

Science and Mathematics Education Centre

**The Getting of Wisdom of a School Leader**

**Terence Francis McCarthy**

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Doctor of Philosophy

of

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## **DECLARATION**

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This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published by any person except where due acknowledgement has been made.

Signature:

Date:                    May 2008

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## **AN ABSTRACT**

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This study is an interpretive narrative that seeks understanding of self as a human being and as a school leader through examining my lived experiences over seventeen years. To interpret my reflections on these experiences, I retell and interrogate my narratives and some writings of contemporary authors on leadership and on the purposes of education. I develop propositions about leadership that provide me with preliminary understandings about leading others.

After listening to various professional voices heard as I participated in local, state and national professional activities Australia-wide, I am compelled though to go beyond my propositions and subject them to more intense scrutiny, drawing on the works of philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato and Aquinas, to broaden and deepen my understanding of self as a school leader.

I come to a desiring of a virtuous kind of leadership that is deeply moral and ethical. This *eros*, this passion for understanding, provokes a turning point in my study towards looking for guidance and inspiration from various religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, about possibilities for wisdom and virtue in leadership.

Thus, my narrative, the getting of wisdom of a school leader, releases new insights about the role of self-knowledge, love and “the good” in leading education.

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## CONTENTS

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### AN ABSTRACT

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
Transvestites at Two O'clock	1
Stories	8
Trust the Gut	8
Literature	14
Propositions on Leadership	17
Professional Conversations	18
Rocky Coast Leadership Project	19
Sideshadowing	
<i>A Glance at a Sideshadow</i>	23
Insights on Leadership	24
In Search of Understanding	25

### PART ONE:

### DEVELOPING PROPOSITIONS AND INSIGHTS ON LEADERSHIP 29

### CHAPTER 1

<b>THE FIRST INSIGHT: SELF-AWARENESS AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS</b>	30
Snapshots of the Purpose of Schools	30
Appeals to <i>Eros</i> and Democracy	34
For Better or for Worse?	37
Snapshots of Leadership Theory	39
Copping it on the Chin	44

<b>Proposition I - Leaders reach out to people, especially the marginalised</b>	47
The Story of Oscar	51
<i>A Student Perspective on Schooling</i>	58
Thinking on Your Feet	61
<b>Proposition II - Leaders are reflective and self-aware</b>	64
The First Sideshadow	67
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b>THE SECOND INSIGHT: VIRTUE, COURAGE AND VISION</b>	73
Biting the Bullet	74
<b>Proposition III - Leaders are courageous and take risks</b>	75
Facing the Music	77
I Don't Speak to Her	82
Yes, But Do They Want It?	84
<i>A Letter to Kevin</i>	87
<b>Proposition IV - Leaders act ethically</b>	89
<i>An Ethical Framework for Dealing with Difficult Human Issues</i>	92
Never the Twain Shall Meet?	94
<b>Proposition V - Leaders embrace and cultivate tradition</b>	97
<i>Diary Notes: Anxiety - Listening to my Inner Self</i>	101
Tough Times at the Office: Part One	103
Tough Times at the Office: Continued	111
<b>Proposition VI - Leaders establish a vision and values with others</b>	123
Vision and Values at River View	124
The Second Sideshadow	128

<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b>THE THIRD INSIGHT: OPENNESS, DISCERNMENT AND CHANGE</b>	132
Towards a New Curriculum	134
<b>Proposition VII - Leaders know when to be collaborative</b>	138
<b>Proposition VIII - Leaders are learners</b>	141
Exploring the Role of Principal	142
<i>Diary Notes: Getting Around the Classrooms</i>	144
<i>Diary Notes: The Job</i>	146
<i>Self Shadowing Exercise</i>	147
<i>Diary Notes: Suspension</i>	150
<b>Proposition IX - Leaders are in touch</b>	151
Eulogy for David Probert	152
<b>Proposition X - Leaders have passion</b>	154
<i>Change Stories in Curriculum</i>	157
<b>Proposition XI - Leaders are open to change</b>	159
Towards a New Curriculum (Continued)	162
<b>Proposition XII - Leaders nurture leadership in others</b>	169
The Third Sideshadow	170
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
<b>THE FOURTH INSIGHT: LOVE</b>	176
Horses for Courses	177
<b>Proposition XIII - Leaders are true to themselves and true to others</b>	179
Pool of Wisdom	181
<b>Proposition XIV - Leaders access the wisdom of others</b>	183
<i>Diary Notes: Professional Loneliness</i>	184
<b>Proposition XV - Leaders are caring</b>	185
Victoria	187

The Fourth Sideshadow	188
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
<b>THE FIFTH INSIGHT: MEANS, ENDS AND “THE GOOD”</b>	194
Harmony Day!	194
<b>Proposition XVI - Leaders respect the power of choice</b>	196
Something About Maureen	198
<b>Proposition XVII - Leaders seek the greatest good</b>	200
What Would You Do?	202
The Fifth Sideshadow	206
<b>PART TWO:</b>	
<b>IN SEARCH OF AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP</b>	211
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
<b>THE VOICE OF THE PROFESSION</b>	212
Emerging Insights about Leadership	212
<i>Self-Awareness and Concern for Others</i>	212
<i>Virtue, Courage and Vision</i>	213
<i>Openness and Discernment in Times of Change</i>	213
<i>Love</i>	213
<i>Means, Ends and “the Good”</i>	213
The Voice of the Profession	215
<i>Local Voices: District Principals Meeting - Conversations on Leadership</i>	216
<i>State Voices: Tasmanian Principals Association - Conversations on Leadership</i>	219
<i>National Voices: APAPDC Forum - Conversations on Leadership</i>	222
<i>My Quest for the Holy Grail of Leadership</i>	224

<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
<b>THE WISDOM OF THE AGES</b>	229
Wholeness	229
The Spiritual Dimension	231
Myth and the Origins of Religion	240
Leadership and the Great Religions	242
Ghosts from the Past	246
Finding My Compass	247
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	
<b>UNDERSTANDING VIRTUOUS LEADERSHIP</b>	250
Understanding the Lived Experience	250
Mary's Story	250
<i>Understanding 1 – Self-Knowledge and “the Good”</i>	259
<i>Understanding 2 – Love</i>	265
Father Jim's Homily	266
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	
<b>SUSTAINING THE SELF AS A LEADER</b>	269
A Dialectical Turn	269
The Gift of Hindsight	270
A Walk With Myself	271
Enneagrammatic Self Knowledge	279
Finding My Better Self	280
<b>REFERENCES</b>	283
<b>WORKING PAPERS</b>	293

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## INTRODUCTION

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### Transvestites at Two O'clock

As Father Richard, a Jesuit Priest, finished his sermon, the two transvestites walked assertively up the centre aisle of the Catholic Church of Sacred Heart and found a seat. In their bright frocks they stood out from the rest of the congregation, who were trying not to notice the most recent additions to their faith community situated in a red light district of Sydney. Later, as Father Richard stood outside the church wishing his congregation the holiest and happiest of Christmases, he couldn't help but wonder where his two late arrivals were. He need not have worried as he felt a tap on the back of his shoulder.

"Father, we just love that gold lame' you're wearing. Where can I buy that, for heavens sake?"

Father Richard did not blink. "It goes with the job. I get to wear lots of nice things. Anyway, I'm Father Richard."

The transvestite replied, "I'm Pat and this is my friend Chris."

Father Richard warmly took the hands of Pat and Chris and shook them firmly. Pat then apologised for having to rush off but not before issuing Father Richard an invitation he found very difficult to refuse.

"Father, what are you doing after mass? We've got a show at 2am. Can you make it? We'd love to see you there."

Father Richard imagined the Sydney Morning Herald's headlines in the morning newspapers - "Catholic priests exposed at Gay Nightclub."

Steeling himself, Father Richard managed to sound enthusiastic in accepting the invitation. "Yes, I'll be there. Do you mind if I bring Father Nick with me?"

"That will be wonderful," Pat replied.

He gave Father Richard the name of the club and the address.

“All you have to do is go to the desk and say who you are. Georgina on the door will be expecting you. Don’t forget, the show starts in forty minutes.”

Father Richard’s next task was to find Father Nick and convince him that they would be “doing God’s work” in accepting Pat’s invitation.

After hearing Father Richard’s unlikely story, Father Nick said with a wry smile, “This will be a hoot! Let’s go.”

On the way to the club, Fathers Nick and Richard carefully discussed their strategy for entrance and attendance at the club.

“We’ll find the darkest corner of the room and just sit there.”

As they timidly walked past ‘security’ at the entrance to the club, they arrived at the desk and gave their names, just as Pat had instructed.

Georgina greeted them enthusiastically.

“Oh, we’re so pleased to see you here. It’s really nice you can join us. We’ve got a big crowd tonight. Just follow the lights and you’re there. I hope you enjoy the show.”

Even more timidly, Fathers Richard and Nick followed the lights and entered a room where all colours of the rainbow were swirling around the room. Father Richard noticed an empty table that the lights weren’t fully reaching. “Over here,” he said to Father Nick, who followed promptly.

Just as they were about to draw breath in relief that they had made it this far without incident, the music stopped and the lights stopped swirling. A familiar figure appeared on stage bathed in spotlight.

“Well everyone, our Christmas Eve Show is always special and tonight is even more so because we have two very special visitors with us.”

The hearts of Fathers Richard and Nick simultaneously sank.

“Can we have the spotlight over to the far corner please? Yes, there they are. We have Fathers Richard and Nick from Sacred Heart Church with us tonight and we’re so happy they can be here on Christmas Eve. Let’s all make them feel very welcome.”

A huge and genuine round of applause broke out. Partially blinded through the glare of the spotlights, Father Richard couldn’t help but notice faces of all descriptions and origins turning towards him with the warmest of smiles and a genuine sense of welcoming.

“You should hear this man sing,” Pat said to the crowd, pointing at Father Richard. “I’m wondering whether Fathers Richard and Nick would like to lead us in some Christmas carols?”

Both priests looked at each other, knowing there was no way out of this. “Here we go,” said Fathers Richard and Nick as they both set off for the stage.

“Thanks, Pat,” said Father Richard with a large grin on his face as he took the microphone. “Let’s begin with Silent Night.”

For the next twenty minutes, those present at the club sang the most beautiful and reverent renditions of traditional Christmas carols. Fathers Richard and Nick would later say that this was an incredibly moving experience, being able to share the true spirit of Christmas in such a meaningful way with such a diverse group of people.

Pat and his two friends later connected more closely with the Sacred Heart Church, regularly attending mass. Sadly, both Pat and Chris were to later contract the AIDS virus and die of related illnesses but they had won the support and love of the people they came to know through their involvement with the church. Both received a Catholic burial.

Recounting an experience at the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) Leaders Lead Forum in Launceston, Tasmania (2002), Father Richard Leonard said that “leadership is about reaching out to people, especially the marginalised. Had I not accepted Pat’s invitation on Christmas Eve, the special relationship between Pat, Chris and the Church may never have happened.”

Father Richard concluded his presentation to the largely secular group of principals and school leaders by singing the following Irish Blessing.

May the road rise up to meet you,  
May the wind be always at your back,  
May the sun shine warm upon your face;  
The rains fall soft upon your fields.

(Working Paper 1)

Jeremy Hurley (2003) in *Heart, Knowledge and Courage - Report from Tasmania* described what followed in these words.

It was extraordinary to look around at the end of the final presentation at the Leaders Lead Conference in Launceston, and see how affected so many people were. The blessing, completely unexpected in the first place (how many times have you been blessed at a cross sectoral principals conference?), had been sung so beautifully that just for a minute the rules had changed. The carpet had been pulled out and many of us, as David Loader had talked the day before, 'stumbled'. Heart, knowledge and courage. Maybe these had been what the two days had actually been about, and maybe Father Richard SJ had summed it up, encapsulated it, by taking this serious risk, communicating deep knowledge at an emotional level, unapologetically being the priest in this secular environment. In fact, maybe Father Richard had actually shown us what quality leadership can be. (p.31)

Hurley is a Professional Officer of the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC). This organisation is the peak professional learning body of the nation's major principal associations that represent principals from government and non government schools. At that time, Hurley's role was to report on the Launceston Leaders Lead Forum which was part of APAPDC's national leadership project. Just what quality leadership is and what it looks like is a question that continues to fascinate me since first taking up the role of school principal back in 1988. I have experienced the highs and lows of leadership during the following seventeen years. So why begin my study with Father Richard Leonard's story of his Christmas Eve experience? I think it is because his presentation on leadership is the most humanly authentic and powerful I have ever experienced. It connects with my inner self. Father Richard's presentation also seemed to touch others as he reached out to their humanity. He may have also "shown us what quality leadership can be" (Hurley, 2003, p.31). This statement goes to the heart of the question that this interpretive study poses: *What is quality leadership and how can it sustain me?*

New scientific and technological discoveries are rapidly influencing local contexts. I want to especially see if there is something that might *sustain* me as a school leader in positively influencing the lives of others. *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* describes *sustain* as "1. support, bear the weight of, esp. for a long period. 2. give strength to, encourage, support. 3. (of food) give nourishment to"

(1992, p. 1170). The meaning of the word sustain is central to my explanation of what it is that I am trying to achieve from my study of leadership. I want to better understand myself as a leader and the influences on my leadership so that I can lead others well over the long haul during the good times and also the more difficult. I do not seek or expect to discover a ‘magical’ theory of leadership that I would suggest is the way to lead. Rather, I hope that my understanding of leadership arising from this philosophical study gives nourishment to other current and aspiring school leaders.

Michel Serres (1990), in a conversation with Bruno Latour who, in *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time* relates how philosophy,

seeks and gives answers not only to problems that are “expert” (and often narrowly professional) about art or science – space, time, history and knowledge, methods and demonstrations – but also, and perhaps especially, it gives answers to simple and inevitable, vital questions we must ask, starting in childhood, and that have never been answered except through philosophy. (p. 168)

Serres says that our answers to the questions that puzzle us come not just from books but also from “direct and often painful experiences of the state of things” (p. 168). I sense that my way of exploring questions about leadership may reflect the hopes of Serres.

As an Australian researcher on schooling, Brian Caldwell (1999, p.2) states in his paper *The Future of Schools: Three 2020 Scenarios*, it is a cliché that we have become a knowledge society in a global economy. Few would dispute that we are undergoing one of history’s greatest social transformations. Pat Thompson (1999), another Australian researcher on schooling, builds on this theme in her paper *Here Comes the Global Neighbourhood and an Emerging Global Principal?* Thompson states that there is an assumption that a regime of benchmarking against state and national curriculum standards will serve the needs of the global labour market. These developments are testing and compromising individual identity. The role of the school leader in these times is becoming more difficult and complex, as Thompson illustrates, with some tensions that are still evident today.

Schools are expected to educate all children “to their full potential” (whatever that means), while at the same time sorting and selecting for higher education and employment; and schools are expected to educate for individual pleasure and interest, for broad social involvement and civic engagement, and for economic utility. (p.4)

I want to explore leadership through many of these complex and core issues confronting school leaders in their daily work. My challenge is to earn your empathy as a reader. I want to engage you in reflection on my experiences that prompt my reflection on leadership. I hope you will come to appreciate my interpretation of experiences in ways that you might find contemplative, deliberative and self-searching. I am inviting you to come with me as I try to find out more about what true leadership may be. I want to show you my perspective as I take you through my leadership experiences of the last twelve years or so. I want to better understand the things I have done well, and not so well.

Janice Morse in her article *Designing Funded Qualitative Research* states that the key to selecting a qualitative research topic is to recognise a field that will maintain the researcher’s interest over time (1998, p. 57). I am genuinely interested to see what comes out of this study. That is my motivation. I want to articulate what it is that might sustain me, and perhaps others, in future school leadership. I hope that this understanding about leadership may have a positive influence on the professional learning of current and aspirant school leaders.

Patrick Duignan (1996), in his paper *Get Real: Some Reflections on Authentic School Leadership* expresses effective leadership as

the capacity of individuals and groups to motivate others, and each other, in an organisation to become committed to the shared vision and goals and to work in harmony to achieve them. (p. 2)

Whilst there is no shortage of opinions on what constitutes effective leadership, this definition shares common ground with many. Duignan examines a number of metaphors that assist leaders to go beyond opinion toward a practice of leadership that makes sense in the real world.

I met Patrick Duignan at the 1995 Australian Primary Principals Conference in Canberra. To many delegates, his presentation was a conference highlight.

Duignan is currently Associate Professor of the Australian Catholic University. One of the metaphors that Duignan (1996) shares, “notice the dying sparrow,” is particularly helpful to my reflections on one of the more challenging times of my career. The metaphor relates to the way leaders need to be attentive to those members of our organisations who are finding it difficult to cope in their daily lives. I will be borrowing this and other metaphors from Duignan during the course of my study because they not only assist my reflection on leadership, but also the exercise of my leadership.

I will retell my school leadership experiences through stories and diary accounts that link diachronically with literature, professional conversations and a particular leadership project I was involved in on the Rocky Coast of Tasmania. Rocky Coast is a pseudonym I use to generalise the location of this project and honour the privacy of participating leaders. I will point out some of the fairly obvious propositions about the nature of school leadership. These propositions derive from this strategy of retelling stories and seeking understanding through reading relevant literature and conversing with others. I then adapt a process of sideshadowing that came to me from Evgenia Cherkasova (2004) and her article *Philosophy as Sideshadowing: The Philosophical, the Literary, and the Fantastic*. Sideshadowing will allow me to go to the shadows of my experience, light and dark, to help me develop a logical practice of research that opens and leads me through doors of possibilities to investigate those propositions. As I seek the art of sideshadowing, I seek insights and understanding on what it means to be a leader.

As a spectator or participant, please join me on a journey that seeks understanding of leadership using these strategies. Feel free to be sympathetic and imaginative with me as well as sceptical. Place yourself in my shoes in the stories I tell and grapple with the issues that still perplex me. Dennis Sumara (1996) in *Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination* suggests that stories reflect our interactions with others in the world. They reveal a history of our traditions. Sumara believes that it is the arrangement of stories into narrative form that is a point of access for others to these experiences (p. 87). If you are to travel with me, I want to firstly explain and illustrate each of the narratives of my journey and show how they might connect with each other to unfold meaning. Let's start with the stories.

## Stories

Since 2000 I have kept an open diary of the key events that have influenced my leadership. These include notes from District and Principal Association meetings, workshops and conferences and various other gatherings with individuals or groups. I also use diary notes of conversations and events from 1994 in order to provide a more longitudinal picture of my leadership. Stories develop from this data as tools for reflection.

I develop stories from those experiences that particularly prompt my reflection and learning. The stories provide snapshots of the role of principal but do not include every aspect of it. That would be a very difficult thing to do. As the stories will illustrate, new dimensions of the role seem to surface on a daily basis.

In a number of the stories, I want you, as the reader, to try to experience being a principal of my time in my shoes. These stories try to capture what I thought and how I spoke and acted *at the time*. I might do things differently now with the benefit of my thesis journey. I do not write these stories to justify a particular course of action or infer good practice on my part. They are there as a tool for reflection on my leadership. You may notice asides that I have written into some stories. These asides are akin to what Kieran Egan (1990), writing on education and child development issues in *Romantic Understanding: the Development of Rationality and Imagination*, explains as wisdom coming from ironic understanding. As I reflect on my stories, it became apparent to me that some understandings of my leadership were not evident in my initial narratives. For example, I discover times when the language I used as leader was more that of the autocrat than the democrat that I had thought of myself as. I write these asides with a degree of good humour and self-forgiveness.

I also endeavour to share with you a range of stories that illuminate the highs, lows, and 'in-betweens' of school leadership. Here is one of them.

### Trust the Gut

I had taken up a new position as Education Adviser to the Minister for Education. I soon became aware of the multi-dimensional nature of a

Minister's role and the many competing interests that confront her in the decision-making process.

I recall one evening when I was out to dinner and I received a call on my mobile phone. It was the Minister calling. She informed me of an incident that had potentially serious consequences for two students, their families and their school community. For reasons of confidentiality, I need to be vague in describing the circumstances of this situation.

The next morning, the Minister and advisers met to discuss the kind of response that the Minister should make. The Minister's first concern was for the welfare of the students, their families and the school community. At issue was whether the Minister should also make an immediate political response to alleviate potential community concerns in relation to the incident. The feeling of the advisers was that a political response was required but it should only play a minor role in comparison to the human response.

The Minister expressed her gut feeling that an equally strong political response was required. Her argument was that failure to do so would send a message of indifference to the circumstances that confronted the school.

The Minister's will held sway, as did her personal contact with the principal of the school and families of the students involved in the incident.

In the time that followed, the Minister received an exceptionally positive response from parents, teachers and various professional organisations to her human and political response to what was a very difficult situation. Her instincts proved correct.

(Working Paper 2)

This story illustrates the significance of leaders being human, being instinctive and acting with a degree of political nous during the difficult times.

Donald Polkinghorne (1999), in *Reporting Qualitative Research as Practice*, details a shift in the philosophy of science that is now seeing statements as human constructions of reality. He explains that it is through interaction with the world that these constructions evolve. Narratives may better represent research reports developed from this understanding of knowledge (p. 7). It is through narrative that I construct and reconstruct my reality, my understanding of school leadership. In this way I seek insight into my living being as it exists at particular times in my professional life. In his book *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the*

*Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Parker J. Palmer says that identity and integrity are not only concerned with our “strengths and potentials”, but also our “shadows and limits” (1998, p. 13). I have a feeling that my narrative will reveal all that Palmer associates with identity and integrity and involve me in what Polkinghorne calls the actual “progressions and regressions” that become evident as my project unfolds (p. 8).

I want to reflect the understanding that develops as a result of human action and my reflection on that action. Polkinghorne tells how research practice and other human endeavours share a movement through time. Diachronic researchers become the protagonists in the drama of their quest for understanding. Polkinghorne describes this quest as a composition that might include, for example, accounts of dilemmas, actions, events and interactions with a range of people. The unfolding composition may reveal a consideration of skills, values, intentions, fears and other factors. Polkinghorne sees the process as a “temporal whole” whereby the knowledge claim is a conclusion based on meaning that is dependent on the evolving actions and events of the entire research process (p. 9).

Polkinghorne (1997) explains that diachronic research comprises an interrelated set of human activities portrayed through a narrative form of discourse. It frees up the researcher to describe human actions as occurring before, during or after other actions or events. Polkinghorne tells how diachronic research stories may report actions or events involving attempts at clarification or resolution of a problem or even its complete unravelling. He describes the capacity of narrative discourse to transform a series of unrelated research events into a unified story (p. 9). Polkinghorne emphasises the importance of *emplotment* and the use of narrative grammar in this transformation. He proposes that in emplotment, actions and events bind together into the temporal whole and display in a way that demonstrates their contribution to a particular outcome. Emplotment is the organising quality that moves away from the individual events towards an unfolding of the wholeness of the project. Narrative grammar pieces together the individual research events into elements of the temporal whole from the beginning of the research project to its end, like the way semantics play in the constructing of language (pp.14-15). It is almost as if this method of research was conceptualised to address my research needs and purposes! I had originally

hoped that I may be able to neatly categorise each story under headings that feature particular leadership issues. The reality seems to be that leadership is complex and more than one issue usually arises from any given encounter. Through time I relive stories that enable me to reflect on issues of leadership arising during this study. Polkinghorne illustrates the different ways emplotment can draw the elements of a project together. He reasons that, although a single thread may suit this purpose, multiple threads or subplots are often used. They piece together to make the “complex and layered whole.” This approach enables the values, emotions, intentions, considerations, dilemmas and situations to unfold within the process of composition and become my narrative of inquiry, insight and interpretation (p. 15).

Polkinghorne relates how stories are retellings of past events, with their meaning flowing from the researcher’s reflections on them. Elements of the stories that are not relevant to the development of the plot need not be included in the narrative research report. Polkinghorne refers to this as “narrative smoothing” (p. 15). I consciously exercise this writing strategy, especially in regard to some of the more painful leadership experiences. For example, I don’t delve into what I might have perceived at the time to be the shortcomings of some individuals you will meet in stories such as *Tough Times at the Office*. To suggest a problem arose through the fault of others is ethically problematical for me and their right of reply is beyond the scope of this study. Factual information necessary to maintain the integrity of stories relating to such issues is included without, I hope, any degree of narcissism. I assign pseudonyms to characters and places in my stories to protect the identity of people featured in them. The only exceptions I make to this practice are where I wish to honour a person in some way and therefore refer to his or her actual name. As Peter Clough (2000), a researcher on inclusive education maintains in his article *Reflection*, we are “licensed” to tell some stories and not others. Some stories are too difficult to recount and are often “censored” in one way or another (p. 66).

Polkinghorne (1997) also asserts that the narrative research report is not a linear story. He holds that a variety of extraneous events and diversions make up the narrative research report. Bringing them together in language, according to Polkinghorne, requires “meaningfulness and order” that may not have been apparent at the time these events occurred (p. 15). I put forward propositions

about leadership that flow from my reflection on the stories in an attempt to give order. I seek a deeper understanding of these propositions through the process of sideshadowing, which enables me to look into possibilities about leadership that I might not have otherwise considered.

Polkinghorne describes the capacity of the narrative format to express the temporal unfolding of the research where previous events and actions might limit, affect or contribute to actions that follow. Subsequent events and new understandings that arise during the course of the project retrospectively clarify the meaning and importance of actions and events evident at the time they occurred. Narrative also has the capacity to discern and organise the acts and events of the research in terms of their relevance to the purpose of the project (p. 15). This notion of retrospective clarification of meaning is one that grows more as I write - particularly in relation to the more challenging experiences featured in the stories.

Researchers using a narrative approach speak with the voice of the storyteller rather than that of the logician and arguer. They speak in the first person to tell their story. The stories told are adapted to meet the needs of readers with real voices heard. The writer declares his or her interests when making knowledge claims to reviewers (Polkinghorne, pp. 15-16). My report is not one that argues the merits of a claim for knowledge. I speak with the voice of my mind, heart and spirit. My characters' voices express theirs as they contribute to the unfolding wholeness of the research. Given the inherent complexity of leadership, it is my hope that a rigorous search for meaning and understanding of my stories reveals useful knowledge. And I hope to deserve your trust, as the reader, in my performance as a writer.

By the time I came to convert my daily journal into a research story, I found I had become what Polkinghorne portrays as the protagonist seeking to generate knowledge in a setting that marked the beginning of a large drama. I had a rationale for pursuing knowledge about leadership but was unsure about how I would bring all of my stories together into a meaningful whole. For example, how could I bring together unforeseen happenings; the intentions, motives, strategies and actions of the protagonist and other characters affecting the outcomes of the

study; and the degree to which these factors influenced the research process closer to, or away from, the purpose of my study (p. 17)?

Polkinghorne argues for experimentation with narrative forms of reporting, asserting that whilst the synchronic approach displays the structure of a research project, “the diachronic approach captures the human actions and temporal character of the research project” (p. 18). In acknowledging the usefulness of both approaches, he underscores the capacity of diachronic research to increase our understanding of the human condition. The narrative format enables the researcher to report on his “investigative travels”. It is my intention for you, the reader, to witness my ‘travels’ and the nuances of their context. It is my hope that the narrative will, as Polkinghorne suggests, transform these travels into a coherent journey that probes and interprets meaning (p. 19).

Polkinghorne’s theories on research methods help me justify the course of my journey. Marcia Salner in *Self-Deception in Qualitative Research: Validity Issues* helps me with the issues of validity and trustworthiness of my stories. Salner (1999) believes that the self-reflexive capacity for controlled distance stems from a deliberate cultivation of a zone of objectivity within our subjective experience. Self-deception, on the other hand, results from a failure to objectively evaluate the extent to which our own desires and preconceptions colour our interpretation of research data (p.1). We can avoid self-deception through collaboration with others.

In the mirror of the other, we can find the blind spots which occlude our vision of ourselves and our interpretation of the life world in which we must act. Ultimately, our relationship with others mediates our own awareness of the ways in which we deceive ourselves. (p. 8)

My intention is for the stories, literature, professional conversations, the Rocky Coast Leadership Project and the sideshadows to connect and work together to test the validities of my propositions as I seek to research a deeper understanding of leadership. Insights on leadership develop from this form of collaboration that may also help me discover what Salner describes as “blind spots”.

The notion of collaboration underpins my approach to this study. It reflects the view of Polkinghorne (1997) who outlines how scholars are reconsidering the property of knowledge to see it as an “agreement reached by a community of scholars” (p. 7). Laurel Richardson (1990) in her book, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences*, seems to align with this view.

Unlike the logico-scientific mode, which looks for universal truth conditions, the narrative mode is contextually embedded and looks for particular connections between events. The *connections* between *events* is the *meaning*. (p. 13)

I make connections between events, collaborate with others and pursue agreement among scholars in seeking understanding of leadership. I want to give you a sense of how I intend my thesis methodology to work. I will use my earlier story, *Trust the Gut* to show how the meaning I take from my stories is further scrutinised through lenses of literature, professional conversations, the Rocky Coast Leadership Project and other writing strategies that I will explain to you. Remember the story’s emphasis on the place of instinct in leadership? I look to other sources for a deeper understanding of such issues that arise.

## **Literature**

A search on the internet reveals literally millions of references and perspectives on leadership. An exploration of literature helps me interpret the stories and contributes to my understanding of leadership. I find myself using four major references for the literature during this study – Carolyn Shields (2003) and her book *Good Intentions are Not Enough: Transformative Leadership for Communities of Difference*; Peter Senge (1992) and his book *The Fifth Discipline - The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*; Jeremy Hurley (2003) and his work *Heart, Knowledge and Courage - Report from Tasmania*; and Robert Maynard Hutchins (1952) and his voice in *The Great Ideas: A Syntopian of the Great Books of the Western World*.

The title of Shields’ book initially attracted me to her work, indicating that good intentions in leadership were not enough. At the time of my first acquaintance with Shields, I had been writing up some of the more painful stories of my leadership. I was feeling somewhat miffed at what I perceived to be injustices done to me despite my very best intentions. I found that Shields provided me with

a broad overview of leadership theory that helps me draw meaning from these experiences rather than my perhaps ill-founded perceptions of injustice.

In reflecting on my leadership experiences, I found myself questioning why certain events took place. I found some of Peter Senge's ideas on organisational learning. At first, I used them to unpack many of my leadership stories. I drew other ideas from Keith Morrison's (2002) book *School Leadership and Complexity Theory*.

I found the writing of Jeremy Hurley (2003) useful in framing some propositions on leadership with which I theorise my stories. Much later I found Robert Maynard Hutchins (1952) who guides me to the ideas of the great philosophers. Hurley and Hutchins feature often in the story of my inquiry.

For now, I wish to demonstrate how I use the literature to examine meaning in relation to my leadership experiences. For example, former U.S President, Bill Clinton, in his book *My Life* (2004, pp. 497-499) and philosopher Rene' Vincente Arcilla in his article *For the Stranger in My Home: Self-Knowledge, Cultural Recognition, and Philosophy of Education* (1995, p. 162) help me reflect on the story of *Trust the Gut*. Clinton illustrates the importance of leaders trusting their instincts in recalling circumstances surrounding the Waco siege of April, 1993. Clinton relates the killing of four Federal agents and the wounding of sixteen others during a confrontation with the religious cult residing in the compound several weeks before the siege. The sect's leader, David Koresh, saw himself as a messianic leader. He had an almost hypnotic control over his followers known as the Branch Davidians that included men, women and children. The sect held a large stockpile of weapons and a stand-off between the Davidians and the FBI had continued for over two months.

Clinton recalls how, on the Sunday night of April 18<sup>th</sup>, Janet Reno, his Attorney General and trusted adviser informed him that the FBI wanted to storm the compound the next day. Reno said she was concerned about the potential sexual abuse of children held there and the risk that Koresh was planning a mass suicide. The FBI needed to approve proposed action. Clinton expressed serious reservations about this strategy, preferring to blockade the compound and deprive the Branch Davidians of food with the hope of eventually securing their surrender. He effectively employed this approach several years earlier as

Governor of Arkansas in dealing with a siege of a right-wing extremist group who had established a compound in the mountains of north Arkansas. Clinton recalls how he said to his adviser that they should try and do what worked in Arkansas. The adviser countered that the FBI was sick of waiting and tying up huge resources that would be useful elsewhere and the risks of possible child sexual abuse were very real. Clinton eventually approved the raid. Watching the cable news network CNN the next day, Clinton saw flames engulf the Koresh compound. The raid had gone very wrong. Eighty people had died, including twenty-five children.

Clinton tells how he knew he needed to confront the press and take responsibility for these events. Janet Reno, his adviser who was also the Attorney General, persuaded him that she should confront the cameras and take full responsibility for the raid. As the first woman to hold this position, she did not want to appear to be passing the buck on to someone else. Another adviser, George Stephanopoulos supported the Attorney General's stance whilst two others felt that Clinton should be the first to speak to the media. The will of Reno prevailed. Before Clinton could talk to the media, they had already praised Reno and criticised Clinton for allowing her to take the blame. Clinton expresses his feelings about these events.

For the second time in less than twenty-four hours, I had accepted advice that ran counter to my instincts. I didn't blame George. He was young and cautious and had given me his honest, albeit mistaken, opinion. But I was furious at myself, first for agreeing to the raid against my better judgement, then for delaying a public acknowledgement of responsibility for it. One of the most important decisions a President has to make is when to take advice of the people who work for him and when to reject it. Nobody can be right all the time, but it's a lot easier to live with bad decisions that you believed in when you made them than with those your advisers say are right but your gut says are wrong. After Waco, I resolved to go with my gut. (2004, p. 499)

The Minister in *Trust the Gut* and Bill Clinton are leaders who have learnt, perhaps painfully, to be attentive to their instincts. In his article, Arcilla arrives at

this, “To find myself and to stay true to who I am, I need to turn my attention to an inner voice already deep inside me” (1995, p.162).

Before Arcilla, Clinton had been less attentive to his inner voice than the Minister and paid the price. The stories of Clinton and the Minister reflect the philosophy of Arcilla and the same philosophy reflects their stories. Use of literature as a tool for reflection on my leadership stories enable preliminary understandings to come forth that are expressed as propositions about leadership. For example, a proposition on leadership that follows my reflection on *Trust the Gut* and Bill Clinton’s Waco experience is leaders trust their instincts.

