CHAPTER FIVE

THE SUPERORDINATE PROPOSITION

Introduction

This study examined 'Western Australian Government primary school principals' conceptions of what constitutes a 'good' school'. Fifteen primary school principals were interviewed and the transcripts of those interviews were analysed using the open coding procedures of grounded theory. The codes and classifications of the interview data, together with documents and focus-group discussions, were further analysed using analytic induction to develop five propositions related to the central research questions. These five propositions consist of one superordinate proposition, centred on a theme entitled 'Weaving the Fabric', and four subordinate propositions centred on themes entitled 'Walking the Talk', 'Producing the Goods', 'Leading and Lagging' and 'Seeing is Believing'. It is clarifying to represent the five themes in the form of a diagram. Represented as a jigsaw puzzle, the diagram presents 'Weaving the Fabric' as the central piece of the puzzle, a piece which interlocks with the other four. The construction of the puzzle is intended to reflect the 'bricolage' feature of 'good' schools (Ball, 1997, p.317).The symbolism of the jigsaw puzzle itself is a comment on the puzzling or paradoxical nature of schools. Key words spread across the puzzle pieces, as well as the puzzle pieces themselves, have a paradoxical value. 'Change', 'size', 'testing', 'choice' and 'fun' are just a few of the 'puzzling' or paradoxical characteristics of 'good' schools.
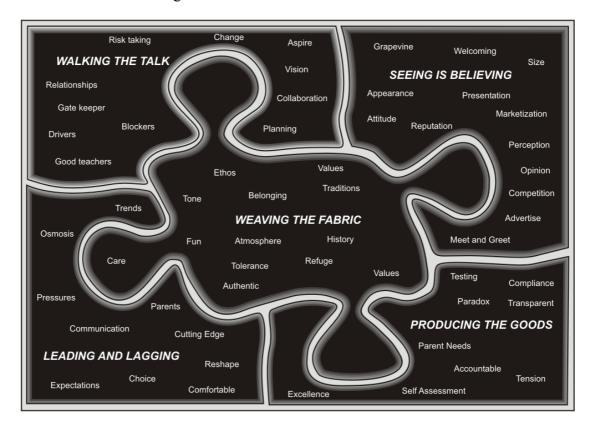
Fig 3 The 'Good' Schools Puzzle

This thesis suggests that the principals interviewed during the study into conceptions of 'good' schools theorize that a 'good' school is constructed using the five themes outlined in the diagram above. Of these themes, 'Weaving the Fabric' appears to be the key element. Each theme has a number of properties which are encompassed in the following propositional statements:

'WEAVING THE FABRIC' – First and foremost principals consider that a 'good' school fashions itself an ethos which engenders the ofttimes intangible characteristics of a positively-orientated, authentic, caring community.

WALKING THE TALK' – Principals consider that a 'good' school has dynamic leadership which enables a school vision, copes with ambiguity,

and structures productive relationships in the pursuit of quality teaching and learning.

'PRODUCING THE GOODS' – Principals consider that a 'good' school questions the efficacy of external testing, creates self-assessment tools, attempts to be transparently accountable to its own community, and encourages child-centred teaching and learning.

'LEADING AND LAGGING' – Principals consider that a 'good' school nurtures a symbiotic relationship with its local community with a view to meliorating educational change.

'SEEING IS BELIEVING' – Principals consider that a 'good' school generates a sound reputation which, although ultimately linked to quality teaching and learning programs, is heavily promoted through the marketization strategies of attitude, appearance and public opinion.

This Chapter deals only with the superordinate theme 'Weaving the Fabric' and with its associated propositional statement. Within the chapter there is an examination of the various properties of the proposition, namely: ethos, positive school environment, authentic processes, caring inclinations and the concept of a distinct school community.

Weaving the Fabric

The proposition formulated under this theme states: First and foremost principals consider that a 'good' school fashions itself an ethos which engenders the ofttimes intangible characteristics of a positively-orientated, authentic, caring community.

The theme 'Weaving the Fabric' was inspired by a combination of documents found in the researcher's own Endeavour Primary School describing the foundation principal's vision of creating a 'tapestry' of programs, ideas and cultures at the new school (En, 270600), together with the comments of principal, Ian Wray, who described how non-English-speaking students integrated into his school:

> And while they couldn't always talk the first six months, at the end of the six months they were part of *the fabric* of the school (IW, 28).

Though Endeavour Primary School and Wray's school differ greatly in regards to size, location, socio-economic status and general school programs, they are very similar in their need to develop a sense of unity and community amongst their students, staff and parents. As with all schools contributing to this research, there was a sense that a critical element of school was to draw people together to enhance their learning. The Endeavour Document (270600, Appendix I) notes that the school's 'framework or tapestry' impacts on "good teaching and sound education programs" suggesting that such unity can "make both of these that much better."

