

## Principal Leadership and Its Link to the Development of a School's Teacher Culture and Teaching Effectiveness: A Case Study of an Award-Winning Teaching Team at an Elementary School

Hsin-Hsiange Lee, *Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology*  
Mao-neng Fred Li, *National Chia-yi University*

**Abstract** This study aimed 1) to describe a school principal's leadership and the context of the school's overall teacher culture that cultivated an award-winning team at an elementary school; 2) to analyze the award-winning team's learning behaviors, shared goals, values, beliefs, mutual interactions or dialogues, and sharing of experiences; and 3) to unveil the key factors that shape excellent teaching team culture and its functions. Major findings were:

1. The award-winning teacher group at the school was able to facilitate the development of professional co-operation and teaching innovation within the school and to transform the school into a learning community.
2. The campus ethics of affiliation, collegiality, and experience-heritage were cultivated at the award-winning elementary school.
3. The school leaders, especially the principal, had a critical impact on the development of the school's teacher culture via their determination and encouragement.
4. Both the school principal and the school's senior teachers played an exemplary and leading role in shaping a high-quality school culture for professional development.

**Keywords** Teaching excellence awards; Teacher culture; Principal leadership

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## Background

Teaching excellence awards are offered by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan to kindergarten, primary, junior high, and senior high school teachers in recognition of outstanding teaching. The awards are designed to encourage teaching innovation and improvement in class management (Ministry of Education, 2007), so that students can be more effectively taught or guided in line with their aptitudes.

The screening process for teaching excellence awards involves two review levels—local government and MOE. The reviewers' panel at each level includes authority representatives, teacher representatives, school administrators, parent representatives, experts, and community leaders of integrity. For each round of screening, document reviews and field observations are conducted. Evaluation criteria and weights are assigned to each dimension of teaching, as shown below:

1. Teaching ideals and process (50%), covering educational philosophy and practices, team operation, and classroom management;
2. Teaching innovation and accountability (50%), covering teaching innovation and learning performance.

The award for teaching excellence is designed to be given to a collaborative teaching team consisting of at least three certified teachers, public or private, at senior high, junior high, elementary, and kindergarten levels. Excellence covers two dimensions: (1) teaching ideals and process; and (2) teaching innovation and accountability, which includes educational philosophy and practices, team operation, classroom management, teaching innovation, and learning performance. The award-winning teams receive a trophy, as well as nationwide praise, and a handsome cash award of NT\$600,000 for the Gold prize and NT\$300,000 for the Silver prize.

## Research questions

The dynamics between teachers, principals, and the cultures developed in these learning environments form the basis for our research questions. The explicit questions in this study are: how do Excellence Award recipients achieve their excellence in teaching and guidance? Did the excellent teaching team create a unique school culture that helped them win the award for teaching excellence from the Ministry of Education? What factors contributed to teachers' willingness to form a teaching team instead of keeping with their original habit of working alone? What is the overall contextual culture in which the teaching team is situated? How does the school principal's leadership affect the school culture? What are the key factors that direct the development of a quality school culture?

## Literature review

### *Relationship between school culture, teacher culture, and teacher behaviors*

School culture, varying from school to school, is an "inner reality" (Deal & Peterson, 1993) of schools that reflects the state of the school climate or learning environment. As Peterson (2002) states, "It is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the 'persona' of the school. A school culture influences the ways people think, feel, and act" (p. 10). Teacher culture is a major as-

pect of school culture. Usually, teacher culture reflects the conservative side of the current social mainstream culture; in particular, a culture of indifference may emerge as a natural reflection of sustained suppression by upper authorities (Fong, 1998). Teachers are not tools with which to consolidate political power or stabilize a social order. When teachers' status is limited to the tiers of professional and technical personnel within the school system—responsible only for management and implementation of courses—with no power of critique or adjustment over curriculum and teaching, all educational outcomes will be limited to objectives-level teaching only (Weng, 2003).

