Professional Culture as a Variable in Effectiveness of Higher Education Faculty Members

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ABSTRACT

The importance of human relationships is a valuable trend in the area of organizational effectiveness. Using this concept of culture, some evidence exists which supports the idea of differential outcomes in organizational effectiveness, but they are not specifically related to educational contexts. An exploratory study is proposed to identify possible perceived links between professional culture and teaching effectiveness among faculty members.

Results show that there is a frequent connection between perceived institutional goals and culture perception at the same time that an interesting variability of teaching models that could be associated with culture elements as well. Although these results support the idea of perceived dependence between culture and effectiveness, further research could ratify these associations and probably link perceived effectiveness with behavioral indicators of that evaluation.

KEYWORDS: teacher effectiveness, higher education, interviews, professional culture.

Within the business community and in the educational system, culture has become one of the most prolific fields of research and a useful tool to study organizations (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985, as cited in Smart & St. John, 1996). When applied to the higher educational system, culture becomes even more relevant since it is not only associated with the workers of that business but also with the desired product of that industry which are competent adults expected to satisfy the need of qualified work and responsible citizenship.

This review is an attempt to propose a relationship among organizational culture in faculty members, their teaching-learning practices, and the effectiveness of their academic labor on the students. Based on organizational culture literature, organizational effectiveness indicators, and learning quality standards, this proposal seeks to discover possible perceived effects of different types of faculty culture in their perceived effectiveness on their students.

Does the difference in culture among faculty members imply an important influence on the students, besides to the influence on their academic knowledge? Education structure is intended to influence students: that is its goal. However, to what extent do the people inside the institution imply a different academic outcome for the students? To what extent, do the faculty members feel linked in their ways of being or

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thinking, and transmit that to their students as a part of their "training"?

Education, besides its basic function to transmit knowledge, has an important role in the socialization and stratification of society (Brint, 1998). In higher education, we can expect that socialization would not be as strong as in a student's primary and secondary education. However, normative processes which occur in the late adolescence and early adulthood suggest the importance of interpersonal relationships such as mentoring, a phenomenon in which a young adult takes a role model in his/her field of action and develops a nurturing and close relationship with the older adult who influences the progress of the younger (Zachary, 2002). Taking elements like this into account, the socialization effect in the university setting may not be a minor issue.

If we agree that culture can be broadly understood as a set of shared values, we would also have to imply that in an educational setting culture has a significant role in the relationships between students and teachers, academic status and behavior, and communication dynamics among faculty members (Firestone & Louis, 1997). Studying cultural dynamics helps us to understand institutions and helps to engage a culture's members in shared goals and actions (Tierney, 1988). As a shared and distinctive framework, we can also expect that the management of an organization with a defined culture would consider ways to promote the adoption of practices and politics that are aligned with those ideals (Smart & St. John, 1996).

In an effort to define the concept of culture, some people would argue that organizations have cultures, but others would say that they are a culture itself. A useful definition is Schein's approach to this concept:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (1992, p. 12, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2003).

In Schein's model, there are some elements considered indicative of culture: observed behavioral regularities, group norms, espoused values, formal philosophy, rules of the game, climate, embedded skills, habits and mental models, shared meanings, and integrating symbols. He does not think that recognizing these indicators should represent a problem for researchers. However, he believes the problems with trying to assess culture are mainly related with the non-systematic way of newcomers are socialized to the culture, the uncertainty of the behavioral manifestation of culture, and the doubt of a unitarian set of shared values in a single organization. In an attempt to measure culture, we could be missing elements that is not taught to external people, we could be looking at some manifestation that is not necessarily based on the organizational culture, or maybe we could be looking at behavioral referents from different subsets of culture and attempting to get a big picture from them (Schein, 1993).

Inspired by Schein's point of view, several consultants and authors have dedicated their efforts to establish better and clearer statements about culture. The main problem that soon was faced by the researchers was the broad variety of concepts, approaches, measures and interpretations of the same idea of culture. After some years of research, the literature still struggles to achieve a consensus on the concept of culture, such as the assumption of shared elements and the idea of culture uniqueness. Even with those uncertainties, most of the culture consultants look for manifestations such as rituals, stories, jargon, specific types of humor, and physical arrangements to assess what they think is culture (Martin, 2003).

