CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In producing a thesis around the topic 'Western Australian Principals' Theorizing on 'Good' Schools' the focus of the research is on practitioners' accumulated conceptions of such schools. Data for this research were collected and analysed using grounded theory methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss, 1987). With grounded theory, the research commences with no 'up-front' propositions or theory, the researcher having an open mind (Punch, 1998, p.163). Hence, initially, very little reading is required. As the research progresses data analysis will begin to highlight areas where literature needs to be consulted.

Although the research project on 'good' schools was approached with an 'open mind', there were two texts that provided the inspiration and motivation to investigate the 'good' schools issue. These texts were the book *Possible Lives* (Rose, 1995) written by Mike Rose, and a seminal article by Stephen Ball entitled *Good School/Bad School: Paradox and Fabrication* (Ball, 1997). These two pieces of literature remained as valuable touchstones throughout the research process. Their content and influence will be discussed first in this literature review because of their centrality to the thesis.

Following a consideration of the works of Rose and Ball is a brief recapitulation of the literature dealing with 'restructuring' of education. This topic, dealt with as context in Chapter Two, is also at the heart of

conceptions of 'good' schools. Restructuring introduces the pervasive background policies that are affecting the structure and purpose of education. This section of the literature review highlights the issues of human capital theory, outcomes rather than inputs, local management, and the availability of choice to parents. It is intended to create some concept of the impact of the 'restructuring' movement.

Next, there is an introduction of features in the 'good' schools debate. All of these features were generated out of the steady collection of interview data. The first of these significant features is 'school effectiveness' research. This research is closely aligned to the concept of 'good' schools. It is followed by a brief discussion of 'school improvement' research and practice, with mention being made of the uneasy liaison that school improvement has with effectiveness research. The final two features of the 'good' schools debate, on which there is substantial literature, are accountability and school culture. Accountability is related to all areas of education and is an essential element of teaching and learning. Restructuring has appeared to give accountability a keener edge. School culture might be seen to exist at the opposite end of the tangibility spectrum, but the elements of ethos, vision, values and climate are perceived to have quite 'measurable' effects on the quality of schooling.

This literature review chapter concludes with a brief recapitulation on the wide field of literature that is influencing the concept 'good' schools.

Ball and Rose and the Meaning of 'Good'

Though there is a broad collection of literature dealing with 'good' schools of various kinds, there is very little literature that addresses the issue of

principals' conceptions of 'good' schools. There are some valuable

individual interviews with redoubtable head-teachers, including *A*

Conversation with Herb Kohl (Scherer, 1998), and some observations by

principals themselves such as *On Sheep and Goats and School Reform* by

Roland Barth (1986), but there is a dearth of collective images produced by

groups of principals. That fact makes this thesis entitled 'Western Australian

Principals' Theorizing on 'Good' Schools' important and timely.

There are also few direct references to the meaning of the concept 'good'

schools. It has previously been noted that even the word 'good' really defies

description (Moore, 1959, p.7). Many educators and writers use substitute

words for 'good'. 'Effective' is a common alternative which also acts as the

descriptor for the school effectiveness research movement. Even 'effective'

has its various connotations:

> While the purists argue that 'effective' has an objective
> meaning while good is a subjective term, in point of fact,
> both are value judgements. Both start from a set of premises
> as to what school is for, how its success should be judged
> and by what means (MacBeath, 1999, p.14).

MacBeath's statement is a crucial reminder of the complexity of perceptions

of 'good' schools. The perceptions are based on personal, social or political

viewpoints and they are a reflection of what individual people believe to be

the purpose of schools. That position constitutes the framework for this

thesis which seeks only the viewpoints of a selected group of principals.

Mortimore (1991, p.214), when presenting his descriptions of school

effectiveness research, adds to the complexity of terminology when he notes

that school effectiveness is "the search for ways – both adequate and reliable – to measure the quality of the school." He goes on to say:

> The term 'quality' itself, of course, is not unproblematic. When used in connection with schools it is bound up with fundamental questions about the nature of education itself (Mortimore, 1991, p.214).

It is perhaps of little comfort to realise that leaders in the field of education grapple with the terminology associated with 'good' schools. This struggle for meaning is, however, the substance of what schools in general, and learning in particular, are all about. Whilst there is debate there is hope of progress and change; "Differences, like risk taking, hold great opportunities for learning" (Barth, 1990, p.168).

Accepting that there is wide debate about the purpose of school, this thesis chose Ball's (1997) work to provide the 'working definition' for 'good'. The definition bears repeating in order to reiterate the importance played by values in education, and in order to anticipate the tensions and uncertainties that will arise from the confrontation with these values:

> What counts as good and bad, of course, rests on what qualities of institutions are valued. The valuing is to a great extent determined by the indicators and technologies of quality which are predominant at any point in time (Ball, 1997, p.334).

Not only does Ball (1997) supply the definition for 'good' in this study, it is his writings on education that help direct the research focus that has been used. Paramount amongst these writings, in relationship to the directions of this study, is the paper *Good School/Bad School: Paradox and Fabrication* (Ball, 1997). In this paper Ball addresses the question of what is a 'good' school by examining a much lauded, grant-maintained, girls' secondary

school in England; "Martineau is a 'good' school: just about everyone thinks so" (Ball, 1997, p.319). He discovers and reveals that this archetypical 'good' school contains within it, the seeds of its potential destruction. Some of these seeds are of its own making whilst others are sown through the agencies of school improvement or school inspection. The Martineau teachers, for instance, keen to sustain inspection standards and meet public expectations, find themselves "invigorated and empowered by new demands and skills, exhausted by additional work and, in some cases, alienated from their selves and their colleagues" (Ball, 1997, p.334).

What Ball is saying is that labelling a school as 'good' doesn't mean that everything about it is 'good'. Nor does it mean that the school is 'good' for all people, or for all time. Silver (1994) sums this position up whilst noting that schools are struggling to serve many 'masters':

> A school might just succeed in satisfying itself that it is a good school, and might be judged by others to be a good school, not by everyone all the time, but enough to suggest that it is fulfilling appropriate purposes as best it can, with the people and resources available to it, and at least for the time being (Silver, 1994, p.163).

From Ball and Silver comes the conception of a school as being tenuous and temporal. The school site and the school buildings do not constitute the school itself. Beare *et al* (1989) suggests that a school is "a conceptual entity which people collectively create and maintain largely in their minds" (Beare *et al*, 1989, p.172). Ball extends this image by describing a school as something built up over time "to form a bricolage of memories" (Ball, 1997, p.321). This sense of the school being more than a gathering of buildings and people is a powerful one. Though external forces might try to rationalise, or

formalise schools, that is really an exercise in futility. The school is unique, fragile, changeable concept, rooted in the values and traditions that created it.