The key to the success of school education depends on a good quality school culture, because “school culture influences what people pay attention to (focus), how they identify with the school (commitment), how hard they work (motivation), and the degree to which they achieve their goals (productivity)” (Peterson & Deal, 2002, p. 10). The existence of unique school cultures allows each school to display its distinct advantages (Cheng, 2004) and has a great impact on performance and on the school's effectiveness (C.S.Wu, 2007). Traditional school norms have been shown to construct *cultures* antithetical to collegial interaction among *teachers* and between *teachers* and administrators (Keedy, 1991). Current educational reform in Taiwan demands a grassroots approach from school teachers, in which their relationships must switch from alienation to close co-operation within a learning group. Teachers are being asked to reshape their identities, which places them in an awkward position. They have their own culture problem to solve (Chen, 2004). School culture is gradually shaped inside and outside of the campus. A close relationship exists between school culture and overall school image and effectiveness. Understanding a school's teacher culture is integral to developing a good quality school culture. The key element of school culture relies on the teacher culture. Where there is a high-quality, positive, and professional teaching culture, there must be a high-quality school culture. As a Chinese saying puts it, “It takes ten years to nurture a tree, but it may take up to one hundred to educate a man.” Education takes time and is the fundamental root of cultural heritage; the impact of teachers on students is far-reaching. Teaching is an on-going process of innovation and growth. Facing the demands of educational innovation and new expectations, teachers benefit from connections and function best when not isolated from the society.

### **Relationship between school principals' leadership and a school's teacher culture**

The school principal is the creator or re-shaper of a school's teacher culture and influences not only the actions of the school staff, but also their motivations and spirit (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The principal's personality traits, attitudes, and behaviors have a crucial influence on school culture and, through school culture, on teacher culture, especially its atmosphere. For instance, previous studies have demonstrated that school principals have a significant direct or indirect impact on teachers' performance, job satisfaction, effectiveness, motivation, commitment to professional development, and collaboration (Anderman, Belzer, & Smith, 1991; Nnadozie, 1993; Campo, 1993; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Reames, 1997; Jones, 1998; Hallinger, 2003;

Sahin, 2004; Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; DuPont, 2009). The literature review on effective principals reveals that they appear “transformational” rather than “transactional” (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1988; Day, 2000; Sahin, 2004), “interactive” rather than “buffered” (Anderson, 2004; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006), and “empowering” rather than “controlling” (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Alkire, 1995; Day, 2000), and that their school culture tend to be “collegial” rather than “bureaucratic” (Kline, 1987; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Drago-Severson & Pinto, 2006) and “collaborative” rather than “individualistic” (Colley, 1999; Gruenert, 2000; Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Consequently, an effective principal may need to offer teachers charismatic leadership, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass, 1985). What is more, an efficient school principal should be able to read the culture correctly, assess the culture appropriately, and reinforce or transform it as needed (Deal & Peterson, 1999) to make the school run smoothly and effectively.

### **Teaching excellence award and quality of teaching**

In Taiwan, the teaching excellence award for primary and secondary school teachers was designed to recognize outstanding performance in teaching and to encourage teachers to devote themselves to teaching innovation and providing better learning guidance (Ministry of Education, 2007). Alberta, Canada, started offering teaching excellence awards in 1988. The province’s education authorities invited students, parents, teachers, colleagues, principals, and community members together to recommend excellent teachers or outstanding principals to the education authorities (Alberta Government, 2006). In Australia, a National Teaching Excellence Award sponsored by the National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEITA) Foundation of Australian Scholarships Group (referred to as ASG) was also established. On behalf of the government, the Foundation honors and praises excellent teachers in kindergarten, elementary, and junior high schools (NEITA Foundation, 2006).

No matter where a teaching excellence award is offered—Taiwan, Canada, or Australia—each one focuses on the improvement of teaching quality and learning effectiveness. Alberta, Canada, honors outstanding teachers with a grand dinner and an award certificate given to teachers and their schools. Australia’s program works in much the same way. The Australian award also offers prize money to assist the winners in promoting a new research project on teaching innovation. Since the implementation of a new nine-year integrated curriculum in Taiwan, the Ministry of Education has invited experts and scholars each year to select the best teaching teams, in order to encourage teachers to improve their teaching quality. Winners are rewarded for their achievements with a handsome bonus.