At Endeavour Primary, much of the interweaving fabric of the school is decoded through themes, rules and regulations, policies and timetables. As such it is structured and visible. Much of the fabric is less formal, less structured, and far less tangible. All schools appear to have an almost invisible fabric of relationships and attitudes that people can 'feel'. Paul Darkin, principal of West Bloomfield Primary, describes taking visitors around his school and experiencing "the good vibes" (PD, 363) from all the things being seen and heard. Significantly, Aboriginal students, perhaps well

attuned to understanding subtle signs and symbols, avoided attending one of Barnaby Treen's schools because "it's got a funny vibe, this place" (BT, 99).

Like many elements of schools, the sense of a fabric or tapesty holding the institution together, defies analytical description. 'Vibes' is as good a word as any to describe the feeling, although ironically it appears in few dictionaries. There has been a conscious effort to avoid the use of the term 'culture' to describe the phenomenon because that term is too broad and imprecise for the purpose of this thesis. Culture is well documented in the 'good' schools' literature (Barth, 1990; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Deal & Peterson, 1999), but it is such a global term that even the experts appear to search for further clarification. Beare *et al* (1989, p.18) highlight various similar terms when they comment that the best schools "have developed a culture, milieu, environment, atmosphere, *a cultus corporis* which in a myriad ways influences how well children learn." In similar vein, Van Maanan (1998, p.3) wrestles with the dilemma of culture being an imprecise, changeable and largely invisible phenomenon. He notes that:

> Culture, while certainly a cosmic idea, is nonetheless expressed in some down-to-earth ways … It is necessarily a loose, slippery concept, since it is anything but unchanging … Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible through its representation.

This study, whilst not disputing the presence of 'culture' in a school, or in any other place of human interaction, has nonetheless tried to respond to Van Maanan (1998), and, where possible, represent 'culture' in some 'down-to-earth' ways. Hence the symbolism of fabric, and the consistent use throughout the thesis of the terms 'ethos', 'beliefs' and 'values'. For this research into 'good' schools the school 'fabric' is the overall representation

of "the stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems and confront challenges" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p.128).

It will be noted that school principals use the word "culture" quite freely in their conversations and exploit the full range of its farrago of meanings:

> We're seeing quite innovative schools … because they've got a consistent culture, and one that is the culture of excellence, it's the culture of innovations, it's the culture of openness (CJ, 347).

In their expansive use of the term 'culture', school principals are acknowledging that one of the prime facets of what they believe to be the fabric of their 'good' school is something very difficult to define. Deal and Peterson (1999, p.2) explain it as something 'sensed', something 'special', "something extremely powerful but difficult to describe." Terming this 'special' phenomenon the 'fabric' allows us to pick apart some of the warps and wefts without continuing to debate the chimeric nature of the whole. A principal interviewee, Ronni Latham, new to the job, and new to her school, picked out some major threads from the tapestry of her school as she sought to bolster the school's reputation and fortunes. She recalls that:

> The tradition and history came through very, very strongly. And that's part of our ethos statement that the school community was very keen to have there … the school community is very proud of that tradition and want to build on it, and sees that as a springboard for us moving forward into the future (RL, 45).

Here Latham demonstrates both an understanding of the complexity of the intangible elements of her school, and also the realisation that tradition and history form part of the rich fabric that gives value, meaning and direction to

school development. Importantly, she introduces the concept of school ethos which appears to weave through all 'good' schools.

First property of Weaving the Fabric:
Ethos

Latham, at her new school, and only months into her first principalship, chose the ethos as the starting point for creating or maintaining a 'good' school. Kel Yardley, on his appointment to a sprawling, fast growing school in the northern corridor, did the same, explaining that:

> The first year I was here we spent writing an ethos statement and all it is, in the end, is seven statements about what we believe about education and kids and stuff. I bring that out at every staff meeting and every PD day … just to run through that statement again and make sure everyone can still live with it (KY, 138).

Yardley's definition of ethos is the one adopted for this thesis. He talks about an ethos being "what we believe" about schooling and teaching. Elsewhere (KY, 160) he used the phrase *raison d'etre* as the catch-cry for his school – 'the reason for being'. Donnelly (2000, p.134) translated ethos in much the same terms as Yardley, describing it as "the distinctive range of values and beliefs which define the philosophy or atmosphere of an organisation." The importance of the term, according to Donnelly (2000, p.150) is that it "alerts us to the formal goals of the school and … informs us of the ideals which the founders of that school sector aspire to." Latham has her own definition of ethos which sits well with those of Yardley and Donnelly namely: "recognising what your school is all about" (RL,107).

It is important not to underestimate the importance of school ethos to the construction of a 'good' school. It would appear logical that a school would determine 'what we believe' or 'what we aspire to' before attempting to plan

any further. The ethos is, a fundamental piece in the 'good' schools puzzle and the foundation upon which successful and appropriate education can be built.

