

## On Teachers' Social Culture

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### Abstract

Teachers' social culture refers to the integration of social concepts, rules, behaviors and thinking systems constituted and shared by the group of teachers during their communicative practices in the domain of school. As a subculture of school cultures, it's not only influenced by school cultures but also reconstructs school cultures, and constructs the assumptions, beliefs and values of teachers' culture.

**Key words:** Teacher; Social culture; Teachers' culture

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Teachers' interaction in school is often understood as an interpersonal art, and belongs to the scope of the study of interpersonal relationship. We believe that it also belongs to the category of the study of teachers' culture. That whom a teachers chooses to contact or not contact and contact in what manners, is permeated with the teacher's value and way of thinking. In different schools, teachers' interactions have different forms and connotations. As an existing form of teachers' community, teachers' culture will inevitably lead to a social culture based on the value orientations, criteria and behavioral norms of the

teachers' group in their long-term communications. Under the organizational norms and institutions of the school, teacher's communicative behaviors will form a social culture based on the special domain of school. Therefore, teachers' social culture is formed in the particular domain of school, and is a confirmative way of thinking after the screening of the teachers' main values. When a teacher enters the "domain", she/he will adjust her/his values, behaviors, verbal expressions, communication methods and other aspects accordingly so as to adapt to the culture. Therefore, teachers' social culture is an important part of school cultures. Here we want to explore what is teachers' social culture, and how it affects teachers' culture.

### 1. THE CONNOTATION OF TEACHERS' SOCIAL CULTURE

Teachers' social culture is teachers' social interactive culture. From the perspective of scope, teachers' social culture is a part of the social interactive culture. If the social interactive culture is regarded as a "macro culture", then, teachers' social culture can be deemed as a "micro culture". Following this idea, teachers' social culture not only relies on the social interactive culture but also is independent of the social interactive culture. So, to define teachers' social culture, we must clarify the concept of social culture. Although domestic and foreign claims on the concept of social culture are different, they both contain two aspects - cultural form and cultural significance and interpretation. Cultural form refers to the language and behaviors during the communicative process. Cultural significance refers to people's value orientations and interpretative systems in the communications. The same kind of cultural form may have a variety of cultural significance, and the same kind of cultural significance may be expressed in different forms, depending on the individuals' own experiences,

knowledge and value awareness on the definition of communicative situation. This article will follow the social cultural framework of cultural form and cultural significance to discuss teachers' social culture.

Teachers' social culture is the performance of the interpersonal relationships in school. Some people believe that school interpersonal relationship has five kinds of forms: stable form, complementary form, mandatory form, conflictive form and closed form. The interactive culture between teachers and leaders has five types: respectful type, coordinated type, obedient type, advisory type and conflictive type (Xiao & Shen, 2008). These five interpersonal relations illustrate the communicative cultures between teachers and leaders mainly from the perspective of interpersonal relationship. So, whether the communication between teachers and teachers has the same five performances? Similarly, how about the relationship between leaders and leaders? The teachers' social culture discussed in this article mainly refers to the interactive relations in school, and these relations not only include the interactive relations between school leaders and teachers, but also relations between teachers and their colleagues, between teachers and students as well as their parents, and between teachers and school administrators and ordinary workers. The performances of these relations are the forms of the teachers' social culture, and are the confirmative forms of teachers' social values. The significance of teachers' social culture comes from the value judgment realized by the teachers and their choice of value behaviors.

Based on the above analysis, we can make a descriptive definition on teachers' social culture. Teachers' social culture refers to the integration of social concepts, rules, behaviors and thinking systems constituted and shared by the group of teachers during their communicative practices in the domain of school. This paper focuses on exploring the influences of teachers' social culture on the school culture. To explore the issue, we make a prerequisite assumption that the relationship between teachers' social culture and school culture is a process of mutual construction, meanwhile, teachers' social culture is an important part of teachers' culture, and mutually construct with the teachers' culture. Therefore, below we will explore that how does teachers' social culture construct the school culture? How does it mutually construct with the teachers' culture?