### **Teaching team and school culture innovation**

An effective teaching team should include curriculum experts, scholars, and academic staff. However, the team should not involve too many people, and its members should be able to interact freely in order to eliminate self-isolation among teachers (Shih, 2004; Jackson & Davis, 2000). School authorities, in developing a teaching team, must first understand the unique traits of the teaching team to make its oper-

ation efficient and smooth. When the teams are working effectively, the school organizational culture is better able to make smooth changes, integrating and transforming school teaching and guidance to enhance students' learning.

## **Relationship between teaching excellence award-winning teams and a school's teacher culture**

A school's *teacher culture* is defined as the powerful latent force that resides within a school and guides teachers' behavior. It can have a tremendous impact upon school effectiveness. School culture has a dynamic evolution and is developed gradually through a long-term cumulative process. It is fostered from elements essential to the campus, such as teachers and students, parents and community residents, and their interactions. An award-winning team is composed of teachers who regulate school activities or curriculum implementation. "Like teacher, like student" (a chip off the old block) is an oft-heard comment. From our point of view, teachers affect not only students but also schools. The teaching team may have a significant impact on the overall atmosphere of a campus, and can bring about in-depth changes in school culture (Chang & Lee, 2007). Changes in school culture that may be stimulated by a teaching excellence award-winning team are worthy of attention and research. A close relationship appears to exist between school culture and performance demonstrated by the teaching award-winning team (T.C. Wu, 2007).

## **Research design and procedure**

### ***Research methods & data analysis***

This study was a school-based participatory research project intended to describe and explore schools' teacher cultures. The research approach emphasized the views and reflections of researchers in their natural context to explore how people understand the social significance of the living environment, attempting to watch, listen, and analyze a society in the real world of life (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Data collection methods included 1) participant observation, 2) semi-structured interviews, 3) documentary analysis, and 4) field memos and reflection notes. The semi-structured interviews were initiated with 19 open-ended questions. Selected initiated interview questions are listed below:

1. Compared with the award-winning teaching team from the other school, what are the most distinctive features of your award-winning teaching team at Ta-I elementary school?
2. How do your team members communicate or interact with one another?
3. As a team member, what is your attitude or opinion toward conflicting views or issues?
4. Do your team members share a common vision to work for?
5. What strategies does the current principal use to encourage your team members to work hard?
6. Compared with the previous principal, what is the major difference in leadership?

In order to make the data analysis more credible or more reflective, the following measures were taken for data crosschecking. First, we used different sources of data from teachers, principals, and grade directors at different periods of time. Second, data were collected in diverse ways, such as from official or unofficial documents and from teachers' personal documents, to enrich and enhance the credibility of data.

### **Selection of research field**

Initially, two nearby elementary schools whose teaching teams had won the Teaching Excellence Award from the Ministry of Education, Taiwan, were sought as our study participants. After a brief introduction to our case study, two principals were consulted in person about their willingness to take part in the study. We also took steps to ensure that we would not interfere with school operations and would protect the privacy of the people involved. Finally, we obtained two principals' permission for preliminary entry into the research. After evaluating the schools' contexts, teachers' openness, and the convenience of observation times for researchers, one elementary school called Ta-I Elementary School was selected as the setting for our case study, through which we hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of the award-winning teaching team's culture.

### **Timetable for entry into the research field**

This study consisted of a two-stage investigation of six months' duration, during which researchers would conduct data collection and interviews. During the first stage, the researchers went to the research setting for an initial exploration. The researcher held three interviews with the principal about research topics. During this two-month period, the researchers also met with some members of the teaching-excellence team and finalized their initial study mainframe and research questions.

Later, the researchers entered the research site for the second stage of the study, which lasted one semester (four months). During this observation period, the researchers made school setting or class observations, conducted in-depth interviews with teachers involved with the study, and assembled reflective anecdotal records from interview notes or observations, memos from transcripts, audio recordings, and school documents. Then all the data were analyzed and categorized for identification of themes.

