

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“The principal is the key player in a school; from the principal, the climate of the school will come. The climate of a school is its moral feeling derived from the values that the principal advocates and makes actionable. The climate significantly impacts the culture. The culture is defined by the practices, both explicit and implicit, in which the constituents of the school are involved. . . . The climate and culture of the school impacts the type of community that a school will be. The sense of community is defined by how the relationships within the school are created, valued, sustained, and managed.”

—Paul M. Quick and Anthony H. Normore

The climate or atmosphere of a school reflects the cultural norms adopted by principal and teachers. Reciprocally, climate may affect a deepening of values and beliefs shared by school constituents. Culture, or ethos, is central to school success. Culture is the glue that holds the elements of school together. *Culture* refers to patterns of learned behavior, shared meanings, and a commitment to shared values. *Climate* is the mood prevalent in a school. A school, for instance, that encourages constructivist learning theory to inform the nature of knowledge and teaching practices will provide students with

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opportunities to construct meanings on their own. Hands-on or active learning experiences are commonly found in such schools. Classroom climate is open and engaging as teachers encourage experimentation while employing varied and alternative teaching strategies. Students are active, moving about the classroom to work on projects with fellow students in cooperative learning groups. Organized chaos may characterize the classroom experience for these students. Constructivist pedagogy is supported by teachers and principal, who believe that people learn best constructing meanings on their own, sometimes through trial and error. These values, which sustain experiential learning, create an atmosphere in which learning becomes a spirited engagement between learner and content, where the teacher serves as a facilitator. The climate that ensues from such beliefs of how students learn best affirms and deepens school commitment to learning by doing. Hence, climate and culture are reciprocal processes that represent the essence of a classroom or a school.

Culture is made up of and shaped by the values, beliefs, and attitudes that exist among teachers, students, parents, staff, and community. Culture doesn't only affect values, it also reflects them. Also, culture is reflected in the behavioral norms, traditions, and myths of the school (Schein, 1992). The culture of a school is conveyed formally via meetings, brochures, and logos and informally through hallway, cafeteria, and faculty lounge conversations.

A school climate or environment that is safe, secure, attractive, bright, and clean, where discipline codes are enforced and hallways are pleasant, is supported by a culture that promotes a sense of respect and pride in the school. As a cultural leader, you are in a pivotal position to greatly influence the nature and extent of school culture and climate. Your actions as a cultural leader ultimately affect student achievement (Cotton, 2003).

One of the challenges you face as a new leader is to widen your lens to avoid seeing behaviors and events in isolation of the context in which they occur. Rather than viewing the school from only an organizational or structural perspective (Owens, 1995), a cultural leader engages others in discussion of core beliefs and values.

Deal and Peterson (1999) recommend several questions that give principals a way to understand a school's culture:

- How long has the school existed?
- Why was it built, and who were the first inhabitants?
- Who has had a major influence on the school's direction?
- What critical incidents occurred in the past, and how were they resolved, if at all?
- What were the preceding principals, teachers, and students like?
- What does the school's architecture convey? How is space arranged and used?
- What subcultures exist inside and outside the school?
- Who are the recognized (and unrecognized) heroes and villains in the school?
- What do people say (and think) when asked what the school stands for? What would they miss if they left?
- What events are assigned special importance?
- How is conflict typically defined? How is it handled?
- What are the key ceremonies and stories of the school?
- What do people wish for? Are there patterns to their individual dreams? (pp. 17–19)

The first thing you do as a new principal is to sense the school climate and seek to understand its culture. As Matthews and Crow (2003) explain, "All other efforts will be contingent on your understanding of what already exists" (p. 146). Once you understand both climate and culture, you can begin to frame a vision for the school. Vision can also reframe a school's culture and affect climate. However, vision cannot be built in isolation of culture and climate.