### **Propositions on Leadership**

In his article *Three Approaches to Participative Inquiry* (1998), Peter Reason, a British researcher on co-operative inquiry, explains propositional knowledge for composing his research that reflects John Heron’s (1981b) three frames of experiential, practical and propositional knowledge. Reason explains how these frames may differentiate but also shows how they can be co-dependent. Reason draws on Heron’s idea of propositional knowledge that statements and theories portray as knowledge “about” something. Reason makes the point that in research on people, the propositional knowledge stated in the research findings needs to embed in and glean from the experiential and practical knowledge of the subjects in the inquiry. If the propositions are generated solely by the researcher who is not involved in the experience being researched, and are imposed without advice on the practical and experiential knowledge of the subjects, we have findings that directly reflect neither the experience of the researcher nor that of the subjects (p. 265).

Following Heron and Reason, I put forward propositions on leadership such as leaders trust their instincts, which are gleaned from the stories, literature, professional conversations and the Rocky Coast Leadership Project that seem to work co-dependently and help me find meaning. Jeremy Hurley’s (2003) report on proceedings at the 2002 APAPDC Leaders Lead Forum frames my reflection on most propositions. You may remember that I used Hurley’s report to help me reflect on *Transvestites at Two O’clock*. The report draws from presentations by David Loader who is a former principal of Wesley College in Melbourne, Professor Bob Lingard from the University of Queensland and Father Richard

Leonard who is the Director of the Catholic Film Office. Hurley's report seems to anticipate many of the leadership questions that puzzle me. I use Hurley as a heuristic hinge to other literature and conversations that help me probe for a deeper understanding of my leadership propositions.

Whether my propositions are true or false or whether they reflect the field of possibilities on leadership is not going to disturb me. My propositions assist me to connect with my lived experience and develop knowledge. I am seeking understanding of what might *sustain* me in my leadership. It is also my hope that the understanding I find may be useful to others. When I first began this journey of understanding, I thought, deep down, that I might discover the true mysteries of leadership. Perhaps the best I can do is to pursue what Polkinghorne earlier explained as a property of knowledge that is an "agreement reached by a community of scholars" (1997, p. 7). My attentiveness to professional conversations that I engage in illustrates, for example, my search for such agreement on the subject of leadership.

### **Professional Conversations**

Professional conversations help me to interpret the experiences I glean from the varieties of personal and professional conversations that I have recorded or recalled over the last ten years. They include personal conversations, formal interviews, conference and workshop presentations, meeting conversations - anything said that may help me better understand the notion of leadership and myself as a person and leader. I should point out that propositions may also arise from these conversations or from the experiences of principals involved in the Rocky Coast Leadership Project.

As I do with the stories, I assign pseudonyms to characters and places referred to in my conversations to protect the identity of people featured in them.

Amongst many interviews one example, in particular, helps me illustrate the value of such conversations. Mary is a colleague principal who is reflecting on some very difficult decisions she has made in relation to cuts to the staffing of her school. Mary's words help me to more deeply examine the proposition on instinct in leadership.

Leadership of the heart is also about declaring vulnerability. Some, unfortunately, will take advantage of it.

This community has the right to rely on us, to know we're giving them a positive experience.

If we're not doing it well enough, I change it. In actual fact, when the battle's on, leaders can't indulge in too much reflection. There's something inside you that enables you to get on and do it.

I use the word faith and I have to be able to draw on that.

(Working Paper 3)

What is this "something inside" that helps leaders "get on and do it"? Mary uses the word "faith" rather than instinct.

### **Rocky Coast Leadership Project**

I also research questions about leadership through the eyes of a group of five school principals engaged in the Rocky Coast Leadership Project in Tasmania during 2004. The project investigates new ways of schooling that might better fit the context of the Rocky Coast Cluster of schools. Distances ranging from twenty to one hundred kilometres separate these schools situated amidst scenery akin to the Canadian Rockies.

The project focussed on the role of school leadership in achieving better outcomes for students. The Rocky Coast Cluster is one of twenty-seven clusters now operating across Tasmania as part of a major restructure of the state education system. Three of the four Rocky Coast schools are located in traditional mining communities that benefit or suffer from the state of the mining industry.

Influential members of the community publicly challenged the traditional role of schools and made adverse comments in the local and state-wide media. In response, the Tasmanian Department of Education created the position of Cluster Principal. Matthew successfully applied for this position. He worked with the four principals from schools in the Rocky Coast cluster of schools in seeking new learning opportunities for students. The Cluster Principal didn't have line management responsibility for principals. Matthew's role was to provide principals in the Rocky Coast cluster with a co-ordinated link between their schools and the

Rocky Coast community. Matthew is a close personal friend of mine. I know his personal qualities of honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness well. Matthew invited me to work with him and the other Rocky Coast principals (Prue, Eve, Wayne and Sharon) to research and evaluate their leadership project. My experience of working with these school leaders is one other vivid and formative lens for my thinking and questioning. I interviewed them twice, editing some elements of these interviews not relevant to leadership using the “narrative smoothing” approach referred to earlier by Polkinghorne (1997, p. 15). Following my time with these school leaders, I developed propositions on leadership and interpretively reflected on existing propositions.

To illustrate how the Rocky Coast interviews help me probe for a deeper understanding of leadership in relation to propositions such as, leaders trust their instincts, I recall an unscheduled interview with Brendan during the second series of interviews. Brendan is a recently appointed deputy principal who took on a leadership role in the development of a new curriculum for the Rocky Coast schools. His enthusiasm and passion really struck me as he detailed his work with colleagues that would expand learning opportunities for students. He recounted a question from a sceptical parent at a forum held to share key elements of the new curriculum. He had just finished what he and others thought to be a very exciting and informative electronic presentation on this subject. The parent was doubtful about the capacity of the schools to deliver on their promises.

Parent - Why should we believe what you are saying?

Brendan’s reply revealed his polite, but steely determination and commitment to the cause.

Brendan - Watch us. This will happen.

(Working Paper 4)

Was this the “something inside” that helps leaders “get on and do it” which Mary called faith and Bill Clinton might have termed instinct? In relation to this question, Sumara (1996) speaks about finding access to horizons of understanding not previously there (p. 128). And so, also, I practice sideshadowing to help me discover horizons in relation to my leadership propositions such as the one I am exploring on the role of instinct in leadership.

## Sideshadowing

Eva Cherkasova's (2004) notion of sideshadowing that I mentioned earlier suggests that understanding is about grasping a range of possibilities. She borrows the idea of sideshadowing from Gary Saul Morson (1995) and his book, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time*. Where foreshadowing in narrative pulls me forward into events, sideshadowing points to the "abnormal operation of events and champions the concrete, random and inassimilable" (as cited in H. Carel & D. Gamez (Eds.), 2004, p. 202). Cherkasova explains how her focus is on the use of "fantastic literature" and the philosophical possibilities that it generates. She argues that philosophical practice comes from the art of creating, entertaining and multiplying possibilities, whether it takes the form of a treatise or that of a story. She proposes that sideshadowing is imaginative play with possibilities as well as impossibilities. It is concerned with the idea that every situation, whether real or imagined, comprises not only what happened, but what might have happened.

Cherkasova, in describing Aristotle's insistence on narratives as stories possessing a linear plot of events, explains that the reality of our lives never makes complete sense as it might in a classic tragedy. She argues that what distinguishes the work of philosophers and philosophically inclined writers is their awareness of the field of possibilities and their desire to discover them.

To Cherkasova, seeing philosophy as a sideshadowing endeavour opens the door to options including those that may be unforeseen or unthinkable. It is characterised by the "what if" questions and holds to scrutiny the very practice of thinking. She argues that, at their best, philosophy and fantastic literature insist on a close connection between "what is", "what might be" and "what cannot be" and effectively make effective use of this relationship (as cited in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 202).

Cherkasova illustrates sideshadowing in referring to Andrew Hurley's book, *J. L. Borges, Collected Fictions* and the Jorge Luis Borge (1954) story *Funes, His Memory*. After a serious head injury, the central character, Ireneo Funes, comes to the realisation that his view of the world has become unbearably acute and multi-dimensional with his memory unerring. For example, whilst an ordinary person may notice three glasses of wine, Funes mind would see every grape

squashed into the glasses complete with all the stalks and offshoots of the vineyard. Cherkasova explains how the impossible job of imagining what it is like to have a flawless memory and equally honed sense perception provokes the reader to reflect on the boundaries of human awareness. She explains that Funes, for example, could not generalise. He might argue that the same dog seen from the front at 3:15pm and from the side at 3:16pm were not necessarily the same creature. In the world of Funes, particulars ruled and they were often of an immediate nature. Borges introduces questions into this story such as “What allows one to think?” and “How are concepts formed?” (as cited in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 206). Cherkasova says that these are questions that generations of philosophers struggle with. The narrative of Borges challenges our capacity to think through the implications of our imagining. Cherkasova holds that fantastic sideshadows of the kind cast by Borges enable us to philosophise about things such as appearance and reality. They provide a philosophically inclined mind with inexhaustible material and inspiration (as cited in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 207).

Through the practice of sideshadowing, I hope to discover and share with you the limits of my reflection on my lived experience as a leader. I want to push through these limitations and canvass the field of possibilities through what Cherkasova describes as “fantastic literature”. I hope that distilled insights on leadership come forth from sideshadowing my propositions that might help me better understand past events and sustain me in my current and future roles as a school leader. Much of my fantastic literature draws from Robert Maynard Hutchins’s (1952) voice. Hutchins takes me to sideshadows of the great philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato and Thomas Aquinas. I also look into the fantastic original works of these and other philosophers.

Reason earlier featured Heron’s view of propositional knowledge as knowledge “about something” expressed in statements and theories. From my reflection on *Trust the Gut* and Clinton’s writing, I formed the proposition, leaders trust their instincts. The steely determination of Brendan in response to a parent expressing doubt over a key curriculum initiative illustrated one dimension of leadership in relation to this proposition. My conversation with Mary and her attentiveness to the “something inside” perhaps points to another. I’m sure that there are more

possibilities on the notion of instinct in leadership that I can discover with the help of Robert Maynard Hutchins.

Throughout his career, Hutchins was a fierce proponent of using books which have gained the reputation of being great books as an educational tool. I stumbled across Hutchins and his 'great books' through a conversation with my sister at the home of my parents. I remarked to her that my study was leading me to pry into the wisdom of the great philosophers. She then asked me whether I had taken a look at "Uncle Ted's books". These books, comprised of tens of thousands of pages of original works by the great writers and philosophers together with commentaries on them provided by Hutchins, were situated in the next room where they had been for the last thirty years. What good fortune! They provided me with an incredibly rich source of insight into the ideas of these writers and philosophers.

Whilst my concept of fantastic literature may be different to Cherkasova's, I choose Hutchins and the wisdom of the great philosophers as a primary vehicle for my sideshadowing. They offer a rich source of fantastic literature that seems to go beyond the scope of more contemporary literature on leadership. They form the epistemological base that underpins my deepening self-understanding. Hutchins and the great philosophers offer what at first might appear to be fanciful sources - where contemporary literature on leadership might fear to tread, or they may be too old to be likely sources. Hutchins, describing Aristotle's view of prudence in the following example, helps me illustrate how I might use sideshadowing in relation to the proposition on instinct in leadership. I suggest that sideshadowing brings ancient thought into visibility in twenty-first century leadership stories.

#### **A Glance at a Sideshadow**

Hutchins describes prudence as the ability to "know how to deliberate or calculate well about things to be done." It is a quality of the mind and also a moral quality. Hutchins refers to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and his prudence which, as Aristotle says, is not consideration of means to any sort of end. Instead, prudence deliberates about those means "which conduce to the good life in general" (as cited in Hutchins, 1952b, p. 473). The words of Hutchins and Aristotle seem to be taking me from the notions of "instinct" and "something inside" to the idea of

moral wisdom. Might a fuller examination and understanding of moral wisdom be an insight on leadership that helps sustain leaders in their role?

## **Insights on Leadership**

The stories, literature, professional conversations and the Rocky Coast Leadership Project interviews will thus be working co-dependently to form propositions on leadership. The title of each chapter from 1-5 describes an insight on leadership revealed from the sideshadowing of propositions in these chapters. For example, I call Chapter 1 *The First Insight: Self-Awareness and Concern for Others*. When I go into the sideshadows of my propositions in this chapter, the importance of self-awareness and concern for others in leadership becomes revealing.

Much to my surprise and delight, a second part of my thesis comes to light in Chapter 6, which becomes an upheaval, a dramatic turning point, like a paradigmatic shift. I have turned it into a hinge to take you to the final chapters that are different to those earlier in the study. I borrow the hinge metaphor from Sumara who outlines his use of a particular chapter of his book *Private Readings in Public: Schooling the Literary Imagination* as a hinge.

This chapter is meant to function like a hinge, linking the first three with the last three chapters. It is like the spine of a book, which, at the same time, functions to bind, to identify, and to separate, for although the first three and the last three chapters are related, they are also distinct from each other. (1996, p. 87)

Sumara developed the idea of intertextuality around the metaphor of weaving in his first three chapters, asking readers to imagine themselves as threads in the fabric of a complex web of intertextual experience. He makes a significant transition in the hinge chapter by departing from the metaphor of weaving and developing ideas of co-specification and co-emergence for attention in his last three chapters. The hinge chapter is a turning point (p. 87). Similarly, I establish tentative understandings about leadership in the first five chapters of my study from the stories, literature, professional conversations and the Rocky Coast interviews. These understandings, initially expressed as seventeen propositions and further distilled into five insights about leadership through the exercise of sideshadowing, do not seem enough to sustain me as a leader. So I look further

abroad for an understanding of leadership that may help me through the tough times as well as the less challenging. Conversations with professional colleagues and others in Chapter 6 turn me towards the wisdom of the great religions of the world and more fantastic literature that takes me into spheres of deeper understanding about what might sustain me in leadership. The first five chapters and the last four chapters are related, but separate from each other, hinged by my fantastic literature.

In Chapter 6, I listen to what school leaders say about leadership at various local, state and national forums and examine how their views translate into key statements on this subject. Two questions justify this exercise. Is there anything about leadership important to the profession that I have not yet encountered in the first five chapters? In what ways can the profession probe my insights on leadership and deepen my understanding of them? The insights on leadership emerging from my experiences as a school leader and those expressed by the voice of the profession turn me towards a virtuous kind of leadership that is moral and ethical.

### **In Search of Understanding**

I continue my journey through Chapter 7, drawing on the wisdom and virtue of the great religions of the world in search of a deeper understanding about virtue, morality and ethics. In Chapter 8, my search for understanding of leadership comes tentatively together through *Mary's Story*. Mary is a colleague principal. Mary tells of one of the most challenging experiences that a leader might face. Her story helps me probe, test and clarify my understanding about leadership. In Chapter 9, I declare, with the benefit of hindsight that my study has afforded me, what I believe will sustain me as a leader and explain how I might now go about the day-to-day reality of school leadership.

Is mindfulness of Salner's (1999) notion of collaboration, Polkinghorne's (1997) advocacy of the pursuit of agreement between scholars and Richardson's (1990) belief that the meaning is in the connections between events sufficient for me to claim validity and integrity for the research I undertake? I believe it is but this question provokes me to consider the potential influence of my Catholic upbringing on my attachment to particular understandings that arise. Shaun Gallagher (1992) in *Hermeneutics and Education* maintains that the process of

tradition has a profound influence on interpretations made from research and that all interpretations are the product of language. He says that whilst we may endeavour to be independent researchers, we must concede our familiarity with those things that may initially present themselves as new. He characterises this relationship as a “belongingness” of the interpreter to the function of tradition and the context of language. In other words, our biases arise from traditions accessed through language. As much as I try to stand back far enough to be critically reflective, I cannot deny, as Gallagher maintains, the power of this tradition on me as a researcher. Gallagher makes the point that, whilst we have language, language has us. Because of this, tradition and language have certain power over us. They have a hold on the way we see the world (p.83).

Roy Pugh (2000) in her PhD thesis *Moral Imagining, Self-Understanding and Transformation: The Designing of Professional Learning* also refers to Gallagher (1992) who, in following Hans Georg Gadamer, asks us to question in a dialogical and self-reflexive way, and to consider questioning as a way of interpreting meaning.

All understanding is self-understanding. Interpretation is a questioning of ourselves not only with respect to the subject matter, although the “person who thinks must ask himself questions” (Gadamer, 1989, *Truth and Method*, p. 375); it is also questioning of ourselves with respect to ourselves and our circumstance. (as cited in Pugh, 2000, p. 78)

I aim to ask myself enough piercing and probing questions so that my Catholic and other traditions might not remain so embedded as to unduly influence my search for what sustains leadership. In his essay *The Constellation of Hermeneutics, Critical Theory and Deconstruction*, Richard Bernstein (2002) writes about the philosophy of Gadamer who says that living dialogue lies behind our existent understanding of texts, works of art and traditions. We come to understand a text by discovering how to question it and learning how it poses questions to us. Texts do not have meaning in themselves. Instead, meaning arises through our interpretation and understanding. Bernstein displays Gadamer’s insistence upon the importance of dialogue and the character of question and answer in interpreting and understanding (p. 278). Earlier, Polkinghorne explained how knowledge forms from collaboration among scholars

(p. 7). In my research, I aspire to experience and report on genuine collaboration with colleagues, scholars and others as “a living dialogue.”

Whilst Polkinghorne, Gadamer and Bernstein all assist me to be aware of the influence of tradition on my research, the words of Mary Zournazi (2002) encourage me not to ignore my attachment to it. In her book *Hope: New Philosophies for Change*, she interviews the Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers who has done much work within the field of science and its connections with life and politics. Stengers cautions that we must not forget our attachment to our own story when we are describing what it is that makes us human. We cannot claim to speak for all humankind. It is what makes us human that is the principal question for the diverse traditions that exist. If there was simply one answer, there would be no diversity of tradition. Different traditions produce their strength and faith in their own way. We are all part of our tradition and we are products of that tradition (pp. 262-265). Is there common ground here with the way Gadamer sees tradition as a continuing conversation that lies behind our understanding? Gadamer and Stengers imbue me with a sense of confidence to pursue my inquiry wholeheartedly - whilst acknowledging the influence that tradition may have on my understanding.

Several other writers help me justify the choices I will be making in exploring my understanding of leadership. My journey will show me troubled, perplexed, harassed, lost or vulnerable in tough times and more upbeat when sailing smoothly in better times. Thomas Schwandt (1997), whose scholarship and teaching is particularly concerned with the union of social science and moral inquiry, adds another dimension to the notion of interpretation in his article *Textual Gymnastics, Ethics and Angst*. He points out the postmodern perspective in relation to the complexity of human and social life, explaining that postmodern ethnographic interpretations matter, even if they are presented in a form that may be conditional at best (pp. 305-306). Carolyn Ellis, in her article *Evocative Autoethnography: Writing Emotionally about Our Lives*, adds support to this view. She tells how autoethnographic stories that focus on the self in a social context enable her to accomplish a variety of goals. These goals include connecting “social science to literature, academic interests with personal ones, emotions to cognition and social life to the concrete living of it” (1997, p. 117). Whilst these words of Ellis resonate with my research methodology, Schwandt points out that

such approaches brings with them problems to do with “reflexivity, aesthetic and narrative form” and learning to accommodate uncertainty (p. 306). With this in mind, I foresee questions and propositions emerging during my study that seek to articulate *understandings*, rather than *findings* about school leadership. Alan Peshkin (2000, p.9) in his article *The Nature of Interpretation in Qualitative Research* makes clear Howard Becker’s view as cited in Norman Denzin’s *The Research Act* (1989, p. 1) that there are no crucial tests of theories in which something is proven right or wrong in social research. The real test has always been how useful or interesting the outcome is to others. My hope is that the outcome of my journey will be useful to others.

So, before setting out, I return to my beginning, my question: How to *sustain* myself and others in school leadership so that we might positively influence the lives of our children. School leaders play such a pivotal role in the education of our students and the shaping of their lives. If schools could shape children’s lives for the better, could it be for the creation of a better world? What is the purpose of schools? If I am to understand myself as a school leader, I need to also understand what my purpose is in being a school leader.

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**PART ONE**

**: DEVELOPING PROPOSITIONS AND INSIGHTS ON  
LEADERSHIP**

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## CHAPTER 1

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### THE FIRST INSIGHT: SELF-AWARENESS AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS

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Carolyn Shields (2003) examines complex and varied purposes of education in the belief that they influence our thinking and action in schools. Early in my career as a school leader, I had developed a strong, but in some ways naïve, view that good intentions are fundamental to good leadership. By consistently accumulating mistakes over time, I soon began to understand that there is more to good leadership than good intentions. Whilst the writing of Shields seems to affirm this understanding, it also provides a broad overview of the purposes of schooling and associated theories of leadership. I think familiarity with these purposes and theories may assist me as I reflect on the stories shared and search for understanding on what it takes to lead our schools.

#### **Snapshots of the Purpose of Schools**

The first purpose of education, according to Shields, is “academic preparation”. Schools expect to provide the academic instruction that prepare students for participation in democratic processes (p. 59). She questions the narrow definition of academic preparation often used, which usually relates to preparation for university or a professional life. Whilst Shields agrees that this pathway is important, she asserts that it is not the only one. She emphasises the importance of schools providing students with the opportunity to progress towards a trade or engagement in entrepreneurial activities. These students, according to Shields, also need academic preparation in these areas (p. 60). The response of Matthew, the Rocky Coast Cluster Principal, to a question on the purpose of schools seems to support this view.

...the new economics will impact on school and cater for the enterprise, hospitality and enterprise needs of the community. I'm becoming less of a believer in schools as we've known them. We've previously been trying to force square pegs through round holes. Schools of the future will channel the resources the

community provides to meet the needs of students. The school will be more of a conduit than an institution.

(Working Paper 4)

The second commonly cited purpose of education examined by Shields is “training for the workforce.” Shields cautions against education systems focussing too heavily on job training, saying that other purposes of schooling may be limited if a balanced approach is not adopted (p. 61).

“Socialisation”, the origins of which date from the beginning of the nineteenth century, is the third purpose of education outlined by Shields. Schools help students to become acquainted with the culture of the society in which they live, imparting appropriate social behaviours. Shields has reservations about this approach to schooling, cautioning that attempts at socialisation need to consider the backgrounds and identities of the individual (p. 62). Sharon, the principal of a Rocky Coast District High School catering for students from pre-school to Grade 10, argues that

...the social aspect is so important. We’re also there to provide enriching experiences for kids. Students need to see themselves as a group, as members of extended family.

(Working Paper 4)

I suggest that schools need to consider the backgrounds and needs of the individual as they embark on activities enabling students to work together and enjoy the culture of their society.

A fourth purpose of schooling is “the creation of a just society.” To Shields, schools have the opportunity to develop the unique strengths of each student (p. 64). Implicit in this view is that schools need to teach students to reflect on the society in which they live and to think about the legacy they wish to leave for future generations. To illustrate this point, Shields outlines the seven generation precept of some Native American groups. They believe that during a single lifetime, an individual has the chance of knowing seven generations ranging from one’s great grandparents to one’s great grandchildren. Therefore, when making decisions, we should consider what the implications may be for the seventh generation (p. 64).

So what is the prevailing view of the purpose of education in today's schools? To John Goodlad (1997) in *Reprise and Look Ahead*, education is an adventure of the self, an endeavour of private purpose and experience. He reasons that the self shapes through social encounters experienced in a public context. To Goodlad, it is the nature of these encounters that is of critical importance. He asserts that we can only pursue the private purposes of education, explained as the development and satisfaction of the self, in the fellowship of public purpose. Goodlad sees schooling, on the other hand, as a means to design a context for the shaping of many selves towards ends that are predetermined. Schools largely determine the nature of these ends and the practices they use to achieve them (p. 155).

Goodlad contends that children can and do become educated and develop their personal selves without schools but argues that the driving forces behind schooling is a view that schools should also advance the common good. He asserts that definitions of what constitutes the public need and good vary from society to society (p. 156).

David Hanlon, in his presentation to a Tasmanian Curriculum Consultation Project Schools Meeting (2001), propounds that we need to have a fundamental debate about the purposes of education. At the time, Hanlon managed the development of the new curriculum for Tasmanian schools scheduled for implementation in 2005. During this meeting, he questions whether education encompasses social capacity and political practice, working smartly and flexibly, improving life chances and opportunities, enriching and enhancing the business of living and enlarging the mind.

Hanlon (2001) then outlines his position on the purposes for education in the twenty-first century.

I would argue that our task, as educators, is to enable our students to shape and change the world - to use wise intelligence. We want them to continue to learn and combine learning, work and life for a happy future. Above all, we want them to enjoy an immediate start to post school life that is optimistic - not despairing.

(Working Paper 5)

Sharon Todd (2001) in *'Bringing More Than I Contain': Ethics, Curriculum and the Pedagogical Demand for Altered Egos* adopts a similar position to Goodlad and Hanlon, but with a cautionary note. She inquires into the idea that pedagogy is about "learning to become." She acknowledges that, on the one hand, this approach implies an implicit rising to the occasion towards something good. It is concerned with teachers and students making more of themselves, as Hanlon intimates. On the other hand, she argues, "learning to become" also carries a significant burden. If it is a tool for good, it can also be a tool for less noble ends. This view then raises questions of a normative nature, such as who is it that we desire people "to become" (p. 435)?

To Goodlad (1997), democracy is the word most consistently applied to articulate the balance between individual and collective freedom and individual and collective responsibility (p. 156). He sees the creation, development and refinement of an infrastructure that balances individual freedom and civic responsibility as the most challenging of endeavours. He sees democracy and education as interdependent (p. 157). A democracy, Goodlad argues, requires an educational infrastructure that nurtures an appreciation for freedom and responsibility (p. 158).

Goodlad holds that the educational agenda for the twenty-first century must be a public one that is concerned with the concept of educating the self in a context of civility and civic communities. Schools must provide for such cultural contexts and teachers need training as their moral stewards (pp. 164-165).

Kerry Burch (2000), in his book *Eros as the Educational Principle of Democracy* asks, "Who would dare to step outside the dominant paradigm of education?" He intimates that it perhaps the young and those working at the margins of disciplinary boundaries who regularly oppose the prevailing view of common sense. It is those who contest the dominant purposes of education and who view problems through different lenses that will be able to develop new educational meanings and approaches (p. 198). Burch may well have been referring to Australian academic and researcher Hedley Beare, whose lens on schooling expressed in his keynote address *Painting the Scene, the Future School* at the 2002 joint conference of the Tasmanian Secondary Principals Association

(TSPA) and the Tasmanian Primary Principals Association (TPPA), who challenges the dominant paradigm of education.

The children in our schools now will have the most awesomely strategic role in caring for the planet in world history. The challenge is to build a world community that nurtures a sustainable environment or one that continues to decline. The traditional school model is incapable even now of providing adequate education for the world's children. It isn't how many people the earth can sustain, but what level of suffering and ecological destruction we are willing to tolerate (referring to Halweil of Worldwatch, 2000)! What can we do, in schools, to do something about the carrying capacity of the earth - on a global basis?

The authority of knowledge and class structures inherent in schools still exists. This manifests in initiatives such as league tables that display comparisons of student achievement. This model is a fossil of the past - it won't satisfy the global inter-connectedness needed to address the problems of the world. This is an 1890's mindset.

Beare (2002) then asks us to consider what our mindset for the future ought to be. His own is that

...our planet is a living organism and we humans are participants in its development. It's not just an age of linking computers but of internetworking human ingenuity.

(Working Paper 6)

### **Appeals to *Eros* and Democracy**

Burch's belief that the liberal modernist paradigm is one of the main restraints on the task of deepening and extending the democratic state reveals the challenge of Beare's appeal for our connection with each other and our environment. He submits that *eros*, or the ideals of passion and connection, are devalued. Burch asserts that we need to reveal the anti-erotic prejudices of the liberal knowledge system so that we can then explore how *eros* and democracy can energise democratic approaches to education (pp. 175-176).

Burch draws on the ideas of American existential psychologist Rollo May (1969) and his book *Love and Will*, where May describes *eros* as “a state of being”, a form of desire that enables the condition of possibility for a relationship with our highest potential (as cited in Burch, 2000, p. 176). It is concerned with ideals such as the greater good, passion, connection and empathy. To Burch, these qualities go to the heart of democracy.

Burch then draws on the thinking of Cornelius Castoriadis (1995) who in his paper *The Problem of Democracy Today* maintains that democratic dispositions arise from self-reflection and a passionate concern for the world in which we live. Castoriadis may well have been referring to Hedley Beare’s keynote address! Castoriadis contends that it is this kind of political reflection that is at the heart of democracy. It is to do with a passion and concern for the present and future state of public and social affairs. Burch explains Castoriadis’s view of democracy, saying that it is primarily concerned with learning how to question power (as cited in Burch, 2000, pp. 183-184). Burch later states that, if questioning is a characteristic of democracy, then it is *eros*, the desire to know, that provokes this questioning (p. 185).

In exploring the notion of paradigm change, Burch paraphrases the words of Thomas Kuhn expressed in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, saying that “paradigm shifts occur when conventional assumptions about what is taken to be known lose their capacity to explain rapidly changing circumstances” (as cited in Burch, 2000, p. 196). Burch suggests that this “crisis of explanation” leads to a shift from the old view to a new way of knowing that is founded upon alternative claims of knowledge outside the realm of the old paradigm (p. 196).

Burch’s comments about paradigm change resonate with the rationale for the Rocky Coast Leadership Project that seeks to improve educational outcomes for students on the Rocky Coast of Tasmania. Matthew reaches for new ways of explaining purpose in education.

It’s about taking a holistic view of education and training and its links to economic development and social capital. In general terms, the sorts of outcomes we’re looking for are a community that values education and the role education plays in improving their lives. For example, TAFE (Technical and Further

Education) might provide training for aged care workers so they may work at the new hospital. There are plenty of unemployed youth, but they don't have the skills to fill the positions. We also want the community valuing their schools and the schools to be cutting edge. This is some of the hard edge stuff of the Project.

(Working Paper 4)

Matthew's passion connects with a very real focus on improving life's opportunities for the Rocky Coast students and community. He outlines a number of possibilities for education on the Rocky Coast. But are they sufficient? Burch refers to the struggle to explain the myriad of educational contradictions evident in classrooms across America. He cites the issue of consumerism, which he asserts is dissolving public identity and public meaning. Burch argues that schools are not sufficiently engaged in educating students to be critically reflective and democratic citizens (pp. 196-197).

To Burch, a new paradigm for citizenship education would only be possible if educators were to revisit some of the ancient conversations concerning education of the desires. This would mean moving beyond the traditional boundaries of the liberal/modernist paradigm (p. 198). He advocates *eros* as an organising principle of education, explaining that it may assist students and teachers to appreciate the more affective meanings and aims of education such as passion and connection (p. 176).

Perhaps it is Shields (2003) who proposes the most appealing way forward, suggesting that the principles of justice, optimism, empathy and democracy, if taken together, may help schools deliver programs that prepare students well for the future. She sees justice embracing both equality and equity whilst democracy relates to presence and participation. Shields also believes that all students need to feel a sense of care, respect and acceptance, which is a hallmark of empathy. Shields portrays optimism as the provision for students of opportunities and choices beyond school. She suggests that school leaders need to consider each of these four criteria when making judgements about their schools (pp. 73-74). Questions such as the following may be helpful in guiding school leaders in the decision-making process.

- Who benefits? Who is disadvantaged?

- Who is included? Who is excluded?
- Who is marginalised? Who is privileged?
- Who is legitimated? Who is devalued?
- How do we know? To whom are we listening?
- What data are we using for our decision-making? (p. 81)

Following Shields and, like Matthew, a strong advocacy for inclusive school communities might better position us to provide ways for students to experience success and contribute to their sense of community. I am sensing that Shields is leading me towards a particular view of schooling that has affinity with the ideas of Matthew, the Cluster Principal whose voice I draw on to help me find meaning for this study. He is a personal friend whose qualities of honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness seem to fit well with the idea of schools as just, optimistic, empathetic and democratic. If this is a worthy aspiration for schools, what kind of school leadership is required?

I have a story that helps me examine this question. Come with me to the year 2002.

### For Better or for Worse?

I had just returned to River View Primary School after a few weeks of recreation leave (you will get to know more about this school). It formed five years earlier in 1997 from the amalgamation of two schools at opposite ends of the township of Seavale on the Sun Coast of Tasmania. It was now a dual campus school with pre-school to Grade 6 programs operating at both campuses. On my return in 2002, senior staff began applying pressure for me to look at alternative ways for our school to be organised. Their view was that there was much duplication of effort and resources because of the way our school was structured. They wanted a structure where, for example, the school had one campus providing a pre-school to Grade 2 program and another campus providing a Grade 3 to 6 program. They wanted the school's human, physical and material resources tailored for a smaller range of year groups at each campus. I agreed to table this idea with our school

community. I respected the advice of my senior staff and believed their argument had considerable merit.

With the blessing of elected staff and parent school council representatives of our school community, I undertook some research on alternative campus structures and developed a discussion paper on the possibilities for change. I included information about how dual campus schools were organised in other states of Australia as well as in other areas of the world. I also used Australian Bureau of Statistics census data to include details about the long term predicted enrolments at our school. My thinking was that if we were going to look at alternative ways of working, then we needed to make some informed decisions.

After completing the discussion paper, I then advertised day and night meetings at both campuses for parents and an after school session for staff. Their purpose was to begin the conversation about the desirability or otherwise of options for change. These included having Kindergarten, Prep and Grade 1 at the smaller South campus and Grades 2- 6 at the larger North campus. Another option was to have Grades 5 and 6 at the smaller campus with Kinder, Prep, and Grades 1-4 at the larger campus.

Twelve parents and two members of our teaching staff attended the first parent meeting. After welcoming everyone to the meeting and explaining its purpose, I sensed an anxiety in the room. This anxiety became more apparent as soon as I began taking people through some of the alternatives to how our school is currently organised. Comments were made such as, "I don't want to have to pick up one child from Grade 1 on one side of town and then have to travel across town to pick up my other child from this campus," and "I want my children to be at the one place so my oldest child is there to support my youngest child." Within five minutes of opening this meeting, I knew there was little hope of securing any change. The next parent meeting at night received a similar reception. However, the staff meeting held to examine these options revealed considerable support for a change of some kind.