Both Latham and Yardley utilised a review of the school ethos as the first step in the rehabilitation of schools to which they had been appointed. In Yardley's case, Loisville Primary had developed a very unfavourable reputation, much of it to do with the location rather than the actual school programs. Yardley said his school was considered "the worst of the worst" (KY, 258) when he arrived there. The work on the ethos statement now sees his school's core business as "trying to equip those kids with the skills and understandings and just motivation and stuff, so when they leave here there's some hope for them." The new ethos has created new values and the belief in hope.

Sam Skilton was faced with similar reconstruction work when he arrived at Barnsley Primary, though the socio-economic climate was more favourable to education than that facing Yardley. Skilton's problem was with the Latin motto (*Futura in Nobis*) and the very British acorn emblem that represented his school. Though motto and emblem had to stay, as part of the tradition of the school, Skilton explains how he turned to the values system to enhance the quality of his school:

> That is one of the things I'm endeavouring to do, to establish traditions and what I thought was really important was to lift the sights of the school. So what we've done is looked at, … as far as establishing a positive school climate or culture, … a project we call a 'school spirit project' (SS, 46).

Skilton, in showing respect for his school's history, short though it may have been, demonstrated the fragility of the school fabric and the need to enhance rather than renew. Values and beliefs take time to build and require continuing attention. Skilton has incorporated his school's beliefs into the curriculum in a further attempt to reinforce the ethos of his school.

For principals of new schools establishing 'school spirit' is more challenging. Several schools in the Joondalup Education District, where new suburbs were developing, still operated under the leadership of their foundation principal. Trent Deakin was one of those who opened a brand new school and he notes that he "started from an ethos and philosophy background" (TD, 261), seeing values and beliefs as the key to a 'good' school. Deakin talks about his government school being set up on a 'Christian' value:

> If you take the Christian value as the Ten Commandments that's what a school should have. You should respect one another and respect other people and all that sort of thing. The caring, the sharing nature (TD, 23).

Deakin goes on to say that "to be a good school, I believe, you've got to treat people with respect and dignity (TD, 43). His school, Townshend Primary, has extended these tenets into what he calls the 'foundation' beliefs of his school:

> Children need support of their chronological peers.
> Children need the stimulation and challenge of their academic peers.
> Success breeds success (TD, 262).

Four years on, these three educational beliefs represent what Townshend primary school 'is all about'. There is a clear statement to staff, parents and students about how the school will organise, teach and learn. Together with

its values of 'caring', 'sharing' and 'respect', this school has a purposeful 'reason for being'.

Townshend's three foundation beliefs have translated into an innovative school program where children work in 'blocks' rather than age groups and where teachers work in teams. The school, according to Deakin's own description, is "humming and exciting" (TD, 298). Regarded throughout the Joondalup District as a 'good' school, Townshend Primary can trace its processes, beliefs, values and its reputation back to its ethos statement. It was the ethos that came first. This is a critical priority that Trent Kallahan, principal of Watari Primary echos as he acknowledges; "ethos first and then everything else follows" (TK, 339).

For new schools where the foundation principal has to develop the ethos, there is often one big advantage, all the staff are new. Being new, such staff are often willing to take on a particular set of values and beliefs because at that school none have existed before. Additionally, many new Western Australian schools have merit-selection where the principal is able to choose the staff, raising the possibility of matching staff to the proposed school ethos. Deakin commented on the value of this:

> The ability to have staff who want to be at your school and want to work in the manner in which this school operates, and have a shared ethos and philosophy, is the most important thing to have in a good school (TD, 104).

The issue of merit-selection of staff by all schools is an important one that invites further research. Logic would suggest that the beliefs and values of the staff need to match the beliefs and values of the school in order to

produce quality teaching and learning, as well as to promote growth, change and productive relationships.

It is part of the paradox of the 'good' school that old established schools may have developed an ethos that is stultifying education. Few examples of this scenario occurred in the current research, perhaps because 'purposive' sampling attempted to target more successful schools. The older schools in this sample - North Trenton, Dewberry, Burnley and Merrivale - had all made strong use of established values to build for the future. They had no need to generate traditions and construct a history, there was just a need to rekindle the spirit and perhaps realign the direction. Latham did just these things to revive the ethos at the historic Merrivale Primary. For her school the traditions of the school bell would demonstrate values for her community:

> We spent a lot of time discussing where the bell went, again with the architect, but its very special to the students and the day that we actually, finally got that into place there was great rejoicing (RL, 135).

