency to lead to increased differentiation in curriculum delivery through the mechanisms of course streaming, a practice that often leads to increased social stratification within schools and differentiations in student outcomes (Lee, Bryk & Smith, 1993; Oakes, 1985).

Furthermore, Lee (2000), as well as Hargreaves and Macmillan (1992), have identified several ways in which school size affects the internal dynamics of the secondary school. For example, increasing institutional size often leads to a greater degree of specialization of function among members of the organization. In the case of secondary schools this phenomenon takes the

form of departmentalization, often along traditional academic subject lines. The result is two-fold: (a) organizational fragmentation that serves to divert loyalty from the larger institution to the subunit resulting in reduced overall organizational cohesion (Lee, 2000), and (b) the creation and maintenance of status hierarchies among students and teachers alike thereby contributing to isolation, alienation and lack of engagement on the part of various members of the school community.

Internal Organization

Departmentalization constitutes one of the most pervasive characteristics of secondary school organization in the United States (Siskin, 1991) and Canada (Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1992). As the latter observed, "Today's secondary school are quintessentially modern institutions. Characteristically immense in size, balkanized into a maze of bureaucratic cubbyholes known as departments, and precariously articulated by that geometric labyrinth known as the school timetable…" (p. 32). Manifestations of departmentalization include, the erection of all but impermeable boundaries between different parts of the organization, the transference of the individual member's loyalty from the institutional whole to their specific component part, and differentials in overall influence between component parts of the same organization.

Departmentalization also, as Stodolsky (1993) observed, provides a context for secondary school teaching in that high school teachers, beginning with their initial professional educations, are inducted to adopt "certain implicit views about the nature of subject areas, about how subjects are taught and how they are learned" (p.334). As a result many secondary school teachers identify primarily with the disciplines they teach a development which emphasizes subject matter coverage and the maintenance of academic standards in contrast to the "student orientation" more characteristic of their elementary counterparts. (Braddock & McPartland, 1993).

Furthermore, as previously indicated, the internal organizational structures of secondary schools also impact on interpersonal relations among members of the school community outside of the formal classroom setting as well. Academic subjects in many comprehensive or composite high schools often enjoy substantially more institutional cache than do their vocational counterparts (Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1992), a situation that has the potential to translate into status differentials among teachers and students alike. Page (1987), for example, found that

status, or the lack thereof, accrued by non-academic courses was transferred to the students who took them and that low-track, as well as additional needs students, were often considered to be at the lower end of the social hierarchy by their more academically inclined peers, a situation often replicated amongst their teachers.

Program Delivery

As LeTendre, Hofer and Shimizu (2003) noted, "In all industrialized nations, students encounter curricular differentiation and are sorted into groups, classes and schools as they progress through the public education system" (p.43). This practice, more commonly known as "tracking" or "streaming" manifests itself in one of two forms: (a) the selective differentiated model where students are sorted at a certain point in their formal education and then proceed to specific secondary institutions the nature of which is determined by their proposed career paths; and (b) the comprehensive model characterized by institutions that offer a wide variety of programming at various levels of difficulty within the same physical plant and where delivery differentiation takes place on the basis of perceive ability as well as student choice by sorting students into discrete course streams. While the former is the norm in countries such as Germany and Japan, the latter predominates in Canada and the United States (LeTendre, Hofer & Shimizu, 2003). Since instruction represents what Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan and Lee (1982) referred to as the "core technology" of secondary schools, how that instruction is organized is bound to have an effect on all aspects of institutional culture.

For example, Brantlinger (1993), Damico and Roth (1991), as well as Lawton and Leithwood (1988) all found that course streaming or tracking lead to the differential application of school policies and other behavioural control among students. As Damico and Roth (1991) observed, "Life in our sample high schools was very different for general track and advanced placement students. . . In these schools, students didn't complain about the rules per se, but rather the unfairness with which they were enforced" (p. 11). Areas of contention included items such as the manner in which tardiness and the missing of classes were dealt with, the control of movement in the halls while classes were in session, and the imposition of different penalties for the same offence. Additionally, curriculum differentiation played a role in the creation and maintenance of a peer driven status hierarchy among the student population (Brantlinger, 1991; Cusik, 1991; Lawton & Leithwood, 1988). As Lawton & Leithwood (1988) pointed out, students in special needs and vocational course streams were often labelled as being "dummies" and

"retards" by their more academically inclined peers, a condition that reinforced their low status and was contributed to by their differentiated treatment on the part of teachers and administrators alike.