Our School Council, the main decision-making body of the school in relation to policy and budget matters, met shortly after these meetings to consider the feedback received. It was comprised of six elected parent representatives and six elected staff representatives plus the principal. Their advice was that the wider community beyond those who attended the meetings should have the opportunity to express their views on the way our school should be organised. We would issue all families with a survey asking them to vote yes or

no to the following question, “Do you want the River View Primary School Council to gather more information to see if there is an alternative campus structure model that may better meet the needs of our students?”

Information on the positives and negatives of each option, as compiled by parents and staff at the preceding meetings, accompanied the survey. It was no surprise to find that, just like the meetings, seventy per cent of parents responded in the negative. Interestingly, seventy per cent of staff responded in the positive. However, without parents willing to support a change, a new campus structure was dead in the water. As my school secretary said to me, “There’s not much point having a different school if there are no kids in it.” Her view was that parents were so against the idea of a change that they would send their children elsewhere.

In the three years since that survey, I encountered persistent pressure from senior staff to again open the conversation up about a campus restructure. I sensed the politics of our initial foray into this area had not changed a great deal. My instincts told me to “keep this genie in the bottle.” There was so much else to do in regard to our core business of teaching, learning and caring for kids. The experience of 2002 taught me that this issue had great potential to divide the community and waste much energy. I often asked myself, “Am I going to make things better or worse by again pursuing a change of campus structures?”

My thinking was that, even if I did manage to convince more people to consider alternatives, the result of these efforts may well be a fifty-fifty split between those for and those against a change of some kind. I struggled to see the good in going down this road.

(Working Paper 2)

The experience of *For Better or for Worse* raises questions for me in relation to the role of school leaders. For example, what are we there to do and how might we go about it? I now want to further explore the broad possibilities for the exercise of leadership.

## **Snapshots of Leadership Theory**

In their article *Leadership Communication: A Status Report* (2002), David Clutterbuck, a British writer of over forty books on management and Sheila Hirst, an international consultant on communication, state that there are more books and dissertations on leadership than on any other field of management.

The sheer volume of research and writing about the concept of leadership tells us that this is not a topic that is easily defined, nor one where there will be a great deal of consensus. (p. 351)

Warren Bennis (1989) further reveals this lack of consensus about leadership in his book *On Becoming a Leader*. He quotes from his article in *Administrative Science Quarterly* to briefly outline the path of leadership theory.

As we survey the path leadership theory has taken, we spot the wreckage of “trait theory”, the “great man” theory, and the “situationist” critique, leadership styles, functional leadership, and finally, leaderless leadership, to say nothing of bureaucratic leadership, charismatic leadership, group-centred leadership, reality-centred leadership, leadership by objective, and so on. (as cited in Bennis, 1989, p. 39)

There is certainly no shortage of theories on leadership! As I’ve been following Shields and her overview of the purposes of schooling, it may be useful to probe leadership theories that appeal to her (pp. 6-28). I select those snapshots that resonate with me and lead me to raise more questions. For a little while, then, let’s follow Shields who begins with Sun Tsu, a Chinese General from the sixth Century. In his *Art of War*, Tsu describes honour as his bedrock leadership principle. In times of war, he counselled his leaders to reflect on their actions in contemplation of the way forward (as cited in Shields, 2003, p. 6). We too might concede that, regardless of the principles that leaders espouse, there are no guarantees that he or she will be successful. Shields intimates that the ancient Greek philosopher Plato shares common ground with Sun Tsu in his assumption that not everyone is fit to lead. Plato reasoned that society requires a philosopher-king, someone plucked from the masses to canvass ethical questions such as, what constitutes the good life (as cited in Shields, 2003, p. 6)? Plato’s emphasis is on a moral kind of leadership that Shields and I might advocate is essential for today’s world. I think I need to be careful here and acknowledge the difficulties of identifying one particular type of leadership as a recipe for success. Such recipes invite questions about what is best for whom, under what circumstances and how do I know?

Leadership research in the first part of the twentieth century, as Shields indicates, has a tendency to categorise the leadership traits of history’s great leaders.

Interest in leadership continues into the twenty-first century. Recent approaches to educational leadership include “transactional, transformational, feminist, multicultural, democratic, critical, and emancipatory leadership concepts” (p. 9). Transformational leadership is very much a part of the thrust of schooling in my current context.

Shields outlines the way a number of theorists identify shortcomings of the early leadership theories based on hierarchical organisational control. “Transactional leadership”, for example, focuses on organisational transactions that serve individual interests in return for commitment towards the agenda of the leader. “Transformational leadership”, on the other hand, is “leadership that focuses more on the collective interests of a group or community” (p. 11). Shields holds that theorists commonly associate this model with developing a vision, establishing high expectations, creating consensus around commonly agreed goals, encouraging a climate of intellectual stimulation, nurturing a productive school culture, building collaborative structures for decision-making, ensuring availability of individual support, and modelling best practice and the values of the organisation. Contemporary Tasmanian schools and their system actively promote this model of leadership.

“Feminist approaches” to leadership tend to stress the importance that sex and gender play in understanding leadership. Leaders need to progress beyond the mindset of “power over another” to “power with another” to achieve a specific outcome. Feminist approaches to leadership emphasise the importance of different practices for different contexts. Shields indicates that limitations in this approach focus on gender over varieties of difference which may preserve division rather than overcome it (pp. 11-13).

“Multicultural approaches” to leadership tend to focus on race and ethnicity and challenge prevailing norms of organisational life in similar ways to feminist approaches. They maintain that schools need to adopt new ways of understanding if they are to adequately prepare students to live in a diverse and multicultural global community.

“Democratic leadership” involves listening to different voices in social inquiry and the decision-making process. This way of leading includes “negotiation, dialogue and collaborative reconstruction, as well as a concept of multiculturalism that

goes beyond the common one-person-one-vote notion of democracy” (p. 14). Shields sees similarities between democratic leadership and critical perspectives in leadership. “Critical approaches” promote more equal and harmonious ways of community life and raise questions about class, power and structure (pp. 15-16). She portrays “Cross-cultural leadership” as the practice of understanding, explaining and overcoming the ways in which school communities sometimes exclude people. Cross-cultural leaders must assist their communities to understand the existing culture and investigate how it may be more inclusive for all (p. 25).

My purpose in wading through various theories of leadership is to see if there is something that I can learn from these theories. For now, they provide me with some possibilities for exercising leadership. In describing the deeds of great leaders such as Martin Luther King and Mahatma Ghandi, Shields explains that attempts to define characteristics common to each of them reveal no clear answers. One uniting feature of their leadership might have been their authenticity. Shields quotes Robert Terry (1993) and his book *Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action* who described authentic leadership as being “true to ourselves and true to the world, real in ourselves and real in the world” (as cited in Shields, 2003, p. 26). Shields comments that authentic leaders have a heightened concern for ethical action. She intimates that recent studies on leadership seem quiet on the topic of ethics (p. 26). I ask why I should be quiet on the ethical dimension of leadership?

Building on this theme, Shields cautions that good intentions are not enough. Authentic leaders are “consistent in words and actions, committed to a moral cause, and willing to take a stand...” Whilst they may differ in their leadership style or personality trait, they seek equity for all. Shields then refers to P. S Temes (1996) who, in writing about Martin Luther King in his book *Teaching Leadership: Essays in Theory and Practice*, states that “the best leaders operate on the souls of their followers” (as cited in Shields, 2003, p. 28).

Am I getting closer to being convinced that I can draw inspiration from the great leaders?

I am looking now to Peter Senge (1992), Robert Palestini (2003), Keith Morrison (2002), Mel Ainscow (1999) and others to assist me because they scan territory

not covered by Shields. Senge (1992) refers to a speech made on March 10, 1984 by the former President of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino, when her husband Benigno Aquino left prison. He features her words, "Such people are not made to order. They make themselves that way" (as cited in Senge, 1992, p. 359). Senge then reflects on his own experience with outstanding leaders he has worked with. Their personal appearance or charisma does not define them. Rather, they demonstrate a passion for learning, deep sense of commitment, clarity of ideas and ability to persuasively articulate them. They inspire confidence in the belief that, by working and learning together, the hopes and aspirations of themselves and their organisation may be fulfilled (pp. 358-359).

This "natural" style of leadership, according to Senge, develops over a life-time of self-development. It comes from making an effort to develop our conceptual and communication skills, seeking greater congruence between our personal values and behaviour, and improving our capacity to listen to others. Personal charisma, according to Senge, is "style without substance" (p. 359).

If Senge is saying that personal charisma counts for little in terms of true leadership, what of the "substance" of great leaders such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi? What do these great fellows have that others have not? In Martin Luther King, for example, I see passion, courage and commitment to his moral cause of a just and civil society for all Americans. Nelson Mandela's compassion stands out to me in the way he set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after his election as South African President. This Commission provided those who committed crimes associated with a political objective the opportunity to apply for amnesty as long as they made a full disclosure of the truth. This offer of amnesty came despite Mandela's own jailing for nearly three decades by custodians of the Apartheid era. Gandhi's wise stillness, strength and resilience against oppression in leading India to independence in 1947 also command my respect and admiration.

These theories of leadership provide me with a dilemma! They are making me think more deeply about the way I act. As I reflect on the substance of King, Mandela and Gandhi, a part of me is taking another look at some of the challenges advanced by my story *For Better or for Worse?* By resisting a call to

have another go at changing the way our dual campus school is organised, was I simply resiling from potential conflict or intuitively demonstrating wisdom?

Robert Palestini (2003), in his book, *The Human Touch in Educational Leadership: a Postpositivist Approach to Understanding Educational Leadership*, says that schools “are a living statement, of culture and of values, that forms a part of the fabric of every social member.” He argues that leaders need to develop their own value system or philosophy of leadership that reflects a concern for the people in their organisation (pp. 1-4).

Palestini asserts that being a leader means making a difference to the lives of those who allow leaders to lead (p. 35). He argues that administration as a moral science demands that leaders reflect on their values, directions, effectiveness and the legacy they may leave (p. 36). These words echo those of Patrick Duignan, in his presentation *Ethical Dilemmas and Challenges in Leadership* at the 2004 Australian Primary Principals Association Trans Tasman Conference in Melbourne during which he upheld that we remember school leaders for their personal authenticity, sense of responsibility and presence with others. School leaders are in privileged positions to make a difference and have a responsibility to make sure their students are capable human beings (Working Paper 7).

These words prompt my recall of a situation where my “sense of responsibility and presence to, or for, others” wasn’t what it should have been.

### Copping it on the Chin

This is a story about careless leadership and copping what I deserved! I go back to River View Primary School in the late 1990’s. At the time, the Department of Education had a transfer policy that said that a teacher who had been in a school for five years would have their position reviewed in collaboration with the principal. If the teacher wanted a transfer to another school, the Department would endeavour to find a suitable school for the teacher. If the teacher did not wish to transfer, then the teacher could stay at the current school for another two years. The intent of the policy was that a teacher should expect to transfer to another school at the end of those two years. This depended upon the teacher having discussions with the Department and the principals of any school involved in a possible transfer.

This policy sounded reasonable to me but my leadership in this area was not attentive enough to due process.

I met with Mrs Smith who had been a teacher at our school for five years to discuss her intentions regarding a transfer. She made it clear to me that she wished to stay on at our school. She was happy there and the school was in close proximity to her ageing parents. In offering her some positive feedback on her performance, I indicated there would be no problem extending her current tenure at River View by another two years. I said I would write up the outcomes of our discussion and leave a copy in her pigeon hole to check before I sent it off to the Department of Education.

The write-up of our meeting highlighted an agreement that Mrs Smith would have her appointment extended by a further two years before transferring to another school in 2001. The facts of the matter are that we did not agree to that. I made the assumption that Mrs Smith would transfer but she never gave me any indication this was her preference. The transfer policy clearly states that teachers are to be involved in discussions about their future at the end of the two years of extension. I clearly had not given this issue enough thought or attention. It was really important to Mrs Smith, for personal as well as professional reasons, that she stay at our school for as long as she could. She had made this clear in our discussions. I had made a bad error, which I became aware of as soon as Mrs Smith appeared in my office. She was holding the notes detailing the outcomes of our meeting. She wasn't happy.

"When did we agree that I would transfer in two years time? I'm sick of this kind of treatment. This happened at my last school. They dumped me here and I'm not going to let it happen again! The transfer policy states that I have a say in what happens after the next two years. You've made it clear that I will be transferring. I'm going to the Union about this. It's not good enough!"

Although taken aback by the ferocity of her outburst, one thing became clear to me very quickly. She was right.

After letting Mrs Smith rid herself of her well-founded anger and hurt, my first words in reply were, "I am sorry. You are right. I just haven't given this enough thought and I should have. I am really sorry about this. I will fix it up and let you see it before I send it off to the Department."

There was a stunned silence for a moment then Mrs Smith explained how she was the subject of a forced transfer from her previous school and she did

not want to undergo such an experience again. Our conversation ended with neither of us feeling great about what had transpired. I wondered how this event may impact on my longer term relationship with Mrs Smith.

(Working Paper 2)

Palestini submits that leaders need to examine questions of effectiveness through the development of the people in their organisation. He suggests, for example, that leaders need to reflect on whether their “followers” are learning, are fulfilling their potential, are able to sustain change without rancour or can handle their own conflict without involving others. If the signs are positive in such areas, he argues, it is likely that a humanist resides in the leader (p. 36). I suspect Mrs Smith may not have judged me to be a humanist leader at that time. I needed to learn from this experience and avoid inflicting similar grief on those I worked with in the future.

Returning to Shields, let me bring together two more, yet different, theoretical ideas that she exposes. First, “critical multiculturalism” as explained by critical pedagogists Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (1997) in their book *Changing Multiculturalism*, calls on school leaders to challenge the inequities of power in the status quo and seek understanding of issues such as race, class and gender (as cited in Shields, 2003, pp. 193-194). Shields explains that the power structures in our organisations tend to legitimise the idea that powerlessness is real. We need leaders who seek understanding of the day-to-day practices of schooling and their impact on others (p. 194). Second, Shields proposes that Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of “carnival” as expressed in his book *Rabelais and his World* (1984) may help us see new possibilities for schooling. Can I associate Bakhtin’s carnival, which he characterises as “full participation, the use of humour, challenges to existing hierarchical relationships, the use of masks (that enable us to present multiple persona and to overcome fear), new forms of communication, empowerment and the recreation of boundaries,” (as cited in Shields, 2003, p. 196) with *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary’s* carnival explained as “merry making, revelry” (1992, p.164)? Shields reflects that educators often find elements of carnival in their schools in the form of social activities that might not always meet with the approval of those wishing schools to be serious places of learning. Bakhtin, according to Shields, suggests that medieval carnival provides us with ideas about how schools may become places

where children and adults find new ways of coming together as a community. Carnival encourages everyone to participate and may help us think beyond the more hierarchical forms of schooling to ask questions such as what knowledge is legitimate and, whose knowledge is it that the curriculum represents (pp. 194-197)? If I put these two seemingly different notions of multiculturalism and carnival together, might I recognise that it is possible to promote a school culture that has a sense of fun, purpose and justice where people go to teach, learn and enjoy the company of one another? This is the kind of school I wish to lead.

In what ways do these snapshots of schooling and leadership theory inform my understanding of leadership?

In their introduction to the chapter *When Freedom is the Question*, William Ayers and Janet Miller (1988) reinforce Greene's reminder to us that freedom is linked to the capacity to bring people together to imagine a better world, to think about what ought to be. True freedom calls for consciousness and collective action as we voice our disapproval at the shortcomings of the world in which we live. Greene, says Ayers and Miller, advocates a social imagination in the way we look at the world, asking ourselves whether the change we seek is for the better. She says it is difficult to determine an existing set of imperfections unless you have a vision of an improved social order. Social imagination is much more than caring and involves seeking a world that has a sense of community and respect for the dignity of the individual at its heart (as cited in Ayers and Miller, 1988, pp. 155-157). This seems to me to be a challenge worth taking up.

These words have a certain resonance with the actions of Fathers Richard and Nick on Christmas Eve in the way they reached out to Pat and Chris by accepting their invitation and embracing their dignity and worth. It is the words of Maxine Greene and the deeds of Father Richard Leonard that particularly inspire the development of my first proposition on leadership.

### **Proposition I - Leaders reach out to people, especially the marginalised.**

Consider the words of Hurley (2003) in relation to this proposition made in his report on proceedings at the 2002 Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council Leaders Lead Forum in Launceston, Tasmania.

The unknown - school leaders know that they have to be brave. To reach out to the people who need to be welcomed - staff, students, parents and families, communities - they sometimes have to leap into the unknown. Valuing difference among people and communities involves courage - it means working in unfamiliar ways, being out of the usual comfort zone, being the stranger in someone else's world (p. 33).

In Hurley's eyes, valuing difference and reaching out to others would seem to be about courage.

Looking at the way Fathers Richard and Nick reached out to Pat and Chris "in someone else's world" by accepting their offer of an early morning venture to the nightclub seems to provide a message for school leaders about how we may exercise love and concern for others and reach out to the marginalised.

Mel Ainscow (2005), in his paper *The Next Big Challenge: Inclusive School Improvement* perceives fostering inclusion as the major challenge facing educational systems across the world. This includes attending to the needs of one hundred and thirteen million children in the world's poorer countries who never see the inside of a classroom as well as those children in wealthier countries who leave school with no formal qualifications. Ainscow also expresses concern for those children who may segregate from mainstream education or who may drop out from schooling because it is not relevant to their lives (p. 2).

Jane, the senior officer who has direct responsibility for supervising government schools on the Rocky Coast, seems intent on making schooling relevant to the lives of our young people as she outlines the scope of the Rocky Coast Project to school leaders at the 2004 King District Retreat.

There is a sense of urgency from using old structures that aren't meeting the unique needs of the Rocky Coast. We're building a "guiding coalition" which will be Rocky Coast principals, support service and district office staff with the Rocky Coast community. The vision and strategy is to develop a Rocky Coast network for best practice and best outcomes for kids. It's important to keep things simple. We want to find the dead horses and dismount from them. We'll look for some wins and celebrate them. We don't want to put huge effort into this

without it being sustainable. We need to encourage and reward teacher leadership in this project.

(Working Paper 8)

The Project commenced in earnest in April when Matthew, the Cluster Principal, took up duty. In December, 2004, Matthew made the following comments in regard to curriculum whilst reflecting on the project over the previous eight months.

In the broadest sense, a curriculum relevant to the local community is fundamental. Here, people want to work and the 'old' curriculum discriminates against the locals because it is more of an academic curriculum.

(Working Paper 4)

Todd (2001) questions the assumptions we might make about what it means to learn and be educated. Todd holds that curriculum is fundamental to the education of students and their development as particular kinds of people, individuals or citizens. Todd asks whether the impact of learning, if understood as the "process through which each individual being becomes a subject or self," enacts violence on the individual characterised by the pains, difficulties and struggles that go with learning (p. 431). Is violence too provocative a word to use in relation to the impact of curriculum on some students? If we accept that any act of oppression, subjugation or maltreatment is a form of violence, then curriculum may well have the capacity to enact violence on students. If this is so, Todd ponders what this may mean for the way we think about curriculum (p. 431). Is there a connection between the violence in curriculum that Todd speaks of and the suggestion by Matthew that the 'old' academic curriculum is failing to meet the needs of Rocky Coast students? Could the way students are subjected to a curriculum which seems unconnected to their world on the Rocky Coast, be a form of violence?

Todd examines questions of this kind through exploration of the teaching-learning relationship. Specifically, Todd investigates what is at stake in asking students to learn and considers ways in which the ontological possibilities of teaching and learning relate to the environment for creating ethical relations. To Todd, this pursuit is central to the consideration of the ethical dimensions of curriculum (pp.

431-432). The words of Wayne, one of the Rocky Coast's high school principals, add weight to this view.

This community sees apprenticeships post year 10 as desirable further education. There will be a lot of good employment opportunities for young people on the Rocky Coast, which creates a tension with the Department's retention goals. Some Rocky Coast kids make a deliberate choice that they will not pursue certain options. One of our most able students wants to work in the service industry. Her support network in this town sees that as a good choice. We need to be careful here in how we address such issues and how we impart our middle class values to the local community. We need to do things that are achievable and workable over time.

(Working Paper 4)

Are Wayne's words of caution about "imparting our middle class values to the local community" in regard to curriculum options another example of a school leader being mindful of what Todd described as the potential of the curriculum to enact a certain kind of violence on our students?

For some of her exposition, Todd follows Cornelius Castoriadis's proposals on psychoanalytic thought. She first refers to his essay *Psychoanalysis and Politics* (1997) where Castoriadis suggests that from the moment one is born and until our death, pedagogy shapes the person's becoming by assisting them to make sense of the world in relation to the people and things around them. By making symbolic connections to the environment, the learner relinquishes the unconscious needs and desires of the self in the service of the social order. It is through negotiation with the "outside" and the "other" that the learner learns to adapt to the outside world and learns to control the self for the purposes of developing relationships with others (as cited in Todd, p. 432). Following this line of thinking, Todd wonders to what extent this places a violent demand on learners to become, for example, a citizen or consumer. She refers to an earlier essay by Castoriadis called *Politics, Power Autonomy* (1991) where he points out the importance of recognising the violence *in* education as well as the violence *of* education (as cited in Todd, p. 433).

Todd seriously provokes my reflection on the potential violence of the curriculum, and perhaps of education, in regard to a student with extremely high social and academic needs. Let me tell you about Oscar.

### The Story of Oscar

Oscar came to our school from an extremely socially and economically disadvantaged home background. He arrived after the relationship between home and his previous school had broken down. His parents were refusing to send him to school because they had lost confidence in the school and “the system”.

Oscar experienced difficulty in communicating with others and had a history of violence and poor relationships with teachers and students. The additional resource of a teacher assistant for a limited number of hours per week supported his enrolment. From the briefing I received from district office support staff, it seemed clear to me that Oscar was not capable of attending school without considerable resource support for his learning, social and emotional needs. I agreed to enrol Oscar in a part-time capacity to give his time at school the best chance of success.

Our first task was to find a suitable teacher assistant with the skills and empathy to work with Oscar. We were able to access a current staff member with the appropriate expertise. Because of Oscar's history, we decided to gradually integrate Oscar into his designated primary school class. Each day, he would join his “home” class for physical education and visual arts. He displayed a reticence for working with other students. On the occasions where Oscar did not have his teacher assistant with him, Oscar would stalk other students or refuse to respond to the directions of teachers on duty in the playground. He seemed incapable of socialising with his peers without being involved in a problem of some kind. For these reasons, Oscar had his morning break separated from other students because of his history of problems in mixing with them. Although he seemed happy with this arrangement, we knew this arrangement was not helping his social development.

The curriculum provided for Oscar was a very practical one using the resources of the community. It would involve activities such as assisting the pre-school teacher with her students, field excursions to the local beach, visits to the neighbouring high school to use their wood work room, pond

studies within the school boundary and applying basic numeracy skills whilst shopping at local supermarkets. Whilst I and others shared a sense of discomfort that Oscar wasn't fully included in the life of the school, the program seemed to be meeting his needs. School was becoming a positive experience for him. I suspected that the key to its success was the positive relationship established between Oscar and his teacher assistant.

Unfortunately, major problems arose after our teacher assistant accepted a full-time position at another school. Although I was fortunate to find a very suitable replacement, Oscar was not in the mood for establishing a rapport with him on their first day together. Oscar decided to pick up a hammer and run around the corridors of the school in a menacing manner. He did not appreciate the decisive intervention from senior staff. Without going into detail, it wasn't a very pleasant experience for Oscar or the staff who had to manage this situation. It was time to rethink how we would cater for Oscar's needs.

After several meetings with Oscar's mother, support staff and external agencies, we agreed to continue with a similar program but make greater use of the resources of the neighbouring high school. Oscar would work with his new teacher assistant and have access to a greater range of facilities at the high school that were more appropriate to his needs. The downside of this arrangement was his continuing disconnection from students of his own age.

The new teacher assistant established a positive and trusting relationship with Oscar. The program enabled him to again have a positive experience of school life. At the time of writing, we are now exploring what is next for Oscar, especially how he may spend more time with his peer group.

(Working Paper 2)

In reflecting on the last sentence of this story, Todd's idea of violence in curriculum seems particularly relevant to considerations regarding how Oscar may spend more time with students of his own age. If he is happy working with older students and his experience of school is a positive one, is there a risk of Oscar experiencing an emotional violence if I seek to impose another group of students on him? Who, in fact, decides who our peers are? Perhaps his real peer group are the older students that he experiences success with. Alternatively, am I being negligent in my duty if I don't make an effort to reacquaint Oscar with children of his own age? Thinking through the issues and keeping the best interests of Oscar at heart might be the best answer I can find. Decisions of this

kind may have a lasting impact on the lives of students. On what grounds should we make them?

Shields (pp. 138-140) argues that we need to recognise the differences in the academic ability and interests of students and find ways to meet their academic and social needs in the same way we seek to address differences in areas such as gender and ethnicity. Educators need to guard against labelling students, even with the best of intentions, according to stereotypical images. Shields contends that there is a danger that that we may generalise from these labels and make decisions about these students that may affect children's identities and educational opportunities.

This triggers my recollection of an anecdote shared by Mike Middleton in his presentation *Leadership for Change* at the 2001 King District Principals Retreat concerning the fallibility of attaching labels to students.

Howard Gardner, who has undertaken groundbreaking research on theories of multiple intelligences, led a Harvard University research team whose task it was to study seven of the great minds of the twentieth century. The subjects of the study included people such as Einstein and Picasso who each excelled in one of the seven intelligences. For example, Picasso showed an extraordinary aptitude in the visual intelligences. In researching common links between the seven people under study, the only common characteristic between them was the perception that that they were all slow learners at school!

(Working Paper 9)

Are we justified equating so simply the abilities of children with the circumstances of their daily lives (Shields, p. 143)? There is no doubt that Oscar's reputation preceded him and he came to our school with the label of a child hailing from an extremely disadvantaged background who displays challenging behaviours. I would like to think that this knowledge enables me to have empathy with him and better understand his behaviour.

I remain concerned that we excluded Oscar from the full life of our school. Balancing this concern is our belief that he is currently not capable of, nor does he have the desire for, such engagement. Todd is somewhat reassuring. Are we trying to provide a curriculum that avoids a "violence of education?" I still wonder

where this approach with Oscar sits with the notion of inclusive schooling and equal opportunity for all students. Is my concern for avoiding violence against Oscar also a convenient way of avoiding the harder task of integrating Oscar more fully into our school - as difficult as that may be? Could it be that Todd's "violence in curriculum" may be preferable to non-violence if it means that a child like Oscar may have a more inclusive education? I suspect that my fellow educators and I need to ask ourselves such questions if we are serious about reaching out to children like Oscar who we attend to in the margins of the classroom.

Mel Ainscow in an earlier publication *Understanding the Development of Inclusive Schools* (1999) may help me scrutinise this question and other assumptions concerning inclusive schooling. He highlights how the UNESCO teacher education initiative affirmed the way influential local conditions and cultures impact on schooling. This initiative was concerned with fostering more inclusive models of schooling. Entitled *Special Needs in the Classroom*, the project initially involved research in eight countries (i.e. Canada, Chile, India, Jordan, Kenya, Malta, Spain and Zimbabwe) but later spread to over fifty countries during the dissemination phase (pp. 1-22).

Drawing on understandings developed from this UNESCO project, Ainscow identifies a fundamental dilemma facing all teachers in schools. How do I cater for the needs of the whole group whilst addressing the unique needs of each individual within that group (p. 3)? This is a common problem in schools, as acknowledged by Prue, a Rocky Coast elementary school principal. She was responding to my question during the second Rocky Coast Leadership Project interview about how her "sense of ethics" governs her actions. The question followed an earlier one on the personal qualities that sustain her in school leadership. I was seeking insight into ethical behaviour of teachers and leaders and trying to understand what drives the thinking and action of a school leader.

That's the tension I've described in regard to two challenging children - the tension between support of these students and the greater good. I've got these two extremely difficult children. They are taking all of my time with crowd control. I just realised I have not done any professional learning this year in regard to my leadership of the school. If I leave the

school, I have to disrupt class learning by arranging for a teacher to fill my shoes when I'm not there. What do you do? That's a real issue for me - crowd control and leadership. I'm at a stage where I'm now looking at part-time enrolment for the two students. It's about the greater good. It's not easy trying to balance the needs of the school against those two students. In the end, I think we need to part-time enrol them for the good of the school.

(Working Paper 4)

Prue's response may help my insight into *The Story of Oscar*. For Prue, what comes over is her concern for the common good in managing problems of the kind posed by Oscar and the two children at her school. She seems to have a moral imperative that somehow she needs to find a balance between her capacity to do the right thing for her two difficult students and the right thing for herself and the other students in the school.

Roger Slee in his 2002 TSPA/TPPA conference presentation *New Times: Traditional Schooling and Inclusive Schooling* seems to have some similar views to Prue about how schools and their leaders may cater for the needs of the whole group whilst addressing the unique needs of the individual.

Our task as leaders is to develop engaged citizens in democratic communities. There is no hypodermic link between school-based management and outcomes for students. However, when school-based management focuses on conversations about pedagogy, learning and assessment, outcomes for students are better. The productive leader creates teacher professional learning communities in decision-making, professional development and community engagement. The challenge is to re-interrogate the nature of schooling that enables or disables the education of our students. Inclusion is about all kids, not just those in special needs categories.

(Working Paper 6)

Ainscow (1999) takes a similar stance, proposing that there are three possible responses in considering the needs of the whole group as well as those of the individual. The first is to do nothing different and maintain the status quo. The second involves making compromises and lowering expectations in the belief that

some students will never achieve our expectations. The final response involves seeking to do something that will support the learning of all students. Examining the kind of teaching practices that might cater for the learning of all students, Ainscow maintains that teachers tend to know more than they use and that the use of local knowledge and expertise has great potential for improved teaching and learning (pp. 2-4). Ainscow claims that deficit thinking, which he characterises as the view that some pupils are deficient and therefore need separate provision, is still a dominant paradigm in schooling. He argues that within the four walls of each classroom rests a rich pool of experiences and inspiration. The ability to harness this potential is very dependent on the attitudes and skills of the teacher (pp. 7-9).

As he continues and explores his conversations with three teachers following his observation of their work in classrooms, Ainscow examines what is involved in moving towards classroom practice and school organisation that connects with all students. These discussions affirm his view that teachers know more than they use and that there is ample expertise in most schools for all children to learn well. Advocating a collaborative inquiry approach to school reform, Ainscow explains that schools may progress if they are able to make better use of the existing knowledge and skills of teachers and nurture their potential to work well together (pp. 51-54).

These words resonate with those of David McRae and Bob Lingard that I witnessed during the Panel Session *Getting the Reform Equation Right* at the 2001 National Quality Teacher Conference in Melbourne. Bob first.

What teachers do in classrooms is at the core of good teaching. There are good teachers in all schools. The trick of reform is to get good teachers spread across all of the school and give teachers the chance to de-privatise their practice.

(Working Paper 10)

For me, the notion of de-privatising practice evoked thoughts of bringing people together to talk about teaching and learning. I had long thought that we too often exclude the knowledge and wisdom of teachers. David took stage with an air of serious concern. He acknowledged that schools could be remarkably successful but threw me a challenge that demanded my consideration and action.

The arena of professional failure is clearly definable - the bottom twenty per cent. This is the responsibility of the whole profession. Students who don't complete Year 10 have a ninety-five per cent chance of living the rest of their lives on welfare. Schools also nurture friendships. But there are twenty per cent who are not succeeding! A realistic inroad into the twenty per cent of children we are not reaching is to reduce this figure by five per cent.

(Working Paper 10)

Later, David emphasised the role of the teacher and quality professional learning in improving outcomes for students. With a firm voice and set chin he said,

...there are no rote applications for teaching. Quality teachers must know what to do. How can we sustain them in knowing what to do? The answer rests with highly targeted professional learning that expands their repertoires. Professional conversations are vitally important. Time is one thing we can provide teachers. There are lots of ways to do this - most are legal!

(Working Paper 10)

This last sentence evoked a chuckle from participants as David invited us to be creative in our thinking about how we might find more time for teachers to learn from each other. His passion was infectious. It seemed that he had a profound sense of the right and common sense thing to do.

Bob Lingard and David McRae left no-one in doubt that quality teachers make a difference to the lives of our students. A presentation delivered by four high school students, two of each gender, endorsed this view at the Curriculum Consultation Project Schools Meeting (2001) that I referred to earlier. The purpose of the meeting was to share stories from project schools participating in the development of a new curriculum for Tasmanian schools. River View was to become one of those schools in 2002. I was there, filled with a heightened sense of anticipation and keen to hear about the experiences of schools engaged in the project for the preceding twelve months. The four students from these schools gave their perspective on the factors that make quality learning outcomes possible. I believe that my notes from this meeting, recorded below, are an accurate reflection of their shared views.

## **A Student Perspective on Schooling**

Quality outcomes are possible when:

(1) Teachers have a relationship with students first - respect then follows.

(2) Teachers are prepared and have well-planned activities for students.

(3) Teachers are passionate - teacher delivery engages students.

(4) Students belong to a class - the environment and working conditions provide a level playing field for students and teachers.

(5) Teachers maintain discipline in a fair way - public humiliation is not acceptable.

(6) Assessment provides constructive comments about how students may improve and develop their skills on a personal level - feedback needs to be specific.

(Working Paper 5)

These responses lend positive support to Ainscow's (1999) affirmation of the importance of relationships in the eyes of students. Ainscow says that students tend to evaluate their own school experiences in terms of relationships (p. 133). The student perspective on schooling also appears to support Palestini's (2003) view that we need to reconstruct the science of school administration as a moral science. Natural science struggles to address human issues whereas a moral science is more concerned with the resolution of moral dilemmas (p. 34). David McRae's challenge, to address the needs of the failing twenty per cent of students, seems to be a moral one, a dilemma.

Matthew, the Cluster Principal of the Rocky Coast Leadership Project, gives a real-life context to Palestini's idea of school administration as a moral science and Ainscow's emphasis on the importance of relationships in the eyes of students.