Ball (1997) uses the words 'paradox' and 'fabrication' in the title of his article. 'Fabrication' refers to the 'bricolage' construction; a school built around the history and traditions of its community, and 'paradox' refers to the sense that what is 'good' can just as easily be 'bad', and what is now improving can just as easily decline. The measurement of where each school stands, and how it ranks, depends more on perception than on any form of testing.

People do try to test for 'good' schools using school effectiveness research criteria and through national or state schemes of student evaluation. These test regimes can't identify the 'school' fabrications that Ball (1997) has attempted to portray. Tests, though appearing to be unbiased and factual, take on a cloak of paradox and obscurity:

> Techniques which are intended to make schools more visible and accountable paradoxically encourage opacity and the manipulation of representations (Ball, 1997, p.319).

From Ball (1997) this research on 'good' schools has acquired some philosophical framework. He has provided a workable description of a 'good' school, a sense of schools being cerebral fabrications and a clear focus on paradox; "They may be productive and oppressive, liberating and inefficient, purposeful and unfair" (Ball, 1997, p.321). But, if Ball was inclined towards the philosophical and academic, the other author and educator who motivated this research was a bit more grassroots and practical.

Mike Rose set out across America in search of 'good' schools and the tales of his adventures fill the pages of *Possible Lives* (Rose, 1995).

Rose's journey was both physical and intellectual. Responding to a nation-wide pessimism over education, which Rose (1995, p.1) describes as "a strange mix of apocalyptic vignettes", he set out into the industrial cities, small towns and rural back-blocks looking for signs of 'goodness'. His book is verbally illustrated with inspiring stories of heroic teachers and challenging creative programs. Beyond these stories lie the messages that Rose generates about schools.

Like Ball (1997), Rose found schools to be difficult to classify and compartmentalise. He describes the education he saw as "bountiful, crowded, messy, contradictory, exuberant, tragic, frustrating and remarkable" (Rose, 1996, p.4). It is a scenario that recurs throughout the literature on 'good' schools (Wilson, 1996; Barth, 1986). Complexity and paradox must be factored into all discussion about schools. Teaching isn't simple, learning isn't simple and community relationships certainly are not simple. To present education, in any of its forms, as unified, stable and easily manipulated, may be politically useful, but it is technically naïve.

The power of Rose's work comes from the immediacy of the presentation whereby the teachers and children 'speak' to the readers, and also from the ability of Rose to investigate schools at the micro-level of the classroom. Too often educational research is too far removed from the voices and experiences of the most important people in the schools. Wilson (1996, p.246) is critical of the lack of connection between some policy makers and

the realistic world of the school; "Can we give up our generalised theories about how teaching and learning happen and begin with the more mundane, messier, idiosyncratic way it really happens?" MacBeath (1999) in a critical exposé of school effectiveness research, also urges researchers to get in amongst the classroom and individual learning:

> Conflict, dilemma and ambiguity are, of course, at the very centre of learning, individual and organised, and it is this constant grappling with complexity that makes schools interesting and dynamic places (MacBeath, 1999, p.9).

Rose brings optimism to the search for 'good' schools. He was able to find goodness in the most unexpected places. MacBeath (1999, p.11) calls these places "eddies of excellence" amongst "stagnant backwaters." Rose also requires the researcher to look closely lest they miss "the significance of the everyday acts of courage and insight, the little breakthroughs, the mundane re-imagining of the possible" (Rose, 1996, p.430). This is a timely reminder that 'good' schools is not about management and policies. It is initially about "what happens between a particular teacher and a particular child" (Wilson, 1996, p.7). The observation is backed up by research where "there is increasing evidence, especially from studies using new statistical techniques, that the greater part of the variation among pupils' achievements can be accounted for by differences at classroom rather than school level" (Riddell et al, 1999, p.172). So the message for researchers is to look closely and not to overlook the classroom.

Finally, Rose and Ball both issue a reminder about perspective. Good things can be seen in schools if the vantage point is right. For Barth the vantage point was personal and he looked at schools on behalf of his family; "a

'good' school for me is not a prescription for others, but a dream for myself and my children" (Barth, 1990, p.149). For Silver, there could be a much broader stance; "A 'good' school has always been one which, by some publicly available standard, has consistently achieved known or assumed goals" (Silver, 1994, p.2).

Restructuring

Both Rose and Ball made their comments about 'good' schools against the background of considerable changes in the national significance of schools. Rose was traversing an America which had experienced the 1958 National Defence Education Act designed to boost American academic education in the face of the Sputnik launching. This was a time that was seeing links being developed between education and national security, the introduction of a revamped curriculum and the beginning of direct intervention of the Federal Government into the formulation of educational policy (Engel, 2000, pp.23-24). More changes were to follow, first with Johnson's 'Great Society' programs to boost education for the underprivileged, and then the 1983 publication of the *Nation at Risk Report*, linking education to the economic viability and competitiveness of the country. *Nation at Risk* was what restructuring was all about, namely, human capital theory (Marginson, 1993, p.31) and schools as creators of wealth. By the time Rose was confronted by the 'apocalyptic vignettes' in the early 90s *Nation at Risk* policies, which had become George Bush's '*America 2000*' goals, were promoting national standards, an emphasis on science and maths, site-based management and a longer school day (Urban & Wagner, 1996).

In England, Ball's Martineau Comprehensive Secondary School was operating under the 1988 Education Reform Act which had created a national curriculum, a new system of local management, and a steady movement towards privatisation, competition and enterprise (Chitty, 2002, p.34). Martineau was also subject to the pressure of OFSTED inspections under the new Education (Schools) Act of 1992 (Chitty, 2002, p.75).

Similar changes were experienced in Australia with, once again, a centralising of the policy and accountability functions, a devolution of power and responsibility to the school site, and a concerted national effort to boost international economic competitiveness. These political manoeuvrings, in the face of globalisation, have already been documented in Chapter Two of this thesis, but the impact on schools needs to be highlighted because it gives a national perspective to the concept of 'good' schools. The national perspective centred on four areas; human capital, outputs rather than inputs, local management and school choice. These four elements had both independent and combined impact on the curriculum, the organisation, and the basic ethos and culture of schools.

Human Capital

Engel (2000, p.24) describes the 'human capital' element of restructuring as "the stock of knowledge and skills possessed by the labour force that increases its productivity." The theory behind the idea was that a well educated workforce was of value to the nation, making it more competitive on the global market. Government action, in response to this theory, involved a concentration of curriculum on the areas of national and economic importance, creating what Engel (2000, p.212) considers "an intellectually

impoverished curriculum." In Australia some of this impoverishment can be seen in T*he Quality of Education in Australia Report* (Quality of Education Review Committee, 1985) which recommended strategies to the Federal Government "for raising the standards achieved by students in communication, literacy and numeracy, and for improving the relationship between secondary schooling and subsequent employment and education" (Louden & Browne, 1993, p.121).