The major themes or underlying assumptions of this book and series on the principalship are as follows:

- The principal is *the* key cultural leader in the school building to promote student learning. Student learning cannot occur without mindful attention to school culture and climate. These concepts form the foundation that supports student learning. As a specially trained cultural leader, you champion the beliefs and values that encourage high achievement for all students. You realize, as cultural leader, that school climate influences student learning. You serve a vital role in order to accomplish deep, sustained, and schoolwide achievement for all students (Stolp, 1991).

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- High achievement for all students is the major goal for a principal. A principal may possess charisma, increase parental participation in school activities, raise funds for the PTA, organize meaningful cultural events, or even possess great vision. However, the bottom line is that a principal first and foremost is concerned with activities that actively promote good teaching, which in turn promotes student learning. A principal cannot be considered successful unless high student achievement in academic areas is achieved.

- A principal should be familiar with the three major approaches to management and leadership: classical organizational theory, the human relations approach, and the behavioral science approach (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2003). Taken together, they offer a variety of ways of understanding and working within the school organization. School culture and climate differ within each major approach. Learning to effect change within a school requires a principal to become familiar with specific theories of management within each approach. Although this book doesn't directly address these approaches, successful principals may use various theories to accomplish certain objectives. For instance, if a principal needs to increase motivation among faculty, an understanding of Frederic Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory of motivation is important. Similarly, Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) situational leadership theory is essential in order to realize that each school may be at a different stage of development in terms of organizational structure and maturity. Such a perspective is important for a principal to take in order to adequately assess where to start in leading and developing an organization. Although this work doesn't specifically mention each theory, many ideas are culled from the three theories (see, e.g., Argyris, 1957; Bennis, 1989; Blau & Meyer, 1987; Etzioni, 1975; Fiedler & Chemers, 1984; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1951; Whyte, 1956).

- The principal must play an active, ongoing role in cultural leadership. The comprehensive study *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship* (Portin, 2003) indicated that principals do not necessarily have to have expertise in all

areas (e.g., instructional, cultural, managerial, human resources, strategic, external development, micropolitical leadership), but they must be master “diagnosticians,” able to provide the school what it needs at the right time and in the right context. Nevertheless, I maintain that cultural leadership is qualitatively different from most other forms of leadership. Although it’s difficult to separate each form of leadership from the others, because they all form an undifferentiated whole, cultural leadership can never be simply delegated to others. Every word you speak, every action you take shapes school culture and influences climate. Others help frame school culture and climate, but you, as the principal, play an active and orchestrating role.

- The relationship among school culture and climate, instructional leadership, and student achievement is strong, as reflected in Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standard 2 below.

This book and series is also aligned with standards established by the prominent ELCC. ELCC standards are commonly accepted by most educational organizations concerned with preparing high-quality educational leaders and as such are most authoritative (Wilmore, 2002). The ELCC, an arm of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, developed six leadership standards used widely in principal preparation. These standards formed the basis for this book and series:

1.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.

*2.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practices to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

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3.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by managing the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

4.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.

5.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.

6.0: Candidates who complete the program are educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.

*This standard is addressed in the present book.

Readers should also familiarize themselves with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and National Association of Elementary School Principals standards (see, e.g., http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_School_Leaders_Licensure_Consortium/ and <http://www.boyercenter.org/basicsschool/naesp.shtml>).

Another important point to make in this introduction is for you to realize that although with other forms of leadership (e.g., instructional, operational, and strategic) you must take specific actions to address them and at times you don't actually have to actively engage in them, as a cultural leader you are continually affecting school culture and climate 24-7. Your daily activities, actions, memoranda, e-mails, personal contacts, and so forth reflect, shape, and influence school culture and climate. As such, you may not realize your actions and behaviors are scrutinized closely by others. For example, you may articulate support for

nonevaluative instructional supervisory practices with teachers, but do your actions reflect such beliefs? Teachers will be listening and watching closely. Similarly, parents, students, staff, and community members will pay careful attention to your actions that reflect school culture and climate, and inevitably they will make judgments about your effectiveness. Cultural leadership is therefore subtle and occurs at every moment in thought, speech, and deed.

