

PROLOGUE

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## **NATURE OF THE PROBLEM**

### ***Introduction***

This study explores how two students interpreted the moral component of schooling during a time of duress, and then throughout their lives. These moral aspects were implicitly and explicitly presented by the school faculty through the curriculum and were symbolized in the rituals, documents and artifacts of the schooling process. The time and location of duress in this study is occupied China during the Second World War. Two specific questions flow from the aim of this study. How was schooling co-constructed by students and staff while interned in an artificial culture created by military rule? How do these former students perceive the influence of this unique educational experience upon their lives? This case study is an historical interpretation of how a specific group of people co-constructed (1) schooling to preserve the moral underpinnings of their curriculum from external threats.

Intent of this work is to provide modern educators an opportunity to learn about the moral component of curriculum through a historical examination of two students who experienced schooling under foreign internment. Out of this, parallels may be drawn for today's educators who face threats to their own definitions of schooling be it academically, financially or in areas of social concern. Schooling as expressed through the curriculum is being threatened by continual calls for reforms such as increased academic standards and a national curriculum. The financial foundation is threatened by vouchers, home schooling, privatization and charter schools which compete for an already diminishing public dollar. The schooling climate is under duress due to increased violence and discipline problems that students bring to school which is related to some parents having abdicated their responsibilities, expecting the school to fulfill parental roles for their children. All of these issues impinge on the schooling of children. How these challenges are to be met will be determined by which manner of schooling prevails and how values are implemented in the curriculum.

Finding answers to these questions of what comprises schooling can be approached in many ways. The path for this study is to go from broad, thematic issues down to the minute, everyday existence of the student and teacher relationship to see how schooling is presented, defended, or reinvented. For it is in the classroom that the theoretical, written curriculum is applied and practiced. It is at this level of student and teacher interaction that the negotiating, or co-constructing of the curriculum is realized and thus schooling occurs. (2) And it is the student who ultimately determines whether the moral intentions of the schooling were successful and upheld throughout life.

Though the selected study group is from a previous generation whose external threats were different from those faced by today's educators and students, one wonders if the disparity is so great that lessons still could not be learned from their historical experience. Some of these lessons might focus on possible parallels of the thought processes and emotional responses between today's students and those of the past. It is worth examining the artifacts and documents, and listening to the voices of these former students, to appreciate their interpretation of the long term effects of the moral content of schooling on their lives. Modern educators can learn something about the moral component of curriculum design through a historical case study of two lives, each of which embodies a perspective on schooling.

## ***Background of the Problem***

### **Why this time period?**

Although this study centers on events that happened over half a century ago, the researcher believes that the outcomes and conclusions of this study are relevant for today's educators. A number of qualities attracted the researcher to this specific problem and group of informants. The primary attraction was due to a life-long fascination with the Second World War which led to a Master's of Arts in history with an emphasis in World War Two. Out of that study came a fleeting knowledge of the Japanese-run civilian internment camps and a desire to do further exploration. Viewing the BBC television series *Tenko*, (3) which depicts the lives of British and Dutch women and children interned by the Japanese on the island of Sumatra, added to the intrigue of this topic. The *Tenko* series, and the book it was based on, *Women Beyond the Wire*, (4) raised questions for the researcher as to how schooling was carried out in these camps. Why bother with schooling when there were no materials and no longer any societal expectations for it to occur?

By combining the researcher's interest in history and education, a research topic began to form which would examine education in internment camps. The focus of this study narrowed after meeting former child internees from the Weihhsien

Civilian Assembly Center who had been students at the China Inland Mission Schools. These contacts gave the researcher access to an "insider's perspective" which allowed exploration of school and camp life based upon the experiences of child internees. As David Fetterman states, "The ethnographer is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from the emic, or insider's, perspective." (5) That is a goal of this research and why it is being done as an oral history case study.

### **Why this population?**

Some other attractions for doing this study were the conditions of this specific China Inland Mission Schools (henceforth referred to as Chefoo. (6) First, the absence of parents meant that the school functioned *in loco parentis*. The majority of Chefoo's students had not seen their parents for at least three years prior to the internment. The children were predominantly boarders while their parents served as missionaries hundreds or thousands of miles away in the interior of China. After the start of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, conditions became increasingly hazardous for travel so that by 1941 most of the students were living year-round at the school. The children were separated from their parents for the duration of the war and were completely under the supervision of the school staff.