### **Researcher's role and research ethics**

In this study, the researchers acted as participant-observers. The role of participant-observer acknowledges that researchers cannot be value-free. However, research ethics were strictly observed. The observers maintained a high degree of self-awareness during the participation process in order not to disturb the pace of school operations or school ecology, so that the school's teacher culture could be revealed as it existed.

### **Research results and discussion**

This study was conducted through a literature review and a case study to clarify the contextual links between teaching team performance and school culture, teacher beliefs, and teacher behaviors. The empirical results are discussed in sequence by addressing four major research questions and topical themes subsumed under each research question.

## What are the main characteristics of the school culture and the teacher culture at Ta-I Elementary School and their related contexts?

### ***Ethics-based harmonious culture with mutual caring and support***

During the study, teachers at Ta-I Elementary School repeatedly mentioned mutual caring and aid among colleagues. In particular, many novice teachers were moved, in their first year of teaching, by the ways in which a lot of senior, experienced teachers not only acted as their personal mentors but also extended their welcome, care, and support or encouragement. What's more, senior teachers enjoyed sharing their own personal and informative experiences with beginning teachers. Excellent interaction and a harmonious organizational atmosphere within the school appeared to be the main driving force in making Ta-I Elementary School outstanding. One teacher shared, "When we came to the school ten years ago, those senior teachers treated us as they did before. Take the [XX] teacher, for example—he was very enthusiastic about giving us a morale boost, and would not look down on novice[s] just because of his advanced age (i.e., being old does not mean being wise)" (K01-21 interview).

A teacher who has taught at Ta-I Elementary School said, "I don't feel any stress from the upper authorities, and we all respect our principal and school ethics as well!" (Z02-17 interview). Administrative ethics or campus ethics at Ta-I Elementary School are solidly grounded. The ethical orientation mentioned above results in a clear definition of roles and produces a traditional atmosphere of authoritative hierarchy. At the same time, the campus ethics can moderate conflicts between teachers and thus promote harmonious relationships among its members.

### ***The sharing culture as an aid to upholding or inheriting team experiences***

The harmonious culture at Ta-I Elementary School effectively defuses confrontations between members and has enabled the previously isolated teacher culture to shift toward a culture of team sharing and collaboration. This collaborative culture facilitates the inheritance of experiences in a similar manner to an apprenticeship system. This, in turn, ensures the professionalism of beginning teachers. A beginning teacher described his feelings about the teacher culture at Ta-I:

If a teacher at the Ta-I Elementary School finds that other teachers have a better way to make their students advance more and would like to share, he will try his best to emulate them. In particular, as a novice teacher, I should learn more. (S01-14 interview)

However, a teacher at Ta-I Elementary School complained of having a sense of accomplishment, but also feeling very tired! ... In fact, sometimes the school does not demand us to do so much. It is teachers themselves who decide to do their best! Perhaps this is just the voice from some of the teachers and it does not mean the position from the principal. Instead, some people ask for a better job by themselves. (Z03-26 interview)

As these comments suggest, teachers' individual behaviors are affected by campus culture and by group pressure.

### ***Team participation and joint commitment***

At Ta-I Elementary School, a number of classrooms were often still lit up at 6 or 7 p.m. Teachers were in the classrooms working on classroom layout and lesson preparations or correcting students' work. Because teachers at the school are usually very busy during the school day, these jobs have to be done after school:

Since most of them are unmarried female teachers, the principal asks them to leave the school earlier for safety reasons. It is so touching to find a lot of classrooms still with lights on at 6 or 7 pm on cold winter nights. School teachers are willing to do so. They must be committed to their job and identify with the school; otherwise, they would leave school as scheduled! (L01-41 interview)

Teachers seemed to regard the school as a home also during weekends. For example, there were six or seven teachers who came to school to correct students' papers or to prepare for sports on the weekend right before the school anniversary sports day. They had been very busy preparing for the coming sporting activities during the week and had not had time to correct papers or students' homework. When asked, "Why don't you take students' homework home for correction?" a common response was, "They are too heavy to carry and inconvenient to take home" (961.210 observation & interview).