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## **2. TEACHERS' SOCIAL CULTURE RECONSTRUCTS THE SCHOOL CULTURE**

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Teachers' social culture is the subculture of school culture, and is inevitably affected by the school culture. That whom a teacher chooses to contact and to contact in what manner is based on the value system of the school

culture for judgment and selection. Meanwhile, teachers' social culture has a reaction to the school culture. It rebuilds the school culture through the reconstruction of the school's value system, which also reflects the needs of school cultural changes and development. Therefore, from the perspective of cultural change, we will explore that how teachers' social culture reacts to the school culture. According to theory of cultural values, cultural world is the confirmative form of people's thinking of value (Sima, 2011, p.43). School culture is also the confirmative form of teachers' thinking of value. Therefore, teacher is the subject to create school culture. Some scholars believe that teachers' communication has a profound practical significance. Teachers' interaction helps improve the individual teachers' qualities; helps form a good teachers' group; helps achieve the comprehensive teaching courses; helps improve the comprehensive construction of classes, and helps build a harmonious campus. Based on these, Liu Sijia proposes the strategies to promote the interactions among teachers: form a correct interactive idea among teachers; strengthen the education of interactions among teachers; strengthen the dialogue exchanges in teachers' communications; strengthen the mutual coordination and joint progress among teachers; the school should establish a platform and mechanism for teachers' exchanges and cooperation (Liu, 2009, pp.18-20). The study shows that teachers' social culture has a profound impact on the school culture, and also guides the evolution of the teachers' culture.

The change of a subculture will inevitably bring about the change of the entire culture. Therefore, by changing the social belief and value relationship of communication teachers can reconstruct the school culture. Although teachers' social culture is constrained by the special "domain" of school, the teachers do not passively accept the influences of the structure of school culture. The nature of the pre-existing experience and pursuit of realization in the minds of the teachers provides conditions for them to create a culture. Firstly, teachers continuously construct the value of interpersonal communication based on whether the social practice is able to meet their needs. Culture is not a general symbol or form, but is people's special thinking of value which confirms the various things in the outside world, and is the form that people change the world in order to meet their purposes by creative practices (Sima, 2011, p.43). Teachers' interaction is a purposeful social practice, and is a value practice for the teachers to fulfill the purpose of communication. When the need of this value practice has been met, new needs will be proposed constantly, and these new needs will be met based on creative value practices. During these spiral and repeated communicative activities, teachers' value consciousness will be constantly constructed, and teachers' social culture will be re-created. The new social culture changes the value relationship among teachers, and the new value relationship also

creates a new school culture. Secondly, people are cultural beings. Cultural creation is the realization of human nature (Sima, 2011). Teachers' creation of culture in communications is the essence of teachers' existence in the domain of school. Teachers' social culture is the result of teachers' abstraction and objectification of the regulations, orders, and thinking of value of school culture, and is created by teachers to realize their values. Teachers' interaction is a process to constructing teachers' social culture, and to reconstruct the school culture.

### 3. TEACHERS' SOCIAL CULTURE AND TEACHERS' CULTURE CONSTRUCT EACH OTHER

Teachers' social culture is an expression of teachers' culture in the communicative practices, which is contained in the structure of teachers' culture. The formation of teachers' social culture is the process to form teachers' culture. They construct each other during the interactions.

Teachers' culture is a set of shared basic assumptions learnt by the teachers through socialization, trainings and other ways. These assumptions are the useful experience learnt by the teachers' group in survival, development, adaptation to the environment and the internalization of everyday experience and abilities, so they take it for granted as the correct methods for the related issues of understandings, thinking and feelings to pass on to new teachers (Xie & Zhang, 2012, p.34). The internal structure of teachers' culture includes teachers' assumption, teachers' value orientation and teachers' belief. Teachers reconstruct teachers' assumption, teachers' belief and teachers' value orientation during the communicative process. When teachers' cultural structure limits the development of their social culture, they will reset a thinking system of value through reflection, and when this thinking system of value is confirmed and recognized by the teachers' community, the teachers' culture has been rebuilt.

#### 2.1 Teachers' Social Culture and Teachers' Assumption Construct Each Other

Teachers' social culture consists of three levels, the first is the behavioral way of teachers' social contacts, such as teachers' home visits, talking to students and awe to the leadership. It is dominant; followed by teachers' social values, including the communicative goals and philosophy, etc. shared by the teachers' group. It is between dominant and recessive; the third level is teachers' social assumption which is hidden behind the teachers' social words and actions. It is recessive. In teachers' social contacts, these basic assumptions are basically not perceived and are taken for granted as the basis for actions. For example, if a teacher takes the education level of the parents of a child's as the assumption to determine the responsible attitude

toward the child, then, at the time of the first contact with the parents, the teacher will concern about the level of the parental education, then select the content and manner to converse with the family, and determine the confidence toward the student accordingly. In association with the leadership, if the teacher assumes that he is the employee of the leadership, and the leaders are his employers, then the teacher will hold a belief that "if work not complied with the employers' requests, all hard work will become useless", so the teacher will "obediently" listen to the words of the leadership. If the teacher assumes that parents will interfere with teachers' teaching, he will often report the situation of a student to the parents in order to avoid the parents' blame to him. If the teacher assumes that if he treats the students well, the students will repay his kindness in the future, the teacher will predict which students will become promising in the future, so as to care for him and so on. Teachers' social assumptions directly affect their communications with the leadership, peers, students as well as parents.