I've learned to accept that we're all ordinary people trying to do the best we can. I try and avoid making judgements about people. Heroic leadership doesn't interest me. Honest feedback systems and trusting relationships are the best we can do. You've got to believe things can always be better.

(Working Paper 4)

These comments remind me of a conversation I engaged in with the *Tasmanian Principals Association Professional Learning Group (2004)*. Their role was to develop a professional learning framework for school leaders. I engaged with this group as both participant and researcher. The words of Tim, a Principal Leader in curriculum development, seem to resonate with those of Matthew. Tim's role involves him in working closely with principals, schools and their communities. The group was keen to examine the context of the work of principals before contemplating what their professional learning needs might be. Tim shared his observations indicating the complex nature of the role of principal.

I have yet to go into a school and meet a principal who is not working to do the very best for kids. You are, we are, they are often very lonely as leaders. What are their feelings, hopes, desires and frustrations?

They are managing the agenda, but they see its size as a challenge. Some of the agenda contains leaps into the unknown. We're moving from managing to leading and engaging with communities. The notion of instructional leadership means moving beyond our own school and leading learning in pedagogy, assessment and thinking. Building school capacity through professional learning is a huge focus.

Allied to that is the concern over the quality and quantity of applicants for senior positions. There is also the challenge of building professional learning teams whilst also managing the performance of others. Most principals will say this is the hardest part of their role.

Inclusive education is also a difficult issue, with debate around what this actually means. Health and well-being is also a big issue, especially in relation to principals of small schools.

It is a huge challenge for principals to build the notion of leadership capacity in their schools whilst trying to keep themselves informed of the wider agenda. The sheer size of the terrain is problematical.

(Working Paper 11)

Tim's comments also underscore some of the issues facing today's principals.

My experiences in grappling with calls for change to the campus structures of my school at River View, as outlined in *For Better or for Worse*, echo in my ear as I ponder the complexity of change. You may remember from the story that staff, particularly senior staff, were very supportive of a change that might see, for example, early childhood classes located on one campus and upper primary classes based at the other campus. The arrangement at that time had pre-school to Grade 6 classes at each campus. My problem with making a change was that parents didn't want it even though there were strong educational arguments to support such a change. These arguments included, for example, a more highly focussed use of age appropriate resources at each campus as opposed to spreading them across both campuses. Should the educational merits of change have outweighed community concerns? As principal, I also had reservations about embarking on a journey of change around our campus structures when we were already working as a project school on the development of a new curriculum. The interconnectedness of relationships was very apparent to me on this issue.

Just as Tim expounded the complex, uncertain, unpredictable and problematic terrain of schooling, contemporary authors on leadership and education seem to value exploring metaphors from the science of complexity theory for understanding what kinds of leadership might be best for today's children in their schools (Morrison, 2002; Fullan, 2001). For example, these metaphors encompass particular principles of complexity such as the way one organism, environment or view of the world can be organic, non-linear and holistic or where relationships may demonstrate interconnectedness. Complexity theory offers prismatic views of the world that is more embracing of change than one based on the rationalistic and ordered realm of the physical sciences. Complexity theory embraces change, uncertainty, openness and unpredictability and came forth early in the twentieth century with the emergence of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, quantum physics and theories of relativity (Morrison, 2002, pp 5-9; Fullan, 2001, p. 70).

Tim's actual experiences, supported by Morrison and other scholars' growing understanding of uncertainty helps me see the aligning of the theoretical with a kind of praxis. I come to understand better the difficulty and the paradoxical, the complexity, when unforeseen circumstances confront school principals in their

daily work. There are times when the role demands that we make important, immediate yet uncertain decisions without the luxury of time and space for deliberation or reflection. The following story, based on my diary notes recorded on Tuesday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, illustrate this point. As I said earlier, I want you, as the reader to try to experience being a principal, as though you are spending some time in my shoes. Later I will release you, I hope, from the pain of this. This is how I spoke and acted then. I might do things differently now with the benefit of the hindsight that my thesis journey offers.

### Thinking on Your Feet

My deputy principal was absent for the day, so I was looking after our smaller campus that has just under one hundred and fifty students from pre-school to Grade 6. I was sitting in the staffroom talking to a visiting sports coach who was to take some students for a skills session after lunch. John, a Grade 6 student, presented me with a 'green card' signifying a teacher needed assistance with one of John's classmates. On arrival at the classroom the supply teacher, Mr Cox (who was filling in for the regular teacher), said that his student, Paul was being unco-operative and had run out of the classroom when he saw the green card being carried to my office. After hearing this, I went outside to find Paul pacing about angrily. I made the judgement that some cool down time was needed before I attempted to talk to him. I told him to come to my office when he was ready to talk.

After twenty minutes, he hadn't arrived at my office so I went outside to investigate. I found him outside an exit door and asked if he was ready to talk. He said bluntly that he wasn't going to talk to me.

I said to him that things would start getting a little more serious if he refuses to talk about why he had to leave the classroom.

He replied that he was going to play soccer. It seemed that we still weren't going to have much of a conversation. I reminded him of what I had just said and advised him to be at my office in two minutes or things would be very serious.

I allowed him ten minutes, again, but he didn't arrive so I decided to ring home. The phone line was busy so I made a home visit. Paul lived just across the road from the school. I asked the mum to collect him from the playground (it was lunchtime) and bring him to school the next day. We could discuss the

day's events at that time. The Mum agreed to do so but made some negative comments about the teacher, Mr Cox. The Mum had somehow heard that the teacher was picking on her son. I didn't take issue with those comments as my focus was on her removing Paul from the playground as soon as possible.

My final words to the mum as I walked away from her in the playground were "I'll leave him in your care." I noticed that her son was in a remote area of the playground with a group of classmates.

Thinking that the issue had been resolved for the moment, I returned to the office area. A few minutes later, I heard sounds of students in the corridor asking people in the staffroom of my whereabouts. I looked outside my office to see Paul and his mum leading a delegation of students. The students were making offensive comments about the teacher within earshot of the staffroom.

My immediate reaction, based simply on instinct, was to very assertively order those students outside and invite the mum into my office. On the way outside, the students chanted, "Strike! Strike!"

My stomach started to churn as I resisted strangling the parent as she entered my office. I then expressed my disappointment to the mother at the way she had undermined the authority of the teacher and the school by leading students to the office in that particular way. She said that students have rights too. She claimed that the teacher was picking on her child and other classmates as well.

I agreed with her that students do have rights but I said, "Right now I'm concerned with your child's behaviour and what just happened in the corridor." I told the mother to bring her child to school at 9:15am the next day when we would discuss the consequences of her child's actions. (Aside: I've just noticed that as my emotions rise in retelling this story, my references to 'the mum' change to the slightly less endearing term of 'the mother' – perhaps indicative of my emotions at the time of this incident!). I informed her that I would be talking with the other students about their behaviour during the afternoon. She agreed to my request whilst maintaining her negative stance towards the teacher and defending the behaviour of her child.

Having temporarily dealt with the offending student and his mother, I then went outside (it was still lunchtime) to check on the climate of the playground. I knew I needed to quickly address the poor behaviour of the offending students but was unsure of how and when to do so. I was disturbed at what I saw in the playground. The six or so students who had chanted "Strike!

Strike!" in the corridor were running around the playground still chanting those words. Other students seemed unsure of what was happening.

I decided that it was inappropriate to try and address this situation so publicly and with so much distance between me and the students (the playground is set in five acres of paved, grassed and forested areas).

I went back to my office and pondered what to do next! At that moment, I did not feel in control of the situation. I was genuinely concerned that I might lose control over the offending students and that they may take other students with them.

I made the decision to tell the teacher concerned what had been going on over lunchtime. I wanted the teacher to know that he had my full support. I knew him well. I didn't want him to return to the class until I had spoken to his students, particularly those engaged in making derogatory comments about him and making threats to strike.

After hearing the bell ring to end lunchtime, I walked around to the entrance of the classroom of the offending students. Using a fairly neutral voice, I directed all students in this class (including the offending students) to enter the classroom. They followed my direction and sat down quietly, with me positioned at the front of the classroom. I had held genuine doubts concerning the likelihood of the students returning to their room if the supply teacher had been the person calling them back to class.

I was feeling relieved that the students were there in front of me and ready to listen. I hadn't prepared or thought about what I would say to them. However, my gut feeling told me to be conciliatory, yet assertive. I knew that I needed to help restore the authority of the teacher who was on this class for the day.

My talk to the students went something like this:

"Thank you for the way you've returned to class. I sense that this is the beginning of a really positive afternoon for us all. I'm aware that you might have had a pretty tough morning. I'm a little concerned about that because I know some people have been failing to follow the one rule all students must follow - do what the teacher says. Our classrooms can't work successfully if that doesn't happen. You mightn't always think something is fair. It might not be, but you have to accept it. There are plenty of opportunities in this school to talk about things that bother us. I have to say that I am very disappointed with the way the boys who came to my office at lunchtime behaved. We need to talk about what happened. Here's your chance."

Three or four students then put their hands up and detailed several grievances they had concerning Mr Cox, their teacher for the day. To me, each of these grievances flowed from their failure to follow instructions given by the teacher. I made that point with the students and explained that no-one is perfect and we all have to accept things that we mightn't necessarily like or think is fair.

I went on to say the following:

"I'm willing to put that behind us and have a good afternoon. Mr Roberts, the Regional Sports Coach, is available to take a skills session with you at two o'clock. I need to be sure you can all treat him with respect and also treat Mr Cox with the same respect when he returns as your teacher for the rest of the day. Hands up those who think they can? Those who can't treat Mr Roberts and Mr Cox with respect can come and work with me."

All students eventually put their hands up - some more quickly than others. I then said they were not to let me down. I informed the class that I was going to get Mr Cox (their teacher for the day) and that they could talk quietly until I returned with him.

I then informed Mr Cox that I expected students to do as he asked. I also said that it might be a good idea to finish off the day with a game after Mr Roberts is finished with the sports skills session.

(Working Paper 2)

Whilst my handling of the situation may have been far from perfect, I did my best with the circumstances that confronted me. I drew on my gut feelings, knowledge and experience to get me through. This is the foundation of my second proposition in this program of study.

### **Proposition II - Leaders are reflective and self-aware.**

By putting forward this proposition I am not inferring justification of my actions in *Thinking on Your Feet*. Hurley's (2003) report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference and its attention to intellect poses an interesting question in relation to this proposition.

Intellect - School principals, of all leaders, value higher order thinking, deep knowledge and deep understanding. They know that these intellectual skills are essential for themselves, their staff and their

students. It is at the core of their job. How else can they be sure that the decisions they make are correct, and possibly even more importantly, how else will they not be too sure about their decisions?  
(p. 33)

For me, the point of the *Thinking on Your Feet* story was that I and others often draw on learning from past experiences for guidance in difficult situations. As Hurley implies, we may not always be convinced that we have taken the right path. I am sensing that a little uncertainty may not be a bad thing. Might this cause enough angst to help me be more reflective and questioning of my actions and perhaps exercise better leadership when in similar circumstances again?

I asked the Rocky Coast principals to describe the impact of self-reflection and self-awareness on their leadership.

Eve - I'm not too good on the bigger picture vision stuff. I keep things on the straight and narrow, but I've got a long way to go. You know when things are going down. If I know I've really gone too far, I'll apologise. I know each night I unpack my day - that's my reflection time. I know when I'm tired and niggly. I think I'm getting to understand *me* a bit better. That's when I take myself for a walk.

Sharon - I'm an introvert and I find it very difficult to talk in large groups. David (my former principal) once said many principals are introverts and he had to force himself to talk at assemblies.

Wayne - Isolation, living away from community, really enhances one's self-awareness. Much broken sleep, but sometimes I make my best decisions at 3am.

(Working Paper 4)

To understand the value of sleeplessness, taking walks and getting to know the self, I draw from Senge (1992) who asserts that we manage complexity through the subconscious. This, he believes, is implicit in the exercise of personal mastery which he sees as the "spiritual foundation" of a learning organisation. He explains personal mastery as

the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focussing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively. (p. 7)

To Senge, the higher the rapport between an individual's normal awareness and the subconscious, the higher the level of personal mastery. Senge explains that complex tasks are not addressed simply through our normal awareness and thinking. As we learn, the skills acquired over time become controlled more by the subconscious. He contrasts the conscious attention required to learn the complex process of driving a car with the less conscious attention an experienced driver requires to perform the same task (pp. 162-163).

In some respects, I was on 'auto pilot' in dealing with the situation detailed in *Thinking on Your Feet*. Senge says that people with high levels of personal mastery are less concerned with process and focus their attention on the preferred result. He believes this skill is important because the subconscious has greater clarity of focus. Without it, the subconscious finds it difficult to prioritise (pp. 164-165). I am sensing that my management of the situation was more concerned with addressing each scenario before me rather than seeking the preferred result that Senge associates with personal mastery. The circumstances were changing and I was reacting to them in different ways – by rebuking the parent and the children in the corridor on the one hand and through reconciliation with the children when they were back in the classroom on the other.

I find Senge's thoughts interesting as I ponder over the way I chose to speak to the offending students in such a conciliatory way once they were back in the classroom. My reflection tells me that my priority was on rebuilding a sense of stability and order. An authoritarian rebuke may have made things worse, as they did in the corridor when I pointed to the door and ordered the children outside. I suspect my subconscious was guarding against me making the same mistake again. As US researcher Holly Genzen says in her paper *An Exciting New Era in Educational Leadership*, principals who lack the capacity to plan, consider the implications of a plan, and then reflect on what worked or did not work are condemned to making poor decisions (2000, p. 18).

Was I also learning something important about Senge's insistence on making clear choices and being committed to the truth? I am seeing now that being

honest about my current reality and having a genuine desire for an outcome that has a deep sense of rightness may be a key to tapping the full potential of my subconscious. I certainly hope that I am developing the characteristics that Senge associates with personal mastery (p. 165-166).

Looking back on *Thinking on Your Feet*, the story seems to encapsulate what Cherkasova (2004) portrays as beliefs, motives, fears, strategies and blind spots (as cited in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 203). To Cherkasova, philosophy involves an uncompromising preparedness to expose the boundaries of one's thinking and language and discover the limitations of one's discourse. It requires the philosopher to navigate a way through the world of possibilities and impossibilities (as cited in Carel & Gamez, 2004, p. 204). Any serious study of the human condition must involve an examination of its own limits. That is the intent of my first foray into sideshadowing as I inquire into, more deeply, my first two propositions on leadership.

### **The First Sideshadow**

Two propositions about leadership have arisen so far: leaders reach out to others, especially the marginalised; and leaders are reflective and self-aware.

I want to now unpack some fantastic literature in a quest to go beyond the limits of my thinking and experience to allow insights and possibilities about these propositions. I will use this literature as a fantastic way of understanding myself, others, and the world. I will need to open my mind to the new sciences of the twentieth century and imagine a world full of possibilities that I might never have known...

I begin with David Bohm, one of the most influential theoretical physicists of his generation. I am attracted to Bohm and his fantastic literature because of the way he challenged conventional thinking about quantum theory and led his colleague scientists to re-examine their theories and methodologies. I want to see if his ideas can help me see possibilities for leadership that I might not otherwise consider. In his book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980), Bohm submits that society, as a whole, comprises separate nations and diverse religious, political, economic and racial groups. Various interests are exploiting man's natural environment and breaking it up into a number of different allotments.

Particular personal characteristics, desires and loyalties classify each individual human being like a set of compartments. Fragmentation is widespread across society and in each individual. It is taking us on a path towards confusion of the mind that creates a never-ending series of problems which we are unable to solve.

Bohm continues expanding on his concerns regarding the fragmentation of society, suggesting that this way of life has brought with it pollution, overpopulation, and global political and economic disorder. Our world is not a place that we can be justly proud of. Man's ability to separate himself from his environment and extend the process of division has resulted in largely negative and destructive outcomes. The process of division is a way of thinking about things and serves the more technical and practical applications (such as dividing up an area of land into several sections for cropping). This approach, according to Bohm, when applied to man's concept of himself and the world in which he lives, reveals a fragmentary worldview. Man seems to conveniently forget that it is his mode of thinking that has brought such a view of the world into existence.

Despite this, Bohm feels that man has always sought wholeness in a mental, physical, social and individual sense. The word *health* has its origin in the Anglo-Saxon word *hale* meaning whole. In other words, to be healthy is to be whole. Similarly, the English word *holy* has the same root as whole. To Bohm, man has always sensed that wholeness, or integrity, is the foundation of a life worth living.

Bohm says that the question of why fragmentation has emerged as such a force in our lives is one that requires our due consideration. Bohm holds that fragmentation occurs according to our almost universal habit of seeing the content of our thought as reality in the field of scientific research and also in a more general context. This point seems particularly relevant to my propositions on leadership. Are these propositions so far, only a fragmented reflection of the way I see the world? Because differences and distinctions make up our thinking, Bohm says we tend to view the world in this way (pp. 1-3). Wholeness is what is real, he says.

In other words, it is just because reality is whole that man, with his fragmentary approach, will inevitably be answered with a correspondingly fragmentary response. So what is needed is for man

to give attention to his habit of fragmentary thought, to be aware of it, and thus bring it to an end. Man's approach to reality may then be whole, and so the response will be whole. (p. 7)

Here, Bohm stresses the importance of man's awareness of his own thoughts as insights rather than as a "true copy of reality as it is." Our different ways of thinking are different ways of looking at a particular reality (pp. 7-8). Should I probe my propositions on leadership in such ways, I might come up with more profound insights about what the living experience of leading is like.

In the early stages of civilization, says Bohm, man had a more holistic view of the world. In the East, such views remain, particularly in regard to the way religion and philosophy advocate wholeness and advise on the folly of a fragmented worldview. Bohm ponders why the West does not adopt Eastern approaches to wholeness that includes, for example, the process of meditation conducive to a quiet and ordered state of the mind?

To examine this question, Bohm points to the difference between Western and Eastern notions of measure. In the West, from the times of the Ancient Greeks, to keep everything in its proper measure was fundamental to the good life, which is consistent with the ancient notion of virtue. When something goes beyond the right measure, we deem it to be out of harmony. Fragmentation and loss of integrity are the likely outcomes of this action. As time went on, according to Bohm, the notion of measure and its technical aspect underwent a gradual change. Man began to learn notions of measure through mechanical images from their elders. With this approach came a loss of the inner feeling of measure and its sense of proper proportions (pp. 19-22).

In the light of Bohm's thinking on measure, I examine the proposition concerning the need for leaders to reach out to others, especially the marginalised, from the perspective of measure and the ancient notion of virtue. By this I mean that those living in circumstances that are beyond the right measure are at the margins of our society. Those who are not at the margins of our society have a duty to restore things to their proper measure. I do not infer here that those who are not at the margins are without virtue.

I will now make my first excursion into the notion of virtue. As I mentioned earlier in the Introduction, I discovered volumes of “fantastic literature” in the living room of my parents’ home that had been there since I was a child. My Uncle Ted had given these books, called *Great Books of the Western World*, to my parents four decades ago. They had been more of an ornament than a reference. It was when I asked my sister if she knew of any good books on the notion of virtue that she pointed me towards them.

This collection of books edited by Robert Maynard Hutchins, provide me with a wonderful reference to the original works of the great philosophers as well as commentary on their writing by Hutchins. I see these books as fantastic in a similar way to how Cherkasova saw Borge’s story *Funes, His Memory* in my earlier description of the central character Ireneo Funes and the way his mind would see every grape squashed into the glasses of wine complete with all the stalks and offshoots of the vineyard. Just as this story helps Cherkasova reflect on the boundaries of human awareness, Hutchins and the fantastic literature of the great philosophers helps me extend the boundaries of my thinking in relation to leadership and the propositions emerging from my stories. I use them to prospect for possibilities that I might not otherwise contemplate.

My summarising here comes from trying to make sense of ancient notions in contemporary times as a man who associates duty, obligation and virtue with his job. My Catholic faith draws me towards religious as well as ancient philosophies to assist me in my quest for understanding about leadership.

Hutchins refers to John Locke and his text essay on *Human Understanding* (1690) where Locke inquires into man’s sense of duty and force of obligation. To Locke, man’s sense of duty and force of obligation flows from the law of God, the law of state or through a sense of obligation to another person. Accordingly, the religious man has duty to God whilst the citizen has duty to the state. Locke holds that these duties do not entirely rest with the superior power of God or state. Expediency rules those whose sense of duty is motivated by fear of punishment alone. Those who exercise duty through conscience act with a sense of moral authority (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 358). This line of thinking aligns with the ideas of the ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and Socrates (as I will show later), particularly in the fifth of the sideshadows that has a focus on the notion of

“the good”. To Locke, it is the honest or just man who acknowledges such obligations beyond his duty to uphold the law of the state or God. Hutchins features Locke’s observation of the ancient view that man’s obligation to act in a certain way towards his fellow man is immersed in “virtue, the highest perfection of human nature” (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 358).

If I accept the virtuous nature and desirability of helping my fellow man as a virtue of leadership, on what grounds do I decide to act, or not act, to assist another? Should the virtue of leaders require self-reflection and self-awareness?

Way before Locke, Thomas Aquinas (1222-1274) wrote in *Summa Theologica*, about the power of reflection in relation to self-understanding.

Hence that by which the light sees is the likeness of the visible thing; and the likeness of the thing understood, that is, the intelligible species, is the form by which the intellect understands. But since the intellect is turned back, (reflectitur) upon itself, by the same reflection it understands both its own act of understanding and the species by which it understands. Thus the intelligible species is that which is understood secondarily, but that which is primarily understood is the thing, of which the intelligible species is the likeness.

This also appears from the opinion of the ancient philosophers, who said that "like is known by like." For they said that the soul knows the earth outside itself by the earth within itself; and so of the rest. (1952, p. 454)

Here, Aquinas indicates to me that, through the virtuous act of reflection, man comes to know not only himself better, but himself in relation to his fellow man.

This has been my first experiment in sideshadowing which helps me to create a hinge in my understanding. The stories I have told in this chapter, the authors I’ve selected to assist my interpretation of my propositions on leadership, and the real people I have quoted seem somehow hinged by the sideshadows that have provided insight into the place of self-awareness and concern for others in leadership.

Out of the sideshadows, the possibilities for experimenting with different ways of thinking lead me from one insight to the next. I step here from insight into self-

awareness and concern for others to my second insight into leadership: virtue, courage and vision.

## CHAPTER 2

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### THE SECOND INSIGHT: VIRTUE, COURAGE AND VISION

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Let me return to Morrison's (2002) words on complexity theory to investigate the question of leadership in relation to self-awareness and concern for others emerging from the previous chapter. As I mentioned earlier, complexity theory offers prismatic views of the world embracing change, uncertainty, openness and unpredictability. This line of inquiry may provide further insight into leadership and the place of virtue, courage and vision in this endeavour. Morrison refers to several studies in explaining complexity theory. Most of these studies examine phenomena as complex, adaptive systems comprised of many interacting components. Holistically, these components cause new elements to develop and new phenomena, new structures and new codes of behaviour to form. Each element in the system influences the other and from this interaction, new forms develop whose nature and structure is not predictable. The linear causes and effects of the Newtonian Universe are not possible. To Morrison, our challenge is to understand the changing nature of ever-developing forms. He illustrates this view by referring to the impact of wind on sand in a desert and the resulting change to the landscape that, in turn, causes new wind patterns to appear. Similarly, he sees a seemingly minor incident in the classroom as having the potential to escalate into a major problem involving parents, school governors and even result in legal proceedings (pp. 9-13).

When I read Morrison's insights into complexity theory, they reminded me of a 'seemingly minor' situation that did, in fact, result in the early stages of legal proceedings involving the appointment of a teacher to a position within my school that was not her preferred choice. She was unhappy with the decision. I recount the circumstances surrounding this situation in the following story. I am interested to probe how my actions relate to the insight emerging from *The First Sideshadow* - that leadership involves self-awareness and concern for others.

## Biting the Bullet

Rita had effectively taught the same early childhood grade for several years. However, in recent years parents had expressed their concerns that they did not feel welcome in this teacher's classroom. Parents were reluctant to enlarge on these concerns, other than to say things such as "the door is always shut," and that "we don't feel very welcome in there." Through annual school review processes, Rita was aware of these comments. Each year, the issue seemed to grow in stature. It wasn't going away.

As principal, I had engaged in informal discussions with Rita in order to understand the situation from both points of view. I could not put my finger on the exact nature of the problem, other than to sense that there was something about the way the teacher operated that was not very welcoming. I based this judgement on the fact that I was hearing a consistent message from various parents over three different years. I formally tabled these concerns with the teacher halfway through my third year at this school. I did my best to be specific in illustrating the nature of the complaints I had received. I felt we were reaching a stage where parents would become more vocal if I did not address their concerns.

Towards the end of the school year, when I was still hearing the same complaints, I made the decision to move Rita from her current teaching responsibility to another within the same area of her teaching experience and expertise. I did this because I could foresee a situation occurring where the teacher would most likely be the subject of a substantial parent protest if again appointed to the same position. Rita was not accepting of the decision. She opted to involve the teacher union in a claim of maladministration against me. Much to my disbelief, the claim eventually ended up in the hands of the Director of Public Prosecutions, who took no action.

(Working Paper 2)

According to Nel Noddings (1998) in her article *Ethics and the Imagination*, when there is disagreement between reasonable people on an important issue, there is the opportunity to share stories on both sides of the ledger. Noddings speaks of the importance of critical thinking, "to reach out towards the living other with feeling that responds to the other's condition" (p. 161).

Former US President Bill Clinton affirms the importance of leaders “reaching out to the living other” in his open letters to Israeli and Palestinian citizens that can be found at <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/meast/0119/mideast.03/> on “CNN.com,” (2001). He wrote these letters after serious outbreaks of violence in the Middle East had further stalled peace talks between Arab and Israeli leaders. Clinton had hoped to end his term of office with a Middle East peace agreement, but the Arabs and Israelis could not reach agreement in time.

“...now more than ever is the time for courageous leadership.”  
Palestinians must recognise, he wrote, that “courage is not only ...measured in struggle. It is measured in the ability to seize historic opportunities.” (“CNN.com,” 2001, p. 2)

Clinton associates courage with reaching out to others. How well did I, in fact, reach out to Rita so that I fully understood “both sides of the ledger?”

I made the decision to remove Rita from this class in the full knowledge that it might cause me grief. To me, the soft option was to do nothing and hope the problem would go away. I did not think this was likely. The alternative, as I saw it, was to risk a groundswell of parent discontent with the teacher that may have secured the same result, but in even less desirable circumstances. I still ponder, however, whether I may have been more concerned with my own political survival as a leader than someone concerned with finding the best resolution to a difficult problem. Maybe my understanding of my treatment of Rita may deepen during this study. I did not predict, however, that this situation would end up in the hands of legal authorities! Then again, as Morrison says, “predictability does not exist” (2002, p. 13). Of course, this story is *my* interpretation of events. I know Rita has a different interpretation.

This experience leads me to raise my third proposition to be scrutinised in this program of study.

### **Proposition III - Leaders are courageous and take risks.**

I see the need to point out here that this proposition does not imply justification or vilification of my treatment of Rita. My intention is to illustrate the uncertainty of

leadership as well as the risks and courage that go with good and bad decision-making. Hurley (2003) refers to courage and risk-taking in his conference report.

The edge - In working for change leaders may also need to have the courage to take others to the edge - and push. Working to improve the learning outcomes of students means that school principals are unavoidably involved with change and reform and the risks and responsibilities associated with both. (p. 33)

As I have indicated, I always knew there was a risk to my relationship with Rita and possibly others if I was to change Rita's teaching role. I sensed I would be taking her to "the edge" if I did so. In my reflection on this story, I now feel more attentive to issues around *how* I make decisions. Six years after removing Rita from her early childhood class, I can see more clearly that I failed to provide Rita with the opportunity to adequately share her story with me. I think the fall-out from removing Rita from her early childhood class was more to do with how I made the decision than the decision itself. I think I need to take a closer look at issues such as 'means and ends' at some point in this study. As Morrison and others have indicated, leadership is complex. Decisions are not always black or white. Journalist and author Polly Labarre (2000) affirms this understanding in her article *Do You Have the Will to Lead?* She interviews philosopher Peter Koestenbaum, relating his belief that no-one has ever taken a significant decision without a journey through anxiety, uncertainty and guilt. Labarre maintains this is what transformation is about. It involves assuming control over the patterns that govern our minds – our view of the world and what is possible. Labarre tells how, to Koestenbaum, this is the "zone of fundamental change, strength, and energy – and the true meaning of courage" (as cited in Labarre, 2000, p. 222).

The Rocky Coast principals *Prue* and *Eve* consider this proposition on courage and risk-taking in the context of their school settings. They responded to a question on the influence of moral and ethical practices on their leadership.

Prue - I've become a little bit hardened about letting conflict come to the surface. I used to avoid it and that was a big mistake. Eventually, I had to confront it at this school when it was too big and too late. I've done it better this year, saying on one day to the staff member in question "If there is any problem you have, please see me."

Eve - I had a parent volunteer at my school who was bullying a teacher. I met with the bully and he was quite aggressive, resulting in him resigning from the program he was helping out with. I went through a lot of anger about the way he was intimidating the teacher. I made a decision to tackle him. I tend to be more up front with things. I'm a big equity person and I really felt this guy was a bully and this poor teacher was just doing her job.

(Working Paper 4)

It appears that I am not the only principal confronted with difficult situations! Ainscow (1999) emphasises the importance of educative leadership that recognises the dependence of school improvement on the growth and development of its people. For schools to become more inclusive, he says courageous leadership is required. This involves being open to challenge through discussion and debates and support of our colleagues (p. 178-179).

Just as Eve had a challenge to address an undesirable situation in her school in regard to the bullying of one of her teachers, the following story might well illuminate a different kind of challenge requiring courage in leadership. The story concerns another dilemma I faced in my role as principal at River View Primary.

### Facing the Music

I was very keen to extend the range of our specialist programs for students. Programs of this kind in Tasmania traditionally comprise physical education and music. We had some very talented classroom teachers on staff whose talents went well beyond these specialist areas. Two of them were practising visual artists. I was keen for all students in the school to be more widely exposed to the arts. However, our school funds only stretched so far. An idea I had was to provide students with a combined offering of music and visual arts over the year. This would mean reducing the level of music provision to accommodate the visual arts. To ensure there would be no additional cost to the school, this arrangement would also mean employing Bob, our music teacher, for fewer hours each week. Bob was a temporary employee for the hours in question. In previous discussions with Bob, I had indicated my desire to give students greater exposure to other areas of the arts. For this reason, I had made no guarantees to him about maintaining his

current teaching load in music. However, I knew I would need to have further discussions with Bob if we were to reduce his load in order to provide a visual arts program for students.

I consulted senior staff to get their perspective on this issue. They saw the reduced teaching load for Bob as the main problem with this initiative. They also raised difficulties with timetabling as an issue. I let senior staff know that I had already held discussions with Bob and more would follow. Senior staff advised that teaching staff would need to support the proposal for it to go ahead. They suggested I sell the idea to staff on the basis that the visual arts would provide a new learning opportunity for students and that music would continue, but on a reduced basis.

In mid-November, I met with Bob to let him know I was seriously considering the option to provide students with a visual arts program as well as music. His response was to emphasise the importance of providing a music program for five days per week. We talked over related issues and I believe Bob walked away with an understanding that we would be providing a visual arts program as well as music in the following year if staff supported this arrangement. He had made it clear that he didn't like this idea but would be accepting of any decision made. I held further discussions with Bob in early December to keep him informed of our progress.

I published information concerning the proposal in staff notes on December 10<sup>th</sup>, as part of an update on school plans for the next year. Staff approved the proposal at the staff meeting held later that day. It proved to be a meeting that challenged my capacity to articulate and justify what I believed in. After the meeting, I took the time to reflect on what had transpired by recording the following notes in my diary on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002:

Last night's staff meeting focussed on a proposal to extend our Arts program by offering visual arts in 2002. The implications of this proposal are that we will lose some of our music provision. This means Bob (our music teacher) will teach for three days instead of four. In conversations dating back several months, Bob voiced his strong opposition to this proposal. At some point, I felt staff needed to have some input into the decision.

The questions I had to ask myself were:

How can I sell a program (visual arts) to staff that I believed made things better for students but worse for one of their colleagues (Bob)?

How can I approach this task honestly and openly whilst maintaining Bob's dignity?

After further discussions on a personal level with Bob, as well as seeking counsel on this issue from senior staff, I decided to inform staff of this proposal via staff notes, inviting feedback to any member of senior staff (Aside: On reflection, I think I was avoiding potential conflict with staff on this issue by simply tabling the proposal on staff notes). On the advice from Sara, a member of senior staff, I also tabled the proposal for discussion at staff meeting last night. Sara's feeling was that an open discussion would remove any hint of improper process and be the healthiest way forward for all concerned. Bob would be present at the meeting.

At the meeting, I tabled the proposal and asked staff if they would like to discuss any related issues.

Five teachers expressed some concern about reducing Bob's teaching load in music. I got the feeling that most people were happy for the proposal to go ahead but were conscious of not diminishing Bob in any way. I felt very strongly that, unless there was an overwhelming revolt, I would resolve that the proposal go through. My stated reasons were that it was a great opportunity for our students to have formal exposure to the visual arts as well as music.

I had taken the time before the meeting to think through what I would say if staff challenged me. I'm glad I had done so because my presence of mind was helpful in dealing with the issues raised. It was resolved after some discussion that we approve the proposal presented to staff. My reflections on this issue include the importance of

- clarity on the reasons for change and honesty with self about the integrity of those reasons;
- early conversations with the person who is likely to be involved in change;

- involvement of staff in the decision-making process, as long as their involvement doesn't compromise the dignity of an individual;
- a 'game plan' - taking the time to think about what might be said or not said in public discussions relating to the issue; and
- openness to the counsel of others.

Three years on, both our visual arts and music programs are strengths of the school.