For the study of 'good' schools it is important to be aware of 'human capital' factors seen to be operating in national testing and the drive towards national curriculum. The emphasis remains on traditional academic subjects at the expense of more 'liberal' subjects such as values education and the arts. Seddon (1994, p.185) suggests that it "is this tradition of liberalism which needs to be rescued from economism." Not only is the curriculum restrictive and inappropriate for 'good' schools, the literature gives the impression that the whole human capital theory is flawed and unworkable. MacBeath reports on:

> … the lack of evidence to connect test performance at school level with economic performance at national level. Were test and economic performance to correlate, countries with a poor economy would not perform well in standardised tests while in rich countries the opposite would be the case (MacBeath, 1999, p.17).

Outcomes Rather Than Inputs

The Quality of Education in Australia Report (Quality of Education Review Committee, 1985) not only linked schools and human capital, it also recommended that governments concentrate on an analysis of the outcomes of education rather than inputs. Outputs referred to the measuring of student

achievement against some carefully constructed criteria. Those criteria were contained in state or national curricula. O'Donoghue and Dimmock (1998, p.71) point out that it was no coincidence that there was a "change from a concern with inputs during the relatively prosperous 1970s to a focus on outcomes during the financially stringent 1980s." It was only a matter of time before national goals for Australian schools were being developed which, in turn, heralded "national reporting, and national curriculum and assessment frameworks" (Seddon, 1994, p.179). At almost exactly the same time, the *National Curriculum Consultation Document* (Department of Education and Science, 1987) for England and Wales was released, which had the appearance of being "the basic grammar school curriculum devised at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Chitty, 2002, p.65).

The concept of 'good' schools has been strongly influenced by national curriculum and national testing which "paved the way for proponents of versions of education 'quality' that are destructive of public education" (Angus, 1992, p.381). Engel (2000, p.28) suggests that *Goals 2000*, the American program which brought a national focus to curriculum and assessment of standards, has had a similar effect in "excluding any direct participation by the community served by the schools." This is paradoxical since restructuring appeared to include elements of devolution of authority to school sites.

Local Management

A major component of restructuring was the relocation of some decision making from central education authorities to the schools. The theory behind the move was that bureaucracy would be streamlined and money saved. It

was also a recognition of the potential community and educational value of site-based schools. The blueprint for the reform was contained in the Australian Schools Commission Report *Schools in Australia* (Australian Schools Commission, 1993) where "it was clearly stated that schools would be better places if the centralised control of schools by the states was loosened" (Angus , 1995b, p.6). The process started in Western Australia with the publication and promotion of *Better Schools in Western Australia: A Program for Improvement* (Ministry of Education, 1987). Once again, the developments in Australia reflected those in England and Wales and in the USA. For England and Wales it was the 1988 Education Act that allowed schools to 'opt out' of local education authority control and become relatively independent. The Thatcher Government declared that the provision of site management would help in "raising education standards, producing a better educated society and improving the management of schools" (Chitty, 2002, p.37). In the USA the movement towards site-based management began in the late 1980s and was initiated by state legislatures (Urban & Wagoner, 1996).

For this thesis on 'good' schools, the importance of the local management of schools' developments is that schools did not become all-powerful. Urban and Wagoner (1996, p.337) speak of the perceptions of the teachers in these schools where "there was often as much scepticism about site-based management changes as there was resentment over the increased state mandates that flowed into their classrooms during the 1980s." In Western Australia there is still a significant degree of Department of Education control over the running of individual schools, as reported by the Robson

Report – *Investing in Government Schools: Putting Children First* (Robson, 2001, p.97):

> There is a need for a conceptual shift from managing a 'school system' based on common policies, structures, formulas and funding allocations to managing a 'system of schools' that recognises different school environments and diverse student populations in the provision of support services.

As principals speak about their conceptions of 'good' schools in this research project, they do so against the changing dimensions of their managerial and educational leadership roles. They have gained more independence but they have also become much more accountable. They not only face "the removal of government funding from public schooling and the imposition of rigid objectives and accountability" (Townsend, 1996, p.122), but at the same time site-based management is leaning "towards the location of education in a consumer market under the supervision of the state" (Marginson, 1997, p.167). They have entered the era of parent choice.

School Choice

School restructuring and the concept of devolution can be described in many ways and from many viewpoints because, as with the concept of 'good' schools, the view depends on the vantage point. It must be noted, however, that much of the literature describes education reform in Australia, England and Wales and, to a lesser degree, the United States as being "driven by the politics of privatisation" (Harmen *et al*, 1991, p.21). Chitty (2002, p.33) designates the period of English education policy from the 1988 Education Act through to the new millennium as being "an attempt at gradual privatisation – at blurring the boundaries between the private and state sectors."

Whether it be privatisation or not, the trend is towards parents being given choice so that they can pick the school that best suits their child. That process, which is not as simple as it sounds, creates a number of problems, the first being marketization. The public schools of England and Wales, the USA and Australia are well and truly in the marketplace and there is a need for them to sell themselves. Critics of the 1988 Education Act in England and Wales saw real problems in marketization:

> Schools would be pitted against one another in a cut-throat drive to attract students. New types of head-teachers would be appointed; new types of teachers would be welcomed into the profession; and different kinds of people would be trained for the inspectorate. The culture of co-operation and public service would be replaced by one of competition and enterprise (Chitty, 2002, p.34).

Here again is the paradox that bedevils education – though choice will allow children to enjoy a school that suits them and, although marketization will motivate schools to improve and perform, the standard of education, and the indisputable need for equity, will suffer. Engel (2000, p.35) is particularly scathing of choice and marketization, seeing them as "profoundly destructive of any attempt to build a coherent value system for young people in the schools. In the name of freedom of choice they exacerbate social fragmentation and dissonance." Angus (1992) paints a similarly destructive picture; "The emphasis on individual interest within a market orientation, reduces the complex nature of education to that of a commodity to be consumed, traded or cashed in to return a profit. In this set of values, educational outcomes, or even educational certificates, can become more important than the educational process itself" (Angus, 1992, p.394).

The review of some literature associated with restructuring of education indicates that this is a broad area of great historical and philosophical depth. The impact of political and economic decisions on a state or national scale have wide repercussions as they cascade down upon the individual schools and classrooms. What advantages the national interest may damage the rights of individuals and ride roughshod over legitimate demands for equity.

This study into 'Western Australian Government primary school principals' conceptions of what constitutes a 'good' school' is played out against the background of a new outcomes curriculum, local management of schools, and growing privatisation of the public sector. School principals will experience these developments as "dilemmas, conflicting demands, and incompatible solutions" (Seddon, 1994, p.168). It is vexatious whether the changes have been efficient, and doubtful whether they have been effective.