Interestingly, the idea of culture is sometimes viewed as a process, and sometimes as a result. When is viewed as a process, culture analysis focuses on dynamic elements such as relationships and learning of behaviors and norms. On the other hand, when culture is
conceptualized as a result, it is understood as the wisdom from those who were here before in a specific group (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Based on this trend, the literature has two main branches in the interest about culture and effectiveness. The first one is devoted to relate culture types and their respective distinctive outcomes (i.e. Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983, as cited in Smart & St. John, 1996) and the second one is interested in the relationship between the strength of the culture and its results (i.e. Dennison, 1991, as cited in Smart & St. John, 1996).

In the first set of hypotheses, several models have been proposed as useful schemas to understand different organizational dynamics and analyze them depending on key features. One interesting point of view is the one proposed by Bolman and Deal (2003) which identifies four different frames to understand organizations: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic, depending on the emphasis and interest that each organization puts in its procedures, relationships, decisions, or meanings, respectively. As a brief characterization, organizations following structural frameworks are devoted to maintaining formal relationships and organizational stability, organizations focused on human resources are interested in fulfilling relational needs of their members, organizations organized around political elements are concerned about power and status relationships, and, finally, organizations oriented to symbolic frameworks are interested in the creation of common elements and meanings (Bolman and Deal, 2003). In a broad sense, studies examining the differential effectiveness of these types in 2-year and 4-year colleges have found that institutions with an emphasis on structure score lower in most of the criteria for effectiveness (Cameron and Ettington, 1988, as cited in Smart & St. John, 1996).

Other typologies to discuss organizations are the so called clans, adhocracy, bureaucracy, and market organizations (Cameron and Ettington, 1988, as cited in Smart & St. John, 1996) depending on their bonding mechanisms, regulations, and the type of leadership they have. As a way to give a quick characterization, it is possible to describe clan cultures as cohesive and flexible environments with a mentor as a leader; bureaucracies as organizations with an emphasis on stability, predictability and control; adhocracies as institutions characterized by an emphasis on achievement oriented activities and innovations, and finally, market organizations as institutions usually based on competition and production bonding. Related to these categories, there is some evidence to suggest that adhocracy and market culture types are the most effective in terms of promoting student careers (Smart & St. John, 1996).

The second line of hypotheses which has to do with the strength of a culture basically states that the organization can have better outcomes if there is congruence between the promoted values and the actual practices (Smart & St. John, 1996). Then, when the teachers have strong professional communities, it is probable that they could have collective responsibility about their students, a better commitment, and shared values (Kruse & Louis, 1994) that would allow them to more effectively face the education process.

As a result of the culture, discourses of knowledge, communication styles, and practices in higher education may vary significantly among settings, institutions, or even disciplines. These differences influence and are influenced by the way the students and professors think, speak and enact the academy (Read, Archer & Leathwood, 2003). These possible differences affect the potential effectiveness of the faculty members, because it is known that teachers not only need to know their subjects, they also need to communicate their knowledge to students (Kanu, 2000). Not surprisingly, teacher effectiveness has already been found to be related with some organizational variables, such as shared decision making and the belonging to a coaching network (Shahid & Thompson, 2001). Such organizational variables are consistent with the concept of culture, climate, or any description of the uniqueness of that work environment.
Additionally, there could be a significant difference according to the level of dependence among members that is fostered by the culture. As Johnson and Johnson’s theory suggests (1989), social interdependence exists when individuals share common goals and each individual's outcomes are affected by the actions of the others. This independence may be differentiated from social dependence (i.e., the outcomes of one person are affected by the actions of a second person but not in the opposite direction) and social independence (i.e., individuals' outcomes are unaffected by each other's actions). If there is a degree of social interdependence, this can be under the form of competitive or cooperative work. Therefore, it might be logical to hypothesize that environments with a positive social interdependence would have a shared sense of culture and probably a better collective approach to the teaching-learning process.

Now, if we analyze the most common scenario for a higher education academic, there are some specific characteristics of higher education that are distinctive and relevant in this theme.

