Chapman Friends School:
A Study of the Creation of Culture

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(ABSTRACT)

In recent years a body of literature on the topic of school culture has emerged, highlighting the importance of developing strong school cultures. My purpose was to explore the creation of culture in a new school by studying the school's core principles, leadership, history, practices, decision making, language, membership, environment, and critical events.

The setting for this descriptive case study was Chapman Friends School – an alternative Quaker high school located in a mid-Atlantic state. Data-gathering techniques included: (a) weekly on-site observations, (b) formal interviews, (c) school publications and documents, and (d) the researcher's log. The data were analyzed with a thematic coding system based on the cultural components.

Three factors were found to be critical in the creation of culture at Chapman Friends School: (a) core principles and the symbolic interactions whereby they were transmitted; (b) the charismatic, authentic leadership of the headmaster; and (c) the consensus-based standards for student membership. The creation of culture at Chapman Friends School was a process wherein school members sought to resolve problems and issues resulting from their conflicting expectations of what the school should be. The creation of culture at Chapman Friends School involved the development of a shared image of what the school should become. Finally, as indicated by previous researchers and supported in this study, a culture evolves over time.

The findings expand the field of literature on the subject of school culture and provide insight for school leaders and educators seeking to create effective school cultures. Related topics for further study include: (a) student enrollment screening procedures which shape a school culture, (b) the effect of secular school leaders on the creation of culture in religious-based schools, (c) the effect of the absence of a Quaker majority in Quaker schools, and (d) alternative environmental options for school settings and their effect on school culture.
DEDICATION

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.
Philippians 1:6

To John and Frances Dowling, my parents, who gave me the gift of life and who continue to inspire me to live a life rich in the hope, joy, and love of God.
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I give thanks to God, for the Spirit of the Lord has been upon me in this endeavor.

I am most grateful to John, Joan, and the teachers, staff, students, and parents of Chapman Friends School who welcomed me into their community and afforded me intimate access to their struggles, challenges, joys, and successes during their first school year. Due to their openness, sincerity of heart, and enthusiasm, I was able to complete this study. I have been inspired and enriched through my encounters with this community of remarkable individuals.

To Dr. David Parks, my committee chairman, I am sincerely appreciative. His enthusiastic interest in my study and abiding encouragement, not to mention the many hours he spent reading my dissertation, have been critical to my completing what, at times, appeared to be an impossible task. I also extend appreciation to my committee members, Drs. Patrick Carlton, Christina Dawson, Richard Fenchak, and Stephen Parson, for the time and effort they extended on my behalf.

“It takes a village to write a dissertation,” and I am greatly indebted to the Blessed Sacrament School village. Valerie Garcia, my Colleagues in Christ, Father John Cregan, the students, and their parents, have championed me from the start, offering their blessings, prayers, encouraging words, inspiring cards and banners, and even snacks during my month-long sabbatical. My success in this endeavor is due in large part to the unyielding support I have received from this caring, Christ-centered community.

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In closing, I acknowledge the simple yet profound role that Carl Dolan played in this process. When I began my research in 1997, Carl was the headmaster of one of the parent schools of Chapman Friends School. I had initially met Carl in the early 90s and it was Carl who John contacted to inquire about me. Carl gave John a very positive recommendation, thus John
welcomed me warmly to Chapman Friends School. This acknowledgment is bittersweet as Carl died in the fall of 1999. His journey toward authenticity is now complete.
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