School Effectiveness

Peter Mortimore's definition of an effective school is one "in which pupils progress further than might be expected from considerations of its intake" (MacBeath, 1999, p.14). This definition does have an outcomes emphasis which betrays the penchant for school effectiveness researchers to target schools which generate high standard-attainment scores. Coe and Fitz-Gibbon (1998, p.433) describe the 'school effectiveness' title as misleading since that expression creates "over-emphasis on the school level and … over-simplification of the relatively problematic construct of 'effectiveness'." Despite some vagueness about the exact meaning of its title, school effectiveness research has been robustly influential over the last thirty years

or so, and it is a source of important background information for this thesis on 'good' schools.

School effectiveness researchers were active in the early 1960s attempting to try and quantify the efficacy of schools. The expectation was that home background was highly influential in the education of children. The study that really confirmed this belief was headed by Professor James Coleman in the USA in 1966 (Beare *et al,* 1990, pp.2-3). The Coleman Report entitled *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman, 1966) was the result of a comprehensive study of thousands of children across America. It showed that schools had little influence on a child's achievement. Coleman's research was backed up six years later in a similar study conducted by Jenks (1972).

These results showed a much smaller effect from schools than most teachers and parents had assumed (Beare *et al*, 1990, p.3). It was not until the late 1970s that some significant studies began to report that, in fact, schools did make a difference. Pre-eminent amongst this group of studies was the work done by Rutter and a team from the University of London. Rutter's findings were published in the book *Fifteen Thousand Hours* (Rutter *et al*, 1979) which noted that "children's behaviour and attitudes are shaped and influenced by their experiences at school and, in particular, by the qualities of the school as a social institution (Rutter *et al,* 1979, p.179). The report went on to declare, in true school effectiveness manner:

> Children benefit from attending schools which set good
> standards, where the teachers provide good models of
> behaviour, where they are praised and given responsibility,

where the general conditions are good and where the lessons are well conducted (Rutter *et al,* 1979, p.204).

Rutter and his team provided a unique longitudinal study of student achievement in school. Not only did their research stimulate further investigation into the factors that make schools effective, but it provided the classical list of school effectiveness indicators. In this case, the list included good standards, good teacher models, good general conditions and well conducted lessons. It is these lists that have tended to typify school effectiveness research and perhaps downplay its value. Barth (1986, p.294) rues the fact that "our public schools have come to be dominated and driven by a conception of educational improvement that might be called 'list logic'."

School effectiveness research, which dominated through the 1980s and continued strongly through the 1990s, was motivated by "a loss of confidence in what schools could do and a growing disquiet about what they were doing" (Silver, 1994, p.4). It is no coincidence that the demand for this kind of research came at a time when countries were keen to make schools more accountable and more productive. Hence, the value of the lists of 'effectiveness' factors.

School effectiveness research basically provided a 'snapshot' of a school at a point in time (Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993, p.51). 'Effective' schools would be identified on the basis of standardised test scores, and then their school-wide management and organisation analysed. From investigation of a number of such successful schools common features could be extrapolated.

The features became the list. One such list was developed by Edmonds (1979) and popularised by Lezotte (1991). It is termed the five factor model:

1. Strong educational leadership.

2. High expectations of student achievement.

3. An emphasis on basic skills.

4. A safe and orderly climate.

5. Frequent evaluation of children's progress (Creemers, 1994; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Tibbitt, Spencer & Hutchinson, 1994).

This list, and a host of others, some of which are far more expansive and extensive, contain what their authors believe to be the essential components exhibited by effective schools (Mortimore & Sammons, 1989;Watkins *et al*, 1986). Grafted on to any school or backward mapped (Reynolds *et al*, 1993, p.53) into them, these elements should, it is argued, have the power to produce guaranteed improvement.

There is, however, quite a gulf between the creation of the lists and school improvement. This lack of interface can be attributed to many factors, not the least being the concept of 'effectiveness'. The basic statement that summarises the conceptual difficulty is that 'effective' doesn't necessarily mean 'good'. Glickman (1987, p.624) points out that "effective schools can be 'good' schools, and 'good' schools must be effective schools – but the two are not necessarily the same." Silver (1994, p.6) notes that "it would be possible for a parent to accept that a school is effective without being good." This is more than a subtle or semantic difference, it is about viewpoint and perspective. School effectiveness research is bound, by its 'snapshot' characteristics, to direct its attention to a broad overall picture of a school, as

represented by its organisation and administration. Scheerens *et al* (1989, p.270) suggests that "the way effectiveness is defined in the mainstream of school effectiveness research conforms to the notion of organisational productivity and its theoretical background of economic rationality." Elliott (1996, p.200) adds clarity to this statement by describing school effectiveness research as "a mechanistic methodology, an instrumentalist view of educational processes." These arguments are related to the quantitative and positivistic methodology of the research and the apparent simplistic nature of the findings (Willmott, 1998). It is these aspects of school effectiveness research that, in the final analysis, distance it from the concept of 'good'. Glickman (1987, p.623), writing at a time when school effectiveness research was in its ascendancy, believed that "the current fascination with findings from the research on effectiveness has blinded schools and school systems to the more basic question of goodness."

Angus (1995a, p.30) suggests that the school effectiveness movement has "become trapped in a theoretical and methodological cul-de-sac because of its obsession with single correlations and a search for universal recipes for fixing schools." This is an argument that pervades the school effectiveness literature. Many writers now dismiss the use of a recipe, or list, as a descriptor of or creator of a 'good' school (Coe & Fitz-Gibbon, 1998; Creemers, 1994; Purkey & Smith, 1993; Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993; Reynolds & Packer, 1992; Willmott, 1999). Slee (1999, p.6) is particularly severe in criticism by stating that "the liberal claim that ineffective or failing schools, by adopting the characteristics of those schools deemed successful, can also tread the path to success, is naïve or disingenuous." It is an

important issue that the school effectiveness research is unable or unwilling to use its repository of data to create new centres of effectiveness. The cul-de-sac appears to have terminated at the production of the lists; "This issue is evidentially crucial if the intention of school effectiveness research is ultimately to improve schools rather than simply measure them" (Coe & Fitz-Gibbon, 1998, p.427).