The training that prospective faculty receive, when it happens, is mostly in research institutions where mentors are much more likely to emphasize research over teaching (Fairweather & Rhoads, 1995). There is no specific teaching training that a faculty needs in order to be a successful academic. Therefore, a culture that would exist in a specific university department, could probably be generated from two major sources: formal selection process, and socialization and communication among professors within the structure of the university. Then, one major issue is how the professional community is formed and maintained, and another one is the way that this culture is communicated and expressed to the students and how it affects them. Even in precollege levels, teachers’ personal processes, knowledge, and beliefs affect their behavior. University professors, not having received teaching preparation for their role, only acquire their expertise based on feedback, trial-and-error, and reflection which could lead to unfounded beliefs or knowledge about effective teaching (Hativa, Barak & Simhi, 2001).

One area that may make a difference about how teachers develop relationships with their students is the shared idea that they may have about the role of educators. There are 5 suggested ways to see the teaching-learning process: transmission perspective, developmental perspective, apprenticeship perspective, nurturing perspective, and social reform perspective (Pratt, 2002). Establishing a broad differentiation, it is possible to distinguish that the first two points of view have a strong emphasis on intellectual achievements, and the other three have their focus on relational and political outcomes of the teaching-learning process. All of them have distinctive values and a preferred way to approach to students and a different way to understand when the teaching-learning process is being effective.

But, the product that any institution of higher education wants is not just excellence in learning but knowledge production and impact in the community. If these are a part of their goals, they also need to be part of their evaluation process. In terms of teaching quality in higher education, an interesting definition is provided by Vieira (2002) which says:

> “the aim and the process of transforming learners into critical consumers and creative producers of knowledge, thus empowering them to become actively engaged in school and lifelong learning, as a condition for improving the rationality and justice of the context where they (inter)act” (p. 256).

This concept includes elements of social responsibility, transparency of assumptions, pedagogical coherence and relevance, reflectivity of practices, integration of democratic values, self-direction promotion, and a creativity/innovation emphasis in the teaching-learning processes. All these factors can be operationalized in concrete actions concerning teachers, students, and institutional practices (Vieira, 2002) and,
therefore, can be measured as part of a common effort by the faculty to achieve high standards in teaching. At this point it is interesting to notice that some elements here described as quality indicators are also considered key elements in the literature of organizational culture, such as the value assigned to control or creativity.

The variability in faculty culture is important even without taking into account the variability in the student body. When that element is added, the capability of the institution to overcome students' challenges or to empower them to follow a particular model is even more relevant. For example, it has been suggested that teachers from higher status backgrounds or values could be less familiar or comfortable with students from lower classes and a different social capital (minorities and/or students with different socioeconomic level). Some teachers could perceive them as lacking of maturity, intellectual abilities or academic habits. Teachers who feel a sense of commitment toward those students could be more successful working with them (Alexander, Entwisle & Thompson, 1987).

Then, it is reasonable to think that good professional cultures help to make or to maintain good students. Faculty members with a shared sense of responsibility for the collective good and with a broader sense of teaching than simply transmitting should be able to make some difference in their students. This difference may not be only in terms of information, but also in terms of personal functioning and probably the contribution that their graduated student can make in society. Teacher effectiveness not only should be perceived as short term, but also as long term. When adults are asked about a special teacher, they always describe a person who really connected with them and who provided a guidance for them through cognitive and personal processes, to obtain enduring and meaningful learnings (Zachary, 2002).

Interaction timings, classroom dynamics, extra classroom interactions, and teaching techniques are probably related with the teacher's personal beliefs about education. If we agree with the idea that a person is not an isolated entity in his/her environment, it is then logical to assume that to some extent, those values are shared and expressed in the immediate social network of the teachers.

Based on the culture literature which suggests differential outcomes for different types of culture, the organizational factors in teacher effectiveness, and the effect of teacher styles in learning qualities, this study seeks to explore organizational factors in perceived effectiveness by faculty members. The hypothesis will be primarily related to the idea of the possible differences effects of culture in perceived quality of academic processes in the students. The mediator function of sense of interdependence will also be explored.

**METHODS**

**Subjects**

Participants of this study were faculty members who wanted to volunteer for this research. Their initial connection with this research was through the investigator, since they belong to the same network of faculty members or because they belong to the same thematic virtual community. Essential to the qualitative methodology is the mutual perception of the research as an instance of horizontal knowledge relationship instead of a relationship of a subject knowing an object.