Whatever the age of the school a school ethos is only effective if it is uppermost in people's minds. It is not a document or understanding that can be developed and then put aside. It must be visible and it must actively touch every other facet of school life. Yardley brought Loisville's ethos statement out at every opportunity and discussed it with his staff. Barb Gaynor, from Lancelot Primary, incorporates her school ethos into the talks she gives to prospective parents at her school. She explained that:

> I talk about everything that's in line with everything I value. I underscore the ethos. We say we care; we say we have a very, very supportive learning program; we say we contact parents sooner rather than later (BG, 220).

Gaynor has melded her own values and beliefs with those of her school. It is a fundamental requirement of a 'good' school that staff embrace the ethos and carry it through into their teaching and daily school life. Ethos becomes woven into the whole fabric of the school. It is that unseen feeling that gives a school consistency, character and 'vibes'. But though perhaps unseen, it is usually the product of hard work, commitment and collaboration. Kallahan commented on this as follows:

> What I see as an ethos is the result of a lot of hard work put in by staff and students and parents alike. The work we're really talking about is back into values, and attitudes, and work habits (TK, 165).

In this study on 'good' schools principal after principal perceived that the core strength of their school was the set of values and beliefs that governed every aspect of school life. Some principals altered the terminology a little but the sense was clear. As Peters put it:

> All schools have their strengths and weaknesses but we have a good climate, a good culture and a good identifiable ethos (MP, 252).

A school ethos appears to be essential as a first step in creating a 'good' school. It forms out of discussions, debates and difficult decision-making. It may become enshrined in its own right as values and beliefs, or it may form part of a mission statement or a vision. It must be revisited constantly to see if it remains appropriate and authentic. Most of all, it must come alive in the school. Observer notes (WT 010600) record that Kallahan's Watari Primary School was 'welcoming' and cheerful, and that the students were 'quiet, orderly' and beautifully dressed in school uniform. A school with a self-proclaimed set of strong beliefs and high standards, the environment reflects Kallahan's understanding of ethos:

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> A real and living thing that I think you can actually stand
> back and see alive in front of you as the kids move around
> the school (TK, 178).

The ethos appears to be a critical thread in the fabric of the school. The tapestry of interactions, processes and procedures seem to weave around it. It makes school community a positive, safe and productive place to be. Goens (1996) attributes strong foundation and stabilising characteristics to the ethos:

> A structure built on values, attitudes, feelings, ethics, ideals
> and principles provides a ballast that enables schools to
> withstand confusing external pressures and to create a
> humane environment where children can become the people
> they are meant to be (Goens, 1996, p.54).

This symbol of ethos as the 'ballast' for the school is a powerful one. It positions values and beliefs as the key to elements in creating a school that is able to remain stable and focussed, especially in times of uncertainty and change. The ethos must be established before anything else is put in place, and it must remain as a central, visible and accepted part of the school structure. Once the ethos is in place 'all else follows'.

Second property of Weaving the Fabric:
Positively-orientated school environment

Principals interviewed for this study see the school ethos as the ballast or key thread in the development of a positively-orientated, authentic, caring community. These aspects of the school fabric are somewhat more visible than the ethos itself. A useful description of a positive environment is provided by Ducharme and Kluender (1986). They see a 'good' school environment as:

> …safe, positive places for students; there is order in the
> buildings. The adults, who are generally well prepared to
> teach, like young people. Parents and community members

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support the school and the students, and despite an occasional complaint, appear happy.(Ducharme & Kluender, 1986, p.43)

Though this is perhaps a conservative view of the school there are a number of significant facets of school life that are raised in this passage. The focus needs to be on the elements of safety, order, liking, supporting and happiness. Throughout the interviews conducted during this study there were a great many references to all these elements mentioned by Ducharme and Kluender (1986) and they were perceived by principals to be foundation characteristics of 'good' schools. Barnaby Treen, whose Sunset Beach Primary School was still in the construction stage, had spent a six month planning period getting ready for the opening term in 2001. He, together with members of his staff, and his school's prospective parent community, had created a vision for the first day of school. Treen declared that the children's initial introduction to Sunset Beach should be memorable:

> I want them to be welcomed, to have someone there with a smile for them and someone to tell them that they're starting a new school. It's a new adventure, it's a new world and they're going to have fun on the way, so that at the end of the first day, they want to come back on the second day … we'll make that our target, that they'll want to come back on day two (BT, 330).

Treen's proposals for his new school have an underlying ethos. He values children's self-esteem, he promotes the love of learning and he believes in the motivational power of excitement and laughter.

Treen was consistent in this perception of a 'good' school for children and he spoke with passion about his previous school where ghost-tunnels, go-carts and sand-boarding helped to restore respect, pride and happiness to a school that had seen difficult times. This is not a case of fun for the sake of fun, but

rather a philosophical belief that children learn in a positive environment. It is a belief based on values such as respect and care. His instruction to teachers for their dealings with children is straightforward and plain; "go out there and you treat children nicely, and you smile at them " (BT, 260).