Overall, secondary school organizational cultures develop within, and are to a greater or lesser extent subject to a set of structural boundaries which serve as the operational parameters of these institutions. While many of these characteristics such as school size, internal organizational structures, and program delivery mechanisms to name a few, are readily observable, others are more elusive. Comprised of various myths, ceremonies and rituals, as well as a school's sense of mission, these intangibles none-the-less play a significant role in helping to define and maintain an institution's collective organizational culture.

Constituent Members and Their Functions

The model of secondary school organizational culture illustrated earlier in Figure I identifies and outlines the functions of the three components identified by Anderson (1997), Frymier (1987), Willower (1987), Lee et al. (1993) and others as constituting the core components of secondary school culture. The following examines the functions of each constituent member as well as the manner in which their interaction serves to impact on other components of the overall organization.

The Role and Impact of School-Based Administrators

Lee, Bryk and Smith (1993) divided the role of the school-based administrator into two distinctive components, manager and mediator. A further examination of these strands should serve to cast further light on the role these individuals play in the creation and maintenance of secondary school culture. The aforementioned researchers described the management function in terms of the coordination of activities, resource allocation the establishment and enforcement of rules and procedures, as well as the supervision and evaluation of programming. For example, rule enforcement was defined as "management strategies that decrease school disruption and increase the safety of students" (p. 205).

School-based administrators also serve as mediators providing an important conduit between the classroom and a variety of interest groups external to the school (Myers & Murphy, 1995). These include parents, authorities at higher levels of educational governance, as well as a variety of social service and law enforcement agencies to name a few. In addition school-based administrators are also responsible for the protection of what Lee et al. (1993) referred to as the

"technical cores" of their institutions from external influences that disrupt, or have the potential to disrupt, the instructional missions of their schools. Myers and Murphy (1995) divided such external influences into two categories, hierarchical and non-hierarchical with the former representing "directives from higher-level administrators" while the latter "emerge from within the organization" (p. 16). It is incumbent upon school-based administrators, in their view, to mediate the impact of these influences on teachers, students, and parents alike.

Deal and Peterson (1999) provide an alternative vision of the school-based administrator's role, that of the "symbolic leader" as symbols, from their perspective, play a vital role in the life of an institution. As they observed, "Symbols, as representatives of what we stand for and wish for, play a powerful role in cultural cohesion and pride. Attachment to shared symbols unifies a group and gives it direction and purpose" (p.60-61). For example, effective school leaders are able to identify and communicate the "hopes and dreams of the school, thus refocusing and refining the school's purpose and mission" (p. 89).

Moreover, school-based administrators have the capacity to influence two of the significant outcomes of secondary school organizational structures, teacher efficacy and student engagement (Lee, Bryk & Smith, 1993). In the case of the former, Blasé & Blasé (1999), as well as Bogler (2001) found that the actions of school-based administrators had a direct influence on teachers and classroom instruction. Additionally, school-based administrators also have the capacity to influence student engagement with the institution attended as well as with the process of formal education. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999), for example, found that transformational leadership had a significant effect on both the affective and behavioural aspects of student conduct. Furthermore, additional research has indicated that school-based administrators play an important role in the establishment of school climates as well as instructional structures that are the prerequisites for student academic achievement (Heck, Larsen & Macoulides, 1990).

Furthermore, the actions of school-based administrators also play a pivotal role in the creation and maintenance of their schools' social orders as the ubiquitous adolescent peer group and its accompanying status hierarchies do not form in a vacuum. As Jones (1976) explained, "students form groups on the basis of with whom they are placed in school, which is largely determined by the administration" (p. 331). Moreover, as Wallace (2000), Gray (1993), and Damico & Roth (1991) indicated, an undetermined number of school-based administrators are less than even-handed in their application of institutional behavioural norms and that certain

students, and groups of students, may be accorded a greater or lesser degree of latitude in their conduct, a practice that serves to reinforce their position in their schools' social orders.