In this way, the participants were:
### Table 1. Theme guide for interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Specific contents</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional culture</td>
<td>- Awareness of a sense of shared identity among faculty members.</td>
<td>- Assess the existence of a perceived culture among faculty members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Symbolic representations of culture: rites, scripts, jargon, etc.</td>
<td>- Assess the perception of uniqueness of the academic team.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Characteristics of the perceived culture: leadership, emphasis, objectives.</td>
<td>- Suggest the nature and defining characteristics of that professional culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interdependence</td>
<td>- Quality and quantity of actual opportunities to be in contact with other faculty member's affairs.</td>
<td>- Identify formal and informal opportunities to construct culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Potential common goals</td>
<td>- Estimate level of perceived dependence with the group.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Sense of belonging.</td>
<td>- Estimate level of adequacy in the perceived climate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceived effectiveness</td>
<td>- Skills and expertise in the teaching task.</td>
<td>- Estimate the perceived relationship between culture and personal performance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Mental models of teaching and their preferred learning products.</td>
<td>- Identify teaching style and expectations for students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Perceived relationship between teacher-student.</td>
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</table>
Researcher's assumptions: In a semi-structured conversational interview the most important instrument is the interviewer. Therefore, it is necessary to declare the assumptions or cognitive schemas in order to give a context for the written product.

Here the researcher works with the idea that professional culture as a whole has a close impact in first, the sense interdependence that each faculty member perceives, and second, in the context that is given to evaluate or self-evaluate his/her effectiveness. There are not causal relationships proposed but there is an assumed level of interaction between the professional social context and each teacher perceived control and efficacy.

Also, another strong assumption is the differential effect from the culture on teacher's sense of belonging or adequacy depending of his/her judgment of the faculty as a primary or secondary group.

Procedure
Each participant was approached either directly by the researcher by e-mail or instant messaging or were invited by somebody else who knew about this research in what is called snowball sampling technique. After the first contact was made, the researcher discussed the consent form with them, answer any possible question and then direct the interview.

Facilitating and hindering conditions: One of the best facilitators to this dialog was the willingness of the participants to engage in the interview. Most of them actually thanked the researcher for the opportunity to discuss those topics.

One obvious obstacle to these interviews was the use of instant messaging systems. Although they ensured a real-time interaction, instead of just a written survey or open ended questions, it is necessary to admit that non-verbal and eye-to-eye contact elements of social interaction were missed. Probably, if the participants needed to type every answer, they would redact them in a more reduced fashion than if they just needed to explain them verbally.

Once the interviews were realized, they were entered in the software ATLAS.ti which is a tool for qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. It offers a variety of tools for accomplishing the tasks associated with any systematic approach to unstructured data. That software allows the researcher to code and form network maps of among the categories.

RESULTS
The interview transcripts were analyzed according to axial codification, using the objectives and specific contents of the theme guide as categories. The summary of the individuality of each case is presented in Table 2.

As can be observed, each case portrayed a different kind of culture. BE described a clear clan culture, in which the relationships among faculty are developed in personal and cooperative terms, and where the leader is seen as a non-restrictive motivator. In that context BE feels confident in her abilities to motivate and foster changes in her students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Dynamic strategies</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BE</td>
<td>Profile: Considered as a young, creative and dynamic teacher.</td>
<td>Goals: Teach students considering quality more than speed.  - Small group of teachers.  - Age range 25-35 years.</td>
<td>Interdependence: Faculty take collective responsibility for each student. Continuous academic and non-academic meetings.  - Leader = friend</td>
<td>Learning: a “conscious” learning. Teacher as only one source of knowledge. Reference to society.  - Confidence in change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ET</td>
<td>Profile: considered as experienced teacher, with multiple skills and professional background</td>
<td>Goals: Make a profit.  - Large school with unconnected faculty.  - Predetermined syllabi.</td>
<td>Interdependence: no institutional contact among faculty. Fierce competence among them, no collaboration.  - Leader = no effect.</td>
<td>Learning: narrow range of utilitarian skills. Desirable to be critic and creative.  - Most of the students do not change. Some gray caterpillars can become butterflies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RR</td>
<td>Profile: Considered as an efficient worker, oriented to details and able to adjust to institutional goals.</td>
<td>Goal: Run things smoothly, educate professionals.  - Growing faculty, new department.  - New additions asked to adequate to school project.</td>
<td>Interdependence: creating spaces to share, but the teaching part is autonomous.  - Leader = himself  - Unmotivated teachers.</td>
<td>Learning: oriented to others, clear concepts, adaptive.  - Relationship with students as a father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Profile: a skilled professional, avid researcher and team player.</td>
<td>Goals: accreditation, recognition, productivity.  - Large group of faculty members</td>
<td>Interdependence: not really cooperative, just adding individual achievements  - Leader = fearful</td>
<td>Learning: teacher as an example and a mediator between research and students. Mentorship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ET experiences a culture clearly oriented to the market, with an institution oriented to make a profit out of the educational process. Faculty members do not have power to suggest any change, because is determined by a superior instance. He does not feel a personal responsibility about any possible change in his students, but he enjoys being a witness of that.