### **What kind of teacher culture is revealed in the award-winning teaching team?**

#### ***The teaching excellence team is basically an extension of a grade team.***

Team members all agreed that winning the teaching award was a joint effort of the successfully extended operations of the grade team. Therefore, the award and the school's excellence are seen as an achievement accomplished by all members of Ta-I Elementary School.

The glory of winning the Teaching Excellence Award does not belong to us only! We are just the lucky ten whose names are listed on the prize. Like Mrs. X, when she is doing her project, there are two to three teachers from her grade team under her command. It can be said that our outstanding teaching team has been supported by all the grade teams at our school and has secured all possible resources from each grade to win the award! (A06-54 interviews)

#### ***Team members are touched by the driving force of their insistence on educational ideals.***

Some teachers, after participating in the teaching team, were impressed by the entire team's ability to seek out innovation and to maintain a positive attitude. Some saw these characteristics as the greatest fruits of their efforts.

Because everyone has moments of laziness, a teacher cannot be very active all day every day. In the course of the team operation, everyone has a different job of data collection and does not know if there is any challenge waiting for you. However, you will gain a new im-

petus for moving on as soon as certain new ideas are proposed after a weekly meeting. ... When you go back to your own class, you will find that you are just a small screw of the big school machine that carries you on for ever. (J01-02 interviews)

What motivates the team members to make sacrifices for the benefit and achievement of the group is their adherence to educational ideals that are inspired by the group dynamics. By means of this momentum, many innovative curriculum units have been successfully completed.

### ***Teachers in the team are more active than the other teachers.***

When asked about ways to improve team development, each person had a lot of potential ideas leading to many feasible directions. One teacher shared:

If you want to carry out each aspect of the teaching plan, it needs a lot of manpower to get it done! There are quite a few partners who are worried about this. ... Everything is hard in the beginning. As long as I start it, I will go on without stopping. To stop halfway is not our style. We just do it without any doubt! (Man 01-02)

A lot of creativity and wisdom are aroused by the spirit to fight to the bitter end. Each member of the teaching team overcame a number of difficulties to design a series of teaching materials with enriched curriculum and teaching content.

### **How does the school principal affect the school's teacher culture?**

Over the past six years, Principal Wang was the first to win praise and recognition from parents and education authorities. In the eyes of the school's teachers, an outstanding principal possesses a variety of the skills discussed below.

#### ***Good communication skills***

Since Principal Wang's arrival in her new job, teachers have chatted more frequently with the principal of their own initiative. Some teachers feel that Mrs. Wang is therefore well informed about recent information regarding the teachers. They kid about her being "a secret policeman from the Ming dynasty!"

Some teachers think that the principal demonstrates high emotional quotient (EQ) because she can effectively handle unpleasant incidents between teachers and parents: "Our principal's EQ is quite good—for example, she is good at dealing with conflicts in points of view between administrative leaders and teachers" (Z03-36 interviews).

Because of her educational ideals, Mrs. Wang encourages open communication with colleagues to exchange different opinions and provide peer support. Although one teacher observed, "Our principal however sometimes insists on her perspective; for example, if there is something that she wants to get done, she will continuously persuade us and convince us to do so" (A01-65 interviews).

#### ***A culture changer***

Some elementary schools are relatively old and conservative. As a result, their organizational culture is deeply rooted and cannot be easily modified. A new school principal is often defeated by the school's traditions and cannot survive even the first

few days of the principalship. Ta-I Elementary School is no exception. However, Ta-I elementary teachers felt that an almost imperceptible change in school culture had occurred under Mrs. Wang:

Mrs. Wang has sparked an organizational culture change. (*Researcher: What is the difference?*) The big difference comes from her sincere care for and consideration of teachers. ... Mrs. Wang, after all, is a woman. Yet, she knows how to guide the overall development of the school comprehensively. (O01-01 interviews)