Measurement of schools is big business for the school effectiveness movement (MacBeath, 1999, p.15). The reason for this demand lies with an intense interest by governments in how schools are performing and with the attractive simplicity of the effectiveness lists. Thus, OFSTED inspectors walk into schools in England and Wales armed with school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness criteria culled from the extensive range of lists and characteristics (Elliott, 1996, p.205; OFSTED, 1995). These criteria are grouped into areas requiring inspection including the achievement of pupils, the behaviour of the children, the organisation and deployment of staff, the standards of teaching and various management issues involved in the running of a school (OFSTED, 1995). The inspectors make use of standard assessment test scores (SAT), attendance and exclusion figures, and the cost of school salaries. There is a strong reliance on utilising school processes and achievements that are visible and measurable (Schagen & Weston, 1998). Hamilton (1999), in a critical essay entitled *Idols of the Market Place*, condemns the use of school effectiveness indicators to evaluate schools. He describes the concept as 'utilitarian' "because it builds upon aggregate measures (eg examination results, class sizes, attendance figures, cost per

pupil)" (Hamilton, 1999, p.9). Woods and Jeffrey (1998) are equally

censorious, noting that OFSTED inspections deal with terms such as:

> … value for money, documentation, efficiency,
> effectiveness, standards, investigation, investment,
> feedback, monitoring, observation, coverage, outcomes,
> grades, judgement, benchmarks … all associated with
> financial audits (Woods & Jeffrey, 1998, p.549).

The measurement of schools using effectiveness indicators "is technically

and morally problematic" (Hamilton, 1999, p.3). It is technically problematic

because the indicators are so restrictive, being only things that are observable

and measurable. Technically, the identified indicators may also be the results

of effective schooling rather than the causes of improvement. Applying such

limited and, perhaps, impotent measures to 'failing' schools may well be an

exercise in frustration. School effectiveness research is morally problematic

because it discounts areas of school life which may be the only things that

really count in a school. These latter characteristics, which might be

considered better indicators, include measures of educational worth

(Hamilton, 1999), the celebration of difference (Slee, 1999), and the

modelling of caring and community (Ripley, 1995). Rose (1995, p.3)

believes that "we operate with inadequate, even damaging, notions of what it

means to be 'excellent'." He urges that models of effectiveness concentrate

on "social and cultural variables" (Rose, 1995, p.424).

School effectiveness research is not 'fine-grained' enough to promote the

development of school improvement. There is a need for the research to

investigate the role of the classroom teacher, examine the elements of school

culture, and contemplate the myriad of factors that interact to create the

unique concept of a school. As Rose (1995) observes, we overlook the minor

triumphs and we fail to celebrate innovation and difference. It can be argued that school effectiveness can "unfairly discriminate against low socio-economic schools" (Thrupp, 1998, p.204), allowing little compensation for the quality of the intake (Coe & Fit-Gibbon, 1998; Riddell, Brown & Duffield, 1999). It can also be argued that school effectiveness research "still has some way to go in understanding how the internal culture of the school works and how it connects – in multiple interwoven strands – to the world outside" (MacBeath, 1999, p.12).

Though school effectiveness research is a rich vein of valuable material which can be mined for a study on 'good' schools, the treasures need to be handled with caution. Reynolds (1996) uses the analogy of 'snake oil' when he discusses the enduring popularity of the school effectiveness movement. There needs to be an awareness of a perceived bias towards academic achievement and an inability to cope with curriculum activities, pedagogical conditions and community context (Elliott, 1996, p.211). Reynolds and Packer (1992, p.174) have developed a five factor model which helps to re-establish a framework of the basic complexities that really do govern life in schools:

1. School influence is not as large as home or community influence.

2. Classroom teaching is the important factor in variance between schools.

3. School performance can vary quite rapidly over two to three years.

4. Schools are not necessarily effective across the board.

5. There is not a blueprint that will make schools effective.

Schools are complex and they are changing. This thesis on principals'

conceptions of what makes a 'good' school takes the view that there is no

'blueprint' that makes schools 'good' or effective. It also agrees with Elliott

(1996) that school effectiveness may be unable to cope with future school

improvement:

> The school of the future is likely to be a more flexible
> organisation with highly permeable boundaries. Personally I
> can't imagine a highly reductionist research paradigm,
> which searches for the 'mechanisms of effectiveness'
> amongst all this complexity, having much of a future
> (Elliott, 1996, p.223).

School Improvement

Fundamentally, school improvement should be linked directly to school

effectiveness research (Reynolds, 1996a). School systems in various parts of

the world exploit the implied connection by applying the 'effectiveness' lists

to schools in the course of school inspection and review. That process is used

in Western Australia, with the school effectiveness criteria being outlined in

a booklet entitled *School Performance: A Framework for Improving and*

Reporting (Education Department of Western Australia, 1997). This booklet,

copies of which are in each school, directs school principals to measure their

school against the criteria and plan improvements accordingly. The Western

Australian system is duly adhered to. It appears to be a "simple,

straightforward and compelling" (Barth, 1986, p.294) way to harness school

effectiveness research to the job of school improvement, but as Barth (1986,

p.294) has said, "it doesn't seem to work very well."

School effectiveness research seeks an "understanding of the characteristics

and processes of effective schools" (Brighouse & Tomlinson, 1991, p.4),

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whilst school improvement research focuses "on the means by which a
school changes and develops, improving the quality of its teaching and its
pupils' experiences, and ultimately, it is believed, their performance"
(Tibbitt, Spencer & Hutchinson, 1994, p.152). Though they have different
outcomes, it would appear that the more theoretical school effectiveness
could inform the more practical school improvement measure (Coe & Fitz-
Gibbon, 1998, p.427; MacBeath, 1999, p.17; Mortimore, 1995, p.7;
Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993, p.54; Tibbett, Spencer & Huchinson,
1994, p.153). Reynolds (1996a) has created the following chart showing how
the two traditions are apparently so diametrically different, at least on the
English stage:

School Effectiveness Research	School Improvement Research
Focus on schools	Focus on individual teachers and groups of teachers
Focus on school organisation	Focus on school processes
Quantitative in orientation	Qualitative in orientation
More concerned with schools at a point in time.	More concerned with schools as changing.

Adapted from Reynolds, 1996a, p.145.

As Mortimore (1991, p.219) succinctly puts it, "the relationship between the
studies of school effectiveness and those of school improvement … is not
simple … they differ in focus."

School improvement research remains relatively underdeveloped
(Mortimore, 1995). It has much to offer in regards to creating 'good'
schools. Rather than lists of effectiveness indicators, school improvement
operations require just one or two factors that could interact with others to
produce change (Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993, p.52). 'Good' schools are

no doubt created out of a successful mixing of the elements and school principals and staff need to be aware of the fragility and temporal nature of the 'good' schools concept. They also need to use the practical strategies of school improvement to train the staff and community in order to keep abreast of the changes. This process is not a snapshot approach; "Effective schools, in their myriad forms, never stay still long enough to be pinned down" (MacBeath, 1999, p.9).

Accountability

As Rose (1995) searched across America for individual examples of 'good' schools and schooling he was drawing attention to the dilemma of effectiveness research and its inability to see beneath the organisational façade, the mechanical administrative procedures, and the national test averages. Rose recognised the paradox and the problem:

> Perhaps the difficulty lies in the measures of achievement and models of effectiveness that are at the centre of many reform proposals: standardised tests, reductive comparative designs that ignore social and cultural variables, ways of analysing institutions that focus on function and structure (Rose, 1995, p.424).