(Working Paper 2)

Ainscow (1999), Greene (1990) and Professor Stephen Heppell (2003), who is a Director at Anglia Polytechnic University, help me find meaning from my diary reflections in relation to *Facing the Music*. Ainscow counsels me to be aware that whatever we do includes all of us (p. 218). How true! In many ways, it was I who was 'facing the music' as I tried to convince staff that the proposal to change our specialist programs and reduce our music teacher's teaching load was a good thing to do. Not only did I risk diminishing the standing of our music teacher, but I also risked diminishing my own reputation as a leader if I handled the situation poorly. Maxine Greene (1990) in *The Passion of the Possible: Choice Multiplicity and Commitment* adds further insight into this experience. She asserts that it is only when persons experience themselves as taking risks and embarking on new beginnings that the predictable gives way to the possible. Greene propounds that each of us must seek understanding and experience of ourselves in an open-ended quest, the destination of which is uncertain. We must realise that there is always more to grasp and determine, but know that what we see from our vantage point in the world is just a perspective. That being so, we need to be receptive to new possibilities of new developments in ourselves and the world in which we live. For Greene, this requires a certain kind of care, to be attentive to, and concerned for, others (p. 69).

I believe I did my best in relation to our music teacher. I hope that I was connecting with something in myself that would have honoured the wisdom of Ainscow and Greene. Heppell, in his presentation *Tomorrow's school – what we should be doing for tomorrow TODAY* to the 2003 ICT E-Learning Showcase Conference in Hobart (Working Paper 12) said that the mindset we need to take

on board as leaders is “don’t waste anybody!” People are an incredibly important natural resource - particularly children. Heppell wants us to re-examine everything we do because he believes much of what we do is born from convenience. He asks us to question what we do, why we do it and whether we can do it better.

I recall Heppell because his questions seem so relevant to my reflections on *Facing the Music* and *Biting the Bullet*. These stories also involved contentious human resource issues that had potential to cause me, and others, a great deal of angst. I sometimes ask myself, “Why do I do these things? Wouldn’t life be easier if I stuck with the *status quo*?” Perhaps the *status quo*, which *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1992, p. 1134) describes as “the existing state of affairs,” is not something leaders should accept if they can see potential for things to be different and better.

Heppell is somewhat reassuring. Schools cannot afford to waste anybody. People, particularly our children, are too precious a resource to neglect. As we pursue better things for our students, we should not easily dismiss pain that others might suffer in this pursuit. I think leaders are obliged to also consider whether ‘the gain justifies the pain.’ The ‘people issues’ seem undeniably ever present in leadership.

Managing conflict between staff is one of the more difficult issues I face as a leader. Judging the point at which intervention should take place is never easy. Deciding how I might intervene is another problem. The advice of more experienced principals during my early years of school leadership was to intervene when the well-being of the school was at risk. I’ve tried to adopt this counsel during my time as a school leader but have been less clear on how to intervene.

My next story illustrates the value of tapping into the wisdom of colleagues on tough issues! This one is about conflict between staff. Noddings (1998, p. 161) asks us to understand the position of others during difficult times. This kind of appeal to understand the stories of others, underpins the process for conflict resolution that takes place in this story.

## I Don't Speak to Her

In 1998, the relationship between Jean and Nancy, two key members of our administrative staff, had broken down to the extent that their behaviour towards each other was hurting the well-being of the school. They were no longer on speaking terms. I had no choice but to intervene. The challenge for me was to make things better rather than worse. I wasn't sure how to go about this task. I expressed my concerns to a principal colleague who said that he knew a process for managing conflict that might be helpful. It would involve me chairing a mediation meeting between the conflicting parties and rigidly following a process for mediation that he had become familiar with.

In a later phone call to my colleague, I recorded this process for mediation in my diary notes of May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998.

1. Outline the purpose of the meeting.
2. Ask each person, in turn, to describe:
  - a) the problem from his / her point of view;
  - b) how he / she would like things to be; and
  - c) how we can ensure that our hopes for the future become a reality.
3. Future Orientation - re-state to the conflicting parties what they have said they will do to ensure things get better.
4. Seek a commitment from both parties to do what is required to make things better.
5. Conclude the meeting by asking them to shake hands.

After describing the process to me, my colleague said that, if things go well, the conflicting parties usually hug each other at the end of the meeting.

I called a meeting with Jean and Nancy and followed the process as described. In outlining the purpose of the meeting, I said that we would be following a process that had helped others deal with their problems and asked them for their understanding if proceedings seemed a little formal. The outcome of the meeting was incredibly successful. My jaw dropped when Jean and Nancy hugged each other at its conclusion, each of them making commitments to each other about trying to make things better.

(Working Paper 2)

Whilst I have reservations with the formality and the seemingly contrived nature of the process, it ensures both parties have the opportunity to listen to each other. To their credit, Jean and Nancy grasped this opportunity.

*I Don't Speak to Her* makes clear, for me, the importance of collegial support in school leadership. I honestly do not know how I could have managed the situation without the support of my fellow principal. This story also lends support to what Senge (1992) describes as the role that mental models play, particularly in conflict situations. Senge asserts that once we are able to see our own assumptions more clearly, we enhance our capacity to move a conversation forward more productively. He believes that the most productive learning occurs when we achieve a balance between advocacy and inquiry. When achieved, the goal is not to find the most worthwhile argument, but to find the best one. To Senge, we are each other's greatest ally in the quest for skills in reflection (pp. 195-202). I believe the process for conflict resolution that my colleague principal gave me provided a balance between advocacy of the people involved and inquiry into the issues surrounding the conflict, finding a positive way forward.

In the stories I have told so far, I can discern issues of performance management processes in the administration of a school. In *Biting the Bullet*, Rita was the subject of ongoing parent complaints regarding the operation of her early childhood class. The music teacher in *Facing the Music* was unhappy at the prospect of having his hours reduced so that students could also benefit from exposure to a visual arts program. The two administrative staff in *I Don't Speak to Her* were in combat with each other and failing to communicate with each other. Perhaps regular performance feedback from me to some of the main players outlined in these experiences may have alleviated some of the difficulties faced. Remember the words of Matthew, the Rocky Coast Cluster Principal, "Honest feedback systems and trusting relationships are the best we can do" (Working Paper 4).

One experience that illuminates my understanding in this area occurred on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2001 when I tabled with staff the idea of our school adopting a more formal approach to professional feedback. Our approach at the time was informal, with verbal or written notes of thanks or recognition appearing in pigeon holes or expressed in newsletters, staff meetings or corridor conversations. My rationale

for change was that this approach was ad hoc and inadequate. I was keen to address this issue. My enthusiasm became a little more grounded in reality following a conversation with a couple of teacher colleagues. Here is the story.

### Yes, But Do They Want It?

One Saturday during lunch at a Doctoral Seminar, I informally shared with Shaun, Phil and Jean my intentions of having a conversation with staff on the topic of professional feedback. I stated my belief that people who needed or deserved feedback inevitably missed out under the informal arrangements that existed at my school. My intention regarding a staff meeting scheduled two days later was for teachers to meet in grade level groups and ask them how they would like to receive professional feedback. My Curtin colleagues opened my eyes to a possible staff response.

Phil, a secondary teacher, said that he didn't think people really wanted much feedback. "I know some teachers who simply detest being singled out at a staff meeting for doing something well. People are generally just happy to have something they have done quietly acknowledged at an appropriate time - even if it's something as simple a note of appreciation regarding the way an injured student was attended to."

Shaun, a secondary college teacher, said, "I know teachers who close their doors and their blinds and do not welcome visits to their classrooms."

Jean, a primary school teacher, simply said, "Why do you want to do it?"

I replied, "I try and acknowledge the good work people do, but I know that this approach is pretty limited. It's not a really good state of affairs when formal feedback only comes when there's a problem. It would be nice if I could somehow have a school that would allow us all to receive feedback in a non-threatening environment."

Jean replied "Well, that's got to include you and feedback can be very threatening. It depends on what you want and how you do it."

This conversation affirmed the approach proposed earlier by my senior staff - ask the teachers what sort of feedback they would like.

At the next staff meeting, I explained my view that our current approach to giving feedback was inadequate. I said that even if we did this well, it was certain that the efforts of some colleagues would still go unrecognised. The

only formal feedback provided to staff is when there is a problem of some kind or for example, in the case of probationary teachers, where there is a system requirement for it.

I invited staff to meet in their grade level teams (Kinder/Prep, Grades 1/2, Grades 3/4 and Grades 5/6) and provide feedback on my comments and put forward alternative approaches for professional feedback.

My diary notes record outcomes from these discussions.

From the Kinder/Prep Group

Informal feedback is preferred to a more formal model. There is an acceptance that the work of teachers is often lonely. We would welcome more opportunities to get together with teachers from our own, as well as other schools.

From the Grade 1/2 Group

We see formal approaches to professional feedback as forms of appraisal. Informal feedback is preferred.

From the Grade 3/4 Group

We would welcome public acknowledgement of the work of teachers and support staff. Assemblies and similar forums provide such opportunities. All feedback must be genuine. Current practices of mentioning the 'good things' at staff meetings as well as holding special morning and afternoon teas are valued. We would also welcome more opportunities for grade level meetings.

From the Grade 5/6 Group

Informal approaches to professional feedback are preferred. 'Buddy' relationships with teachers in similar grade levels that encourage the sharing of ideas should be encouraged. (Aside: I've just noticed my semantic expression as I've recorded faithfully the language I used at the time of these grade level meetings with staff. My language is bureaucratic, positivist and written in a passive voice. Several years after recording these events and, hopefully, with the benefit of personal and professional growth that is embedded in this interpretive study, I sense that I might now record these grade level responses in a less passive and bureaucratic tone).

(Working Paper 2)

It became clear to me that formal feedback processes were *not* desirable to staff. The views of my teacher colleagues in our Saturday lunch conversation were close to the mark. Informal approaches are preferred. Perhaps Matthew, the Rocky Coast Cluster Principal, is right in his earlier statement that it is not the formality of process that is important. It is the honesty of process that has meaning for people. The responses of staff also advocated the need for more opportunities for staff collaboration and collegiality. Prue, from the Rocky Coast Leadership Project, had stressed the importance of having someone to talk to.

One of the most worrying things in my work life is that I'm not thick-skinned. The problem is that I don't want to be a person who is not touched by the impact I have on people. I often talk over this sort of thing with Greg (a recently retired school principal). We make hundreds of decisions. No-one gives you feedback on the good decisions but plenty will give it to you on the not so good ones. I've found there will be no forgiveness in these times. We all need a very, very supportive partner. Wayne, Eve (colleague principals) and I have done this job as single persons. The wear and tear on my health has been appalling.

(Working Paper 4)

The message is clear from Prue. Principals, in particular, need someone they can talk to. The job can be very lonely and stressful.

The issue of honesty in giving feedback to staff is one I would like to investigate further through the retelling of my experience with Chris. Chris had been a school attendant but, due to a workplace accident, he was unable to undertake manual duties such as cleaning. Consequently, he moved to River View on a return to work program from a neighbouring school. The aim of the program was to retrain Chris as a teacher assistant with a view to him eventually becoming a permanent staff member in this role at my school. The retraining program normally involves a formal process for performance feedback mandated by the system.

Chris worked as a teacher assistant in the library and in various classroom settings. Every month or so, he would meet with me and a rehabilitation officer employed by the Department of Education whose role it was to co-ordinate his return to work program. We would give Chris feedback on his performance of

duties in the library and classrooms, telling him the things he was doing well and pointing out the areas where there was scope for his further development. Over several months of meetings we shared his struggles to do any more than follow relatively simple instructions. For example, Chris would find it difficult to show initiative perhaps by mounting a student painting in a pleasing way. Teachers that Chris worked with understood that he was undergoing retraining. They were happy to show him how he might go about his duties but he seemed unable to perform them to anyone's satisfaction. Despite several months of patient coaching, support and feedback from me, his rehabilitation officer and the staff he was working with, it became clear to us that Chris wasn't suited to the job of teacher assistant.

At the end of his return to work program, I was responsible for making a recommendation on the future employment of Chris. My task was to either to approve him as suitable for permanent employment as a teacher assistant at my school, or declare that I was unable to make such a recommendation. Chris did everything within his capabilities to retrain as a teacher assistant. Because of the formal feedback processes and avenues of support in place, the final recommendation did not surprise him. I think I am being honest with myself in saying that I acted with a clear conscience on this matter. To recommend him for a permanent position would set him up for failure. Such action would cause much frustration among staff and students who would have to endure his inability to do the job.

The following letter to Kevin Jones, Human Resources Consultant at the Department of Education, details my decision.

**A Letter to Kevin**

To: Kevin Jones

Human Resources Consultant, Health and Rehabilitation

Human Resource Management Branch

Subject: Workplace Trial Assessment and Recommendation- Chris Smith

Dear Kevin,

Attached is an assessment of Chris Smith's competence in relation to a workplace trial as a teacher assistant. Chris has

worked in a 0.1 (1/2 day per week) capacity since the beginning of the second semester, 2001 on a program to assist him in his development of requisite teacher assistant skills. At a meeting between Michelle Abel (from Rehabilitation Services), Noel King, and I held on Tuesday 18th December, the attached assessment was tabled with Chris Smith, with issues related to a recommendation on Chris's future employment also discussed. As Principal, I have made the following recommendation based on the attached assessment and in consultation with Chris.

#### Recommendation

Chris's assessment demonstrates his limited competence in relation to teacher assistant duties. This means that, in practical terms, our school would be able to employ Chris on a limited basis only - for duties he is able to do unassisted. Thus, I am unable to recommend Chris as a teacher assistant to the Department of Education at this time.

Terry McCarthy

Principal

19-12-01

(Working Paper 2)

Such action is a very difficult thing to do. My remaining concern was for Chris and the uncertainty of his employment following this decision. Unfortunately, this was out of my hands. The Department of Education and Chris would work together on this issue.

In reflecting on this experience, it seems all too easy to ignore the pain that Chris would have endured. Can I justify my decision when I know that his sense of self-worth was most likely shattered at that time? At what point might a leader decide that someone's self-worth is more important than an aesthetically pleasing display of student work on a wall? I submit that if there was real hope that Chris might have come close to being a capable teacher assistant, I would have recommended him for permanent employment. It was very difficult for me to terminate Chris' employment at my school.

What did I learn from this experience? For now, I will agree with Matthew and my staff about performance feedback processes. It is their honesty, rather than formality, that is important. The impact of these processes on the individual

needs to be foremost in the minds of those involved. My experience with Chris leads me to desire a human rather than clinical approach to giving feedback. This is especially important when a person's career (not to mention their sense of well-being) is at stake, as in the case of Chris.

This story recalls to me the words of Len, a High School Principal, at a Principals for the Future Cultural and Ethical Leadership Workshop (2000, Working Paper 19). On giving feedback, he stressed the importance of "being truly honest and truly kind." Simple words, yet they influence my actions in every situation where difficult words need to be said - especially in relation to an individual's work-related performance.

Here, I am ready to propose again.

#### **Proposition IV - Leaders act ethically.**

But now, recalling Hurley who says

School principals need to take a stand on issues of values and ethics. Their task is to sponsor the search in their students for the nature of the meaning of life. They cultivate in themselves, their staff and students, compassionate judgement and critical consumption. In other words they judge - but don't condemn, and teach others to do the same. (2003, p. 34)

I remember that the magnitude of my decision to end Chris' career did not trouble me greatly in its aftermath. Did I exercise the compassionate judgement described by Hurley and find peace with the decision? I am not sure and I still wonder whether I found this peace a little too easily given the fact that my decision ended Chris' career.

Robert Starratt (1994), in his book *Building an Ethical School: A Practical Response to the Moral Crisis in Schools*, suggests that all social settings are artificial and structured to benefit some people at the expense of others. The ethical challenge is to make these structures more responsive to the needs of all citizens (p. 47). Can I honestly say to myself that the process we adopted for Chris' return to work program was responsive to his needs and geared towards

his success? I must have believed I could and perhaps this is why I did not endure much guilt over my decision to end Chris' career as a teacher assistant.

My reflection on Chris deepens when I consider the third of Patrick Duignan's (1996) leadership themes that asks us to "notice the dying sparrow". Duignan says that, in most organisations, there are those portrayed as the weak or the wounded. This is becoming more common with the impact of reform agendas, company takeovers and restructuring. He argues that we have an obligation as leaders to care for the wounded and those who are struggling in our workplaces. These people often feel lonely and alienated. Their work is sometimes characterised as mediocre by leaders who remain ignorant of the difficulties that these people endure (p. 4). These words make me feel less comfortable about my handling of Chris.

Duignan calls for leaders who have sensibility, conscience and heart, and who are not afraid to confront the moral implications of their actions. He calls for leaders who are characterised by what E. Grady Bogue (1994) describes in *Leadership by Design* as "spiritual scars and calluses on their characters" that follow from agonising over the morality and ethics of their decisions (as cited in Duignan, 1996, p. 5). Duignan laments the fact that, too often, leaders fail to think before they decide. The time for moral analysis is before we act. He quotes Christopher Hodgkinson (1991), a contemporary writer on leadership who wrote in his book *Educational Leadership: the Moral Art*.

In the realm of morals it is not enough to proceed backwards into the future, forever seeking to remedy the ill effects of our actions after the event. (as cited in Duignan, 1996, p. 5)

In other words, the time for agonising over a decision is *before* we make it, not *after*. Duignan indicates that the skill of leadership is more concerned with the thought behind the leader's actions than in the actions themselves (p. 5). Duignan's advice, in particular, has assisted me on many occasions since first hearing of it at a national conference in 1995. Rocky Coast principal, Eve laments having a conscience, though it is clear she believes it is necessary.

We're dealing with people lives. If I didn't have a conscience I might be a happy person!

(Working Paper 4)

I note Hurley's reference to the terms *ethics* and Duignan's preference for the term *morals*. Mark Freakley and Gilbert Burgh (2000) in their book *Engaging with Ethics: Ethical Inquiry for Teachers* provide insight into the etymological roots of the terms ethics and morality. They outline how ethics derives from the Greek *ethos* meaning character. Morality derives from the Latin word *moralis* meaning customs or manners. Freakley and Burgh see ethics as being concerned with seeking understanding of what it is to live well, whereas morality is more to do with duty, rights and obligations. What ethics and morality have in common, according to Freakley and Burgh, is that both are concerned with how humans relate to one another (p. 97). It is with this understanding that I use both terms interchangeably during the study.

Patrick Duignan's notion of authentic leadership expressed in his paper *Authentic Leadership for Authentic Learning* seems to encapsulate both ethics and morals. Duignan sees authentic leadership as being "centrally concerned with what is significant, what is right and what is worthwhile" (2004, p. 2). Becoming apparent in my stories told so far, it is no easy task to be sure of the direction to take on the really tough issues. One approach I use to help me discern whether a decision is right or wrong before I make it flowed from a *Principals for the Future* professional learning workshop for experienced school leaders. At the time of the workshop, held over three days in October, 2000, I was the Tasmanian Department of Education's Principal Consultant. My role was to co-ordinate professional learning programs for aspirant, newly appointed and experienced school leaders.

At the workshop, I assisted the facilitator, Roy Pugh, an independent consultant, in its co-ordination and became an active participant in proceedings. Pugh developed the methodology for the workshop that had a strong emphasis on inquiry and dialogue. It enabled existing teams to renew their team learning skills and commitment to each other. Participants had engaged in a similar workshop two years earlier where the teams initially formed. Over the following two years teams would meet in a climate of collegial support involving the sharing of experiences and readings. Participants learned from, and supported each other.

On the final day, participants engaged in a project using tools for reflection developed during the workshop. Following extensive dialogue between members of my team, we could see the need to develop some kind of process that might help us make decisions on the toughest of issues - especially those where the greatest good is not easily discernable. As Karl Hostetler (1997) says in his book *Ethical Judgement in Teaching*, "even good people need to try to better their understanding of what is good and right" (p. 195). The following document is the outcome of our deliberations. It was designed to help school leaders understand what may be good and right on the more difficult issues.

### **An Ethical Framework for Dealing with Difficult Human Issues**

1. Does authentic and relevant information inform my understanding of the situation and the issue?
2. How well do I understand
  - the issue?
  - the position of others (where they are coming from)?
3. What are the options for resolving the issue?
4. How would each of these options impact on
  - the people directly concerned with the issue?
  - the organisation?
5. Who will benefit from this decision?
6. On ethical and moral grounds, given everything I now know about the people and the issue, am I at peace with this decision?

By Robyn Tate, Mike Holland, Miep Sheehan, Terry McCarthy

Draft: November 2000 with acknowledgement to Dr Roy Pugh (facilitator) for her guidance and inspiration.

(Working Paper 13)

Stephen Law in his book *The War for Children's Minds* holds that children and adults should be encouraged to seek guidance on questions of right and wrong from others and defer to "a parent, teacher, priest or a rabbi, and perhaps to a wider faith or other community" (2006, p. 84). I found the insights of my colleagues very helpful in coming to understand how I might discern right from wrong on the more difficult issues into the future. Cindy Cisneros (2001) in her paper *An Exploratory Study of Principals' Learning in Three Schools* makes

reference to research from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement “Effective Leaders for Today’s Schools” (1999) study. She argues that communities of practice are the most effective vehicle to enable inquiry. They are geared towards learning and innovation informed by the local context. The strength of this approach, Cisneros explains, is that learning occurs in a social environment of “mutual relationships and shared experience.” This approach, Cisneros maintains, is appropriate for principals and policy makers at all levels - local, state and national (p. 28). Communities of practice enhance skills and drive innovation. They enhance the strategic influence of principals to transform their schools (p. 31).

Was this my experience of the workshop with Pugh and colleagues? Whilst I do not consciously refer to the ‘hard copy’ of the ethical framework developed at the workshop, I keep it as a mental model of how to deliberate over the really difficult issues that confront me as a school leader. According to Senge (1992), mental models and systems thinking go together because one helps us identify our hidden assumptions whilst the other focuses on the restructuring of assumptions to expose the origin of the problems we face (p. 203). Integration of the two help us move from mental models with an events orientation to those that recognise longer-term patterns of change and the structures that influence those patterns. Senge believes learning organisations are characterised by decision-making based on “shared understandings of interrelationships and patterns of change” (p. 204).

Morrison (2002) seems to take a similar position. Feedback is central to learning and must occur between the interacting components of the system. He explains that many complexity theorists refer to Donald Hebb’s (1949) view of learning that is associated with the principle of connectedness and expressed in his book *The Organization of Behaviour: A Neuropsychological Theory*. Hebb was an influential theorist concerned with the relation between the brain and behaviour. To Hebb, if X and Y occur together, then the brain forms an association between the two. The association becomes stronger when this event repeats. The association dies if the event seldom or never repeats. Morrison illustrates this theory with a school situation where a parent may experience emotional pain at meetings with the principal. If this pain reappears at subsequent meetings, that experience

influences the parent's behaviour towards the principal. The parent learns something and it affects her behaviour (as cited in Morrison, 2002, p. 17).

Morrison is also concerned with the impact of positive and negative feedback. Negative feedback brings smaller returns than positive feedback, which brings increased returns. Negative feedback is regulatory and acts like a thermostat to prompt intervention whenever deviation too far from the norm occurs. Just as a thermostat manages to switch itself on and off according to variations in temperature, schools need to find ways of sensing their environment and adjusting to it as the thermostat does to its environment (p. 17). Might this understanding be relevant to my deliberations over those really difficult issues that confront me in my leadership of schools? How can I develop the skills to sense my environment and the wisdom to adjust to it?

Morrison's reference to the research on school mergers in the UK by Mike Wallace (1996) in his paper *Policy Interaction and Policy Administration* underscores the difficulty of this task. Wallace explains that mergers often happen in a turbulent environment and that the interactions of the key players (including school, community and system players) in such initiatives are complex, unpredictable and sometimes hostile. Order is not predetermined, with the universe evolving, changing and turbulent. Life is uncertain and holistic. These contextual factors, according to Wallace, are characteristic of the new paradigm of "dynamic complexity" (as cited in Morrison, 2002, p. 14).

Wallace's ideas help me recall and reflect upon a story from my early experiences as foundation principal of River View Primary School. As you may recall from Chapter 1, River View arose from the merger of two schools at opposite ends of the township of Seavale, Tasmania in June, 1997. My appointment would be effective on the first day of the new school's operation.

### Never the Twain Shall Meet?

#### Background

Prior to the amalgamation, Seavale Primary School had a student population of 500 students, with Harbourville Primary enrolling 115 students. The larger school was the preferred choice of many parents in the

town. A number of parents elected to enrol their children at Seavale Primary even though Harbourville was their local school. Whilst Harbourville had several empty classrooms, Seavale did not have sufficient space to accommodate all intending enrolments.

To address these and other educational issues, the communities of both schools decided to form a Combined School Council. It comprised staff and parent representatives from both schools. This group worked with Tasmanian Department of Education personnel in a review of education in Seavale. Its brief was to determine the best educational provision for primary aged students in the town. The review took two years to complete.

After much research and debate, the Combined School Council recommended that Harbourville and Seavale primary schools amalgamate to form a new school.

A public meeting in April 1997 attended by the Tasmanian Minister for Education approved this proposal. River View was one of the first schools in Tasmania to form from an amalgamation. The Kindergarten (pre-school) to Grade 6 operation of both schools would remain and be campuses of the new school under the leadership of one principal. The Tasmanian Department of Education advertised the principal's position state-wide according to merit selection procedures. I was the successful applicant.

Some potentially incendiary circumstances preceded my first day. The principals of the former Harbourville and Seavale Primary Schools had been unsuccessful applicants for the position of principal at River View Primary school. I and a newly appointed deputy principal had replaced them. A number of parents and staff voiced their disapproval over these appointments. A core group of parents from the former Harbourville Primary school (now the "South Campus" of River View Primary) had been vocal in their disapproval of the merger with Seavale Primary (now the "North Campus" of River View Primary) and were still opposed to it. There was open conflict between parent and staff representatives on the Combined School Council, which was to be the main decision-making body of the school in terms of policy and budget processes. Surrounding these circumstances was a great deal of uncertainty about how the new school would operate - especially given that it occupied two campuses on opposite sides of the Seavale township.

I was aware of these circumstances on arrival. I took the attitude that I had a clear mandate to lead the school towards positive change. There was no turning back on the decision to amalgamate. My stance was that the school community was looking to me for leadership.

I called a special meeting of all staff (teaching and non-teaching) after school on day three to outline the key principles we would use to manage change. I gave all staff a document called “Amalgamation Starting Points” which described these three principles. I explained that the purpose of the meeting was to negotiate some starting points that would help us move forward. (Aside: I’m not sure ‘negotiate’ is the right word, here. I can see now that I was more concerned with seeking approval of the way forward I had planned for the school!) I acknowledged the work of the school community, especially by the previous principals, in moving towards the formation of River View Primary.

These shared guidelines stressed the importance of negotiating a process that enabled us to identify and address issues. Ensuring good communication with stakeholders and their involvement in decision-making was another point of emphasis. Principles of equity, fairness and common sense would underpin all decisions made.

At the meeting, I put forward these guidelines to staff in draft form and invited their amendment or approval. Staff gave mute approval and accepted the guidelines without amendment. Approving nods of the head were my best indication of agreement. I sensed tension and uncertainty among staff.

My final words at the meeting echoed the document distributed at the meeting:

“We’ll be successful if we keep in mind that our core focus must always be the classroom and student learning. That’s what we’re here for. We need to build on the traditions and successes of Seavale and Harbourville Primary schools. Don’t forget that the things we say and do will greatly influence our school climate and public image. Always keep the best interests of the school at heart. One more thing. No matter what problems or issues arise, we can work them out! There’s nothing that we can’t work through together.”

I also held similar meetings over the next week with the three major parent groups of the school. One was for parents representing the South campus, another for parents representing the North campus with the third meeting held for staff and parent representatives of both campuses. The Guidelines

for Implementation of the Amalgamation received endorsement from these groups. Our new school was underway.

(Working Paper 2)

In outlining a process that might help us move forward as a new school, I knew I could not ignore the history and tradition of the community that made up the new River View school. Hans-Georg Gadamer, in his book *Truth and Method* (1992) suggests that, in order to know when historical research investigates tradition, something new and different can be understood (p. 216). Tradition separates the historian from his object. He believes that it is through research into tradition that understanding becomes possible (p. 217). My understanding of the behaviour of some of the more vocal parents opposed to forming the new school seems clearer when I look at the context and history of the local community. The former Harbourville Primary school was the social base for most of the people in the surrounding area, many of whom are socially and economically disadvantaged. I could understand their reaction as fear of losing their local tradition of support and friendship arose. Reassuring them that we were going to build on the existing social capital of the community, rather than destroy it, was an important early task for me as leader of the new school.

Gadamer believed that all education depends on tradition, referring to the force of morals and their base of tradition. Tradition has influence over our attitudes, behaviour and “finite historical being.” New insights or established reason do not create morals (p. 280). Tradition largely decides our attitudes and institutions. Gadamer acknowledges the ambiguity of tradition, explaining that it is partly comprised of freedom and history. Tradition needs affirmation and cultivation. It is active in change throughout the ages. Even when there is an enforced and violent change, much of the old is usually preserved. It blends with the new to form a new value (p. 281).

Out of school histories and Gadamer’s counsel, I am proposing a fifth proposition on leadership:

**Proposition V - Leaders embrace and cultivate tradition.**

Hurley (2003) touches on this proposition in his report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference.

Information - Principals need to have the best information about all the people in their school community, because with it they can make the best decisions. On the other hand they also need to understand that education cannot compensate for society. (p. 33)

Hurley's emphasis on the importance of principals getting to know the people who comprise a school community may be a helpful first step towards principals understanding their community's traditions. The Rocky Coast principals stress the importance of tradition in their context.

Matthew - You can't just walk into the Rocky Coast without finding out what the issues are and working from that.

Prue - I guess one of the issues for the community and parents has been a little bit of "we've seen this sort of thing before."

Eve - It's very traditional - hegemonic masculinity reigns.

Wayne - Local context matters. The whole community is in transition. We need to be careful here about what we are saying we want to change. Some will receive this well, some not.

**Matthew spoke of his hopes and aspirations for the Rocky Coast Project.**

I would like people to be proud of the Rocky Coast again. It's about loss of hope, possibly due to the previous decline of mining. We say to a bright kid "You should go to Uni" instead of "You should work for Smith Engineering". The school values are clashing with family values. There's nothing wrong with working for the local firm as long as it's a choice and they don't feel trapped. I'd like to think the community can be strong and vibrant like they once were. We want them to get into tourism, hospitality and enterprise opportunities that go with the new economic environment - the old environment was to do with "the mine will give you a job". The new economics will impact on school and cater for the hospitality and enterprise needs of the community.

(Working Paper 4)

I can relate to the Rocky Coast principals and their accent on the importance of being familiar with the local issues and traditions. I had a similar outlook in taking

up my appointment as foundation principal at River View Primary. Context seems to be a powerful factor in the change process.

Taking this line of thinking further, Morrison (2002) says that for a system to survive, it needs to be open to the environment, feeling it, responding to it and eventually determining it. It must perpetuate itself and undergo the process of renewal over time (p. 15). Matthew, the Cluster Principal, seems to be advocating a process of renewal as he speaks of the mining traditions of the Rocky Coast and the need for their communities and schools to embrace the new opportunities that the tourism and hospitality industries may bring. Gadamer's earlier words concerning tradition and times of change that pointed towards a preservation of the old as it blends with the new may guide the way forward for these communities (p. 281).

Referring to Margaret Wheatley's (1996) work on the significance of new science in management, relationships and today's ethics, Morrison proposes that schools need to create their own identity within the context of their local community. An organisation responds effectively to its environment when it has a clear picture of its own identity (p. 15). Change is the lifeblood of survival and learning is central to change. Systems or organisms cannot survive if they fail to learn from their environment or their environment is unable to learn from its constituent elements. A school that does not meet local demands and operates in a vacuum will simply perish (p. 16). Morrison advocates a paradigm shift that supports new forms of schooling in an evolving world. The role of school leaders in the change process is central to this endeavour (p. 27).

So now let's hear about change from the Rocky Coast principals and their description of the Rocky Coast Project.

Sharon -The project is about the Department stepping outside traditional boundaries to address issues. It's about a bringing together of teachers, particularly inexperienced teachers. The fresh look at incentives for teachers to come to the Rocky Coast and retain them is also important. We also need to be cleverer with further education and an extension of vocational and educational training programs (VET). The Project has many forks to it.

Eve - The general thrust of the project is to strengthen the links with the community and improve outcomes for students. We want to develop a common learning program across the cluster.

Prue -The project is about student retention, curriculum opportunities, professional learning and teacher recruitment. One of the starting points is that if the community doesn't take a broader view of education across the Coast, communities will balkanise around their school. This is a potential obstacle to change. Across the board, parents want restoration rather than change.

Wayne - My understanding is that it has huge potential to achieve some cultural change. The Rocky Coast culture centres around five competitive and parochial towns. This is a huge challenge.

(Working Paper 4)

I hear these school leaders contemplating something akin to Morrison's paradigm shift that supports new forms of schooling. The complexity of the task before them is evident in their acknowledgement that there is a desire from some sections of the community for restoration of the old - all of this set within a historically competitive and parochial environment. Complexity theory may well assist us to look at schools from a dynamic instead of static perspective. It may help us to understand how schools might respond to internal and external contexts and find the most useful ways to benefit from imaginative and innovative activity within school-wide structures (p. 31). Might this approach be another avenue for the Rocky Coast schools to explore a better way of schooling?

Egon Guba in his article *Stories of Inner Change* (1996) explains that human beings have many available resources that may help them make sense of their problems, a task that is sometimes easy, at other times difficult and in some instances unmanageable. He exhorts us to "trust our instincts" (pp. 46-47). Senge points to the power of the subconscious as an aspect of the mind that is well-equipped to manage the complexity inherent in our organisations. He believes that we have a capacity to deal with complexity at the subconscious level that we do not have at the conscious level (1992, pp. 364-365).

I can ruefully relate to Guba's emphasis on instinct and Senge's on subconscious in regard to my working through a problem regarding the school's finances. The following diary entry illustrates how my mind sometimes works during these times.

**Diary Notes: Anxiety - Listening to my Inner Self**

I experienced a bout of anxiety relating to a school budget matter today. I awoke at three o'clock in the morning with a very uneasy feeling over the seemingly trivial matter of the costs passed on to staff for our daily morning tea.

At the beginning of the year, I had signalled to staff that I was keen to reduce the cost of staff morning tea contributions whilst provide a complimentary "cuppa" to parents and visitors. I felt this was in keeping with the welcoming ethos of the school. This would mean that the school funds would subsidise the cost of tea and coffee for staff, parents and visitors. My logic was that I had always felt uneasy about parents who were gifting of their time to help out in the classroom and yet feeling obliged to pay for a cup of tea or coffee in the staffroom.