By being placed in the internment camp and moved away from the parents' and the Mission Board's jurisdiction, the teachers and students were left to work out for themselves how they as a school would function and interact with the rest of the camp. Focusing on this small school made for a less complicated study of the change in teacher to student, student to student, and student to parent relationships caused by an intervening circumstance, in this case, war.

Thomas Sergiovanni, whose writings on school culture will be used throughout this study, quotes G. Hofstede's description of a school's culture as the "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one school from another." Sergiovanni continues that a "school culture includes values, symbols, beliefs, and shared meanings of parents, students, teachers, and others conceived as a group or community. Culture governs what is of worth for this group and how members should think, feel, and behave." (7) It is this "collective programming" that allowed the Chefoo school as a moral community to reconstitute itself within the confines of an internment camp.

The war and the internment created a stable school population for approximately eight years with very few departures, or new students or staff entering in. This stability as well as the seclusion of the school prior to internment created a unified understanding of the school's goal and mission among all those involved. Because of this tight community, it has been easy to locate the group fifty years after the event. Although there is an element of temporal distance from the

event for both the researcher and the informants, the commonality of the school group makes it possible to track and compare perceptions and life-long outcomes among the informants. Finally, the war and internment camp conditions provide an opportunity to examine the basics of education, stripped of all the traditional peripheral trappings of schooling.

## **What is Schooling?**

Sergiovanni states that there are five purposes of schooling. They are: "to develop basic competency in the three R's; to pass on the culture; to teach students to think; to build character; [and] to cultivate excellence." (8) President William Clinton stated that "schools do more than train children's minds. They also help to nurture their souls by reinforcing the values they learn at home and in their communities." (9) Schools are also viewed by some as historically playing a part in the "construction and reproduction of inequitable power relations between groups of people," whether in the form of class or gender relations. (10) This study is most concerned with the notions that schools are responsible for passing on the culture of their society and for character development. Whose culture and character is, or should be, emulated and passed on is a continuing argument that will not be answered by this study. However, the researcher is in agreement with Sergiovanni that "everything that happens in the schoolhouse has moral overtones that are virtually unmatched by other institutions in our society." (11) It is the "moral overtones" of schooling and how they are interpreted and lived out by students over time that is the concern of this study.

While the Chefoo School was based on a specific moral teaching, Christianity, all schools disseminate some type of moral base within their curriculum. It can be argued whether or not the implicit or explicit moral themes are to reproduce the existing power relations, to maintain social norms, or to pass on cultural traditions. Whatever the purpose of transmitting character and moral values, it is accomplished directly or indirectly through the curriculum in an institution that "enjoys a place within our society very close to the family as a moral nurturing community." (12) The intent of this study is to discover how a group of students perceived and internalized the moral component of the curriculum into their moral identities and then preserved or changed that identity when threatened by other forces and over the course of time.

## **Relating past and present**

*In Leadership for the Schoolhouse*, Sergiovanni talks about the need for schools to be "a kind of moral learning community ... that enjoys a place within our society very close to the family as a moral nurturing community." In practice, however, this is not what happens as the theories of leadership and school

organization are often imported from foreign fields of the corporate world and industry. Sergiovanni calls for schools to develop their own "theories and practices that emerge from and are central to what schools are like, what schools are trying to do, and what kinds of people schools serve." To do this, schools need to begin "developing a practice of leadership for the schoolhouse [which] will require a change in the theory of school itself The change proposed is to understand schools as moral communities.... The moral voice of community is anchored in shared values, ideas, and purposes." (13)

This study cannot provide "how to" answers for successfully designing and implementing a curriculum that builds moral character. It can, however, give those who create, write and present curriculum things to think about and explore further as to how students interpret what is being taught and form their individual reality versus the collective reality. This study can also help define the type of community educators and parents wish their school to be. Should the school community reflect the values of its surrounding neighborhood, or should it set higher standards for students to aim for and achieve? The Chefoo teachers expected their students to rise above their internment situation and not to yield to the temptation to relax their academic, social and moral standards.