### ***Inspirational leadership: Recognition, rewarding, and encouragement***

The principal rarely resorted to invoking her authority to demand teachers' compliance. She respected teachers' opinions and listened to their comments. Consequently, teachers' resistance to authority was also rare:

Our principal is not an authoritative person. At open meetings, she does not directly criticize teachers and will communicate openly with us. Our face is saved because of her consideration of others!" (I01-65 interviews)

In addition, Mrs. Wang often focused on the positive side of a teacher. She usually looked for the teachers' merits rather than their shortcomings: "Mrs. Wang used to praise me in public. (*Researcher: Did you feel pressed?*) No, open praise is the best way of leading" (X02-33 interviews). Mrs. Wang often encouraged teachers in public through positive comments or feedback. In particular, whenever the parents or community members were present, she would list each teacher's merits and recognize schoolteachers' efforts: "Mrs. Wang's open positive comments are not the same as the smooth mediation to get along with colleagues. That kind of caring is different" (F01-19 interviews). Because of her smooth mediation, care-driven, and kind insistence, the teachers at Ta-I elementary school sense her caring and commitment, and they respond with hard work, which makes school excellence possible. It appears that Mrs. Wang has fulfilled a principal's main duty as "a school culture builder" (Campo, 1993, p. 119).

### ***Colleagues' good friends***

"Our principal has won our hearts!" This remark impressed the researchers. Many teachers at Ta-I had a sense of Mrs. Wang's affinity and were willing to make friends with her. A retired teacher recalled, "Mrs. Wang is so intimate, and she is often considerate of you! For example, she will buy a small gift for me when she takes a trip abroad. She has won my heart. It seems trivial, but it is important for mutual caring!" (X03-26 interviews)

## **Principal Wang's impact on the school's teacher culture**

### ***Creating an up-up group dynamic and fostering a win-win environment at Ta-I Elementary School***

In the information age, the only constant is change. In the new era of education, there are many aspects of education that need adjustment. However, due to their

habitual daily routines, school teachers are generally not prepared for a change: “Even if harmony resides within the school, the phantom of resistance to change will always be there!” (B01-25 interviews). Mrs. Wang claimed that “harmony” within the organization may not necessarily generate momentum. The principal must lead each of the organization’s members to participate in school activities.

From a superficial point of view, many principals assume that as long as the school teachers would not find fault with something here and there (of course, the less there is argument, the more there is harmony), the school will naturally make progress. From the outside, the school seems harmonious, but there is no upward momentum. To achieve school momentum, different levels of leadership and guidance are required. (B03-23 interviews)

By using different measures, Principal Wang encouraged teachers’ active involvement in school affairs. Trying not to miss any opportunity, Mrs. Wang managed the upward momentum for the school, which was her most important strategy for school management.

### ***Sense of accomplishment and importance***

Many teachers at Ta-I admitted that they were tired, but that they were filled with a sense of accomplishment and proud of being a member of the school: “To teach at Ta-I, I feel a sense of accomplishment” (Y02-23 interview). Silvester (2008) argued that a sense of accomplishment indeed may trigger enthusiasm in work. Mrs. Wang noticed its importance too:

Although teachers are usually mature adults, they are still very concerned about the principal’s emotional support and recognition. Due to lack of momentum, some academic grade teams could be strengthened more. Even if they have not performed very well, I usually will try my best to pick out some of their positive achievements for open recognition, as long as they are willing to do it. (B05-19 interviews)

### ***Monitoring the development of the administrative team as the school model***

Mrs. Wang had higher expectations for the administrative team than for the general teachers at Ta-I Elementary School. Her aim was to ask the executive staff to serve as good models, so that positive development of the whole school could be directed. For example, the principal would say:

School directors should spare no pains. The administrative staff should take the initiative to serve teachers. Then, effective teaching and learning can be facilitated. Because the division heads are excellent, they often assist the directors. You, directors, should work harder if you want to look after the administrative and teaching quality at the same time. In Taiwanese, you have to pick it up! Do it by yourself. In fact, to be responsible, directors themselves have done their best. (B05-43 interviews)

## What are the key factors that shape the development of teacher culture at Ta-I Elementary School?

### ***Emphasis on campus ethics and inheritance of experience***

Much attention has been paid to the traditional campus ethics at Ta-I as the key element affecting the teacher culture. One teacher commented, “She is the principal; how can we let her look after every trifling matter for us?” (A06-41 interviews).