The source of my anxiety arose this morning because I had not made it clear to anyone how these arrangements would be funded in the school budget. I was concerned that it might appear that I used school funds to unduly subsidise staff tea and coffee costs. This really worried me. When I awoke at 3:00am that morning I realised just how concerned I was because of the situation I, myself, had created. My head filled with thoughts of financial impropriety.

I found inner peace as soon as I decided to ensure that processes in place for morning tea payments met with the approval of our school community. Put simply, I was at peace once I decided to be completely transparent with all arrangements. This would take the notion of deception, which was the source of my anxiety, out of the equation.

(Working Paper 2)

The only remaining issue to face was whether the practice of subsidising staff and visitor morning tea costs was an appropriate one. Our school council

deemed that it was. Advice later received from the Department of Education confirmed this practice as “a grey area” that was acceptable as long as it was not abused.

I reveal these diary notes because I wish to examine the potential for the seemingly mundane issues to impact significantly on the thinking and action of a school leader. Even if the notes simply illustrate my capacity for paranoia, I wonder how many other school leaders endure similar experiences. I am grateful for the vigilance of my instincts and subconscious, especially for their work at three o'clock in the morning! I continue to take notice of those early morning wake-up calls.

The reliance of managers on intuition seems to be receiving greater acceptance despite the fact that it is difficult to logically explain this approach. Senge refers to Robert Fritz's *Path of Least Resistance* (1984) in quoting Einstein, “I never discovered anything with my rational mind” (as cited in Senge, 1992, p. 169). Einstein's gift was his ability to grasp extraordinary intuitions, such as his discovery of the theory of relativity, by imagining himself travelling on a light beam, and turn them into rational propositions (pp. 168-169).

Gadamer provides another dimension to this discussion, suggesting that to develop an awareness of a situation is an especially difficult task. He says that, because the concept of a situation infers that we are involved in it, it is sometimes difficult to be objective in our knowledge of the situation (p. 301). How well I can relate to these ideas! I tell my most demanding and distressing experience as a school principal in the following story. I recall it because I believe it offers further possibilities for interpreting and understanding school leadership. I travel back to the year 1994 and West Beach Primary school to be part of a situation that arises two years later involving the appointment of an acting principal to replace me whilst I took a period of study and recreation leave. This is a complex story that details a long, twisted, unravelling of mysterious misunderstandings, contested opinion, human needs and a system gone wild, which I expected I should restore to order.

## Tough Times at the Office: Part One

I arrived as principal at the idyllically situated West Beach Primary school in 1994. The school enjoyed a beachfront setting with expansive grounds on the Sun Coast of Tasmania. In 1994, it had an enrolment of two hundred and forty students from Kinder (pre-school) to Grade 6. The school's student population drew from families of all socio-economic groups. Ten class groupings operated that included several composite classes (for example, Grade 5/6). There were eleven teaching staff and twelve support staff.

Even though I had been a principal in small schools or deputy principal in larger schools for six years prior to taking up this appointment, it seems as if my learning about leadership only began at West Beach. I experienced a roller coaster ride as principal where I truly experienced the highs and lows of school leadership. The story begins at the start of my second year at this school. The first year is another story...

We began the 1995 school year with five new teachers. All came with reputations as 'effective teachers'. A respected colleague commented when visiting the school "You've got some *very* interesting personalities here. I'll be interested to see how they all go together!"

Overall, the teaching staff displayed an outstanding commitment to embrace our goal of giving students every available opportunity to use computers and related technologies to advance their learning. Our school community had agreed to this thrust during the previous year as a way to raise the school's public image. The school had endured some difficult times in regard to the challenging behaviours of some students. Their negative impact on staff morale and health was a major factor behind the appointment of five new staff for 1995.

I was aware of some of their backgrounds through discussions with fellow principals during the staffing process undertaken in October the previous year. My position was that I was prepared to work with and around the personalities as long as they looked after the students in their classrooms.

As the year progressed, I became aware that there seemed to be two distinct groups of teachers forming. I would portray one group as those who saw themselves as the harder working, more progressive teachers (whom I refer to later as the 'Progressives'). The other group did their work well, but

appeared to be less ambitious in terms of their career (whom I refer to later as the 'Conservatives'). A couple of other teachers fitted neither category. Despite this diversity, there seemed to be a good feeling among staff at the school.

A key role of mine in regard to our focus on technology was to seek new learning opportunities for students in this area and then seek a staff mandate for their use in classrooms. Without exception, staff gave their support to every proposal put to them.

We had no detailed strategic plan in this area. We were writing the script as the opportunities came along. It seemed as if one opportunity would lead to another. We quickly established a reputation as a school that was willing to embrace new approaches to learning.

From 1995-1997, West Beach Primary school embarked on a journey that saw students using a variety of electronic tools for learning. We installed a thirty station computer laboratory equipped with software for cross-curricula learning. We also delivered Interactive Science and Languages Other Than English (Indonesian) programs to our classrooms via satellite from the Victorian Directorate of School Education. A Canadian-based author also provided writing workshops for gifted children via email. New classroom computers were equipped with CD ROMS. Our students participated in the GLOBE Environmental Education Project using the internet. We also delivered teacher and student programs in Languages Other Than English (Indonesian) from other parts of the state to the school using the school's new video conference facilities. The Tasmanian Department of Education provided these facilities to enable teachers and students separated by distance to interact face to face via a television screen.

The professionalism and goodwill of staff underpinned our progress in these areas. Our Parents and Friends Association played an important role in raising funds to support our technological initiatives.

With a successful 1995 behind us, Fran transferred to our staff in 1996 from a school in the same district as the new deputy principal. She was the third person in two years to occupy this position. In 1995, Ann had filled the role in a temporary and outstanding capacity. She remained on staff for 1996 as a classroom teacher. One of my 1994 deputy principals, Kathy, also remained on staff as a classroom teacher. She was an extremely talented

educator who had lost the desire for the role of assistant leader following tumultuous times experienced in 1994.

The 'Conservatives' on staff warmly received Fran. However, the "Progressives" were less welcoming. Whilst the incoming deputy principal had many positive qualities, her lack of leadership in some key areas caused me concern. I met with her during the first semester of 1996 and discussed some focus areas for her growth as a leader in our school. I thought this was the best way forward at the time.

It was around this time, in March 1996, that I learned I was the recipient of an award for leadership in the use of technology in education. This meant I was to embark on a world study tour for the second semester of 1996 to examine how schools and their systems were using technology to enhance teaching and learning. For me, this was a high point of my career. Ironically, the circumstances surrounding the appointment of a replacement for me whilst on study leave also led to the most difficult and stressful time of my career. I believe it exposed flaws in my leadership that I needed to recognise and address.

I recount what followed in anguishing detail, not to excuse or justify, but to help me understand what happened in the circumstances that occurred during the process of appointing a 'stand in' for me whilst I was away.

Short-term appointments in the Tasmanian Department of Education may be made by direct selection, by calling for expressions of interest from within the school and beyond. The district superintendent had responsibility for advertising and filling the position, usually in consultation with the principal.

I can see now that my thinking was flawed and naïve. I was keen to have the acting principal appointed from within the ranks of my school rather than have the position filled by a person from outside the school. Perhaps someone from outside may not have shared my enthusiasm for the directions in which we were headed. I believed Ann, my deputy principal from 1995 who had fulfilled the role with distinction, deserved the opportunity to lead the school in my absence.

Given the reticence of Fran, my current deputy principal, to exercise leadership in certain areas, I was convinced she would not seek the position. I was equally convinced that Kathy, my deputy principal from 1994, would not be an applicant.

My view was that if we advertised the acting principal position from solely within the ranks of West Beach Primary school, there would be just one applicant – Ann. How wrong I was! I advertised the position within the school. Ann and Fran both applied for the position. The appointment process opened the divisions amongst staff that had been lurking beneath the surface for some time.

A conversation I had prior to advertising the position did not help things. I was sitting in my office after school when Ann dropped in for a chat. She raised the issue of my forthcoming period of study leave.

I cannot recall why, but for some reason I said to her "You should put in for the principal's job when I'm on leave. I reckon you'd get it because I don't think anyone else will put in for it." At that very moment, I felt a sinking feeling in my stomach. I knew I shouldn't have said that. I don't believe I was being dishonourable or mischievous. The sinking feeling was to do with me potentially compromising a fair selection process should anyone else apply for the position. My worst fears about this conversation were to come to fruition in the weeks and months that followed.

Another error of judgement on my part that I can now see relates to the selection process for choosing a replacement principal. By confining expressions of interest for the position to applicants from within my school, I was excluding worthy aspirants to the position from outside of the school. Additionally, if my assumption that there would only be one applicant from within the school was wrong, then I would be setting up a potentially divisive contest between current staff members. How little thought I gave to these issues and what a price I paid.

Before applications for the position were due in at district office, Fran, the current deputy principal, indicated she was interested in the position. Ann, the deputy principal before Fran, had already indicated she would be an applicant.

To be consistent, I then felt I should encourage Kathy, who also had previous experience as a deputy principal at our school, to apply for the position. My reasoning was that if I had already encouraged one former assistant to apply, then I must do the same for the other. (Aside: Now, over a decade later, as I reflect uncomfortably on my interactions with Fran, Ann and Kathy, I see my leadership at the time as vulnerable and reactive). Whilst I began experiencing a little discomfort at the situation that was evolving, I

knew that a selection committee comprised of the district superintendent, myself and one other principal would make the appointment. As outlined by Tasmanian Department of Education selection procedures, we would appoint the person demonstrating the superior merit, regardless of my personal preference. I was also confident that staff would accept the appointment of whoever the panel chose. Was this assumption of confidence my third mistake?

In the event, there were two applicants for the position – Fran and Ann. The selection panel, comprised of the district superintendent, a principal from a neighbouring school and myself, examined written applications and discussed the relative merits of both applicants. The panel was eventually unanimous that Ann be appointed acting principal ahead of Fran, my current deputy principal.

My first task at school the next day was to advise each of the applicants of the outcome of the selection committee meeting. My current assistant, whilst obviously disappointed at the outcome, seemed to be accepting of it. The successful applicant was excited at the prospect of leading the school. I remember telling her that I was sure people would welcome her appointment, which I would make known through staff notes. Looking back, this was an impersonal way of communicating this appointment. Maybe I knew, deep down, that some staff would not embrace the appointment.

I must have been blissfully ignorant of my mistakes because the first inkling that something had gone awfully wrong came the next day. I received a phone call from a close relative of my current deputy, Fran. He said that I had a big problem on my hands and that Fran was devastated. He mentioned that a staff member had contacted him by phone to say that the appointment was ‘political.’

Later that day, another teacher on staff said to me, “You don’t realise what you have done. People are really upset by what has happened.”

The underlying conflict that I had suspected between staff was surfacing. It seemed that most of the ‘Progressives’ were accepting of the appointment, whilst the ‘Conservatives’ were hostile towards it.

I waited to see if the dust would settle. I didn’t want to be defensive about the appointment. Comments made by staff to me over the next couple of weeks that “things are not good” and that “some pretty nasty things are being said”

led me to believe that I needed to clear the air at the next available staff meeting.

I took on an assertive stance at the staff meeting. I had prepared my spiel to staff in my diary notes, as transcribed below.

I'm aware that things haven't been the same since the appointment.

It's funny how sometimes it hits you that you've got to say or do something.

I was thinking about the key principles that good teams operate under. Modern sports coaches often stress the importance of teamwork and the need to accept decisions made for the good of the team - even if you disagree with them. This seems relevant to our current situation.

Of course, its perfectly OK to disagree with anyone or any decision - I'm certainly available at any time to discuss issues that may arise.

In terms of the process used to make the appointment, the options were very clear:

- Make a direct selection through district office without advertising the position.
- Advertise the position internally (to staff within the school) in accordance with Departmental Equal Opportunity and Merit Selection Guidelines - remember we have a very talented staff team.
- Advertise the position externally (to staff within and beyond the school) - there was clear feedback from the community that indicated a preference for continuity, not change.

I could say more, but I can't disclose the nature of conversations held with Fran, Ann and Kathy.

I will say that this is a school where everyone is encouraged to fully utilise their talents and to really pursue their professional goals.

It would be a sad day if that changed.

I'll conclude by saying that we should never take relationships within a school for granted.

We all need to play the team game to ensure this is the kind of place we want it to be. This is our collective responsibility. I'll now invite comment or discussion on anything I've said or not said.

Immediately, one teacher made the comment that "I'm concerned because the deputy principal always takes on the job when the principal goes on leave. This is what happens at other schools. I don't think it's right that someone else is given the job here." I made the point that the Merit Selection Process, outlined in very clear guidelines by the Department of Education, required selection panels to appoint the applicant with the superior merit. This includes an applicant's knowledge, skills, qualifications, experience and potential for future development as judged by the selection committee. I said the panel appointed Ann purely on merit with precedent well and truly established in other schools when people other than a deputy principal replaced a principal taking leave. Another staff member said it was good that we filled the position with someone from our own staff.

The atmosphere remained tense. Another staff member commented she was glad we were having an open discussion about the appointment and she hoped we could now move forward. After giving staff the opportunity for more comment and then emphasising that I was always available to discuss any issue, we moved on to other staff meeting matters.

I was far from convinced I had made things better. I would come to know over the following days, weeks and months that I had not. The next morning, I received mixed and unsolicited feedback on the previous afternoon's staff meeting. One staff member repeated to me the words of another at the meeting, "Wasn't Terry terrific last night!"

Another staff member soon dashed any positive feelings about the previous afternoon when she said to me, "You've only made things worse..."

(Working Paper 2)

I felt responsible for the breakdown in relationships between staff. At the time, I had difficulty clarifying what I might have done differently. This remained so for several years. I seemed unable to detach myself from the situation and look at it objectively. Peter Block (1996), in *Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest*, explains how the choice we make as leaders is ultimately between service and self-interest. We search, often in vain, to find leaders we have faith in. He submits that our doubts are less about their talents and more about their

trustworthiness (p. 9). It pains me to think that some staff at West Beach questioned my trustworthiness, especially when I consider the words of management author Stephen P. Robbins (2002) in his book *The Truth About Managing People – and Nothing but the Truth*.

When we trust someone, we assume they'll act honestly and truthfully, and be reliable and predictable. We also assume they won't take advantage of our trust. Trust is the essence of leadership because it's impossible to lead people who don't trust you. (p. 74)

Although I was still able to lead staff, the way forward was not clear to me. I believe it was only when I came to see these events from a different perspective later that I could see the picture a little more clearly. I can now “stand outside of it”, that is, outside of the situation about which I was unable to have objective knowledge, as Gadamer (1992) intimates. He explains that “to be historically” means that “our knowledge of ourselves can never be complete” (p. 301). History hands down all self-knowledge (p. 302). The task of historical understanding, according to Gadamer, involves trying to see what we are trying to understand in its true perspective. For understanding to occur, we must try to place ourselves in the other situation. When a person thinks historically, according to Gadamer, he understands what passes on without necessarily agreeing with it (p. 303). Is this the challenge for me as I search for understanding in relation to the circumstances I referred to in *Tough Times at the Office*? Had I acted according to traditions passed on, traditions that I was unconscious of? Can I ask this question now because I am aware of these traditions? Am I learning “to be historically”?

Gadamer seems to be telling me that I do not stop “being historically”. I continue being historically. As I move on, I can stand outside of a situation and look at it from a new or different perspective. In doing so, I am being historically at another time in my life's history. This idea prompts an almost comical thought as I look back upon my modest sporting career where I often resisted the call to train harder and get fitter. My thinking at the time never made the connection between training to a higher level and performing at a higher level. For me, training was simply something I had to do. My skills would be sufficient to carry me through. I recently ran into a former coach of mine who remarked, “You were a good player who didn't quite get the best out of himself.” I wonder why! Had I been able to

stand outside of the situation back in those days and see how incomplete my knowledge of myself was, I might have done better. I'm wondering if I am coming to think that this is how I am coming to be in relation to my study. I might be coming to understand Gadamer's notion of what it means to be historically. Just as I can look into my historical being and now see that, as a sportsman, I needed to train harder and get fitter if I was to realise my potential, this journey of reflective study is also enabling me to understand how I may become a fitter leader.

Morrison (2002) may assist me in this endeavour as he says that relationships are central to the notion of connectedness. Relationships are mutual, not one way. To Morrison, this means the nurturing of trusting relationships that are collaborative rather than competitive and striving for mutual benefit (p. 19). This last statement seems especially relevant to *Tough Times at the Office*. The relationships between the 'Conservatives' and 'Progressives' on staff were collaborative on one level as they worked very successfully together on technology-based projects. However, the continuing story of *Tough Times at the Office* illustrates they were not trusting relationships. I return to West Beach shortly after my failed attempt to calm the waters.

### Tough Times at the Office: Continued

I spent the next couple of weeks before taking leave getting on with the matters of school leadership. I didn't think there was much more I could do to address concerns relating to the appointment of my successor for the final semester of the year. During this time, however, another set of difficulties did raise an issue that was just as controversial and would cause more controversy and dilemma for me.

Our staffing for each year depends largely on the number of students enrolled at the school. Enrolment predictions for the following year indicated twenty fewer enrolments. This meant we were almost certain to have one less teacher for the following year. Someone would have to transfer to another school.

Whilst the staffing process is undertaken during the final semester of each year, I didn't want to leave this task to my replacement. I was glad that the Department had a transfer policy that would be helpful in these

deliberations. I contacted my district superintendent and expressed my view about who should transfer. I stated that I was willing to have a conversation with this person about a transfer. My superintendent's advice was that I should leave any decision regarding a transfer to my replacement and the annual staffing process during the final semester. Her reasoning was that circumstances can change and it was too early to make such a decision.

My next dilemma was whether or not I should alert staff to the possibility that we might lose one teacher from our staff team for the next year because of declining enrolments. I elected to tell them what I knew at the next staff meeting, stating that transfers must accord with the Department of Education's transfer policy. I told staff I didn't want to leave this task to someone else, but it was the district superintendent's view that it was too early to make such a decision. I would leave it until later in the year when the staffing process is undertaken. There seemed acceptance by staff that this was a circumstance beyond everyone's control. It didn't generate discussion or questions of any significance.

That evening, I remember feeling very uncomfortable about tabling that particular issue at the staff meeting. A friend who is a teacher from another school visited my home that evening. I took the opportunity to ask him what he would have done if he was in my position.

His words were "Tell the truth. They (the staff) can't criticise you for that."

I remember challenging that view by saying, "All I've now done is make them worry about who may be transferred."

His reply was, "Oh yeah? And when they do find out someone needs to go (be transferred), they'll know you knew and didn't say anything? They'll say the bastard didn't tell us."

I think my friend's colourful words were wise. The next day, one of my more forthright teaching staff said to me, "We'd already done our sums. We knew someone would have to go."

I was genuinely and perhaps naively surprised that staff were so aware of such issues.

Things seemed to settle down over my remaining days before embarking on study leave. I was well aware that the relationships between staff weren't harmonious. I simply hoped that people would rise above their differences for the greater good. Staff gave me a very generous farewell with some morale

boosting personal messages and gifts. However, I couldn't help wondering how things may be when I returned for the new school year. I didn't have to wait that long to find out.

On return from my overseas study tour, four weeks prior to the end of the semester, I became aware that our school was still not a happy place to be. I was still on study leave when I received a phone call at home from a close relative of the teacher on staff who was to transfer to another school. She said there was much unhappiness about the decision to transfer her. I referred the caller back to the acting principal and district office. This was one decision I was not responsible for.

Three weeks before I commenced duty for the new school year, a staff member arranged with my wife to give me a surprise birthday breakfast party at my favourite restaurant - McDonalds! Over half of the staff attended, with several others tending their apologies. This was a really nice gesture, one that I greatly appreciated. I began to think that we may be able to put the events of the previous year behind us. I also wondered if this was their way of showing support for me, despite the tough times they had all endured.

Despite the good feelings of the surprise party, the reality was that relationships between some staff remained very fragile. I decided to plan the first staff meeting very carefully. I was encouraged by the key messages provided by Patrick Duignan in a framework for leadership that he shared in a presentation to the 1996 Australian Primary Principals Association conference in Canberra. His key messages included the importance of accepting differences between individuals and showing respect for others.

I made his Paper from this presentation the focus of our first staff meeting of the year. The meeting began with me acknowledging the good work undertaken during my absence. We also attended to the usual housekeeping matters (timetables, etc). My diary notes, transcribed below, outlined the process for exploring Duignan's Paper.

Introduction - distribute Paper and explain its relevance to our school.

Form Groups of 2 or 3 - read the Paper and underline or discuss any point Patrick makes that will help us have the best year we can possibly have in terms of our feelings for ourselves and each other.

We'll share our thoughts after we've had time to read.

I sensed that those present saw the session as worthwhile. A couple of staff later commented to me that the session was just what we needed. I felt we had made a good start to the new school year.

I decided not to immerse myself in problems between staff members. I didn't think I could do much to help them through their personal difficulties with each other. Instead, I focussed on supporting the educational programs of the school. I made the commitment to spend more time in each classroom and provide teachers with 'off class time' to work on class or school programs.

About six weeks into the first semester of 1997, our acting principal from the final semester of 1996 visited my office to give me some unsolicited feedback on how things were progressing. The news was not good. She said there was a perception in the school that I didn't have my finger on the pulse and that I was only interested in technology. This was the focus of my overseas study tour. She explained that teachers would like to see me working with them in their classroom and getting to know what was happening. Although I was actually releasing them from their teaching duties on regular occasions to enable them to have some time for planning, this wasn't enough. She also made other comments about relationships between staff, saying there were still problems.

Whilst I didn't necessarily agree with all that she said I sensed she was trying to be helpful. I politely thanked her for taking the time to see me and noted her comments.

My reflections varied on that feedback. I may not have had my finger on the pulse regarding relationships among staff. I was getting on with the business of teaching and learning in the hope staff would do the same. It was my hope they would put aside their differences. I did not see there was anything I could do to make adults behave in a particular way. Modelling the words of Patrick Duignan shared at the beginning of the year and treating others as I wished to be treated was my chief strategy. If that failed, I wasn't sure of where to go next.

Despite my unbridled passion for technology in education, I felt the perception by some staff that it was my only interest was a little harsh. I was also perplexed at the comment regarding teachers wanting me to spend more time in their classrooms. I thought I was already doing that by taking over their classrooms and providing teachers with some precious 'off class time.' I was starting to wonder if the problems among staff could ever be resolved.

With the benefit of the feedback provided by Ann, I had the choice of ignoring it or taking action. My feelings were that regardless of how I felt about the accuracy or fairness of the feedback, the perception was a reality for some staff. I needed to take some action or risk more damage to my leadership or the school.

This action took the form of separate meetings with teaching and non-teaching staff. Our non-teaching (teacher assistants, school attendants, office staff etc) had been relatively free of the relationship problems between staff, although they were well aware of their existence.

My diary notes, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1997, outlined the approach taken for these meetings. I began by acknowledging the division among staff that had surfaced back in August 1996 and continued to this time. I explained how I had approached the beginning of this year with my focus on actively working with students in classrooms. I said that, whilst we had made a positive start, we needed to put in place structures that will help us continue to move forward. Staff agreed to my proposal that we meet regularly in Grade Level Teams (for example, Prep-2, Gr 3-6) to work through issues related to our classrooms and the school and also make our weekly staff meetings open to non-teaching staff. My rationale for this approach was that it would help ensure lines of communication were open at all levels of our school.

I was not confident that these measures would do much to improve the real problem of the school as I saw it - the unwillingness of some teachers to set aside their differences for the greater good of all. The Department of Education advertised the position of principal at River View Primary school around this time with the successful applicant commencing duty in June of 1997. It was a school of over six hundred students and would represent a significant promotion for me. West Beach Primary School's enrolment was two hundred and forty students.

As difficult as the previous eight months had been, our school had continued to do significant things for students. We had recently won a \$30,000 grant to deliver programs for gifted children using computers and related technologies. Despite the problems that existed between staff, they were all very capable teachers. Students were happy, engaged learners and parent satisfaction with the school was high. The school's profile in the community had also risen significantly over the previous two years.

If I was to leave the school, my legacy would be a well performing school that had made significant progress over the previous three years. My other legacy, a staff divided, was one that I did not feel good about.

I made the decision to apply for the River View position. I could not see how I could do any more to resolve the differences between staff. I also felt my health and well-being was at risk if I was to stay at the school for much longer.

Thankfully, I was the successful applicant for the River View position. My last day at West Beach was on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1997. Staff were very kind in providing me with a farewell dinner earlier that week. Staff held an afternoon tea for me on the last day where the current deputy principal and I made speeches. She spoke very highly of my leadership, ensuring I left the school on a positive note. I responded graciously, thanking all staff for their contributions and efforts over the previous three years. My final words asked them to see the good in each other. I said they had so much to offer each other and the students within their care.

Within two weeks, there were new challenges to meet at River View Primary School.

(Working Paper 2)

So what is my learning from this experience? As I mentioned earlier, it took me years rather than days to have a sense of how I might respond to this question. My response is a preliminary one as I sense there are more understandings I need to pursue.

First, although it mightn't be evident in the story as told, I believe that I became too familiar with staff during my three years at the school. I would rarely withhold anything from them with my personal and professional persona being one and the same. I would happily share my full array of emotions. I believe this familiarity worked against me in times when I made some hard decisions.

I am also aware that I left myself open to a perception that I was "playing favourites". Ann, whom I appointed to the position of acting principal ahead of the current assistant, shared many conversations with me over the school's future directions. I spent more time with Ann than any other staff member, which I believe fuelled perceptions of favouritism when she was appointed acting principal over Fran. Eight years later, I am more conscious of the time I spend with staff and the equity of its distribution.

These observations echo sentiments expressed by Prue, one of the Rocky Coast principals.

Handling people who are not working well is a big challenge. A situation last year involved the personal problems of a staff member. It hurt the school. It led me to believe in the notion of collegial relationships rather than friendships. I knew socialising wasn't an option and friendship with parents was also not going to be a good idea. In a town like this, that can isolate you. I came here with that understanding. That was my position. I have a very small network of friends. I never debrief to anyone here about school issues in the knowledge that you've got to keep separate from people when you've got to manage them. For me, that was a mental health issue here. The need to have someone on the ground, my partner, to debrief with is crucial.

(Working Paper 4)

Prue also advocates the importance of maintaining some professional distance. This issue was the subject of some discussion among school leaders at an *APAPDC Leader Lead: Sustaining Leadership in Australian Schools Workshop* (2005). I proposed to those present that a little professional distance between a principal and staff might not be a bad thing, especially in the more challenging times. In reply, one school leader said

I think it's really sad if we have to consciously put some distance between ourselves and those we work with. Isn't leadership about being who we are?

(Working Paper 14)

Others present agreed.

Gadamer's (1992, pp 301-303) earlier words also caution me in my advocacy of professional distance. Might I have been demonstrating the limitations of my historical being because of my closeness to the situation that I have tried to make sense of? Might I even be giving comfort to myself, trying to show that my actions as portrayed in *Tough Times at the Office* were right?

With the benefit of hindsight my acceptance of the existence of 'two camps' on staff, occupied by the 'Progressives' and the 'Conservatives' was another area

that I might have been more attentive to. Relationships appeared to be harmonious, yet underlying divisions lurked just below the surface. Shields (2003) states that educators sometimes attempt to minimise differences in an effort to maintain harmony. Such approaches, according to Shields, can be divisive. When we minimise difference, we risk devaluing and marginalising individuals or groups. Interaction without open discussion and authentic representation is superficial. If we are to be together as equal members of a community, we need to examine our common values and understand our differences - whether they are in relation to our ability, colour of skin, social status, religion or gender (pp. 129-131). I believe a more open environment that encouraged expression of many different perspectives might have headed off the deep divisions that were to surface among staff. Instead, we glossed over our differences, pretending that things were proceeding smoothly.

Morrison (2002) may help me here as he emphasises that self-organisation must consider issues such as differentials of power, influence and individual capacities to respond. Leadership, Morrison argues, is not about constraint-free forms of behaviour. Complexity theory does not provide a free license. It operates within reasonable boundaries. Morrison also asserts that the role of leaders is to change the perceptions of a situation, a view closely aligned with complexity theory (p. 21). Referring to studies by Sherman and Schultz (1998, p. 9) and Lissack (2000, p. 10), he cites Einstein who remarked that "our thinking creates problems which the same level of thinking can't solve" (as cited in Morrison, 2002, pp. 22-23). Einstein's statement relates well to the 'two camp' situation. My level of thinking at the time did not recognise the danger signs evident before the split between staff happened, nor could my thinking find a way to make things better after the split.

Very little changed despite my best efforts to be more collaborative and encourage staff to be more open with each other. The relationships appeared broken and unfixable. I could see that changes in personnel were required if things were to get better. Because of the limited powers of the system's transfer policy, this was not a realistic option. I also believed that individuals who needed to move elsewhere for the good of the school would be very resistant to a transfer. My stance at the time was that if I couldn't make things better, there was no point staying. My promotion came at a very opportune time for me.

My reflection on this experience seems akin to the micro-political perspective on organisation outlined by Joseph Blásé (1991) in *The Politics of Life in Schools: Power, Conflict and Co-operation*. To Blásé, this perspective provides a valuable approach to understanding “the woof and warp of the fabric of day-to-day life in schools.” Blásé says that micro-politics includes what people think about and have strong feelings about, which is often unspoken and not easily observed (p. 1). Any action, whether conflictive or co-operative, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political significance (p. 11).

My effort to understand the “woof and fabric” of my *Tough Times at the Office* experience is illuminated by Senge (1992) who details seven common learning disabilities of organisations that often go undetected. They include:

- a focus on position rather than the interactions of those positions;
- a tendency to blame others when things go wrong;
- a failure to see how we contribute to our own problems;
- a fixation on events rather than attention to more gradual processes;
- an inability to see the impact of more gradual processes on the organisation;
- a failure to directly experience the consequences of our most important decisions; and
- self-protection in being unwilling to confront complex problems (pp. 18-25).

According to Senge there are two types of feedback processes - balancing and reinforcing. He expresses the latter as an amplifying process capable of accelerating growth or decline, such as the decline in bank assets when there is a financial collapse or panic. Balancing feedback is to do with goal-setting behaviour. The goal can be a particular target such as a takeover of another firm or it might be something less obvious such as a hard to shed habit (pp.79-80).

Senge explains that reinforcing feedback systems sometimes blind participants from seeing how small actions can become large consequences. He illustrates

this in the way managers often fail to understand the impact of their own expectations on their staff (p.80). Did I have a tendency to focus more on events (crises) than the “gradual processes” that were contributing to them, which I suspect included being too close to some staff? My experiences in *Tough Times at the Office* seem a little like the *Parable of the Boiled Frog*. The frog gradually boils alive in a pot of water because the frog cannot detect the gradual rise in water temperature as it proceeds from cold through to hot and so does not jump out of the pot (pp. 22-23). Was I like the frog? The staff reached boiling point with the appointment of the acting principal for my period of leave and I did not sense the water was heating up until it was too late.

Senge (1992) sees balancing processes linked with a desire for stability. A balancing system self-corrects towards goals or targets. He points out that those balancing processes are difficult for management because goals are often implicit. The balancing processes often go unrecognised. There is the example of a manager who unsuccessfully tries a variety of approaches to enhance the well-being of staff, encouraging them to work shorter hours. This approach fails because there is a perception by staff that those who worked harder and longer are the staff most rewarded by management (pp. 84-85).

Senge (1992) maintains that to truly understand how an organism works, we must understand its “explicit” and “implicit” balancing processes (p. 86). The more hidden balancing processes are often behind workplace problems (p.88). For example, Senge describes delays as the time taken for one variable to have an effect on another. He states that nearly all feedback processes experience some form of delay. Unrecognised or misunderstood delays have the potential for disorder and failure. We can ignore them in the short-term but they will cause difficulties over the longer-term (pp. 89-90). Is this concept of delay relevant to my experiences in *Tough Times at the Office*? I seemed not to have realised the depth of difference existing between two groups of staff. The difference eventually became division and no-one could address it satisfactorily - a time bomb ticking over, just waiting for the ‘right issue’ to surface.

Did I unwittingly cultivate a political environment where people were more concerned about power than each other? Senge holds that challenging the grip of power begins with the building of a shared vision. Without a focus on the vision

and values of an organisation, self-interest becomes the driving motivation (p. 273). An organisational climate based on doing “what is right”, says Senge, rather than pandering to “who wants what done”, is a good starting point. A climate free of internal politics also requires openness. He explains this as the ability to speak honestly about the significant issues and to question one’s own thinking. I think we failed to do enough of this at West Beach and paid the price.

Senge holds that people want to be part of something important that is beyond self-interest (p. 274). Consider the words of Eve.

The strength of the project is that our cluster is off and running. Senior staff have been working together for over twelve months and there is trust and respect at the meetings. There’s a comfort - I can say how I feel, we all have the same goal in mind.

(Working Paper 4)

Senge contends that when people begin to hear the hopes and aspirations of others, the foundations upon which the political environment thrived begin to fragment. Through the vision building process, the commitment to live by the values of the organisation that grows through this also serves to break down the political environment (p. 275).

It is now very clear to me that I did not articulate the values of West Beach Primary School in any meaningful way. They existed in written form somewhere, but not in the consciousness of the school community. The school did not have a culture built around an agreed set of core values. Hence, when the tough times came, we had nothing to fall back upon. As principal, I take responsibility for this state of affairs. I learned the hard way about the importance of values as the foundation of a school community.

Charles Taylor in his book *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991) adds another dimension to my reflection on this story. He argues that all cultural fields involve a struggle characterised by people with opposing views that criticise and condemn each other. A similar battle exists between those who argue the merits of the culture of authenticity. On the one hand, there is the view that goals of self-fulfilment shroud in accusations of egoism making a culture of authenticity questionable. On the other hand, there are those who believe that there is

nothing wrong with the self-fulfilment culture. Taylor suggests neither view is right. We ought to be having a debate over the meaning of the term authenticity. Self-fulfilment actually requires qualities of unconditional relationships and moral demands beyond the self. It does not exclude these qualities. We need to raise the moral ideal of the culture of authenticity. Taylor bases this argument on assumptions that authenticity is an ideal worthy of our attention. True meaning of authenticity develops through reason and the outcome of such a debate has a capacity to influence others (pp. 72-73). In a way, Taylor helps me to connect my reflections on *Tough Times at the Office*. I see now that I needed to pursue and facilitate the kind of debate that Taylor advocates. My concern for the good and how I might pursue it then was uncontested. I suspect and can see now how shades of egoism could have clouded my pursuit of the common good.