RR is in a different position, he is actually the chair of his department, therefore, he is the
one in charge of hiring people according to the profile he already discussed with his superiors. Interestingly, he does not feel particularly responsible for the low performance of the faculty in term of teaching, and he blames the apathy and bureaucracy of the system for it. He views himself as a very close teacher who develops personal relationships with his students.

RC feels part of a developing department, in which the emphasis is put in growing and innovating through productive research and constant effort. The leader here is just in charge of directing the efforts to flow in the right direction and there is not a perceived interdependence. RC thinks about himself as a mediator between the scientific knowledge and his students.

**Analysis by theme**

**Professional culture:** Most of the participants seemed to associate their professional culture with the institutional goal, instead of associate it with more informal elements such as personal characteristics each faculty member. When the participants were not in a power position in their culture, they perceived their leader as a facilitator of their perceived climate, and when the interviewed was the formal leader, the basis of the culture was seen in the rest of the faculty members. Additionally, this culture was not perceived as extremely dynamic, by the contrary, it was considered as a context linked to several elements beyond the control of the participants.

Recognizing the existence of a culture not always led the participants to attribute a sense of uniqueness to their faculty group. At the same time, when they talked about the faculty members they did it using this expression as third person, without including themselves in the group they were describing. Under this points of view, professional culture appears as an element that I have not contributed to create, but I must cope every time.

**Interdependence:** Overall, cooperative environments do not seem to be noticeable present among faculty members. The only opportunity that this was mentioned was in a clan culture with a very small group of people. A comment made by RR saying “we are generating cooperative spaces, but trying to honor personal differences” does not give a clear sense of the approach used.

In the market culture, the perception of competition was very clear, and in the adhocracy culture, the idea of independence was noticeably strong.

**Models of teaching and effectiveness:** Each participant seemed to be fairly clear about his/her idea of an ideal learning or an ideal student's attitude supported by their activities as teachers. None of the interviewed academics emphasized content learning over other possible learning outcomes such as critical thinking, creativity, character, or flexibility. It seems that an attitudinal or behavioral change is considered a better outcome than a conceptual understanding. Based on that, their criterion to judge themselves were consistent with their idea of a desirable learning experience, but also consistent with the perceived independence of their outcomes from their peers.

As a way to summarize the relationships suggested by the participants, Figure 1 shows the semantic network that was represented in the interviews.
As can be seen, based on the attributions in this map:

- There is little perceived influence from the faculty members to their leader,
- There is no perceived connection between teaching model and faculty interaction, which may be another element to reinforce the perceived independence of the teaching task.
- Institutional goals are perceived as a significant element in faculty selection, leadership role and faculty interaction. This maybe suggests an external attribution.
- There seems to be little perceived influence between faculty interaction style and student-teacher interaction.
- It is difficult to find a relationship which implies that faculty has some kind of influence on institutional goals.

Of course, this map represents an oversimplification of the expressed relationships and judgments suggested by the participants and it will probably have more power if its information is triangulated with another technique.

**Selected quotes**

BE (female, 2-year college, clan culture)

- *We hold didactic meetings every week, where teachers and service manager evaluate the week, both analyzing good students and bad ones. Also, we share contents and methodological tips for specific courses.*
• We celebrate birthdays, national holidays and American holidays. When something has happened to one person, good or bad, he/she receives support.

• [Our service manager] does not like to be called boss. In that way, his opinions are received and respected in a better way than the director, who always wants to stress the difference from the rest of the staff.

• We take our job as a team, nobody is full responsible of a course; therefore, our actions are synchronized. Students trust their teachers, they understand that they are there to help them learn [...] not as a task, but as the joy of teaching.