Reflective Questions

1. Which of the themes or assumptions above make the most sense to you?
2. Which of the themes or assumptions above make the least sense to you? Explain.
3. How do you perceive your role as cultural leader? What specific actions must you take to be effective? Be specific.
4. What kind of cultural norms and climate must you nurture in order to best promote student achievement?

Allow me to offer a word on chapter format and presentation of information. Information in each of the four main chapters is presented as concisely as possible to make for easy and quick reference reading. Each chapter begins with boxed material called “What You Should Know About.” The box will list and briefly explain the concepts covered in each chapter. Certainly, each chapter will not cover every bit of information there is to know about a given topic, as mentioned earlier. Each chapter culls, though, essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for a successful principal.

The boxed material below summarizes seven research-based ideas about cultural leadership that should serve as checkpoints for your own progress as a cultural leader:

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Seven Research-Based Findings About the Activities of a Cultural Leader

Committed to cultural leadership, good principals know, among other things, the following:

1. Supporting positive school climate is one of the most fundamentally important goals. Cotton (2003) explains, "Almost everything that the principal says and does contributes to the overall school climate" (p. 69).

2. Paying attention to rituals, ceremonies, and other symbolic actions strengthens "a sense of affiliation with the school" (Cotton, 2003, p. 69). Effective principals realize that school culture honors tradition; instills school pride; and recognizes the achievements and contributions of teachers, students, and parents.

3. Establishing a commitment to shared vision and goals is critical. Visionary leadership that emphasizes "academic goals of the school and the importance of learning" (Cotton, 2003, p. 68) is essential.

4. Communicating and maintaining high expectations for student achievement is a chief concern of a cultural leader. Cultural leaders believe that all students can learn and that all teachers can succeed. The principal affirms the potential of all students and teachers.

5. Communicating and interacting with the school community on a continuous basis is important in order to build positive relationships. Such relationships positively affect culture and climate.

6. Supporting risk taking among teachers improves student learning. Good principals encourage teachers to experiment and innovate.

7. Maintaining high visibility and accessibility is good for school climate.

SOURCE: Based on Cotton (2003).

Before I end this introduction, I want to share with my readers something about the role culture plays in shaping perceptions that others may have of you as the principal. Doing so will

highlight the importance of culture and the need to pay close attention to the ways we intentionally or inadvertently contribute to shaping people's beliefs about our work. A cultural leader is sensitive to the impact that perceptions, attitudes, and values have on their work, their ability to perform effectively, and ultimately their ability to shape school climate. The principal is aware that positive school climate can affect teacher, parent, and student morale as well as play a critical role in student achievement.

Images of Principals in Film and Television

"You may sit down, Mr. O'Mally! Think you could run this school? If you could, I wouldn't be here, now would I? No one talks at my meetings—No one—you take out your pencils and write. This is an institution of learning. If you can't control it, how can you teach?! . . . and if you don't like it, Mr. Darnell, you can quit—the same goes for the rest of you. . . . This is not a damn democracy . . . my word is law. . . . There's only one boss in this place and it's me!"

"This is an office, we knock before we enter. . . . Follow the curriculum dictated by the board of education. . . . You must go along with our policies."

"I got a complaint against this pencil you sold me—it don't work." "Ohhhhh . . . what seems to be the problem?" "Every time I write with it, it gets duller, and when I sharpen it, it gets shorter. What we have here is a vicious cycle—duller, shorter, duller, shorter, I don't know what to do?" . . . "You know what they say around here. Any time something keeps getting duller and shorter, they make it the PRINCIPAL!"

Three distinct images of principals emerge after undertaking a content analysis of films and television programs since the 1950s (Glanz, 1998a). The excerpts quoted above are indicative of these three images: principal-as-autocrat, principal-as-bureaucrat, and principal-as-buffoon.

Joe Clark, classic despot in *Lean On Me*; George Grandey, stodgy administrator sitting behind a desk in *Dangerous Minds*; and Mr. Woodman, out-of-touch dullard in *Welcome Back, Mr. Kotter* are not the only ones who are depicted unfavorably in television and the movies as insecure autocrats, petty bureaucrats, and classic buffoons. My content analysis of over 35 television programs and films from 1950 to 1997 confirms the fact that an

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overwhelming majority of principals are depicted as either autocratic, bureaucratic, or just plain silly.