The assumption shared by teachers' group is the deep instruction of school products and school members' actions and value orientations, and is also the cultural unit which people take for granted. It is rooted deeply in the core layer of teachers' culture (Xie & Zhang, 2012, p.117). Teachers in the social contacts will act in accordance with the assumptions of their value system. They are a way of doing things taken for granted and are often not aware of. These assumptions are learned in the course of teachers' daily interactions. When the result of interactions meets the teachers' expectations, they will solidify the original assumption, but when the communicative process does not meet their expectations, they would modify the interactive assumption. This provides a basic condition for the mutual construction between teachers' social culture and teachers' assumption. When the social result does not meet teachers' value needs, they will reflect on their languages and methods to explore and establish a new assumption. For example, if a teacher assumes that "peer is the enemy," then, in the interactions with his peers he will not be sincere. But when the teacher finds that during the interactions other people treat him sincerely, he may establish a new assumption - "peer is not necessarily the enemy", then he will continue to verify this assumption. This new assumption will be fixed as an assumption of the teacher after the verification of his social experience.

#### 2.2 Teachers' Social Culture and Teachers' Value Orientation Construct Each Other

Teachers' value orientation and teachers' assumption are both an important part of teachers' social culture, which are relevant with the constitution of teachers' social belief. In the internal structure of teachers' social culture, the core layer is teachers' assumption, above which is teachers' social orientation, and teachers' social orientation in turn leads to a certain kind of social belief.

Teachers' value orientation is the intermediate layer between the most hidden layer of assumption and the explicit layer of teachers' belief. Compared to assumption, it can easily be perceived or captured. Teacher's value orientation is the middle layer in teachers' social culture, which selects interactions through direct value judgments. Thus, similar with teachers' assumption, teachers' social culture and teachers' value orientation also constrain and affect each other. When a teacher assumes that "peer is the enemy", he will hold the value orientation that "cannot tell the truth nor closely contact in the work", so he will avoid the work and keep a distance when interacts with his colleagues. When the teacher discovers in the processes of interactions that his peers are sincere, he will slowly gain a new experience - "peer is not necessarily the enemy." After verification of this assumption he will choose to sincerely interact with his peers, and "tell the truth" will become the teacher's value orientation. Therefore, teachers' value orientation also observes the law of "antinomy".

### **2.3 Teachers' Social Culture and Teachers' Belief Construct Each Other**

Teachers' belief determines teachers' social action, thereby constrains the social culture. Teachers' belief refers to teachers' belief about the overall educational activity, and is the "database" which is accumulated and developed from the student period, taken granted by the individual teachers, and organized in the principle of individual logic and psychological importance. It is a referential framework to teachers' educational practices (Xie & Zhang, 2012, p.199). Teachers' social contact is a part of teachers' practice, and in the practice various interactive relationships will be inevitably established and form the interactive culture. Any social activity of teachers must uphold a certain belief. Teachers will take the initiative to choose whom they will contact, to take what kind of communication method, and to use what kind of language paradigm. Even facial expressions and performance of emotions are directly related to teachers' belief. For example, some teachers keep a straight face when talking with students, this is because they hold the belief that "a little more sunshine makes a student reckless", so they choose to keep a straight face to interact

with the students, thus the students will feel the teacher's seriousness and dare not to be naughty. Teachers' belief is the internalization and definition of teachers' interactive experience. If a teacher gets the desired result based on his pre-existing belief, the belief will be learnt and stereotyped into the teacher's social belief system. When social values bring about changes in value choice, the teacher's social experience will be constantly refreshed and updated during the practices, or when the teacher's social action gets frustrated, the teacher will revise his belief in turn, and will refresh or update the existing belief structure. Therefore, teachers' social culture builds teachers' belief in turn, so external social culture can also change teachers' belief.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Teachers' social culture is an important part of teachers' culture, which is the integration of social concepts, rules, behaviors and thinking systems constituted and shared by teachers' group during their communicative practices in the domain of school. Teachers' social culture to some extent rebuilds school culture, and affects the development and evolution of school culture in the content and method of the school interpersonal relationships and interpersonal contacts. Meanwhile, teachers' social culture constructs teachers' culture mutually, and affects the evolution of teachers' culture through teachers' assumption, teachers' value orientation and teachers' belief.

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