There is no doubt that accountability is a vital part of the education process. It is part of the cycle of quality teaching and learning. It is an indicator of effectiveness, a tool for improvement and one thread in the complex tapestry of 'goodness'. Macpherson (1996b, p.81) provides a useful definition of accountability:

> Accountability … means answerability to others concerning one's performance and duties … implies the collection and reporting of objective data about role-related behaviours, evaluation against appropriate criteria and then planning systematically for improvement.

McEwan *et al* (1995, p.106) credit accountability as being "one of the few educational activities that have consistently been proven to increase student learning", with the proviso that the accountability is directed towards the important goals of schooling (McEwan *et al,* 1995, p.99). As Macpherson (1996b) points out, the focus should be on 'improvement'. The secret lies in what is being measured and why the measurement is taking place. A 'good' school could be one that measured the right things in the right way.

As with most things in education, accountability is a "complex and ambiguous" process (Poulson, 1996, p.584). Its functions are diverse and its guises are many. Schools are pulled in multiple directions by business, parents, taxpayers, politicians, universities "and by society as a whole expecting schools to be the panacea for all its ills" (Bacon, 1995, p.85). Accountability must serve more than its altruistic responsibility to education improvement. Education is a high cost service and there is a need to show value for money. The push towards efficiency is a challenge to the concept of 'good' schools. Macpherson (1995) bemoans the fact that "the public interest in education has been recast almost solely in economic rationalist terms, with little reference being made to the moral and aesthetic purposes of education" (Macpherson, 1995, p.549).

It is the central education authorities who push the economic-rationalist line. Much of the money for schools comes directly from state and national governments and the taxpayers need to have some indication of returns (Gray & Wilcox, 1995). The returns have taken the form of employment, prosperity and international competitiveness, whilst the accountability

measures have become standardised testing in the basic academic skills. The push for accountability 'has been indistinguishable from the push for more standardised testing, which has been indistinguishable from the push for a better economic global position" (Ball & Goldman, 1997, p.465). Because the central authorities have control of the money they assume control over aspects of accountability. By being able to determine what will be measured and tested, state and national governments gain a powerful defacto influence over what is considered important and what is considered 'good' in schools. Thus, in England and Wales, OFSTED "has become a key player in educational market regulation because of its power to determine what constitutes a successful school" (Rea & Weiner, 1998, p.26). Levels and standards in some externally generated tests can set the profile for what is 'good'. Gray and Wilcox (1995, p.26) classify a 'good 'school as one where high proportions of pupils:

- make above average levels of academic progress
- are satisfied with the level of education they are achieving

The control of the accountability mechanisms by central authorities not only defines which areas of curriculum or school processes are to be measured, but also generates compliance across the spectrum of school functions. OFSTED inspections are a demonstration of the direct consequences of an accountability process where "schools with serious weaknesses are kept under review" (Ouston *et al*, 1998, p.120). Compliance accountability is termed by Thrupp (1998) 'the politics of blame'. This involves "an uncompromising stance on school performance in which the quality of student achievement is seen as a result of school policies and practices"

(Thrupp, 1998, p.196). Poulson (1996, p.585) agrees that external

accountability is "an aspect of the disciplinary technology by which the work

of teachers and schools is surveyed and controlled." Mawhinney (1998,

p.100) notes that governments "have turned to various forms of assessment

to ensure that education systems are both more responsive to public policy

goals and more effective in achieving them." Bernauer and Cress (1997,

p.72) call external accountability "the Trojan Horse of school reform."

For this thesis on 'Western Australian Government primary school

principals' conceptions of what constitutes a 'good' school' there is a need to

take into account the governmental and legislative determinants of the profile

of schools and the functions of staff. Through accountability processes

curriculum priorities can be established and standardised tests can influence

content and teaching methods. Schools are under comprehensive pressure to

comply with the goals of political and economic interests (Bernauer & Cress,

1997; Gibson & Asthana, 1998; Macpherson *et al,* 1998; Schalock *et al*,

1998; Slee *et al*, 1999; Thomas, 1996; Willmott, 1999; Wilson, 1996).

Gallagher (2000, p.503) provides an interesting final perspective on the

compliance characteristic of centralised accountability:

> Underlying our embrace of the assessment industry and our
> cultural distrust of teachers is a fundamental belief that
> what's missing in education today is 'efficiency', and that
> the best way to ensure efficiency is to set up a corporate
> structure in which teachers are held accountable to
> corporate CEOs.

Although much of the accountability pressure that schools are feeling stems

from national governments' attempts to raise educational standards in the

face of economic downturn and heightened global competition, there is also

pressure exerted by the local community. Ultimately, intertwined with political interests, parental pressure is initially directed at individual schools. There is an expectation by parents that schools will perform at acceptable levels and there is a growing expectation by parents that they can choose a school that is performing to their liking. It could be argued that the parents exhibit the same distrust of schools that was seen with state and national governments:

> Awareness of educational issues has never been greater. A cynical public no longer trusts educators' claims that students are learning; it wants tangible evidence to substantiate the claim (McEwan *et al,* 1995, p.106).

Macpherson (1995, p.547) says that parents want accurate information on "curriculum content, their child's academic progress, … comparative assessment and reporting using developmental benchmarks, and … expected learning outcomes early in the school year." It is to be hoped that the parents are able to work with the schools to ensure that the goals of both parties are the same - school improvement. The fear is that schools will be pressured by the community to generate improved academic standards in traditional subject areas to boost employment prospects and entry qualifications to institutions of higher learning (Eisner, 1991; Thrupp, 1998).

There would seem to be a whole variety of goals created for schools by the demands of external accountability, parent choice of schools and individual children's needs. Ball and Goldman (1997, p.231) describe society as being "in transition, with competing values, interests and identities." They describe this situation as "goal chaos" (Ball & Goldman, 1997, p.231). It is 'goal chaos' that is at the heart of the research project on 'good' schools because

goals and values intertwine. There is a challenge to educators to cope with the complexity of goals in the process of improving the focus of teaching, learning and accountability. Macpherson (1998, p.68) cautions that "the ends and means of public education are contested and in a democracy remain contestable." In regards to accountability the vagaries in the goals of education have allowed school curricula to be captured by the clear but inappropriate boundaries of tests and regulations, a situation that appears to be 'regressive' (Wagner, 1996) and 'damaging' (Rose, 1996).

The wide selection of literature on school accountability is essential reading for background to the issue of 'good' schools. There is a close connection between what is measured and what is valued. Complexity arises because of the broad variety of motives and goals that support the various accountability regimes. Because of this complexity and because of the inability to resolve the 'chaos', Kuchapski (1998, p.192) can declare that "despite an outpouring of resources to make public education more accountable, it can be stated with some confidence that in practical and theoretical terms the area of accountability is a mess." With accountability in a mess there must be contention about the definition of 'good'.