An Example

Sometimes a single television show or movie depicts all three aspects of principals, as autocrats, bureaucrats, and dimwits. A made-for-TV movie, *Kidz in the Woods*, highlights a dedicated history teacher (played by Dave Thomas) who takes eight academically and emotionally troubled high school students on a summer class trip during which they retrace the Oregon Trail via wagon trains. The object of the exercise is to “show how yesterday’s events can help solve today’s problems.” The principal, against this unorthodox experiment, is portrayed as an autocrat, a bureaucrat, and ultimately a dimwit. The vice principal, playing a vital role in the movie, is also depicted in various negative ways, at least during most of the movie. This film also demonstrates an interesting and not uncommon relationship between a male principal and a female vice principal.

Mr. Henry Dunbar, a middle-aged, conservative high school principal, confirms his role as petty bureaucrat when he chastises the renegade history teacher, Mr. Foster, the main character in this amusing made-for-TV movie. Dunbar calls Foster into his office and demands that he follow the prescribed curriculum.

Dunbar says, “What’s obvious to me is that you blame me because I insist you follow my standard curriculum.”

“Your standard curriculum,” Foster retorts, “is substandard, and I blame you for not accepting the responsibility for teaching these kids more than is in their books.”

Foster proceeds to leave Dunbar’s office as the bell rings. “I gotta go . . . unless of course you want to teach my class.” Dunbar, the principal, remains silent.

The principal’s incompetence is not too subtly implied. The image as incompetent bureaucrat is effectively communicated. In a later scene, the vice principal is similarly portrayed as having little, if any, teaching experience. At a school board meeting, Vice Principal Felicia Duffy defends her experience by asserting “I did teach . . . for several semesters, that is.”

Mr. Dunbar, determined to waylay Foster’s efforts at succeeding with his innovative strategies, demands that Miss Duffy videotape the class trip as students inevitably get into trouble. Armed with this documentation, Dunbar can convince the board that he was right. Miss Duffy, aghast at the principal’s deceit and unethical behavior, tries to convince her boss not to pursue this

campaign. Relying on his superordinate position in the school hierarchy and employing an autocratic tactic, Dunbar tells Duffy, "You, unlike Foster, don't have tenure." Duffy reluctantly is coerced to comply.

Interestingly, Duffy, as vice principal, complies with the chicanery rather than maintaining her integrity by adhering to more ethical standards of behavior. The image of the principal as dimwit is ultimately imparted as Dunbar's plan is foiled. Once again, principals are portrayed negatively as compared to more idealistic, intelligent teachers.

Our Miss Brooks

One of the early views of a principal that demonstrates all three tendencies, autocrat-bureaucrat-dimwit, is seen in the classic 1950s series *Our Miss Brooks*. Mr. Conklin, played by Gale Gordon, is portrayed as a stern, conservative principal who is continually lampooned by Miss Brooks (played by Eve Arden), the wisecracking high school English teacher.

In the premiere episode, Miss Brooks hurries past the principal's office. "Halt!" charges Mr. Conklin, as the audience gets its first glimpse of the principal.

"I was just on my way to the cafeteria," explains Miss Brooks.

Chastising her, he says, "May I remind you that you are traversing the hallway of a public high school, not the cinder path of the Colosseum."

"I'll slow down, Sir," Miss Brooks replies.

The principal continues, "Before you go, there is something I want to talk to you about. Would you mind loping into my office?" he says sarcastically.

"But Sir," Miss Brooks protests.

"In, girl!" he shouts. Conklin's autocratic image is buttressed numerous times by his proclivity to support school regulations at all costs.