• [My ideal is] a conscious learning, in which the student knows that the teacher is a source of learning, but that is necessary to do additional work and to be in touch with different points of view.

• My classes are fun, they are experiences. They remember the contents recalling emotions they felt or people they knew.

• [I would like to learn more about] management, to provide this country with people who are knowledgeable about business, because I think that is what is needed nowadays.

ET (male, 4-year college, market culture)

• Today there are too few opportunities to communicate with other teachers. The institution does not generate those instances; they have to be created by each person.

• I think that [name of the institution] has become into a money-making machine.

• The institution expects trained and submissive facilitators. Better if they are catholic, conservative, married under God, never divorced, non-smokers, non-alcoholic, and without drug use history.

• I have seen fantastic changes in some students, but I do not believe I was the only factor to be considered, there are always more things.

• This centralized leadership (almost soviet) imposes coursework for every campus in this country and impedes teachers to raise their opinions. The person who is in a leadership position does not matter, because everything is predetermined.

• Many [of the colleagues] are waiting with a chainsaw for you to fall, to fill your position. I think that is dramatic, because we are fighting over miserable pieces.

RR (male, university, bureaucracy)

• [I look for a faculty member who] willingly adapts to our school project, who has compatible expectations with our development plan, who has the available time we need, and who is able to change personal projects to satisfy the group.

• Deans ask our faculty members to do their job and to be responsive to students, but they are not concerned about the conditions in which they need to do so. Those conditions are exactly the ones that teachers are demanding.

• Teachers view their students as passive agents, receptacles of information, who just need to react according to their task of “being a student” with little projection to another dimensions.

RC (male, university, adhocracy)

• Contact [among faculty members] is based on protocol (research meetings, departmental meetings) but without consequences.

• The academic job is mostly independent: each teacher in his/her own section. Some are more private with their information, some others are
more willing to share, and some others are just concerned about their businesses.

- [The director] is a peacemaker, he is afraid to take important decisions. He just tries to keep alive the teams which are producing.

- The goal of the institution is to improve work teams, raise levels of academic productivity, get accredited and generate alliances.

- Teaching should be the last element of our research efforts. Students should feel that personal and collective development of their teachers is reflected in the class.

- I don't think so [other teachers affecting his performance as an academic], unless they work directly with me.

**DISCUSSION**

This exploratory study has suggested the basis for a further research to establish more functional relationships between professional culture and teacher's sense of effectiveness. Although most of the participants viewed themselves as fairly independent from their peers, they also recognized the influence of leadership, rites and institutional goals in their own performance and sense of belonging with their immediate academic context.

To some extent, interviews reflect a sense of helplessness regarding unfavorable conditions for teaching such as lack of resources, lack of motivation, or lack of collaboration. It seems that any possible power is perceived just in the student-teacher relationship, which becomes one of the most defining elements reported by faculty members to characterize themselves as educators.

These type of results are consistent with the literature which suggests differential outcomes according to culture style. For example, the person who participated in a clan culture (with human resources approach) was the only one who mentioned the relationship between her students and society. It is true that there is no reason to assume that this approach was caused or facilitated by a surrounding culture but still is an association that is worth of further exploration.

Another interesting point is the use of the idea of mentorship as a way to foster positive resources on the students. At least 3 participants mentioned some level of personal companionship as part of their own strategies to facilitate a personal and professional development on their students. This argument gives some support to the idea that socialization by teachers is not a minor resource in higher education. Actually, none of the interviewed professors emphasized formal learning theories or academic models to characterize their own teaching styles or the reasons why they felt effective.

This study has addressed only the question of the perceived connection between culture as a work environment and a personal sense of self effectiveness. However, the findings do not imply that such perceived relationships are actually present on each context. In order to support these subjective connections is necessary to plan studies to triangulate the hypotheses and contexts here suggested. This has been a simple attempt to represent basic attributions in these teachers' point of view and it needs to be seen as is, as a propositive schema of related human aspects on teacher effectiveness.

Research supporting these relationships would open an interesting field of action related to acculturation, conformism to the perceived conditions, and consequences of the level of interdependence fostered in academic departments in relation with academic effectiveness. Viewed as a diagnostic tool, the study of culture could bring interesting links among leadership, group processes, or power that are not detectable when those aspects are studied in a separated fashion.
REFERENCES