Some things are clear: accountability is an essential component of school improvement and of 'good' schools (Cuttance, 1994; Cuttance, 1995; Ginsberg & Berry, 1998); accountability needs to address the goals of schools themselves and their communities (McEwan et al, 1995; Macpherson, 1996b; Macpherson *et al*, 1998); and accountability measures

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must have a high degree of teacher ownership (Davies & Williams, 1997; Macpherson, 1996c; Macpherson *et al*, 1998; Newman *et al*, 1997).

To promote the development of 'good' schools we have to be very clear about the ownership of the accountability regime. Brighouse and Tomlinson (1991, p.3) don't believe "market pressures will transform a poor school into a successful one", and Wilson (1996, p.238) warns that "coercing schools into enforcing excellence won't work." There is also a need for accountability to become complex enough "to deal with both moral and practical attributes" (Mortimore, 1991, p.214). It can be argued that schools "exist as multiple and complex networks of belief in people's heads, networks that comprise socially constructed beliefs and feelings, a moral economy of norms and values, and empirical knowledge" (Macpherson, 1996c, p.103). Accountability currently copes with the empirical knowledge but there would appear to be little appetite to go further. Rose (1995, p.9) urges educators to "ponder the intricate mix of mind and heart that defines the classroom."

School Culture

This research project is all about going beyond empirical knowledge and into the 'mix of mind and heart' that helps define a school. Interviews with school principals fall into this phenomenological category. Goens (1996, p.54) believes that the 'mind and heart' are critical dimensions in the analysis of education:

> Matters of the heart are rarely discussed or taken seriously
> in educational research because they are perceived as
> mushy and unscientific. But schools are defined by the
> abstractions that make them special to children – goodness,
> imagination, creativity, caring and spirit.

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Goens is discussing school culture, the fourth and final foreground literature area used to support this thesis on principals' perceptions of 'good' schools. The concept of school culture has been in circulation since the 1930s. During the 1980s 'school culture' lost favour in the face of the apparent practical realities of school effectiveness research and economic rationalism. As we turn into the new millennium, school culture appears to be finding favour again, perhaps at the expense of quantitative investigation and the promises of globalisation.

Terrance Deal was one of the education authors who 'kept the faith' with the topic of school culture throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In an article published in 1985, he wrote that "the pathway to educational effectiveness is inside each school. It exists in the traditions and symbols that make a school special to students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community" (Deal, 1985, p.615). Goens, as we have noted, was saying exactly the same thing a decade later. Deal (1985, p.610) perceives 'culture' to be a school's "style, tone and social atmosphere", a phenomenon which "is related somehow to student performance."

There is a variety of definitions of school culture. Cheng (1993, p.103) sees culture as "the total set of artefacts, behavioural norms, values, beliefs and assumptions shared by members in an organisation." Schein (1992, p.9) describes culture as "a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, developed or discovered by a given group as it learns to deal with problems." Deal and Peterson (1999, p.2), in a key text for this section, *Shaping School Culture: The School Leader's Role* (Deal & Peterson, 1999), conceptualise culture as

"the school's own unwritten rules and traditions, norms and expectations that seem to permeate everything." However, it is from a Petersen and Deal article that this study takes its working definition for 'culture':

> Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems and confront challenges (Petersen & Deal, 1998, p.28).

Culture is closely linked with the terms climate and ethos. Climate would appear to be a very similar phenomenon, perhaps produced as a result of the organization's culture. Hoy *et al* (1990, p.261) explain climate as being "a broad term that refers to members' shared perceptions of the work environment of the organization." These authors also admit, however, that "climate is conceptually complex and vague" (Hoy *et al*, 1990, p.260). Freiberg (1998, p.22) is similarly obscure as he describes climate as "an ever-changing factor in the lives of people who work and live in schools." Findlayson (1987), however, puts climate into a practical form by outlining some of the spectrum of cues that highlight the phenomenon. These cues "range from the colour of the paint on the walls, through the way the chairs are arranged in the staffroom and the presence or absence of pupils' work, to the way people in the school talk to each other" (Findlayson, 1987, p.163). For the purposes of this dissertation, climate and culture are used as inter-changeable terms, with culture being preferred. Hoy *et al* (1990, p.261) come to the same conclusion "there is no general agreement concerning the difference between culture and climate."

'Ethos' is a central concept in this study of 'good' schools and it occurs regularly in the principals' interviews. It is worth trying to give some identity

to a word which is used expansively by authors, interviewees and, probably, the general public. The researcher's own school, opened in 1988, has a foundation document entitled *Endeavour (pseud) Primary School – Tradition/Philosophy/Ethos* (Appendix I). This document, which introduces a unique nautical theme and clear set of values, is a written expression of the school's ethos. The intention of this ethos is to provide "a framework or tapestry to which teachers, students and parents can add their own contributions."

Ethos is closely aligned to culture and appears to represent the core values of the school. Donnelly (2000) struggles with the concept of ethos in a valuable article *In Pursuit of School Ethos*. Ethos is seen to be not a static phenomenon, but "a process which is characterised by inherent contradictions and inconsistencies" (Donnelly, 2000, p.150). Donnelly also makes the point that there can be a range of ethos positions in one school. She articulates that range as stretching from 'aspirational', which incorporates the institution's written statement, to 'moral attachment', which is the individual's "deep seated thoughts, feelings and perceptions" (Donnelly, 2000, p.152). Bearing in mind Donnelly's advice that ethos is a 'nebulous' term, this research project adopts her definition which does give precedence to values, namely:

> ....the distinctive range of values and beliefs which define the philosophy or atmosphere of an organisation (Donnelly, 2000, p.134).

It is difficult to describe, discuss and evaluate aspects of schools which are 'felt' and experienced rather than observed. Cheng (1993, p.181) reminds us that there is uncertainty as to whether "constructs such as school climate …

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are basic properties of the organisation or merely perceptions of the individuals." This is not a surprising statement since it can be argued that the concept of school or schooling is also largely an image in somebody's mind. It is also true that images such as 'school' can be made manifest through representations or metaphors (Fisher & Grady, 1998). Whereas the 'school' can be symbolised by desks and chairs, climate can be 'seen' in the various interactions of staff, the stories people tell and the ceremonies that take place.

Throughout this dissertation on 'good' schools there has been reliance on the works of Stephen Ball which seem to capture the metaphysical nature of schools and education. Ball (1997) uses the two key words, paradox and 'fabrication'. He describes schools as "a bricolage of memories, commitment, routines, bright ideas and policy effects." He goes on to say that they "drift, decay and regenerate" (Ball, 1997, p.317). School climate is just this, a fabrication which undergoes constant change but which does exist. Hence, the paradox – how do you measure and judge a concept that is "built on faith and hope" (Deal & Petersen, 1999, p.32)?