Cultural inheritance is handed down intangibly and includes values, norms, and basic assumptions. Sometimes culture can be perceived, but not talked about. Why are things done the way they are? The cornerstone of cultural inheritance at Ta-I is its leaders. Without them, Ta-I would not be different from the other schools! (Reflection 970, 103)

During our interactions with the school’s teachers, we as researchers in the elementary school were impressed by their respect for the principal. Both the former principal, Mr. Lin, and the current principal, Mrs. Wang, were deeply respected. Although schoolteachers’ associations at all levels of education in Taiwan have played a more active role in the past few years, the Ta-I teachers’ association has not engaged in much conflict or controversy. This level of co-operation can be attributed to the solid campus ethics that maintain harmony.

### ***The leading role of senior teachers***

In addition, Ta-I has a unique inherited culture of “chicks following the mother hen,” which characterizes the leading role of senior teachers. The model enables the teacher culture at Ta-I to maintain a steady, progressive state and gives the school’s culture immunity to the deterioration caused by the rapid changes in the external environment: “Senior teachers take care of us like our own mothers!” (U02-23 interview). Senior teachers often took the initiative to share their teaching or life experiences with newcomers at Ta-I. Through a variety of situations, they helped newcomers adapt to a new teaching environment.

Several senior female teachers have served at Ta-I for a long time. They have won the other teachers’ respect and admiration. They, like housekeepers, tend to do things more actively and enthusiastically: “At Ta-I, these senior teachers are doing their utmost as teachers and get along with everyone quite well. What is more, they also are good co-ordinators. For instance, [XX] is the best peacemaker” (C02-54 interview).

The researchers also observed that there were many teachers who functioned like “housekeepers.” The teachers in these roles were more positive and took charge. They were indispensable leaders and helped to stabilize the school’s development. At Ta-I, there were indeed many senior figures of this type who provided models for the other schoolteachers to follow. When there were controversies concerning campus events, they often exerted a positive force for stability.

### ***Teachers’ overall quality***

As one teacher told the researchers: “You know, it is tough to get into Ta-I as a teacher unless you are in the top five. All teachers at Ta-I are excellent, no doubt” (A07-04 interview). Since many teachers at Ta-I Elementary School were outstanding students

at college and had high self-imposed expectations, they regarded it as a challenge to be a teacher at Ta-I. Combined with a positive group dynamic and atmosphere, they created a school culture that was different from the norm, which is often mediocre, isolated, and indifferent. This co-operative school culture has helped Ta-I usher in a new era of school development and achieve excellence in teaching.

### **Principal's personality: Considerateness, forgiveness, and insistence on educational ideals**

How can a principal make a difference? Mrs. Wang invited the school's teachers to participate in the management and operation of the school, with an attitude of empathy and tolerance. She often laughed and said, "I am just a person who gives a 'big hand.'" Her humility has shaped a good teacher culture, and her approach was the driving force of school development. There was an instance of her remark: "Everybody, be of good cheer! Up to this moment, this is the most serious talk I have given! All the teachers know my disposition. The serious talk will pass on from one teacher to another. At least, it happens at our school" (BA1-05 interviews).

The principal, Mrs. Wang, thought that upholding the ideals of education was a necessary part of administrative leadership:

Reducing the conflict between teaching and administration is necessary, but it is unknown how long the balance between the two sides will last. Perhaps, it is 'Me' who keeps the current balance ... because I think sometimes it is necessary to adhere to ideals. (B03-42 interviews)

### **Conclusions and implications**

Based on the preceding textual analysis and discussion of results, we conclude that teaching excellence can be achieved only through a collaborative school culture, and that school culture is explicitly shaped by a school's principal and implicitly dominated by a school's senior teachers. Specific conclusions and recommendations follow.