The positive value of happiness for children is taken up by Deakin, also a foundation principal of a new school. Deakin's Townshend Primary School had been open for four years and operating on the three part learning philosophy that included the axiom 'success breeds success'. Deakin also had a strong perception about the environment children should experience at school which he connected with those three beliefs:

> The most important thing underpinning those three basic beliefs is the concept that school should be fun. School, education should be enjoyable. It should not be this terrible, frightening, revolting thing that a lot of people see it as (TD, 271).

Treen and Deakin were well aware that the 'fun' aspect of the school environment was not merely for the children. It was an aspect of the whole school climate, culture, feel or fabric. 'Good' schools need to ensure that the staff and the parents share in the development and expression of this fundamental positive inclination in the school environment. All must share and support the fundamental values.

Dianna Tander at Mt Nardon Primary speaks about culture being entwined with the values to produce the positive orientation that she felt was in her school. She notes that a positive school environment is produced as a result of establishing the basic philosophy and attitude of the school:

> Culture is tied up with philosophy, it's tied up with attitude, it's tied up with motivation … and so it's a huge thing. But I

> think that the good school is about that, and when you have
> that, you can develop that business of … being happy. That's
> all culture (DT, 260).

Coincidentally, Tander's school, on the day of the interview, was celebrating 'Footy Day'. All the children and teachers had come along in their jumpers and scarves. It was a whole school event that reflected the school's beliefs about education being exciting and fun. Such events reinforce the day-to-day emphasis on school being a welcoming and enjoyable place. Tander believes that 'good' schooling has always projected this genuine sense of happiness. She sees the school as:

> A place where people are happy to be … and I don't think
> that's changed through history. I really, honestly think it's
> always been that way. You ask anyone what a good school
> is and they will tell you that (DT, 343).

'Footy Day' at Mt Nardon needs to be seen for what it really is. Some may add up the time missed from academic subjects, others might be critical of the noisy, boisterous behaviour, and some might complain about the interruption to routine. For the principals interviewed in the course of this study, the perception of these happy events was that they were precursors to an improved learning environment. The positive atmosphere is directly related to the school's beliefs and values. It grows out of them, and in turn provides a basis for productive teaching and learning.

For Yardley, in a difficult school where many children came from disadvantaged families, and where teaching was a challenge every day, feeling positive about the school environment was the key to making learning happen. A consistent advocate for care and self esteem, Yardley speaks strongly about the most suitable environment for children's learning:

> They have to like where they are and enjoy the people that are around, and feel safe and provided for, and then everything else happens after that (KY, 52).

Though his comments were directed at children, Yardley leaves no doubts that enjoying school, and feeling safe and comfortable, is just as important for the teachers too. He talks about a surprise visit to a ten-pin bowling rink on a staff development day and the subsequent "laugh a minute in the staff room" (KY, 200) when they came back to school and gave out the "worst bowler" trophies. The positive-orientation does not need to be so flamboyant to be good. It is the end result that is important, the sense of being treated with what Steven Urlich calls "respect, consistency, honesty [and] professional trust" (SU, 302).

This study indicates that staff and children appreciate a school which has a consistent set of values and beliefs permeating the whole fabric of the school. Skilton, who surveys his students to find out their perceptions about coming to school (SS, 151) believes that the positive orientation of the environment and the school's emphasis on 'school spirit' and values, extend into the community. He declares that:

> There is a culture within the school where teachers are happy to work, where parents feel that they are welcomed, and more importantly that kids feel that this is a good place to be. They enjoy coming to school (SS, 13).

Similarly, Yardley believes that the positively oriented school environment, a product of his well documented school ethos, has ramifications for the wider community. He cites its importance in generating improved communication and collaboration with parents (KY, 107). His comments are

echoed by many other interviewees, including Peters, who gives strong

endorsement to pleasant relationships:

> My feelings about a good school … are driven firstly by
> relationships and communication (MP, 1).

A positive school environment comes down to the way people are treated.

Treen talks about the importance of the "interpersonal level" (BT, 147) while

Skilton notes that "one of the things I've found important that makes a

'good' school is the human element" (SS, 1). Yardley adds that "authentic

relationships is it" (KY, 3).

School principals interviewed in the course of this study into 'good' schools

consider a positively-orientated school environment to be an essential

precursor to learning. They emphasise the importance of a happy and safe

environment where children feel valued and welcomed, and they speak of the

importance given to communication and relationships. These positive

characteristics, they agree, have a beneficial effect on the school staff and the

wider community. Ultimately, there appear to be strong links between the

school's core values and the development of the positive environment. This

strong alignment with the beliefs and values is described as an 'authentic'

process.