Finally, as previously alluded to, school-based administrators play a significant role in the creation and maintenance of many of the artifacts of secondary school life, those organizational functions and features that serve to make institutional life routine. One such artifact is the regularization of student behaviour through the development and implementation of a variety of rules and regulations via the imposition of codes of student conduct. As Macdonell and Martin (1986) observed, "Rules as a means of legitimizing rational-legal authority, are the core of the bureaucratic phenomena in contemporary society. . . . a system of rules covering the rights and obligations of its members is generally seen as an important characteristic of the school organizational entity" (p.51).

An analysis of a number of such codes of conduct by Raby (2005) and Raby and Domitrek (2007) revealed that these documents shared a number of common themes. These included the following: (a) an emphasis on what Raby (2005) referred to as "passive citizenship" where students' rights are closely linked to corresponding responsibilities and (b) the attempt to inculcate specific work-place related behaviours in students such as respect for authority, appropriateness of dress, and punctuality. Student acceptance or rejection of the aforementioned behavioural constraints has the potential to impact on their engagement with the institution attended and the process of formal education (Raby & Domitrek, 2007).

Overall the role of the school-based administrator in the creation and maintenance of secondary school institutional culture is complex and multifaceted. Exerting influence or direct control over the artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions of their schools' cultures, school-based administrators' actions or inactions have a direct bearing on institutional outcomes such as student engagement and teacher performance.

The Professional Teaching Staff

Firestone and Louis (1999) identify three predominant themes regarding what they refer to as the "adult" cultural component of secondary schools. These are: the tenor of teacher-student relations, both in, and outside of the classroom; (b) the role of academics and the extent to which an institutional focus on teaching and learning impacts on students and teachers alike; and (c) the nature of the relations existing between the professional educators within an individual school. Furthermore, Braddock and McPartland (1993) as well as Stoldolsky (1993), among

others, indicate that each of the aforementioned aspects of institutional culture are strongly influenced by, and are to some extent the result of the administrative structures of those institutions. Of particular interest is the impact of these structures on teacher-student relations as well as their role in defining the nature of secondary school teaching.

One of the pervasive administrative features of the contemporary secondary school is their division into discrete academic units commonly referred to as subject departments, a characteristic that has a profound effect on teacher-student relations both in and outside of the formal classroom setting (Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1992 & Stoldolsky, 1993). Braddock and McPartland (1993), for example, observe that members of a specialized teaching staff are more apt to adopt a subject-centered orientation where their primary professional goals are keeping abreast of developments in their subject area and the maintenance of academic standards in their classrooms. This, in their view, has the potential to lead to a corresponding weakening of the teacher's "student orientation", a feature that is more characteristic of the self-contained elementary classroom.

Departmentalization also has the potential to influence teacher-student relations outside of the formal classroom setting as well. As previously indicated the dual organizational practices of course streaming and departmentalization often function to contribute to the development of status hierarchies among students and teachers alike. Low track, vocational, and special needs students are frequently regarded as "anomalies" and are often considered to be at the bottom of the "educational hierarchy" when compared to their more academically inclined peers (Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1992; Page, 1987). Moreover, Finley (1984) found that "teachers prefer to isolate these students from others, [and] they prefer to avoid them wherever possible" (p. 242). Additionally, Kelly (2004), as well as Hargreaves and Macmillan (1992), noted that a similar phenomenon was evidenced among teachers where a status hierarchy also existed based on seniority, professional credentials and course allocation. Technical and vocational courses, for example, enjoy less institutional cache than their academic counterparts as do their teachers.

Administrative structures also play a significant role in influencing the nature of teachers' relations with their professional colleagues. As Firestone and Louis (1999) observed, "High school teachers typically talk more to members of their own departments than other teachers in the school" (p. 307). Moreover, they have a tendency to visualize both their social and professional ties in terms of their membership in their specific departments rather than in

terms of the institution as a whole (Bryk, Lee & Smith, 1990). As a result their personas as subject specialists are reinforced, sometimes at the expense of the nurturing aspect of the school's mission (Hargreaves & Macmillan, 1992).