### **Conclusions**

#### ***Campus ethics are tightly embraced by teachers at the Teaching Excellence Award-winning school, where a positive teacher culture is demonstrated***

The investigated school put great emphasis on campus ethics and on harmonious interaction between teachers, such that teachers displayed high degrees of dedication to education and efficient working habits. Teachers' positive ways of thinking and senior teachers' active roles in leading and helping new teachers at the elementary school helped to establish a strong teaching model and an ethical atmosphere; these had been inherited from past generations, and will likely be handed down to future generations.

#### ***The Teaching Excellence Award-winning team was formed from a study group of the same grade teachers and developed step by step for many years.***

The Teaching Excellence Award-winning team can be described as a microcosm of the grade team. It was peer-oriented for professional development. The team had been operating for many years and was quite mature. The team members shared good

feelings among themselves. They met weekly to share and exchange experiences in subject teaching and classroom management issues, as well as for emotional catharsis.

***Teachers on the award-winning team are more willing to accept challenges and uphold educational ideals than outsiders.***

The award-winning team shared a common vision to improve their teaching so that students would receive a better education. Members generally worked hard to carry out their missions. Their mutual cohesion was so high that they were more willing to face new challenges. Team members generally had faith that they would get things done through mutual support and continuous innovation in teaching.

***The school principal has a direct impact on the development of a school's teacher culture.***

Principal Wang was often observed to demonstrate care, empathy, and inclusive communication skills that established good rapport with teachers; she offered encouragement as well, giving them a sense of accomplishment. She was also patient, often waiting for an appropriate time to implement any change that required a transformation in the school environment or an improvement to the school's upward momentum. What's more, she always managed to enhance school efficiency through her high expectations and determined will to fulfill the ideals of education within a shared and committed working environment. It seemed that she "led rather than bossed" (Alkire, 1995, p. 22), such that her role was one of service to teachers and staff, rather than of simply issuing commands.

***Senior teachers as mentors can implicitly shape a high-quality campus culture.***

The school's senior teachers, like housekeepers, served as good examples to the junior teachers on the campus and exerted an implicitly stabilizing force. Due to these senior mentors' willingness to share their previous teaching experiences, and due to their active role in the development of collaborative *cultures*, newcomers and junior teachers were able to quickly adapt, transform themselves, and integrate into Ta-I Elementary School.

## **Implications for practice**

Strategies for shaping a high-quality teacher culture are suggested as follows.

***Collaborative teaching teams should be developed to release teachers from their self-isolation.***

As seen in the case study, the fostering of collaboration, common goals, and shared values among teachers in the teaching team is an essential prerequisite to promoting teaching experiences and problem-solving capacity. The teaching team allowed members to help each other with guidance and counseling; in particular, team members' encouragement, support, and assistance allowed new teachers in the team to quickly and effectively integrate themselves into school life and to adapt to school traditions.

***To have an effective teaching team, major leaders should be carefully chosen.***

Schools must carefully choose an enthusiastic person as team leader because “high-achieving schools have strong, competent leaders” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 156). The teaching team may develop their own activities, such as study groups, teaching and research meetings, as well as casual daily gatherings to promote team members’ cohesion and reduce their working pressure. Such mutual supporting dynamics between team members are only activated by a leader’s engagement and enthusiasm.

***Principals and administrative staff must set a good model and replace formal leadership with care and service.***

To create high quality teaching teams, a school’s administrative team must make sure that all the necessary resources are available when needed. Principals and administrative staff are most effective when they do not act intrusively as administrative superiors, but instead offer needed resources, emotional care, and support to make the transformation of campus culture possible.

***Be courteous to quality senior teachers to uphold campus ethics.***

Campus ethics can be upheld by inherited norms and by the teaching experience transferred from senior teachers to novice teachers. Thus, high-quality experienced senior teachers should be honored with praise and recognition whenever and wherever possible. School innovation and effectiveness may be enhanced through a supportive environment, an ethic of continuous improvement, and a stable school culture of inherited norms.

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