Third property of Weaving the Fabric:
Authentic processes

'Good' schools, as perceived by the fifteen principals in this study, do appear

to share a number of fundamental properties, several of which have already

been addressed in this chapter. Because such properties have been discussed

in isolation, it may appear that they are discrete elements that can be

manipulated independently in anticipation of creating a 'good' school. This

is not the case and, hence, the analogy of the 'fabric'. All these properties must be woven together, reinforced, blended and constantly examined for signs of wear. If this 'good' schools' fabric were to carry a label, the label would say 'authentic'. Yardley talks about 'authentic relationships', while Latham speaks of "a common mission of where we're going" (RL, 96).

The arrival at authenticity is the conclusion of a journey that begins with establishing the school values. Authenticity is also the means by which those values were established. Barb Gaynor expresses this circular sense of values in the school as she reflects on what teaching is all about:

> Even though values change over time, I think there are core human values. And if the school is preparing children for life, it's really decision making skills. And if you can bring values into your decision making, then if you can teach your children to do that, then I think you've got the ingredients for a good school (BG, 18).

Gaynor is presenting the concept of authentic teaching providing the skills and processes needed to cope with life. Teaching in this instance is based on values, and the values taught are the values that the school itself holds. This is the crux of 'authenticity'. A school's ethos must be of a nature that can find expression in all school processes. A 'good' school defines what it values and believes in, then proceeds to express those values and beliefs in its teaching, communication, relationships and organisation. The ethos is the framework upon which the 'fabric' of the school is made.

Urlich, who spent some years in a difficult outback school, finds he has developed a framework for his principalship based on values. Situations may change, as he moves from school to school, but the value system remains intact. Urlich notes how this framework, constructed over time, has sustained

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his own educational beliefs and influenced the ethos statements of his

schools:

> When I got through that year … it was a great school after
> that … I was convinced that we can make a big difference if
> we really want to, and the framework is basically the same,
> and it did stem from respect, communication, consistency
> (SU, 353).

Authenticity in schools is about having a clear purpose, a sense of mission,

and a well- defined framework of action. It involves commitment and

loyalty. It also requires leadership, often from the school principal. If a

school is going to be 'good' it needs clarity of purpose. Aaron Mustard,

principal of a Dewberry Primary School in an affluent Perth suburb,

explained how his role sometimes requires him to defend the authenticity of

the vision. He recounts a conversation with a staff member who had covertly

challenged the school's direction:

> If you're not happy with what I am doing come and see me
> and tell me. And you can tell me what you like, the door's
> closed. But if I hear you saying it outside, then I'll be
> pulling you in to ask you why you're denigrating the
> school, and what you're going to do about fixing it up (AM,
> 251).

Mustard is demanding loyalty from his staff. He talks about disloyalty

'denigrating' the school. He is using 'school' in the sense of it being a

perception or creation that is constantly in need of nurturing and review. It is

the task of the leader to keep the threads intact and authentic. On this, he is at

one with Ball (1998) who says:

> What we access and understand as 'the school' is thus an
> effect of the interweaving of certain historic and more
> immediate (and sometimes future, possible) discourses.
> These discourses are typically entangled and confused and
> they are obscured by micro-political struggles, tactical
> blunderings, disguises and ploys (Ball, 1998, p.318).

Ball (1998, p.321) goes on to describe schools as "value-laden and prone to dispute and conflict" which is how the interviewees for this study appear to find them. It is the principal's role to ensure that the ethos of the school is accepted by all, and upheld by all. 'Good' schools have common value systems which apply as equally to staff, student and parent interactions, as they do to the business of teaching. Amidst all the disputes and paradoxes that arise in schools, clear beliefs and directions facilitate the development of an authentic community relationship.

Common values identified in this study as being aligned with the interpersonal relationships, which Yardley calls the "key essentials to a high performing or good school" (KY, 30), are trust, openness, honesty, respect, tolerance and consistency. Mustard talks about the characteristics of "camaraderie and humour" (AM, 153) while Urlich believes his school should demonstrate "listening, acting, responding promptly to concerns, providing opportunities for people to have a say about the school [and] consulting parents" (SU, 54). Gaynor suggests that her staff "trust one another. They're virtually like an extended family" (BG, 77).

Tander eloquently sums up the collaborative element of this authentic set of relationships which help determine 'good' schools, when she states:

> Everyone in this school is important. We treat everyone in this school with respect. We're in this together, so we help each other out all the time (DT, 94).

One of the essential, authentic characteristics interwoven with the ethos of a 'good' school, and integral to teaching, learning and interpersonal relations,

is summarised well in Tander's statement. 'Good' schools are perceived to care about their people.

Fourth property Weaving the Fabric:
Caring inclinations

Translating core values into action in a school means applying the values to the people who occupy the school. This creates a situation where children, teachers and parents are valued. On this Urlich commented that:

> One of the things that I've found important to make a good school is the human element. A focus on the human element, treating students and teachers as individuals. I think that is the way to get a cohesive staff, or team (SU, 1).