Finally, it has been suggested that the tenor of teacher-student relations has an impact on the dual student outcomes of academic achievement and engagement with the institution attended (O.E.C.D., 2003; Hudley, Daoud, Polanco,Wright-Castro & Hershber, 2003; Croninger & Lee, 2001). Specifically, Croninger and Lee (2001) found secondary school teachers to be a significant source of social capital that students can draw on. As they stated, "when adolescents trust their teachers and informally receive guidance from teachers, they are more likely to persist through graduation" (p. 568). Additionally, teacher-student relations also play a role in promoting student engagement with the institution attended. As Hudley et al. (2003) observed, "In sum our data suggest that the glue binding students to the school can be found in the quality of relationships between teachers an students" (p.16).

It is evident that the internal organizational and administrative structures of secondary schools have significant effects on both the manner in which the professional teaching staff view their function within the school community, and aid in establishing the tenor of both teacher-student, as well as teacher-colleague relations. Moreover, the actions of the professional teaching staff also play a significant role through their influence over the dual student outcomes of academic achievement and engagement with the institution attended as well as with the process of formal education.

A World of Their Own: Student Culture, Student Sub-Cultures

No discussion of secondary school culture would be complete without an exploration of that ubiquitous phenomenon known as the adolescent peer group. Intruding into almost every facet of high school life peer groups combine to form distinctive status hierarchies based on socio-economic status, ethnicity, choice of recreational activities, clothing styles, and taste in music among other factors. All pervasive, they can be found in the cafeteria, the hallways and various common areas of their respective schools, through the organization of various school-sponsored co-curricular activities, often intruding into social relations beyond the realm of the school. As Horn (2006) observed, " Creating social categories and grouping people into these categories based on appearance, activities, and attitudes is one way adolescents make sense of

their complex social world and seems to be a natural part of what happens in high school" (p. 217).

This categorization results in the creation of peer based "status hierarchies" where status differentiation among members and groups is determined by dominance, popularity, or social power (Harris, 1995). Moreover, once an individual or group has been assigned to a position within that hierarchy by their peers, achieving a change is status can often prove to be problematic. In essence group membership, rightly or wrongly represents, an assessment of the individual or group by their peers.

In the case of adolescents the peer group performs two essential roles, the first being what Michaelis (2000) referred to as the intragroup function where individuals are attracted to each other on the basis of similar interests or perspectives on life. This provides members with a "zone of comfort to which individuals seek refuge from other groups or the rest of society thus meeting group members' needs for affiliation with those similar to them" (p. 2). The second, referred to as the intergroup function, serves to distinguish their members from those of other groups. As Michaelis noted, "People are sorted into specific groups based on their differences from members of other groups. . . . As such, groups help to define social relations among individuals or between groups." (p. 2). The aforementioned group dynamics often result in the formation of highly structured social hierarchies whose composition and boundaries are clearly understood by their members.

It is important to not that neither the adolescent peer group not their attendant status hierarchies exist entirely of their own accord as school-based administrators, teachers and the wider society combine to play a significant role in their formation and maintenance (Jones, 1976; Brantlinger, 1991,1993; Gray, 1993; Newman, 2004). As Newman (2004) commented:

> If the adolescent world were completely self-contained, a hermetically
> sealed chapter in the life cycle it would be hard enough to live through.
> But it isn't. The teenagers' pressure cooker is created and sustained by
> youths, but its power derives from the way the surrounding adult society
> reinforces its central messages (p. 126).

A specific example of the above being the role played by school-based administrators. Jones (1976) described this process in the following terms, "The administration supplies the students with a trellis. . . . and the students simply cling and grow around it" (p. 332). Examples of this

trellis include, but are not limited to, matters such as the provision of differentiated instruction based on perceived academic ability (Oakes, 1985), the uneven application of social controls based on group membership (Damico & Roth, 1991), and the bestowing of official recognition and reward on individual students and groups of students (Gray, 1993; Wallace, 2000). Moreover, studies by Brantlinger (1991, 1993), Page (1987), and Oakes (1985), among others, have indicated that a student's relative position in their school's status hierarchy is at least, in part, a result and function of the tenor of their inter-personal relations with their teachers both in, and outside of the formal classroom setting.