Ronald David Glass (2004) in his paper *Moral and Political Clarity as a Practice of Freedom* seems to support Taylor's advice. Glass believes that liberatory educators cannot make their classrooms entirely safe from the numerous moral and political issues that arise in the life of schools. Glass advocates for moral and political clarity in our actions and relationships if we are to successfully find our way through these issues (p. 15). I am thinking that the debate Taylor calls for on authenticity may help me find the moral and political clarity that Glass advocates.

I take heart from former Jesuit priest Chris Lowney who is now a writer and consultant on leadership. In his book *Heroic Leadership: best practices from a 450-year-old company that changed the world* (2003), Lowney refers to "leadership stumbles" in talking about the Jesuit view of leadership.

...the most effective leaders are often fired in the kiln of their early missteps – developing resilience, the ability to learn from mistakes, and the wisdom to accept oneself and one's team-mates as imperfect.  
(p. 288)

I needed to learn from my tough times at the office and be a better leader for the experience. My experiences at West Beach also taught me that you can have a vision, but it won't sustain you unless this vision develops with others and an agreed set of core values come to underpin it. This is the basic premise of my next proposition.

## **Proposition VI - Leaders establish a vision and values with others.**

Hurley (2003) cautions that vision in leadership is not a panacea for all that is not well in a school.

I have a dream - School principals, like any leaders, need to believe in a positive future for themselves, the people and the community. It is this belief, this vision, that sustains those personal resources that are needed when things start to feel too much, too hard. Principals know that being a leader can be very lonely, and that there are times when they are on their own. There is nothing better for a school than a principal with vision, but there is nothing worse than when that vision dominates all else. (p. 32)

Eve, too, states that vision building is not a simple matter.

I've always worried I don't have a lot of vision or the experience to have one. I still know where I want my school to be. I look at how the place looks and know where I'd like to improve the grounds and where I want the kids to be at. I think it's hard to have a long-term vision because the community lives with uncertainty and it's more to do with keeping your head above water.

(Working Paper 4)

The flaws in our vision building at West Beach are becoming clearer to me. As principal, I generated the idea that technology was the way forward for us and secured agreement from the school community to actively pursue this vision. Some saw the vision as mine rather than school's. Perhaps if we had developed our vision through a genuinely collaborative process, then staff may not have so easily made negative comments regarding my preoccupation with technology.

Without a shared vision, according to Senge (1992), a learning organisation cannot exist. Shared vision encourages risk-taking and experimentation. It is central to developing commitment to long-term goals. Senge argues that organisations wishing to build shared visions need to encourage their people to establish their own personal visions. Failure to do so means they simply comply with someone else's vision rather than commit to one they share with others (pp. 209-211). Was it compliance I had understood as a way to achieve the good?

What good was I expecting people to comply with? Did I fully know my own vision for West Beach?

I have discovered, as Senge stresses, that genuinely shared visions take time to grow. They are the product of individual visions interacting with each other. Visions that are authentically shared spring from ongoing conversations that promotes not only the sharing of aspirations, but an equally engaging willingness to listen to them (pp. 217-218). Given my tough times at the West Beach 'office', the task of developing an authentically shared vision for my newly formed River View Primary School might well have been fundamental to the school community's ongoing health and well-being.

Here I am then, eighteen months later after taking up the role as foundation principal of River View Primary School. As I indicated in *Never the Twain Shall Meet*, two schools at opposite ends of the township of Seavale in Tasmania amalgamated to form this new school.

#### Vision and Values at River View

By October, 1998, with most of the amalgamation issues addressed over the previous sixteen months, I was sensing that we had settled down to a new way of working as a dual campus school. It was now time to set a clear direction for the future. The comment of a colleague on the importance of vision, especially in relation to school planning and development had influenced me. She made the comment at a meeting of principals gathered to help design professional learning programs for current and aspirant school leaders. At the time, River View seemed to be happily sailing nowhere. I believed we needed to pursue a set of common beliefs and values from which we could build a positive and exciting future for our school.

In October of 1998, I began sowing some seeds with staff and parents on the need for such an initiative. I distributed a sample document from a USA elementary school to give the community an idea of the sort of outcome I was hoping to achieve for River View. The document outlined the values, vision, and key programs of the USA school. I shared my belief with staff that, with most of the amalgamation issues behind us, it was now time to set a direction for the school. There seemed to be no opposition to my proposal that we begin exploring a process that might help us set this direction. However, my

experience was that documents of this kind often gather dust on shelves and delivered few benefits. I was determined that this would not be so at River View Primary school.

Our journey began in earnest with my attendance at a National Discovering Democracy Forum in Canberra in 1998 and a chance meeting with Nigel Brown - the Tasmanian Department of Education Discovering Democracy Project Officer. Discovering Democracy was a national project funded by the Federal Government that focussed on developing student understanding of civics and citizenship. Nigel's interest in the exploration of values that underpin good citizenship complimented our desire to build our school around a core set of values.

He agreed, at my request, to act as an external facilitator for a community consultation on the kind of vision and values our school may desire. On return to school after the Forum, I told staff of my conversation with Nigel and asked for their approval to use him to lead our Vision and Values process. I said that getting someone from outside the school to lead this process, rather than me, would give us the best chance of success and avoid the danger of me exerting undue influence on proceedings. Staff agreed, saving me an embarrassing phone call to Nigel! Under his guidance, we received extensive feedback from River View students, staff, parents and wider community on the things they valued about the school and their hopes for its future. The consultation took eight months and included day and night meetings at both campuses that were open to all community members. The process also included surveys to students, staff and parents and regular meetings with a combined school council Vision and Values team.

It was the task of this team to collate and refine the data into something that could truly represent what we stood for as a school and the vision we had for the future. It was my intention for the work of the team to be genuinely collaborative. We took time at each meeting to ponder and discuss the finer detail of format and intrinsic merits of each word considered for inclusion in our Vision and Values Statement. For example, I can still remember the essence of our conversation over the word *integrity*:

Ann - Don't you think we need to have the word integrity in there somewhere?

Clem - I'm not sure. What are we really saying when we use the word? It's a little too general for me. I think we need to be more specific with the words we use.

Elizabeth - Yes. I'm not sure. We do want our children to have integrity..

We revisited these conversations over several meetings and eventually agreed on the words to express our values, hopes and aspirations for the future.

I circulated Drafts of this statement in school newsletters during March and April of 1999, with feedback invited from our school community. Feedback was subsequently received and amendments made by the Vision and Values Team. The Combined School Council endorsed the final draft of The River View Primary School Vision and Values Statement in May, 1999. As Principal, I felt that our school now had a solid foundation upon which to build a better future for our students.

There were two sentences in the Vision and Values Statement that have guided my leadership since that time: A summary statement went, "We treat others as we would wish to be treated." Another focussed on our desire to "develop a community-based education which provides a pathway of learning for life..." These sentences provided me with a mental note of what was important to our school. They have heavily influenced my thinking and action, as well as the school's plans, programs and curriculum, to this time.

(Working Paper 2)

Senge (1992) speaks of the importance of "governing ideas" for an organisation in developing its vision, values and core purpose. He refers to them as answers to the "What?" "Why?" and "How?" questions. He sees vision as the answer to the "What?" question concerning the sort of future we wish to create. The answer to the "Why?" question embodies the reasons for our existence and our fundamental purpose. The way we wish to act on our journey towards our vision is expressed in the answer to the "How?" question. Taken together, the three governing ideas espouse the things an organisation believes in (pp. 223-224).

In reflecting on the words of Senge and the journey undertaken, the importance of my decision, sanctioned by staff, to engage an external facilitator to lead the process strikes me. The collaboration undertaken was far more comprehensive than the one I had originally envisaged. With him leading the way and invoking intensely team-oriented processes, there was little danger that anyone could manipulate the outcome of our collective efforts. I had confidence that the River View vision and values would be the product of an honest effort to represent what

the community stood for. As principal, I felt a sense of empowerment to model the values as best I could and pursue the vision with passion and vigour. I believe the many conversations that our school community engaged in during the development of our vision and values statement created, as Senge relates, a powerful synergy directed towards fulfilling their collective hopes and aspirations (pp. 217-218).

Senge contends that despite the merits of numerous visions, many never take hold. He states that vision as a living entity can only be realised if people believe they have the capacity to shape their future. According to Senge, visions can expire due to the difficulties people experience in bringing the vision to fruition. They find it difficult to hold the creative tension, the gap between their current reality and the future they aspire to. The challenge for leaders in these circumstances is to divert the focus away from the difficulties whilst still managing the current reality (pp. 228-231).

Senge also mentions that a vision is at risk if people forget their connection to each other. The connection to a larger purpose and each other is undermined whenever people lose respect for one another and the views they represent. This often results in organisations splitting between the “insiders” - those committed to the vision, and “outsiders” - those who do not share this commitment. Polarisation of positions and conflict quickly halt the progress of a vision (p. 230). This scenario seems so familiar to that outlined in *Tough Times at the Office*.

Senge advocates the skills of reflection and inquiry as a way to address problems of this kind. Inquiry enables us to look into the vision of others and open up possibilities for an evolving vision rather than weigh it down with opposing views (p. 228).

Since my first foray into sideshadowing, four more propositions have emerged. I now venture into the shadows of more fantastic literature to examine the possibilities for these propositions on my understanding of leadership.

## The Second Sideshadow

The stories told since the first sideshadow have been leading me to propose the following understandings about leadership: leaders are courageous and take risks; leaders act ethically; leaders embrace and cultivate tradition; and leaders establish a vision and values with others.

What will I come to understand about courage, ethics and historicity? And where will the possibilities that wait in the sideshadows take me on this journey of understanding? Consider the words of Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, whose words on courage seem relevant to the proposition that leaders are courageous and take risks. To Aristotle (384-322 BC) courage is

a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear...and it chooses or endures things because it is noble to do so, or because it is base not to do so. (1952b, pp. 362-363)

Aristotle relates other sorts of courage including the courage of the citizen-soldier, which he associates with virtue and bravery in the face of battle. Aristotle also reveals the way Socrates sees courage as a form of knowledge and includes “experience with regard to particular facts” that professional soldiers use to their advantage in times of war. To Aristotle, courage involves pain because “it is harder to face what is painful than to abstain from what is pleasant” (1952b, pp. 362-363). Where is the place of courage in choosing what I believe to be right or noble?

This question brings me to deliberate on what I might mean by being ethically in the world and acting ethically as a leader? Hutchins (1952a) further informs my understanding of the proposition that leaders act ethically by linking ethical doctrines with the status given to duty as a moral principle. He argues that there is perhaps no more significant issue in moral philosophy than the relationship existing between the ethics of duty and the ethics of pleasure or happiness. To Hutchins, the morality of duty involves judging every act according to its obedience to law and the basic moral distinction between right and wrong (p. 362). That word *right* seems to be emerging as a key word in relation to leadership. How can I know what is right for every situation that confronts me as

a leader? What are the implications here for my understanding of leadership in relation to the virtue and personal character of a leader?

Aristotle (384-322 BC) in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1952b, p. 351) outlines his thinking on virtue.

We must, however, not only describe virtue as a state of character, but also say what sort of state it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well...

Aristotle then expands on this view, focusing on moral virtue.

...if, further, virtue is more exact and better than any art, as nature also is, then virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean moral virtue; for it is this that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect and the intermediate. For instance, both fear and confidence, and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. (1952b, p. 352)

Aristotle seems to be saying that virtue involves balancing our emotions as we seek to have the right motive in doing things in the right way. If so, does this understanding underscore the importance Aristotle places on “means” in pursuing “the good”?

Hutchins adds another dimension to this discussion on ethics and virtue in his reference to a type of philosophising about history and the insights it might provide for human conduct (1952a, p. 718). Is there a connection here with my proposition that leaders embrace and cultivate tradition? Hutchins makes reference to the *Essays* of the great French Renaissance thinker, Michel Montaigne, who sees the reading of history and biography as a window from which to view the world.

This great world is the mirror wherein we are to behold ourselves, to be able to know ourselves as we ought to do in the true bias. (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 718)

For Montaigne, man can only know himself when this knowledge sets against the large scene of history and amidst the variety of human nature. Hutchins also features German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's different perspective on this issue as expressed in his *Philosophy of History*. Hegel says "what experience and history teach is that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it" (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 718).

According to Hutchins, both Hegel and Montaigne reveal the rich insights that attention to our history and tradition can bring, with Montaigne believing that reflecting on history assists self-understanding and Hegel arguing that man, over time, has failed to heed the lessons of history (1952a, p. 718).

Thomas Aquinas (1222-1274), in *Summa Theologica*, speaks of human law in relation to tradition.

Because human laws are devised by human reason, like other arts, the tenets of former times give place to others if something better occurs. Therefore, the same should apply to human laws...Further, by taking note of the past we can provide for the future. (1952, p. 236)

Aquinas seems to not only underscore the importance of learning from the past, but also using these insights to plan for the future. Is this understanding relevant to my proposition that leaders establish a vision and values with others?

Sideshadowing like this with Hutchins in the fantastic literature of Aristotle, Montaigne and Aquinas provides me with insight into the virtuous dimension of leadership and the place of courage and vision. My sideshadowing has affirmed the place of courage in leadership, especially courage of the kind explained by Aristotle that is beyond self-interest. I have also developed a heightened awareness of the way my vision for the future may sometimes be limited by my experience. I need to take greater heed of the past as I imagine and seek a better future. In drawing the threads of this sideshadowing discussion together, I feel the need to inquire, more deeply, into the notion of virtuous leadership and its

relationship to ends, means and “the good”. I suspect my stories, which I am still to share with you, will challenge my thinking about leadership further. Perhaps I need to be open to more possibilities for understanding that await me in the sideshadows.

## CHAPTER 3

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### THE THIRD INSIGHT: OPENNESS, DISCERNMENT AND CHANGE

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Palestini (2003) argues that improvement and sustained progress come from a clear vision of the kind of place the organisation ought to be. All members of the organisation need to participate in the formation of our vision and be accountable for bringing it to fruition. He states that it is here where critical humanism and functionalism intersect. It is difficult for an organisation to be humane if there is no order (pp. 36-37).

Palestini's words remind me of the two key questions I needed to consider following the development of River View's vision and values. Does my school community truly understand what our vision means for our school, which expresses our desire to *develop a community-based education which would provide a pathway of learning for life*? The second question was *if this was where we wish to go, how would we get there*?

In regard to the first question, the importance of community came through the vision and values process very strongly. Shields (2003) argues that if we wish to use the term "community" in relation to schooling, we need to clarify its meaning in relation to the purposes of schools. She holds that people too often assume that everyone has a common understanding of the meaning of community. She illustrates this view by citing the confusion that exists between the notions of school-community relationships and schools as communities. To Shields, the former is concerned with the school's relationship with its wider community, whereas the latter focuses on creating a sense of belonging within the school (p. 37). Shields also argues that schools "must value the intrinsic worth of all members of the community, come together with respect, engage in dialogue, form new understandings, discover shared values, and create a more inclusive, more socially just community in which all children may also succeed academically" (p. 2).

Jim Cumming (1999), whose book *Guide to Effective Community-Based Learning* examines approaches to community-based learning, maintains that most primary and secondary schools maintain some form of contact with their local communities. Cumming says that the rationale behind such involvement is usually associated with attitudes and values concerned with the development of a civil society. He believes that this involvement with community is widening as educators come to understand its potential to enhance student learning and the life of local communities (p. 9).

Cumming describes community-based learning as

a structured approach to learning and teaching that connects meaningful community experience with intellectual development, personal growth and active citizenship. (1999, p. 12)

I use Cumming's perspective on community-based learning as a lens to help me reflect on my experience at River View. Learning occurs beyond the classroom, out in the community and involves people other than teachers in the learning process. Cumming identifies the key goals of community-based learning as student achievement and community or social development. Cumming draws on the knowledge and experience of schools, community organisations, and other agencies, both in Australia and internationally, to outline four principles that he believes underpin community-based learning. First, it is learner-centred and encourages students to develop a sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, their learning. The second principle focuses on the achievement of outcomes negotiated between all partners in the learning process. The third principle targets learning that has a connection to the real world and addresses a specific issue, problem or practice. The fourth principle outlined by Cumming stresses the co-operation of all partners in the planning, delivery and review of the learning activity (p. 12).

How does Cumming's perspective on community-based learning fit with the River View approach? In broad terms, our school community wanted to use the resources of the community to enhance learning. It also wanted the school to be involved in the life of the community and the community in the life of the school. I know this through our vision and values conversations. Coincidentally, this pursuit seems consistent with the key goals of community-based learning as

advocated by Cumming. I am confident our vision represented what our community genuinely wanted. This raises the second question I referred to earlier. If this is where we wish to go, how would we get there?

River View Primary School's decision to become a Curriculum Project School in the development of a new curriculum seemed an ideal strategy to help us realise the hopes and aspirations of our school community. The following story outlines how we became a project school.

### Towards a New Curriculum

In 2000, the Tasmanian Department of Education had commenced work on the development of a new curriculum. The opportunity existed in 2001 to express our interest in becoming a project school that would contribute to its development. These schools would receive significant funding to employ a part-time curriculum project officer and provide 'off class time' for staff to work on project activities. As principal, I was keen for River View to become a project school.

Presentations heard at the National Quality Teaching Conference held in Melbourne during July, 2001 that I referred to earlier in this study had influenced me. In particular, the following words delivered by David McRae in the panel session resonated with me.

Schools are incredibly successful. Magic bullets never work in education - inspiration and remarkable efforts do. Learning is work!

Schools need to provide the right conditions for their teachers to be autonomous professionals making things better for kids. There are no rote applications for good teaching. We must rely on people who are capable, responsible and committed to the task. Quality teachers do make the difference!!

(Working Paper 10)

I believed we needed to get serious about teaching and learning. It was my observation that teachers tended to work in isolation from each other. We needed to find a meaningful way for teachers to have conversations about teaching and learning. I wanted them to learn from each other and spread good teaching across all of the school.

I first tabled with senior staff my interest in becoming a project school. They had become my reliable sounding board for decision-making. I explained my rationale for wanting to be a curriculum project school and my desire to table this with staff at a coming staff meeting. I also pointed out that the Department of Education had mandated implementation of the new curriculum for 2005. I argued that we might as well access the resources that come with project school involvement.

Senior staff wanted clarification of departmental expectations of project schools. The best information I had was that project schools were required to negotiate their role with the Tasmanian Department of Education. We would discuss any negotiated role with our teachers before submitting it to the Department for approval.

I explained to senior staff my desire to negotiate a role that focussed on community-based learning, as expressed in our Vision Statement. I also indicated my desire for a secret ballot of teaching staff in order to make a decision on our project school involvement. I wanted wholehearted participation in the project or none at all. In my opinion, a decision that would impact so significantly on the work of teachers had to be theirs. I said to senior staff that the minimum level of agreement for our involvement would need to be a figure of around seventy percent. I didn't want to be involved in the project if, for example, only fifty percent of staff were committed to it. I believed that we needed a substantial mandate from a significant majority of staff for us to proceed with the project in earnest.

One of the four senior staff members, in particular, wasn't convinced of the merits of project school involvement. The following conversations come from my diary notes.

Beth - I'm concerned that this will end up being just another thing teachers have to do.

Another two senior staff members remained non-committal whilst one, Sara, could see merit in our involvement. She supported the idea.

Sara - I can see what you're saying, but we'll eventually need to be working with the new curriculum anyway, won't we? We might as well come on board now and grab the money whilst we can.

Beth - Yes, I can see that, but we don't know what all this will involve...

I continued to emphasise the opportunity that project school resources would provide to pursue our vision with vigour. I acknowledged the arguments for and against our involvement. Working Paper 2 records me saying the following.

Me - From what I've heard, we're not all in agreement on this issue. Obviously, we've got some reservations. But I also think there is enough merit in the idea to hand this one over to staff. They are the ones who will be most affected. How do you feel about a secret ballot at the next staff meeting? I'd need to do some homework beforehand so they've got the best information before them."

(Aside: From a more mature viewpoint, one I hoped to have reached at this time of writing, I seem to be saying "Thanks for your input, but we're going to do this anyway!" Is this where a leader has to take a risk and make a decision that doesn't necessarily enjoy majority support, as Bill Clinton intimated in his book *My Life* and referred to in my story *Trust the Gut?* I will explore this idea shortly).

Nevertheless, as I continued to conduct discussion and debate, we eventually 'agreed' to table a proposal for our involvement as a curriculum project school to staff at the next staff meeting.

I had contacted officers from the Department of Education seeking key points about what our involvement as a project school may mean for teachers and their work. I wanted to present teachers with the most accurate picture of departmental expectations of project schools. Armed with this information, I delivered a carefully prepared presentation. My spiel to staff, summarised in the document distributed at the meeting, went like this.

Our task this afternoon is to decide whether we wish to express our desire to be a curriculum project school.

We will continue to move forward as a school - whether or not we decide to become a project school.

Personally, I'd love to free up how we work in order to do great things for kids and make the task of being a teacher at this school the most exciting, fulfilling and rewarding job it can be.

We need to create time to think through how we may do this. I have a role in finding a way to make this happen. If it's not as a project school, we'll find other ways. Our growth isn't

dependent on being a project school - I want to make that very clear.

(Aside: Can I hear a touch of the autocrat in my voice in this last sentence? My point was that I didn't want staff to feel coerced towards approval of our project school involvement. We would find other ways to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of our school community if we needed to).

I then went on to explain Departmental expectations of project schools and the resources that would come with such involvement. I had also prepared a flow chart that illustrated links between the Vision and Values of our school and the new curriculum under development. The following meeting notes distributed to staff describe the process that I negotiated with them for making a decision on our project school involvement.

The following process is proposed:

- Sharing of the most accurate information available.
- Reflection, discussion and question time.
- A secret 'Yes' or 'No' ballot - with substantial majority support being required for us to express our interest as a project school.
- If we achieve substantial majority staff support, we then need to seek similar support from our School Council for project school involvement. If we receive their support, a Department of Education committee will then consider our application to be a project school.

Staff seemed genuinely surprised at the formality of the decision-making process. I remember saying that "...if we're not together on this, there's no point doing it. We'll find another way to get where we want to go. We need a figure of around seventy percent approval for us to proceed."

After delivering the presentation and allowing time for discussion and questions, we proceeded to the secret ballot on the question, "Do you agree to River View Primary School expressing our interest to be a curriculum project school?"

Sixty-nine percent of staff responded in the affirmative. I experienced a few awkward moments on declaration of the ballot because I had said a figure of around seventy percent would be required. I posed the question to staff "Do we have a mandate to proceed?"

I didn't want to manipulate the outcome of the ballot, but I also didn't want to unduly procrastinate over the decision. Staff went quiet, and seemed to be waiting for me to make a decision. I then said what I was thinking, that I didn't want to manipulate the decision, but "if there are no further comments and no views to the contrary, then I declare that the ballot result provides a mandate to express our interest in becoming a curriculum project school." After the meeting, I wasn't sure that I had done the right thing in declaring that we had achieved a mandate.

As I was walking out the door that afternoon, a teacher came up to me and said, "That was really good tonight. This is just what our school needs. How do you think those teachers who voted 'No' will handle it?" My reply was, "We'll bring them with us."

The next day, another teacher, in responding to a comment I made concerning how I wished we had received seventy per cent endorsement instead of sixty nine per cent, said I need not have worried. She thought I was splitting hairs on that issue and people were comfortable with our decision. This comment did help me feel better about the outcome of the meeting.

(Working Paper 2)

In retelling this experience, I see the decisions to pursue the curriculum project school involvement and to give staff the choice to be involved or not through a secret ballot as two of my most important decisions in recent years. They provided our school community with a genuine mandate to work collaboratively in making things better for students using a community-based approach to learning.

This pursuit goes to the heart of my next proposition.

### **Proposition VII - Leaders know when to be collaborative.**

The words of Hurley (2003, p. 33) in relation to openness expressed in his report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference seems relevant to this proposition.

Openness - Leaders are open to new ideas and new situations, because this is the way they can find solutions to what might appear to be intractable problems. Not only are they open to the unexpected, they are also willing to leave 'home' and meet their people where they are, geographically and metaphorically.

I knew that I had left the home of my comfort zone by inviting staff to make a decision via the unusual process of a secret ballot.

I use the words “know when to be collaborative” for this proposition because it is my experience that collaborating is not always the best course of action. I believe there may be times when a leader needs to shoulder the burden of a decision alone. Recalling, for example, my decision to remove Rita from her teaching responsibility on the early childhood class in the *Biting the Bullet* narrative is a case in point. I did not, and still do not feel that Rita, as a member of my senior staff team, should have her future openly discussed with other senior staff members.

The Rocky Coast principals illustrate the complex nature of collaborating in the context of their schools.

Prue - This year, I made the decision not to have staff meetings unless we really needed them. If we need to address an issue, I send out an email on the issue. This approach denied one particular teacher the opportunity to grandstand. At our first staff meeting, he started doing this. Only half of the staff attended staff meetings because the rest were part-time. If we need to talk, we do it together over lunch, all together. I've also instituted one-on-one conversations with staff because they're all at different stages of their professional growth. I've engaged staff opportunities to team up or cluster up on common interests. This has led to an informal model of inquiry-based learning for the staff that's right for this context, my school, and these personalities. I'm not going to impose things on them that they're not ready for or don't want to know.

Eve - The structure of our Rocky Coast cluster meeting has really worked well. The truth is that sharing an issue that's going on is great for my professional development. The support is really, really necessary. The benefits of the collaborating are beneficial to my health and well-being as a detox for everything I am going through. I also think it's so important to have a friend or someone that I can go to for advice or use as a sounding board. I need someone to

help draw out what I'm thinking. Often, it's just doing that which helps me solve the problem.

(Working Paper 4)

In reflecting on *Towards a New Curriculum*, I see how curriculum project involvement helped us work towards realising the school's vision, especially in relation to community-based learning. As my asides indicate, leading people towards such action is not easy. Senge (1992) details the way leaders assist their people to see the bigger picture and understand how different parts of the organisation interact. Leaders act as teachers to connect their people to the "purpose story". They articulate the reasons behind why the organisation exists and the directions in which it is heading. According to Senge, leaders who are teachers add a sense of purpose, continuity and identity - a "common destiny", to the lives of people in their organisation (pp. 353-354). Although I can't claim to have exercised such leadership, it is worthy of my aspirations.

*Towards a New Curriculum* illuminates the positive influence of professional learning on my leadership. There is no doubt that my passion for our curriculum project involvement stems from my attendance at the 2001 National Quality Teacher Conference in Melbourne. The presentations were inspiring and fuelled me with a strong research-based rationale for River View to become a project school. Other school leaders could benefit from participation in similar professional learning opportunities. Consider the comments made by Eve.

If there was some sort of way to help me grow professionally, that would be good in terms of leadership. I'm at a loss as to where you get the ideas and inspiration to make things work.

(Working Paper 4)

Eve's pondering over where she might get ideas and inspiration from seems significant. Perhaps school leaders like Eve need to open themselves up to the more significant professional learning opportunities available to them. Senge highlights the importance of doing just that, quoting Hanover Insurance President Bill O'Brien from his paper *Advanced Maturity*.

To seek personal fulfilment only outside of work and to ignore the significant portion of our lives which we spend working, would be to limit our opportunities to be happy and complete human beings (as cited in Senge, 1992, pp. 143-144).

Tina Blythe, a Harvard University researcher, also helps me contemplate Eve's comment. Blythe delivered a presentation to teachers and school leaders at the 2001 Leading Learning Conference entitled *Navigating the Deep Waters: Teaching and Learning for Understanding*. In response to a question about how teachers "may keep their sanity" during times of significant curriculum reform, Blythe's advice was directive but perhaps with the best intentions. She told us to draw on our interests and passions and enjoy our work! Consultation with colleagues and students was preferable to "going it alone." She stressed the importance of pacing ourselves during the year and over the years. She told us to look for the "driftwood on the beach" in our professional learning and take on board ten per cent of something different or better each year (Working Paper 15).

In particular, Blythe's last statement influences me. I rarely attend a meeting, workshop, seminar or conference where I fail to take away a piece of driftwood, something that has special significance for me. I am also attracted to the notion of taking on ten per cent of change each year, whether it is in regard to the development of me, my staff, or my school. Professional learning, in its many forms is my source of ideas and inspiration, and it is the cornerstone of my next proposition.

### **Proposition VIII - Leaders are learners.**

Hurley (2003) enlarges on this proposition in his report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference.

Learning - Leaders are also followers, the expert is also the novice, the teacher is also the learner. There is no need to fear not knowing something when there is still the opportunity to learn. Principals can learn about their work from each other because there are no more experienced and skilled teachers of the subject than themselves. (pp. 32-33)

Here, Hurley emphasises the learning that school leaders can glean from each other. Patrick Duignan (1996, pp. 3-4), in speaking about the second of his themes on leadership, advocates the need for us to "maintain a holy curiosity." To Duignan, authentic leaders are good learners. Leaders need to rediscover a

childlike wonder, awe and excitement in life's journey. Duignan refers to K. L. Smith's *Prosperity Reigns* (1993), who quotes Einstein's words on curiosity.

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvellous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity. (as cited in Duignan, 1996, p. 4)

To Duignan, the rate of change in today's world requires us to be lifelong learners. Matthew refers to the potential of cluster meetings, made up of principals from local schools, for school leaders to come together to discuss issues and learn from each other.

What we'd like to see is the principals working together as a group so they can induct new members as the personnel changes. We also want to restructure cluster meetings and allow time for sharing things they are doing well with each other. The agenda might be to present an issue using a group protocol or share something positive that's happening followed by some routine matters such as school music bands visiting and so on. This process, hopefully, will help principals solve problems collegially.

(Working Paper 4)

Cindy Cisneros (2001) provides support to Matthew's desire for enhanced collegiality and sharing of ideas. She argues that the role of principals is changing. Principals, more than ever before, are accountable for their school's teaching and learning outcomes. She offers that, within this context, principals need to find new ways of sustaining their own professional growth and sharing of successful practices with colleagues. To Cisneros, principals are the prime lever of change in schools. They must take the time to improve their skills in order to provide the best possible environment for student learning (p. 3).

## **Exploring the Role of Principal**

Cisneros cites several factors that have arisen over the last decade to influence the role of a principal in today's schools. They include an increasingly diverse student population with an ever-growing number of minority groups; shrinking

confidence in public schools and a corresponding movement towards private schools; increased violence in schools and a declining appeal of the principalship with fewer people aspiring to the position; and an increase in calls for principal accountability in relation to student learning outcomes (pp. 7-8). Rocky Coast principal Wayne seems to unwittingly endorse this view.

I knew this role would be challenging. I've heard others say it is a very autonomous role. One of the tensions is that it is a physical impossibility to do all that you want to do. There is a tension between having the vision to move the school forward and keeping the school afloat. I'm also conscious of the time I'm out of the school.

A huge part of my current role involves communication and relationships. This includes mediation and putting out spot fires all over the place. I'm also engaged in planning most of the community-based activities. Another important aspect of my role is accountability - satisfying department requirements. I'm also glad I've been able to start some sort of sharing among staff around the new curriculum. In our learning program, there are areas for growth. Other schools, especially the larger ones, have a great capacity for teachers to learn from each other. But only three out of sixteen teachers have remained here since 2002 - a period of less than two years.

(Working Paper 4)

Wayne's last comments in regard to the transient nature of his staff illustrate one of the many local factors that might challenge those in school leadership positions. According to Cisneros, the role of principal is continually evolving and includes the supervision of staff, provision of appropriate professional learning experiences for teachers, ensuring an adequate range and supply of resources are available to address teaching and learning needs and the creation of a safe and healthy learning environment for all (pp. 7-8).

The views of Noel, a principal in a Tasmanian secondary school, on the role of principal seem to endorse the multi-dimensional nature of the position that Cisneros detailed. As I shared with you earlier, Noel spoke at the *2001 Curriculum Consultation Project Schools Meeting* about a student perspective on the role of teachers in producing quality learning outcomes. Students stressed

the significance of teachers being passionate, well-planned and connected with them on a personal level. Noel's school had been working on the development of a new curriculum for Tasmanian schools, just as River View was to do in 2002.

In speaking about the role of principal, Noel identified the importance of matching resources to priorities, providing space for student voices to be heard, making strategic links to existing structure and processes, being a learner in the process, keeping vision alive, keeping a global perspective, modelling teamwork in leadership, engendering risk and nurturing trust, helping others understand change issues, ensuring communication channels are open, being a gatekeeper to manage school agendas, balancing support and pressure of staff, working with the community to establish learning opportunities outside the school, and ensuring teaching and learning is our core business (Working Paper 5).

Is Noel's outline of the principal's role consistent with how others see it? Sharon Pritash (2002) in her book *What People Think Principals Do* tells how children and adults interviewed in the writing of her book place high value on the interpersonal domain of leadership. They believe principals should spend more time interacting with others. Those interviewed had a strong preference for principals who are visible, available and actively involved with all levels of the school community (pp. 102-103). Evident in Noel's advice to principals is clear emphasis on the importance of visibility and relationships in leadership, which is something that I have instinctively known to be important. The following diary notes help me reflect on Noel's counsel.

#### **Diary Notes: Getting Around the Classrooms**

Over the years I've come to know that students, staff and parents really value school leaders getting into the classrooms and showing interest in what is going on. I have made this an absolute priority for Monday mornings and any other time during the week where I can find the time. I also learned from a colleague the habit of walking around classrooms before school and making contact with every teacher and staff member between 8:30am and 9:00am each day. I do this so they have the opportunity to informally approach with me any issue they would like to discuss. I also do it to show interest in what they are doing and get to know them a little better. I always feel good

after my daily rounds of the school or my ventures into the classrooms. I feel I'm in touch with the reality of the school. My well-being is less certain when the imperatives of budgets, school planning regimes and so on take over. I feel as if I fail to make the people I work with a priority. During these times, I also feel more vulnerable to staff discontent because my work is more distant from the classroom. As I write this, I'm becoming aware of the link between my sense of well-being and the need to maintain close links to the students and teachers I work with each day.