Treating people as individuals means finding out who they are and taking a specific interest in them. Seeing them as individuals involves some personal interaction with them. They are not treated as a faceless group, they are valued for their uniqueness. Making this effort to differentiate people in schools demonstrates a degree of caring about them.

Caring is an essential thread in the 'good' school fabric. Yardley is especially passionate about this facet of schools and he insists that his staff 'care' about every child because, as he says:

> If teachers aren't prepared to put relationships first and let the kids know that they like them, and the kids trusts the teacher to be a caring and warm provider to them, then everything else happens after that … nobody learns from people they hate (KY, 47).

This is a crucial statement from Yardley. It emphasises his key school value, caring for people. This ethos statement is demonstrated over and over again in his interview and is demonstrably evident in his school. He talks with pride about winning pastoral care awards for work his staff has done. He emphasises the value of 'trust', which is an indicator of authentic

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relationships. He makes it clear that without care and trust the learning program just won't happen. For these reasons he brings the school ethos statements to every staff meeting because the ethos in general, and the property of care in particular, form the core of education at Loisville Primary.

Care for children is part of the ethos of all 'good' schools. Deakin says that "there's more to being a good school than having academic results. You've got to have pastoral care" (TD, 21). Gaynor agrees and states that her school has "a very strong pastoral care program because every single staff member, teaching and non-teaching, shares it … it's just a very powerful thing for kids" (BG, 243). Tander challenges parents to stand in the schoolyard and to look around at children and teachers demonstrating care:

> Have a look around and see if the little kid that's fallen over, if another kid doesn't come and pick them up and bring them in the office. Have a look and see what happens … Is the teacher going to say "what a silly little boy, you did this and this and this" or, are they going to say "oh, what happened? Did you cry? Gee you were brave. Let me fix it up for you. How are you feeling now?" (DT, 290).

Peters regards care of people in his school as his top priority. He will choose his staff on the basis of their ability to care for children and care for each other. He makes his merit-selection priorities very clear by announcing :

> I rate the performance in the classroom very high. But in some ways I'd rather have a great team player, a great pastoral care person with average to good teaching ability, rather than one with outstanding pedagogy … I put collaboration and genuine care at the highest level (MP, 136).

For Peters, pastoral care is a prerequisite for a 'good' school (MP, 151). His school has gone as far as appointing a chaplain on a part-time basis, a service

that few other government schools have. His chaplain is not only working to support the children but also to support staff.

Yardley has a 'staff health and well-being' plan at his school because he believes that there is a Loisville hierarchy of needs. During the interview for this research he explained the diagrammatic representation of this hierarchy, which is in the form of a triangle. Staff and family occupy the largest segment at the base and students are squeezed in at the apex. He noted that staff were of premier importance in this model:

> It's a triangle and right at the bottom, the big part of the triangle, I've put yourself and then your family … if you don't put the bulk of your time and effort and energy into your family then you're missing the point (KY, 441).

Amidst various anecdotes of how his staff support one another Yardley reemphasizes the point that the 'well-being and mental health plan' for his school represented a focus on "making sure we look after ourselves even within the school environment" (KY, 454).

Latham extends the concept of care beyond the students and staff. She says that "a school cares about people" (RL, 2). She calls her school a "very community-minded school" where "parents are very supportive of each other … The students are very supportive of each other" (RL, 55). In a small school, eager to increase enrolments, she admits that the emphasis on a caring community is not only an authentic outcome of school ethos, but it is also a good way to garner extra school enrolments. She is happy to announce that "we really do try and sell that community spirit and community support" (RL, 58).

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Ultimately, the property of 'care' should be seen as a community-wide value. To be authentic 'care' cannot just be applied to one segment of the school and not to others. The broadness of the 'caring' concept can be easily understood when we associate the value of caring with the necessary obligation of safety. Tander identifies her school as a 'safe' haven by describing it as "a place where people are happy to come to; and they're happy to be in it. I think it's got to be a place where people feel safe. Kids safe from bullying, and the teachers feel pretty safe." (DT, 8).

Deakin introduces the term 'safe refuge' as an apt descriptor of the role of the school in its total care for its students and its whole community. He cites his experiences at the remote outback school of Christmas Creek where the concept of care had wider applications than for schools in the metropolitan areas:

> The reason why my people, you know the parents at Christmas Creek, thought I ran a good school was because I let the Aboriginal people come into the school. They became part of it in a very different way to our parents coming into the school down here … Our school was considered really good because it was a place of safety, and when everything else was falling apart, as it did when alcohol came into those communities, everyone knew if you wanted a refuge you came to the school (TD, 143).