Yet despite this serious image, Mr. Conklin is continually outwitted by the clever teacher and, more often than not, becomes the target of her ridiculous and sometimes harebrained schemes. In the premiere episode, for instance, a very annoying and mischievous Miss Brooks accidentally squirts ink all over Mr. Conklin's suit. *Our Miss Brooks* clearly illustrates the image that principals can act authoritative and official yet should not be taken too seriously.

Implications

The question I'd like to briefly address is simply "What can we learn from examining images of principals in popular culture?"

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Why are principals portrayed as “buffoons”? At first glance, such depictions may serve simply as means of comic entertainment. After all, television and film also poke fun at authority figures in many other professions. Having a sense of humor about the portrayal of such images may be warranted. Yet the unique nature or form of such satiric entertainment may point to some other insights.

Comic satire is a method employed by popular culture to transmit subtle and, often, not-so-subtle messages about, for instance, principals as figureheads representing the school establishment. Portraying principals in such comical ways communicates, in part, that even though they occupy more prestigious positions in the school hierarchy and earn more money than teachers, they are fallible and should not be taken too seriously. Teachers and students, often disempowered in the school hierarchy, are able in this manner to circumvent their subordinate status and demonstrate their autonomy by making the principal seem foolish.

What about images of principals-as-autocrats and principals-as-bureaucrats? Schools, by and large, are organized bureaucratically. Principals and other supervisors serve to support and maintain organizational rules and regulations. Images in popular culture that portray principals as autocrats and bureaucrats are not surprising, given their role expectations and responsibilities.

Perhaps, as principals, we need to at least be aware of the images that filmmakers and television producers are sending to viewers concerning the work we do in schools. We may then, for instance, counter such images by sharing with others our opposition to autocratic and bureaucratic practices.

It has been suggested that promoting an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1984) among principals may go a long way toward altering these negative views. Whether or not such an emphasis would alter the teachers', students', and filmmakers' views of principals is uncertain. What is apparent, however, is that principals sometimes contribute to their own negative image by what they do or fail to do. Principals need to demonstrate that individual needs are paramount in any effective organization. Although caring can and should be nurtured, recruiting candidates who demonstrate such qualities should be a priority. Stereotypical images of principals as humorless bureaucrats no longer suffice. These images are socially constructed and therefore can be reframed. Principals can do so by understanding the role of beliefs and values as they intersect with school climate. As cultural leaders, you play a vital role in shaping people's images of you and the image of your school.

CASE STUDY AND REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Dr. Roberta Rodriguez, principal of Boynton Middle School in a middle-class suburb of Chicago, is the keynote speaker at the Parent-Teacher Association's annual dinner. A dynamic, energetic visionary, Dr. Rodriguez challenges her audience to adopt her "vision for a bright new future for students at Boynton Middle School" by voting for the new inclusive education program that she has spearheaded. "All our children deserve the best," proclaims Rodriguez. "We can no longer tolerate mediocrity. Our schools are responsible to ensure that all students are given the opportunity to succeed without harmful consequences. Schools should provide similar experiences, a common set of learnings, equally effective teaching in an encouraging and nurturing classroom environment." She continues, "Since the overwhelming research and experience of many educators indicate the dangers of ability grouping, I maintain that exclusive use of ability grouping is detrimental to the academic and social development of children. Our curricula must be and will be revised to accommodate the ever-increasing needs of all students. Teachers must have high expectations for all students. We must affirm," she concludes, "what William Spady once said, 'All children can learn and succeed, but not on the same day in the same way.' It is our choice at Boynton to show the way for the district. Our belief that all children can learn must be supported by creating a caring, nurturing, high-standards educational environment for all students." The audience breaks into a spontaneous, thunderous round of applause.