Though the informants being studied were students almost sixty years ago, there is still a connection with today's students. As one reads the stories of the informants' fears and joys, one realizes that their experiences were no different from what we ourselves and our children today express -- the desire to belong, to be accepted, to achieve -- the loneliness of absent parents, the uncertainty of living in a hostile environment. The life histories presented in this study seek to "understand how thought and action have developed in past social circumstances. Following this development through time to the present affords insights into how those circumstances we experience as contemporary 'reality' have been negotiated, constructed and reconstructed over time." (14)

The fact that the informants are nearer to the end of their lives gives them and the researcher the benefit of tracking the effects over the life cycle and the opportunity of drawing long-term conclusions about their educational experiences. As one informant aptly wrote,

I had thought that all this Chefoo/Weihsien stuff was over—a past to be acknowledged but NEVER resurrected or relived. But it is only with the passage of years and the understanding acquired in them that I could make any sense of the people and experiences that have made up my life.

Just as this informant needed the "passage of years and the understanding acquired in them" to "make any sense" of the people and experiences in her life, so too on a broader scale can the analysis of a particular historical event bring

understanding and insight into educational issues that shape today's education policies and practices.

## Summary

Sergiovanni proposes that school leadership should "understand schools as moral communities." (15) In this study, two women give personal accounts about their unique schooling experience in China during the Second World War. The historical events that provide the backdrop for these two women's stories is related in Chapter One. The oral histories of the two women are presented in Chapter Two. Although twenty-four Chefoo students were interviewed, the researcher felt that these two women's accounts best represented the scope and variety of stories that the other informants shared. Chapter Three analyzes how these women retrospectively interpreted and internalized the implicit and explicit moral components of their school's curriculum and the life long impact it had on them. The Epilogue connects the findings of this study to the importance of education today.

It is during this process of interacting, interpreting and internalizing depicted in Chapter Two and Chapter Three that students co-construct with their parents and teachers, the traditions, values and morals of their school and social culture. The co-constructing of these women's foundational moral identities were challenged by separation from parents, the war, and by being confined to an internment camp for three years. Through the oral histories and supporting documents, this research provides insight into how students interpret the moral components of the curriculum and its informal techniques of social control. It is also a model of how one school persevered to maintain its moral community while under duress. Those in education today who believe that schooling is under attack may learn from these students' past experiences. It is hoped that future students may then benefit from a more compassionate and participatory schooling model.

1 See Appendix A, definition of terms. [←](#)

2 Ivor F. Goodson, *Studying Curriculum: Cases and methods* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 18. [←](#)

3 Vere Lorrimer, producer, *Tenko* (London: British Broadcasting Corp., aired 1981, 1982, 1984 & 1985). [←](#)

4 Lavinia Warner & John Sandilands, *Women Beyond the Wire* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1982). [←](#)

5 David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by step* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 12. [←](#)

6 The China Inland Missions Schools were located in Chefoo, China. Since its inception in 1881, the schools had informally been referred to as Chefoo by the staff, students and the China Inland Mission (CIM). [←](#)

7 Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *The Principalsip: A reflective practice perspective* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1995), 89. [←](#)

8 Thomas J. Sergiovanni, *Moral Leadership: Getting to the heart of school improvement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 45. Sergiovanni, *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 122. [←](#)

9 President Clinton, May 30, 1998 as quoted in *Religious Expression in Public Schools: A statement of principles*. U. S. Department of Education, September, 1999, p. 2. [←](#)

10 Sue Middleton, *Educating Feminists: Life Histories and Pedagogy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993) 6. [←](#)

11 Sergiovanni, (1996), xii. [←](#)

12 Sergiovanni, (1996), xii. [←](#)

13 Sergiovanni (1996), xii, xiii, xvi. [←](#)

14 Ivor F. Goodson, "Studying Curriculum: A Social Constructionist Perspective" in Goodson and Rob Walker, *Biography, Identity and Schooling: Episodes in Educational Research* (Hampshire, England: Falmer Press, 1991), 176. [←](#)

15 Ibid., xvi. [←](#)