This thesis on 'good' schools takes the stance that climate, culture and ethos are critical aspects of the thing we call 'school'. It is accepted that these elements though 'pervasive' are also 'elusive' (Petersen & Deal, 1998, p.28). There is support for Fried (1999, p.8) who declares that "a school's culture may not be engraved, like its motto, over the entrance way but it becomes apparent as soon as one enters the building."

In the context of discovering what is 'good' about 'good' schools, the concept of culture may have a lot to offer. Duignan (1995, p.10) suggests that "positive change and improvement are unlikely if the proper climate and culture isn't present in the school." It would be expected that principals of schools would be able to identify aspects of their school culture and link these aspects with elements of school improvement. Deal (1998, p.602) believes that "understanding the symbolism and culture of a school is a prerequisite to making the school more effective."

The focus of school culture is the school community (Barth, 1990). This community encompasses the teachers, children and parents. It is the way these community members work together, "organise themselves, relate, allot time, apportion resources, magnify strengths, overcome weaknesses" (Finn, 1984, p.524) that creates and mirrors the existing culture. Organisational culture, in the sense of these human activities, can produce many aspects of 'good' schools such as collegiality, risk-taking, respect for and encouragement of diversity, and high standards (Barth, 1990, p.9). Over time these "affective bonds" (Schaps & Lewis, 1999) and these "solid, positive" partnerships (Deal & Petersen, 1999) create the myths, legends, heroes and ceremonies that bind people even tighter together.

The important "highly personal transactions" (Elliott, 1996, p.221) that occur in schools relate to all manner of interactions. The role of teachers is critical as they work with one another and with the children. Then there is the role of parents and the support staff which is similarly significant because the "nature of adult relationships affects the quality, character and achievements

in schools" (Barth, 1995, p.67). Perhaps paramount in all these human relations is the role of the school principal, the person who is the focus of this thesis.

School principals can be deemed the custodians of the culture, the "cultural managers" (Stringfield & Teddlie, 1989, p.287). There are echoes here of the school effectiveness research which invariably places the school principal on the list of factors contributing to a successful school. For school effectiveness the management and organisational elements of the principal's role are seen to be important (Hallinger & Heck, 1998), but in relation to school culture the expectations are broader. Of prime importance is the school vision. Good schools appear to "know what they are about and where they are going" (Gray, 1990, p.212). Barth (1990, p.156) observes that to sustain a school's culture, a principal must be able to stay true to one's own vision, respect the visions of others, and gradually work towards a collective vision for the school. If a collective vision cannot be sustained the culture and climate of the school are damaged, resulting in "confusion, demoralisation and failure" (Harris, 200, p.6).

It would be expected that principals of 'good' schools would be very conscious of the various aspects of school life that sustain a positive school culture. Deal and Petersen (1999, p.138) describe this maintenance of culture as a complex balancing act. They talk of the five central paradoxes in a school. These paradoxes have been touched on by the key scholars in this 'good' school debate, Rose (1996) and Ball (1997), who note that such paradoxes contribute to the sense of a school being "bountiful, crowded,

messy, contradictory, exuberant, tragic, frustrating and remarkable" (Rose, 1996, p.4). For Deal and Petersen (1999) the 'contradictions' that a good school principal needs to balance include: the promotion of shared purpose and individual views; care of individuals and the common good of the institution; perpetuating the thriving but seeking change; being reflective but making decisions; and showing strong leadership whilst encouraging leadership in others. Managing the school culture is far from straightforward and it demands constant attention. Stringfield and Teddlie (1989, p.287) describe the process as "ambiguous and personalistic." A 'good' school is certainly not an institution characterised by calmness and predictability, yet it must avoid disorder and low morale (Gottfredson & Hollifield, 1998). In the end, as the principal plays out the paradoxes, it is hoped that a school will display the vibrant features of schools with strong cultures – the restlessness of the struggle to be 'good', a caring atmosphere, community not conformity, sound core values, communal learning and fun (Ripley, 1995). The principal plays a major role in the creation and the continuation of many aspects of a 'good' school culture.

The importance of school culture to the production of 'good' schools can be easily dismissed with arguments about the need for accountability and rigour in education, and herein lies a major paradox for this thesis. In an era when the push for national testing, benchmarking and publication of league tables is paramount (Gallagher, 2000), there is also a strong argument developing for the promotion of school culture to enhance school improvement (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000). These two characteristics of education would seem to be at opposite ends of the accountability spectrum, one being

utilitarian and quantitative, the other being symbolic and anecdotal. Yet there would appear to be a linkage between a strong school culture and the technologies of school improvement and change.

Rather than talking about results and testing, the literature on school culture talks about learning. Even Rutter *et al* (1982, p.182), in the comprehensive study of secondary schools and their effects on children, noted that effective learning appeared to result from a combination of factors and that "some kind of overall school 'ethos' might be involved." Deal (1985, p.18) agrees, arguing that the best schools "have developed a culture, milieu, environment, atmosphere which in a myriad of ways influences how well children learn." As Brady puts it, the 'learning' spoken about by the advocates of strong school culture may be of a different slant to that described by the 'standardistos'' (Brady, 2000, p.649). Brady argues that the push for improved academic standards is really a 'simplistic' and popular view of what education is all about, whilst authentic learning involves the far more complex process of "altering the images of reality" (1991, p.651). This position is supported by Eisner (1991, p.11) who believes that "the major dependent variables of schooling are not scores on standardised achievement tests … they are the kinds of ideas children are willing to explore on their own."

The argument about standards is really an argument about the style and philosophy of teaching. Those who pursue test scores as indicators of success are really giving approval to the positivistic world of school effectiveness and school accountability. On the other side of the ledger are those who

promote the more human face of education with all its surprises and unpredictabilities. This latter group links culture with learning (Barth, 1995; Cheng, 1993; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Rea & Weiner, 1999). They also believe that a vibrant and cohesive school culture facilitates change and improvement (Duignan, 1995; Hansen & Childs, 1998).

Conclusion

Though there is limited literature addressing the specific issue of 'good' schools, much useful information can be found amongst contributions from the areas of school effectiveness, school improvement, school accountability and school culture. It is helpful to frame a literature review around the works of Rose and Ball because these two authors introduce the concept of 'school' as more of a mental than physical construct. They also highlight the messy and bountiful nature of education as well as launching the theme of paradox. From Rose and Ball comes the sense that 'good' education is rare, fleeting, fragile and largely defined by viewpoint and values.

There are many conceptions of 'good' schools from many different vantage points. For school principals, who are the focus of this research project, paradox and uncertainty thread their way into every aspect of an administrator's working day. School leadership is a task where nothing is simplistic and where the demands of creating and inspiring can leave principals feeling "overwhelmed, insulted and inadequate" (Barth, 1986, p.294).