Boynton Middle School (BMS) was heralded as the first middle school in the state to base its curriculum on an inclusionary model. Fifteen teachers who were trained and certified in inclusionary education were personally recruited by Dr. Rodriguez. These teachers shared the principal's deep commitment to inclusion by remaining steadfast in the belief that all children can learn at some developmentally appropriate level. Teachers possessed a critically inclusive predisposition despite their understanding that many social and political forces may impinge on their ability to provide high-quality education to all students. These teachers persisted and committed themselves to an inclusive educational and pedagogical model. Teachers, leaders in their own right and encouraged by visionary principal Roberta Rodriguez, developed several competencies for educators who believe in fostering inclusive education. First, they articulated general principles and then principles more specific to inclusion:

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The teacher committed to inclusion will demonstrate these general principles:

- *An awareness to assess factors affecting development and measurement of intelligence in a society composed of dissimilar cultures*
- *An awareness of learners' values systems, environmental backgrounds, and language patterns*
- *The need to vary assessment procedures for multicultural differences*
- *A respect for and acceptance of differences in cultural background*
- *An understanding of their own prejudices and an ability to deal with them in a positive manner*

The teacher committed to inclusion will demonstrate these specific principles:

- *The ability to describe the basic areas of exceptionality and the special needs of exceptional learners*
- *The ability to perform appropriate screening and diagnostic tests, in conjunction with special education specialists, by observing objectively the behavior and performance of exceptional children*
- *The expertise to plan, modify, and/or develop instructional materials to identify and instruct learners with exceptionalities*
- *The ability to remain sensitive to the needs of exceptional learners in the classroom*
- *The ability to collaborate effectively by respecting the values and opinions of colleagues and primary caregivers*

Roberta Rodriguez explained on many occasions that inclusion is a belief system. It is a process of facilitating an educational environment that provides access to high-quality education for all students (e.g., Kochhar, West, & Taymans, 2000; McLeskey & Waldron, 2001; Wolfendale, 2000). Teachers at BMS believe that all children learning together, in the same schools and the same classrooms, with services and supports necessary so that they can all succeed is critical to a successful school. Maintaining high expectations for all students, believing

in their potential, and providing needed services to fully participate are essential. They believe that no child should be demeaned or have his or her uniqueness ignored or belittled. Students with disabilities should be educated alongside students without disabilities. Special classes or removal of children from the regular education environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classroom cannot be achieved satisfactorily with the use of supplementary support services (Elliott & McKenney, 1998; Morse, 2002).

Dr. Rodriguez often says that practices that are inclusionary are based on “democratic thought and are a hope for the future.” This innovative principal conceived BMS as a learning community in which professional development is not a separate initiative but, rather, is built into everything that is done, “inclusionary,” if you will. She realized that structuring a middle school based on inclusionary practice would lead to criticisms from some parents, students, and community members. “Anything new and forward thinking usually does,” she posited to her staff. “We must persist,” she proclaimed confidently.

She rallied support for her inclusion model over many months at various community forums, school board meetings, and private encounters and at the school. She attracted a competent and like-minded staff of professional educators who believed that inclusion was imperative to ensure successful schooling for all students. She encouraged long-term teachers at the school to keep an open mind about inclusion. She demonstrated to parents and students that an inclusionary model would not in any way detract from the educational experiences for students who usually excelled in school. She pointed out that research and her 25 years in education indicate enormous positive benefits of inclusion for all students.

Despite her pep rallies, Dr. Rodriguez knew that much remained to be done to convince parents and other community constituents, and even some teachers, of the benefits of inclusion. She realized that she had to alter people’s perception, attitudes, and values about how education is delivered. Besides using every opportunity to speak about inclusion’s benefits, she conducted community-school workshops. Dr. Rodriguez also decided to enroll her seventh-grade child at Boynton, with the superintendent’s permission. She explained, “Parents will see my child in an inclusion class and will appreciate my commitment to inclusion for all children.”

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Reflective Questions

1. Why do you think Dr. Rodriguez is an effective cultural leader?
2. What strategies does Dr. Rodriguez incorporate to provide for cultural leadership?
3. Would any of these strategies work for you? Explain why or why not. Be specific.
4. Do you agree with her approach to cultural leadership? Explain.
5. Explain what factors would preclude or permit you to use her cultural leadership approach.
6. How did Dr. Rodriguez use symbolic leadership in the case described above?
7. What other cultural strategies could you use to gain support for your new innovation?