Apart from its function in the establishment and maintenance of the aforementioned status hierarchy, the adolescent peer group also plays a significant role in determining the educational outcomes of individual students and groups of students. Specifically, Finn's (1989) participation-identification model of student disengagement suggests that student success at the secondary school level is to a greater or lesser extent a function of the degree to which they chose to participate in the life of the school community both inside and outside of the formal classroom setting. Such engagement requires that students develop a sense of belonging within the institution they attend and involves taking part in activities directly related to the learning process as well as in the various extracurricular and social activities offered by their schools. Should a student belong, or be perceived to belong, to a low-status group then their identification with, and commitment to both the institution and the process of formal education, has the potential to be negatively affected. Disengagement of this nature is often characterized by academic underachievement, behavioural problems and in its ultimate form premature withdrawal from formal education altogether.

Adolescents are required to navigate their way through a complex web of social arrangements, a process that impacts on their overall success within the institutions they attend (Phelan et al., 1991). The adolescent peer group, a key component of this web, constitutes a persistent and all pervasive aspect of secondary school institutional culture. Constructed among students and reinforced by school-based administrators and teachers alike, peer groups combine to form highly structured status hierarchies within the schools in which they operate. Membership in a peer group, real or perceived, has the potential to become an identity label and can lead to the assignment of an individual, or group, to its position in the aforementioned status hierarchies. Once assigned such a label, achieving a change in status can

prove to be problematic. Moreover, an individual's or group's perceived status can play a significant role in the treatment they receive from other members of the school community. Membership, real or imagined, in a low-status or marginalized group can result in a loss of engagement with both the institution attended and the process of formal education.

Conclusion

The post Second World War era has witnessed a paradigm shift in the societal role played by secondary schools in Canada, the United States, and many other western industrialized countries. Originally envisioned as essentially academic institutions designed to prepare a relatively select number of young people for post-secondary education and careers in public administration, high schools have been transformed into institutions of mass public education designed to prepare their charges with the more nebulous mission of preparation for adulthood and citizenship in democratic societies (Allison, 1984; Dorn, 1996). In undergoing this transformation, the contemporary secondary school experience has become an all but universal adolescent rite of passage, or as Sizer (1984) observed, "High school is a kind of secular church, a place of national rituals that mark stages of a young citizen's life" (p. 6).

Secondary schools are also elaborate, complex mini-societies whose internal organizational structures have a direct impact on the lives of the individuals, and groups of individuals who inhabit them (Lee, Bryk & Smith, 1993). In addition to their formal organizational structures and educative missions secondary schools are also inherent cultural entities replete with amazing arrays of artifacts, rituals, and rites of passage all of which impact directly on the manner in which their inhabitants negotiate the terms of their existence within those institutions (Hemmings, 2000; Hoffman, 2004). The degree of success with which these negotiations are concluded has a significant effect on participants' long-term success, or lack thereof, within those walls (Phelan et al., 1991; Hemmings, 2000).

Additionally, any discussion regarding the structural aspects of secondary school culture should supplement yet never detract from the ongoing examination of the human dynamics at play in these institutions. School-based administrators, the professional teaching staff, and the students themselves all combine to formulate the constituent membership of the school community and the nature of their inter and intra-group relations constitute a critical element of overall institutional culture. School-based administrators, for example, perform multiple roles in the creation and maintenance of their respective school's culture and their actions or inactions

directly affect student engagement, academic achievement, and teacher performance. Similarly, the professional teaching staff serve as educational gate keepers influencing the dual student outcomes of engagement with the institution attended as well as with the process of formal education and academic achievement through the tenor of their teacher-student relations both in, and outside of the formal classroom setting. Finally, no model of secondary school culture would be complete without an examination of the contribution made by the omnipresent peer group. All pervasive and intruding into almost every aspect of high school life, this phenomenon plays a critical role in the development of the status hierarchies that dominate the student sub-culture. Real or perceived group membership is often a determinative factor in the treatment that an individual student, or groups of students receives from other members of the school community.

In conclusion secondary schools continue to be complex organizations whose institutional dynamics have a profound effect on the lives of the individuals who inhabit them. The model proposed in this article represents an attempt to delve into the "black box of the contemporary secondary school, an institution whose organizational structures, ceremonies, myths, and rituals have become something of cultural icons.

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