Deakin has pushed the perimeters of school values and beliefs to their limit. The fabric of the school needs to be authentic. That means the ethos of the school should cover the wider community of the school. For Deakin, that meant figuratively and literally opening the gates of his school and incorporating the associated members from outside.

School community

Though we have looked at ethos and its related characteristic values as though they are 'good' school properties in their own right, it is important to understand that those elements need to be combined to produce the fabric of what we perceive to be a 'good' school. Deakin represented this concept when he opened the gates of Christmas Creek School to provide a 'safe refuge' for his local community. In a less literal sense, the principals of Joondalup, Perth and Fremantle, who were interviewed for this study, were also opening up the school gates and creating a hospitable environment for their parents, teachers and students.

For some schools, the community orientation comes from the relatively small size. Mustard's school of 300 children had a 'rural school' (AM, 101) complexion to it. He believes that there are 'social benefits' from being such a compact catchment area "where people meet after school … so that's part of being a good school" (AM, 101).

Wray's school of 320 children has a similar community spirit with parents coming to school to pick-up their children and socialise. He comments thus on this:

> I mean in an afternoon here there will be anything up to 70
> or 80 parents here and then they'll hang about afterwards.
> So there's a real sense of community (IW, 279).

Wray goes on to add that "fellow parents are very welcoming and they look after each other" (IW, 385), an indication that the values being promoted in the school are being mirrored in his community. As in Christmas Creek, a

seamless fabric appears to extend beyond the classroom incorporating

parents into the teaching, learning and socialising environment.

For Yardley, with his large school of 930 children, a sense of 'whole-school'

community, though educationally, equally important, has been more difficult

to develop. In a pro-active approach, Yardley lured reluctant parents into his

school by way of a playground project explaining that:

> A lot of parents don't feel over-skilled about coming and
> helping in the class and stuff. Almost by accident we
> organised a busy bee … At the time we needed about one
> hundred parents to come and build this playground … we
> got about one hundred and fifty, and all these people had
> never been to the school … from that moment on that was a
> major turning point (KY, 305).

Getting parents into Loisville developed what Tander calls a sense of

"belonging" (DT, 25) to the school, and helped cut graffitti and damage to

the buildings and grounds. It also helped promote the schools' core purpose,

embodied in the ethos, of trying, as Yardley put it, "to reshape society" (KY,

76). Yardley continues to take every opportunity to involve the wider

community in his school, including holding a 'captain's table' once a

fortnight and inviting seven parents in to share morning tea with him. His

efforts have created what he called, a parent body that has "an enormous

sense of communal self esteem" (KY, 294).

Conclusion

The superordinate proposition developed in this study, it will be recalled, is
that:

> First and foremost principals consider that a 'good' school
> fashions itself an ethos which engenders the ofttimes
> intangible characteristics of a positively-orientated,
> authentic, caring community.

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It has been possible to trace the threads of this proposition from the school statements of values through to the much more complex fabric of a whole school community. In the end it is probably this community aspect which earns the school its classification of 'good'. Latham gives voice to this notion, in referring to her own school as follows:

> Yes, it's a very proud school. We're a very small community here and it's a very strong-knit community, and that's probably the greatest selling point of this school (RL, 52).

It is necessary to look behind the overall perception of the 'good' school to find those properties that contributed to its eventual close-knit excellence. The principals interviewed in this study saw those properties to be the school values as promoted through the ethos, the positive school environment, the authentic processes, the caring inclinations, and the resultant formation of a collaborative school community.

These properties of a 'good' school do not seem to exist in isolation. It would appear that they overlap, interact and are subject to constant change. Changing one aspect, such as the size of the school, as happened for Gaynor (BG, 202), can well affect the character of the community or the emphasis of the ethos. Some elements are also difficult to see and almost impossible to measure. This is, perhaps, why they are easier to sense rather than extrapolate from the statistical chart. As Latham admits:

> "I don't know if we actively sit down and talk about what a good school is … you obviously have in your mind what you believe is 'good' (RL, 207)

Through the theme 'Weaving the Fabric' it has been possible to trace the development of the almost intangible characteristics of a 'good' school. The intangibility would appear to come from the core values that drive the

processes, organisations and attitudes that amalgamated to constitute what the public see as the school. Many of these core values should appear in writing as the school ethos. As a written document the ethos should explain much of the felt 'fabric' of the institution. This thesis suggests that 'good' schools have a well-assembled and visible ethos, which is recognised and accepted by all. Only then can the school develop quality teaching and learning, and the reputation and community support to match its achievements.

'Weaving the Fabric' takes the central position in the puzzle that creates a 'good' school. The properties of this theme interlock with the properties of all the others to produce the wider representation of a 'good' school.

Chapter Six will now look at the four subordinate propositions that interlock with the main proposition outlined in this chapter. The four following propositions will be discussed in detail in their own right and in their relation to this superordinate proposition.