Exploring the Cultural Minds of Educational Leaders in a Multiracial Nation

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Research Problem

Educational institutions in multiracial, multicultural Malaysia are rich sites for inquiry into processes of cultural contradictions, contestations and harmonization in leadership roles. The literature review, interviews, observation and analyses of how the thinking and valuing of educational leaders influence their decision making processes, patterns and even leadership styles could contribute towards deeper understanding of what need to be done to preserve and maintain cultural and religious rights and the promotion of ethical professionalism. Since Independence over half a century ago, the educational systems of Malaysia had attempted to forge national unity, principally by policies of common curriculum and co curriculum, common public examinations and teacher education. One area which remains relatively unexamined is how individual educational leaders with their beliefs and values and decision making shape the ethos of schools and influence students, teachers and administrative staff. The ethic communities and the nation as a whole are sensitive to disharmonious values and actions in the educational sector which is used as the main vehicle for national unity. The study can illuminate ways and means of enhancing the articulated national goals of unity by understanding further what educational leaders do to reinforce or otherwise contradict educational vision and mission. The findings of the study as well as the methodologies of the study may also act as a mirror for other multiracial and multicultural schools and societies to examine similar phenomenon.

The Objectives of the research study include the following:

1. What are the governing cultural religious beliefs and values held and used by the educational leaders in their decision-making?
2. Are the beliefs and values held constant or have such beliefs and values changed over time? If there were changes, what were the sources and cause for such changes?
3. What are the sources of new assumptions and values which add on to their cultural and spiritual/religious values or beliefs or contradict such beliefs and values?
4. In dealing with the multicultural and /or multireligious internal environments of the institution and external environments of the pluralistic nation, how do they resolve cultural-religious contradictions and contestations?

5. To what extent do the educational leaders consciously reflect upon the exercise of their beliefs and values upon their routine and crisis related decision-making demands.

Project Description

1. The project will first review available literature on the research problem. The project will then use a panel of expert and practitioners to elicit responses to the objectives stated above. Based on the template of responses, the first round of culture specific participants/ leaders will be invited as members of focus groups to refine earlier Gestalts from earlier contributors. Further Focus Group interviews will assemble informants/subjects/ participant practitioners from various cultural groups.

2. The project will focus on the differentiated educational leaders by purposive sampling of educational leaders from specific cultures working in the predominant cultural milieu of Malay, Chinese, Indian or other indigenous groups. On-site observation visits to various educational institutions will be conducted for direct observation, identification of cultural-religious symbols and icons, and "triangulation" of all sources of data and evidence.

3. The Project will generate a series of other small-scale projects to gather interview data from reflective practitioners and observe their decision-making and behaviours in institutions at pre school, primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary levels. It is planned to conduct several rounds of studies in pre school and primary institutions, in secondary schools and post secondary institutions, in community colleges and polytechnics, in teacher's colleges, in public and private universities and university colleges.

4. The Project will develop an evolving Conceptual and/or Theoretical Framework to describe and explain the nature of assumptions and contents of beliefs and values which consciously/reflectively influence educational leaders and their decision-making processes.