(Working Paper 2)

How noble my words were at this time! Whilst I maintained the habit of getting around the classrooms before school each day, my classroom visits during school hours were never as frequent as I would have liked them to be. I have commenced every year with a new resolution to fulfil this part of my role better. My performance in this area has inevitably declined as each year progresses. Even now, as I write, I ask myself why I have allowed other things to intrude on this very important part of my role. The only honest answer I can give is that other duties such as planned or impromptu meetings have become a greater priority than classroom visits. They should not have. The words of Serena, a teacher on staff who also works part-time in another school system, underscore the importance of getting around the classrooms and the school. Staff in her other school were invited to describe the sort of principal that they would like to see appointed to their school. The position was vacant and soon to be advertised. I recorded her chat with me in my 2004 diary notes below.

I like the way you come in to see what we're doing. It reminds me of the conversation staff at my other school had yesterday. We had to describe the sort of principal we would like to see appointed to our school. Most said they would like to have someone who was visible around the school and interested in what they're doing. They didn't want someone who was threatening to them - they just wanted someone who was interested in their work.

(Working Paper 2)

Whilst I appreciate the positive nature of these comments, I feel an element of discomfort in hearing them because I know I do not visit classrooms as often as I

would like to. I am confident Serena is right about the way staff appreciate the presence of an interested and non-threatening principal around the school as I once resolved to be. My discomfort compounds when I am asked by people who are yet to experience the role of principal, "What do principals do with their time?"

Having been principal of isolated and rural schools with student populations ranging from fifteen to six hundred and fifteen students, I know that the nature of the role varies from smaller schools to larger ones. For example, my experience at Grassy Primary School on King Island during 1989-1990 involved me teaching four days per week, with the fifth day reserved for administrative duties. My current role in a larger school of five hundred and fifty students does not involve regularly scheduled teaching duties. I also delegate many of the administrative duties to senior members of staff. Because of the higher student population, there are more students, staff, parents and community members who require time with me on a formal or informal basis. Meetings and conversations take up a far greater proportion of my time in a larger school than in a smaller school. The following diary notes illustrates what a 'typical day' as a principal in a larger school might look like.

#### **Diary Notes: The Job**

Morning Duty / Meeting re Community-Based Learning/Getting Around the Classrooms /Completing the School Development Plan and Annual Report /Grade 5/6 Assembly / Lunch Duty / Dealing with Complaints re Lending of School Uniform / Professional Learning in Information Technology

What a day! Very rewarding, but I left with a sour taste in my mouth. On the positive side of the ledger, I managed to get around to every classroom at the North Campus. I spent my time well before heading off to the Grade 5/6 assembly. I said a few words and then enjoyed watching the children perform their items and share their work.

After lunch, I attempted to ensure the Annual Report and School Development Plan was completed. A prior appointment from a Department of Education officer made this task difficult but he did provide me with valuable computer training relevant to some new administrative tasks I had to undertake. Parents of a

student wishing to enrol from interstate also made an impromptu visit to my office, as did another parent wishing to make a complaint about a school uniform matter.

My bad feelings at the end of the day weren't so much about the particular issues raised. I was really annoyed at the way people can just enter my office at any time and expect me to give them my full attention. I'm not sure what the answer is. I don't want people to think that I am aloof or inaccessible. However, I also don't want people to ambush me as I felt they did this afternoon. I'll ponder this one. (Aside: I sound a little full of my own importance here, don't you think?)

(Working Paper 2)

My reflection on the unscheduled interruptions seems to reveal that the job of principal in a larger school seems to be very much about conversations with people - whether they are scheduled or unscheduled. As an experienced colleague principal once said to me when we were talking about the impact of such interactions on the role, "Terry, those conversations *are* the role."

In an effort to better understand this issue, I engaged in a self-shadowing exercise using a hand held personal computer over a four week period between April and May, 2004. During that time, I tried to make a note of everything said to me, or by me. I recorded the first day of this experience below. I should point out that, over the four week period, some days were less demanding and others more demanding than the day recorded below. I chose the first day to share with you because I was more diligent in my record keeping on this day than on any other!

#### **Self-Shadowing Exercise**

8:30am

Open email; conversation with teacher re parent separation; conversation with deputy principal regarding death of staff member's parent; visit each classroom.

9:00am

Respond to phone call from Australian Education Union re values education; draft two important documents for staff meeting tonight (Future Educational Provision in Seavale / Best Practice Indicator Survey for School Review); respond to phone

call re person to be interviewed tomorrow for school attendant position - ill father flown to Melbourne, not available for interview - consider whether to conduct phone interview instead; meeting with support services officer re professional learning program for teacher assistants at a coming staff training day; meeting with deputy principal re staff meeting matters; meeting with teacher assistant re protocols for use of equipment in multi media centre.

11:00am

'Time Out Room' Duty; phone call to Human Resources Branch re interviews for the school attendant position; check emails and reply; visit to other campus - talk with officer in charge re school attendant interviews and make arrangements re her pending absence for two weeks; visit classrooms and return to other campus.

1:00pm

'Time Out Room' duty during lunchtime; email check and reply; meeting with staff member who is on maternity leave clarifying her date of return to duty; meeting with coordinator re *Links Literacy Program* and grade level expectations in literacy; conversation with bursar re leave arrangements for two bereaved staff members whose parents passed away last week; write newsletter article re Anzac Day; phone call to applicant re school attendant position about possibility of phone interview; setting up room for school attendant interviews tomorrow.

3:15pm

Staff meeting at other campus

- values education;
- campus review; and
- presentation on the needs and characteristics of autistic children.

4:30pm

Complete newsletter article on Anzac Day.

5:00pm

Depart for home.

(Working Paper 2)

All in a day's work! Let me summarise where I spent my time. Excluding the informal interactions, conversations and banter that is very much a part of school life in corridors, staffrooms, classrooms and the playground (I could not record these as they were too numerous – perhaps in the hundreds), my self-shadowing revealed my day was comprised of checking and responding to my email on three separate occasions, three conversations with staff or parents on issues of significance, three phone calls, visits to each of the school's twenty classrooms across both campuses (if only I could make the time to visit twenty classrooms every day) three separate periods of thinking and writing about school matters, six meetings – only one of which was scheduled, and two periods of student supervision.

What can I learn from such an exercise?

In the *Introduction*, I referred to Carolyn Ellis and her advocacy for autoethnographic approaches to research that seem to have resonance with my study methodology. Nicholas Holt (2003), in his Paper *Representation, Legitimation, and Autoethnography: An Autoethnographic Writing Story* explains autoethnography as “a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context” (p. 2). Holt says that, regardless of the particular focus, authors tend to use their own experiences as a vehicle for reflection to more deeply examine interactions between self and others. Holt acknowledges that the use of self as the only source of data in autoethnography has been criticised for being overly self-indulgent and narcissistic. He maintains that this approach to research is at odds with traditional criteria used to assess qualitative inquiries (pp. 2-3). Holt expresses the view that, despite the scepticism surrounding autoethnography and its reliance on self, we should not dismiss it because “people do not accumulate their experiences in a social vacuum” (p. 16). It is with this understanding that I feel my exercise in self-shadowing provides some intelligence on what a school day might look like for a principal in a school with over five hundred students. As Stacey Holman Jones says in her article *Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political*, “autoethnography writes a world in a state of flux and movement” (2005, p. 764). From my self-shadowing experience, this is the nature of schools. On that one day, unscheduled meetings and conversations took much of my time. The events of the day also pointed to the strategic nature of the role of principal. For

example, a glance at the agenda for staff meeting that afternoon reveals "Campus Review" as an agenda item. This was part of a broader School Council review. The School Council included elected parent and staff representatives who were responsible for the approval of the school budget and development of school policies. The focus of the "Campus Review" concerned how our dual campus school might have operated in the longer term.

As I reflect on this self-shadowing exercise, I am also mindful of the relatively minor impact of inappropriate student behaviour on this day. This has not always been so, as evidenced by diary notes of another day.

#### **Diary Notes: Suspension**

I had just made the decision to get started on my school budget today when the following events took place in three separate incidents.

A boy student hit his sister out in the playground so I went outside to investigate and follow-up on what had happened.

A parent dropped in to complain about another child kicking and punching her son yesterday. She insisted on showing me the bruise on his thigh.

A girl brought a green card (to signify a teacher requires assistance from a member of senior staff) to me with a request that I go to his classroom and collect a boy who had refused to follow simple directions and had sworn at both his teacher and a senior staff member. Unfortunately, the consequence of the boy's behaviour is suspension. This action follows an almost daily ritual of non-cooperation by the boy, outbursts of violence towards students and abuse of staff. I had sent the boy home recently for similar behaviour. The time had come for more formal sanctions and support for the boy's program at school.

(Working Paper 2)

The time I gave to each of these incidents is very much a part of my role as principal. Yet, as the self-shadowing exercise illustrates, there are many other demands on my time. Ainscow (1999) argues that studies of change theory reveal the significance of regular, personal interactions as a key ingredient to success (p. 142). It seems that my role, particularly in the larger school, is not

only about being available to people but also engaging with them as persons. I needed to be 'present' to the mother so that she knew her concern was important to me. At almost the same time, I needed to be available to staff so that I could manage the challenging behaviour of the child who was eventually suspended. Serena's earlier comments about the way staff like leaders who are visible around the school and interested in what they are doing also lend support to Ainscow's emphasis on the significance of a leader's regular and personal interactions. For me, this means being 'in touch' with people's concerns and well-being is perhaps one of the most important leadership practices. And so emerges my next proposition.

### **Proposition IX - Leaders are in touch.**

Principals need to know what is happening in their schools. Hurley's (2003) report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference sheds light on this proposition.

In touch - Educational leaders have a responsibility to be in touch with the 'hot knowledge' - the latest in educational theory and practice, and community concerns. Their teachers are active professionals, and schools are as much about staff as students. Leadership has to be about supporting good pedagogical practice. (p. 33)

Whilst Hurley acknowledges the importance of being in touch with community concerns that are perhaps consistent with, for example, my experiences with the mother of the child who had been kicked and punched, he takes the proposition of being in touch further by pointing out that school leaders also need to be in touch with what is happening outside of their school if they are serious about improving teaching and learning practices.

How does my evolving understanding of the school leader being in touch relate to the kind of schools that Shields (p. 73) earlier suggests are worthy of our hopes and aspirations - schools that are just, optimistic, empathetic and democratic? How does this understanding also relate to the earlier emphasis by Noddings on caring relations in the development of student competence (as cited in Shields, 2003, p. 70)?

I recall an eulogy by Steve Lovell, who was at the time a teacher at Yolla District High School, for David Probert, a highly respected colleague principal. Principals received a copy of the eulogy at a district principals meeting soon after David Probert's funeral.

### Eulogy for David Probert

I had the pleasure of commencing teaching duties at this school the same year as Mr Probert began his tenure as Principal - back in 1991, and I am privileged to be able to speak to you this afternoon on behalf of the teaching staff at our school, and, as well, the many hundreds of teachers throughout the state that he influenced with his unique personal style over a long period of time. For me, personally, he had considerable impact.

When I came here, I already had a good few years under my belt, but he rejuvenated my teaching. I am sure that we who are teachers, as the sad news of his passing reached us during the Easter break, could all reflect on how David Probert in some way inspired us to be better at our job.

Back in 1991, Yolla District High School was a far cry from what it is today. The secondary part of the school had only narrowly averted closure by the skin of its teeth a few years previously whereas the primary sector had attained the same high standards it maintains today. The secondary section, through no fault of the people operating here then was, speaking bluntly, second rate. It was nowhere near the standard of the well-resourced high schools down on the coast. Now, of course, it is.

When Mr Probert started here there was no assembly hall, the science lab was an accident waiting to happen, the bursar and office staff operated under the most taxing of conditions and, at the end of each recess, there was a line up of staff waiting to use the single toilet provided for their comfort.

I remember examining my English resources in those early days, and found the latest novel set we possessed was ten years old, falling to bits, and was patently not one to raise the excitement of modern youth.

On a day-to-day basis, the school operated by the seat of its pants. If a member of staff happened to be away, say on a Monday, then you could find yourself teaching Thursday's timetable on that day - prepared for it or not. If we happened to strike a fine Friday afternoon, it was pens down and off students would gallivant all over the countryside in something I seem to

remember was termed “foxes and hounds”. Fun as that may seem, it was hardly the way a modern school operates. Under David Probert we very quickly became a professional outfit.

Mr Probert had a vision for this school, and look around you at how we have realised his vision. There’s a state of the art science lab, state of the art computer sites, a modern kitchen, an upgraded MDT facility, a fabulous new art / music area, and our assembly hall - well it serves a purpose. All areas of the school are now reasonably well resourced and the English department has plenty of terrific, relevant novels for young people.

He supported to the hilt innovations such as cattle handling, aquaculture, and the Grade 6 / 7 model. You’ll also be pleased to know that staff now have a selection of toilets to choose from.

Of course others contributed to the process, but it was the drive, the energy, the sheer stubbornness and perseverance of Mr Probert that saw it all through.

He was not an office-bound principal - the type that seems to be to the fore in this day and age, with principals increasingly submerged in a welter of paperwork from above. Mr Probert was always out and about each day to see how his school was travelling. He formed a great tandem team with Mr Cox. I’m sure, on the odd occasion when Mr Probert’s vision for the school did take off into flights of fantasy, Mr Cox kept him grounded. I do seem to recall images of temperate rainforests, zoos, deer parks and hazelnut farms.

There is no doubt of Mr Probert’s love and care for his students. This far exceeded what one would normally expect from someone in his position. I recall paying him a visit in his office where he raised the delicate matter of Shakespeare. In my naivety, I felt it held little place in today’s modern English curriculum. Mr Probert felt, on the other hand, that without input from the venerable bard, our students would be behind the eight-ball studying English at Hellyer College. I was soon teaching Shakespeare - he had been quietly persuasive.

As late as last year Mr Probert called me and Mr Willcox into his office to help counsel a young Grade 5 student who was looking forward to being involved in our Grade 6 / 7 model with some trepidation. It was preying on her mind. This small example of how he was willing to give an hour or so of his time in a busy day to just one student with a problem, no matter how great or small, was a measure of the man.

I could go on and on. I could mention that foghorn voice, and his love of the public address system. There was an affinity he felt for the battler and the student with a learning disability. I could make a joke out of his love for Collingwood, and the roller-coaster ride that team had given him over the years. What of his delight of a good yarn, and that wondrous belly-laugh of his?

It would be remiss of me also not to make mention of his firm Christian principles. Above all else, he adored his beautiful wife and family, and I warmly recall the many times he opened up the family home for a staff function, occasions full of the joy of life and friendship.

I have worked with some legendary school leaders in my time - Noel Atkins and Don Lakin at Parklands, and Gerry Cross at Wynyard, are examples that spring to mind. As much as I admire these men for all their fine qualities, DL Probert, in my view, stood alone for his commitment to his teaching staff, his commitment to his school in the physical sense, and above all his commitment to his students. We all know the hours he put in.

In various ways and for varying reasons, we will miss him. He was one in a million, one of life's true gems. I know you will all chorus me when I say thank you Mr Probert for touching our lives in the way you did.

(Working Paper 16)

I still feel tingles down my spine when I read this. I think Shields and Noddings would approve of David Probert's leadership which relates well to the Burch (2000, p. 176) concept of *eros* referred to earlier that is concerned with ideals such as the greater good, passion, connection and empathy. The memory of David Probert prompts my next proposition arising from this study:

### **Proposition X - Leaders have passion.**

Hurley's (2003) report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference, which anticipates many of the leadership questions and issues that puzzle me, in many ways, captures the passion of David Probert. At the same time, he urges caution.

Relationships - The ability to initiate and sustain good relationships is crucial for any leader, and the crux is heart. Relationships are central to working well either alongside or together, and without the support of the majority of people, leaders will not be able to achieve change.

Major change will not be produced in an organisation simply by signing up one individualistic charismatic leader. (p. 32)

Here, Hurley cautions against 'great leader' theories, explaining that we can secure successful change by working well with others. Senge (1992), builds on this theme in describing how "creative tension" lies between what we want and our current reality. Creative tension is the force that brings the two together. Learning becomes a process of expanding our capacity to achieve our hopes and aspirations for the future. It is a lifelong endeavour. Learning organisations are not possible unless the people within an organisation share this ideal (p.141). In their book *Leadership on the Line*, American writers on leadership, Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky suggest that passion is evident in leadership when a set of issues moves us and we feel especially committed to them. These issues are perhaps rooted in our upbringing or culture (pp. 230-231). It seems that my exploration of the proposition on passion is revealing the importance of passion in change, perhaps embodied in the idea of people being genuinely committed towards a common goal.

Senge (1992) explains that when gaps between reality and vision appear, negative emotions sometimes arise that he terms "emotional tension". Senge tells that when these tensions arise, there is sometimes a tendency to lower the vision to relieve the associated anxiety. The risk with this strategy is that we abandon what we truly want (p.151). William Doll (2003), in his article *Modes of Thought*, adds another dimension to this discussion. Doll endorses the role of passion in teaching and learning but cautions that passion by itself is not enough. Doll proposes that play creates a "third space" where creativity and newness reside. In the absence of play, passion has the potential to enslave the possessor to an ideology (p. 9). From Steve Lovell's comments in his eulogy I suggest David Probert successfully created a kind of "third space" through being in touch with his people and supporting their innovative leanings. Such an approach may help guard against the emotional tension described by Senge.

Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink in *Sustaining Leadership* (2003) argue that educational change is seldom easy and virtually impossible to sustain. They contend that discussions on this subject regularly trivialise the notion of sustainability by likening it to maintainability, which is concerned with making

change last. They research deeper meanings of “sustainability” that involve efforts to sustain change in line with the “ecological origins of the concept.” To Hargreaves and Fink, society is complex and ever-changing and is causing a major shift in the demographics of schools. Such turbulence demands different ways of thinking about change in human and natural systems (p. 693).

Drawing on their five year research project on school improvement that involved six secondary schools in an urban and suburban school district in Ontario, as well as on *Change Over Time?* - a study by the Spencer Foundation on leadership that spanned eight high schools in New York State and Ontario, Hargreaves and Fink identified five key and interrelated characteristics of sustainability in educational change. First, improvement fosters learning rather than simply altering it. Second, improvement endures over time. Third, appropriate resources support improvement. Fourth, improvement does not impact negatively on the neighbouring environment of schools and their systems. And fifth, improvement enhances the ecological diversity and capacity of the educational and community environment. Sustainability requires a mindset that “is integrative, holistic, and ecological.” It takes into account the complexity of human and natural systems that Hargreaves and Fink assert is pivotal to addressing the complexities of the knowledge society (p. 695).

This reminds me of the words of educational consultant Mike Middleton (2001) in his presentation earlier referred to at a retreat for school principals of my district.

Change doesn't happen because we've gotten it wrong before.  
Change is a response to a changing world.

(Working Paper 9)

Another comment helpful to my understanding of change processes comes from a colleague principal at a 2002 Curriculum Consultation Project Schools Meeting.

People are not intentionally resistant - the task or endeavour may simply not engage them.

(Working Paper 17)

How does my emerging understanding of change compare to that of other school leaders? I will now diachronically return to the December, 2001 Curriculum Consultation Project Schools Meeting attended by principals and teachers who were working on the development of a new curriculum for Tasmanian schools.

Earlier in this study, I shared with you David Hanlon's views on the goals and purposes of education that were expressed at this meeting (Working Paper 5). Hanlon had managerial responsibility for the development of the new curriculum. At the same meeting, six school leaders whose schools had commenced their journey of change as a curriculum project school during 2001 provided an account of their change leadership experiences.

### **Change Stories in Curriculum**

*Sue - a primary school principal*

We thought we could use the curriculum consultation to get where we wanted to go. The first challenge was that the curriculum project officer was often out of the school. The other challenge was the amount of feedback the project officer was required to give to the Department of Education. A key message is to be clear on the purposes and values of the new curriculum and what they mean for your school. Tensions also arose in regard to Departmental deadlines. We started to move forward once we understood we were there to help the Department of Education create a new curriculum rather than simply focus on the needs of our school. It has been a stressful process and the level of change expected of staff has contributed to that. Stick with it - it'll work!

*John- a primary school curriculum project officer*

Change is to do with relationships, respect and a supportive environment. We adopted several "change principles".

(i) Emotions such as scars from past forays into change affect learning - we anticipated that we would feel fear and a sense of being out of control.

(ii) Learners are unique and control their own learning - we agreed we'd start at different places and end at different places and be happy people who are trying to move forward.

(iii) Social circumstances profoundly influence learning.

(iv) Learning is most meaningful when embedded in experience.

*Ros - a high school curriculum project officer*

Change must be relevant to teachers, the most relevant things being what happens in the classroom. Teachers developed a goal of helping students to be more fluent readers. They took

existing structures and built upon them to achieve their aim. Teachers needed to find quality learning time. This enabled them to present quality research that stimulated paradigm shifts. Our experience taught us to

- listen generously and empathetically - listen and legitimise what all are saying;
- be passionate and optimistic about what we're doing;
- have a high level of intellectual curiosity - go to the research and read; and
- avoid paranoia and self-pity.

*Jan - a high school curriculum project officer*

Barry Bennett (an Education Consultant based in Canada) believes innovation has an eight year implementation phase. We have used existing teams and social capital within the school. Change requires the asking of the right questions. Additionally, in this project, there are no sacred cows! We can question anything. The principal and project officer must work closely together.

*Mike - a primary school principal*

We need to explore the need for change. We need to work with staff and talk about the driving things that caused this project to happen. This is the very best opportunity we will ever have to talk about teaching and learning - an opportunity for the profession and classroom to be what it wants to be. We have to be willing to grapple - be prepared to suspend judgement and suspend cynicism. We are trying to reaffirm existing practice and connect new learning with old learning. There may also be some entrenched mindsets - we may endure revolution as well as evolution. A 'critical friend' for teachers is worth nurturing in the project. This is better than having the project officer or principal question the practice of class teachers. Teams need to have their own brief, with all groups being required to contribute to the learning of others within the school. It's important for the principal not only to check people are with you, but whether they are still with you. We need to build in accountability to colleagues, the school and the system. We also need to celebrate successes,

know when to 'back off' and have a plan in our head for the next bit. Have fun!!

*Hugh - a high school principal*

The principal's vision must be talked about and be congruent with the actions and life of the school. The more we help young people understand what they're learning is about, the more meaningful and effective the learning is. If we want change, we need to provide processes that enable deep thinking on beliefs and values that encourage paradigm shifts.

(Working Paper 5)

Might these school leaders be probing to articulate possibilities for becoming of the kind Stengers suggests is the difference between probability and possibility? I can hear Senge's (1992, p. 141) creative tension in their stories, that is the difference between where schools are and where they wish to be. Their lived experiences affirm the complex and contextual nature of change outlined by Hargreaves and Fink (2003) and emphasise the benefits of gaining congruence between the proposed change and a school's vision and values. Common to their stories is a leader's acknowledgement that tensions and difficulties will arise in the pursuit of change. The optimism, enthusiasm and openness of these six school leaders was also very evident in their presentations as they shared their struggles and learning arising from their change journey in curriculum. These understandings form the basis of my next proposition to flow from this study:

### **Proposition XI - Leaders are open to change.**

Diverting from Hurley on this occasion (his report did not seem helpful to my reflection on this proposition), Mike Wallace and Keith Pocklington, in their book *Managing Complex Educational Change: Large-Scale Reorganisation of Schools* (2002, p. 231), tell how the research on reorganisation indicates that complex educational change is very much dependent on content and context. Ainscow (1999) also emphasises that school improvement is a very complex process that requires a certain sensitivity to address inherent complexities. Describing schools as idiosyncratic communities comprised of many competing beliefs about teaching and learning, he stresses the importance of inquiry and reflection for advancing schools towards their desired ends.

In the change stories, Hugh advocates the need for “processes that enable deep thinking on beliefs and values that encourage paradigm shifts.” Ainscow, citing Barth, Fullan and Hopkins (1999), would seem to support Hugh in his belief that improvement comes from within (pp. 119-120). Joseph Badarocco Jr (2002) in his book, *Leading Quietly – an Unorthodox Guide to doing the Right Thing* seems to agree as he refers to the place of intention in the change process. He argues that motives need to be “good enough and strong enough.” Badarocco Jr explains that complex motives are often a sound indicator that people have a good understanding of a situation. People with complicated motives are less likely to miss nuances and take uninformed action. An awareness of the intricacies of their situation places them better to navigate their way forward. Badarocco Jr advocates that leaders take the time to stop, reflect, inquire and learn before addressing complex issues (pp. 48-50). Badarocco’s ideas on the importance of examining and understanding our motives when contemplating action has resonance with *An Ethical Framework for dealing with Difficult Human Issues* (Working Paper 13) examined earlier in this study. Some principal colleagues and I developed this framework which helps me deal with the more perplexing issues confronting me as a school leader. The framework includes questions such as, “For whose benefit will this decision be made?” and points to the importance of examination of motive before taking action on complex issues.

Senge (1992) builds on this idea, holding that an environment which encourages free expression of ideas and challenges to our thinking and that of others negates the harmful influence of politics and game playing in our organisations (p. 278). Nothing can undermine openness more than certainty, especially in dealing with complex issues. Senge counsels against the mindset of “the right answer.” Rather he encourages us to search for understanding, accepting that there is no definitive answer (p. 281).

To Senge, openness is a creative process (p. 282), a characteristic of relationships, not of individuals. He finds it makes little sense to say, “I am an open person.” He explains this in terms of our tendency to be open with some people and not with others (p. 284). To Senge, openness is to do with “sharing one’s feelings and views and being open to having those views change” (p. 285).

Having heard the reality and complexity of experiences described by other school leaders in *Change Stories in Curriculum* and the importance of openness emerging from my reflection, I will now reflect upon the change journey undertaken by River View Primary school as a curriculum project school. Our negotiated task with the Tasmanian Department of Education was *to determine teacher beliefs on community-based learning and its influence on student learning and social capital*. Teachers and parents at our school saw social capital as the health and well-being of the school community.

Examining the rationale for a community-based approach to learning, Cumming (1999) highlights the impact of economic, social and technological change on the daily lives of people across the world. The purposes of education and goals for schooling are under review with the growing recognition that the youth of today require a broader education that enables them to participate in, and contribute to, society. Much debate has been occurring about how schools can affect a smooth transition of their students to further education, training or employment. Alongside is another debate about whether the impact of information technology on learning might mean the school will no longer be the only vehicle for educating the young (pp. 12-13). In the context of the isolated Rocky Coast mining communities Matthew says

We're trying to do what the vision of Tasmania says - economic and social development. How does the mine here get workers? What are the implications to education and its interface with industry? How do you get education valued here? Tasmania's vision is complex because it's new. It involves understanding community.

(Working Paper 4)

The vision that Matthew refers to is *Tasmania Together*, a vision for the State of Tasmania developed during more than two-and-a-half years of community consultation. It is a long-term plan that seeks to provide Tasmanians with safe, prosperous communities and make the world aware of the State's skills in areas such as the arts, education and technology. Matthew's Rocky Coast experience indicates that understanding community may be central to the progress of this vision and education on the Rocky Coast.

Cumming (1999) sees that the educational climate today is concerned with learning how to learn and involves experiential and real-life learning. He sees that community-based learning could play a key role in ensuring that school practices accommodate the changing nature of our economic, social and technological landscape (pp. 12-13).

*Towards a New Curriculum* continues in the form of the evaluative report of River View's work as a curriculum project school. I sent this report to the Department of Education at the end of the 2002 school year. It tells of the school's change journey as we moved towards community-based approaches to learning. As author and in composing it, I used much of the written feedback that teachers gave me about their curriculum project experiences. I geared the report towards the teaching profession who were the target audience. Of some particular interest is that the language used reflected my mindfulness that the report was also for the bureaucracy as part of our obligations as a project school. I can see now that the passive voice I used intones a kind of lifelessness and fails to capture the vitality and enthusiasm that we were enjoying during the project. The real voices and experiences of the real people who contributed to this report seem compromised.

#### Towards a New Curriculum (Continued):

### A Report on the Progress of River View Primary as a Curriculum Project School

Our work as a curriculum project school necessitated some organisational change, especially in regard to the administrative structures of the school.

#### Staffing

A curriculum project officer was appointed on a 0.5 basis (two and a half days per week) to manage the project.

#### Collaborative Grade Level Teams

The curriculum project officer negotiated with teachers that each class would undertake some form of community-based learning project. These projects integrated traditional learning areas (mathematics, science, the arts etc) and accessed the resources of the community to enrich the learning experiences of students. Grade Level Teams (that is, Kinder and Prep, Grades 1 and 2,

Grades 3 and 4, Grades 5 and 6) met regularly to plan and reflect on their class projects using an action research based approach. We scheduled six formal meetings for this purpose during the year. They took place on student free days or during normal school hours between 11 am and 1 pm. The latter arrangement required the employment of supply teachers to free up River View teachers from their regular teaching duties.

### Management Committee

Each grade level group had a senior staff member and teacher representative on the project management committee. This committee responded to feedback received as we coordinated and oversaw the school's curriculum project work. We held meetings fortnightly or as required. Teacher representatives chose not to attend many of these meetings. Class duties often took precedence over them.

### Professional Learning

Project funds supported teacher professional learning relevant to their project work.

### Funding Community-Based Learning

Class budgets received additional funding to enable our students to go out into the community or bring in designated community members to the school.

### Collaboration

Our involvement as a curriculum project school made teaching and learning a collaborative practice. Previously, teachers had mainly worked in isolation from each other.

### Project Focus

The project focus in 2002 was to determine teacher beliefs on community-based learning and its influence on student learning and social capital. We defined social capital as the health and well-being of the school community.

### Research Findings of Our 2002 Curriculum Project Work

In their written evaluations, teachers identified the following benefits of a community-based approach to learning.

Students were easily motivated, learning experiences were more relevant and we had better access to community expertise.

Flow on benefits to other areas of the curriculum and learning were apparent.

Student sense of belonging to their community was very real.

More parents were involved in the learning program.

Teachers also identified some negative influences of a community-based approach to learning.

Time - liaising with the community is time consuming.

Cost - the cost of buses for transport is considerable.

Behaviour management -the larger environment outside the classroom has no physical boundaries and is full of unplanned distractions for younger children.

Uncertainty, for example - "I invited a local fisherman to discuss his role in our community. However, he could not come because 'the fish were running!'"

Limitations of community resources - there is a danger they may be overused.

As a school, we examined teacher beliefs about the impact of community celebrations on student learning and social capital of the school and community. Summarised written responses by teachers illustrated the benefits of such participation.

The community has a better understanding of schools and their work.

Students develop a very real sense of community.

Community celebrations strengthen the relationship between home and school.

Teachers also expressed some reservations with the school's involvement in community celebrations.

Caution against participation in too many events of this kind.

Concern that students didn't understand the purpose of their involvement.

Unease that staff weren't always involved in the decision-making process.

In their evaluations, River View teachers provided advice to teachers from other schools who may be contemplating a community-based approach to learning. Their advice took the form of the following recommendations.

Provide a clear briefing of expectations to community personnel, staff and students.

Keep it simple – do less better.

Know your students and plan accordingly.

Don't overload your community personnel and resources.

Tap into local knowledge of community expertise.

Be flexible.

Seek the help and wisdom of others when determining your program.

Rethink how your classroom operates.

Don't forget community service.

Teachers had the opportunity to provide general comments about community-based learning in their written evaluation. All feedback was positive, possibly because this element of the feedback process was optional. Detailed below are selected responses.

Anne (a Grade 6 teacher) - Go for it. It enables you to utilise the resources that you have in your community more effectively.

John (a Grade 4 teacher) - Enjoy your interaction with the community (the people you make contact with really appreciate you valuing what they do, and the children love it!).

Lyn (a Grade 1 teacher) - Get out of the classroom and see what actually happens!

(Working Paper 18)

I could sense from the teachers that our school vision of a community-based approach to learning had the potential to positively influence the learning and well-being of students. We had made some significant early steps towards fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of our school community. This was due in no small way to the outstanding leadership of the curriculum project officer and the great support of the project by staff.

Is the collaborative approach to leadership adopted in *Towards a New Curriculum* akin to what Senge (1992) describes as leadership relevant to context that involves “crafting strategies suitable to the time and setting” (p. 344)? The curriculum project officer and I spent much time in conversation as we mapped each new step on our journey towards a new curriculum. The significance of our conversations dawned on me during a presentation by Margaret Ferguson from the Department of Education, Queensland at the 2004 *King District Principals Retreat* where she outlined her understanding of parallel leadership.

Parallel leadership is a process whereby teacher leaders and their principal engage in collective action to build school capacity.

(Working Paper 8)

Senge (1992), like Ferguson, advocates that leaders design the learning processes that empower the people in the organisation to cope with the complex and difficult issues they may face. He likens this approach to mentoring and coaching (p. 345). Similarly, Ainscow (1999) argues that schools need to rethink how they organise staff development. He calls for schools to provide opportunities for staff to work collaboratively, engage in experimentation, and have access to peer coaching (pp. 144-145). At River View, teachers were collaboratively planning their class curriculum projects under the guidance of our curriculum project officer. In their projects they were ‘experimenting’ with community-based approaches to learning.

In her paper *How Principals Help Teachers Learn and Grow*, American researcher on education, Ellie Drago-Severson (2005) cautions that learning-oriented school leaders need to do more than just encourage practice and improvement. Learning-oriented leaders need to be mindful of the complexities of an educator’s work (p. 11). Jay A. Conger and Ginka Toegel (2002) describe such complexities in their paper *A Story of Missed Opportunities: Qualitative Methods for Leadership Research and Practice*. They tell how environmental events tend to shape a leader’s strategic choices but the presence or absence of organisational resources can also restrict or enable the choice of goals. At the same time, the leader is dependent on those she works with to achieve the goals. Therefore, the leader is “both influencing individuals, their organisation, and the environment, as well as being shaped by them” (p. 178).

In many respects, this was my experience at River View. Our success in developing a school-wide approach to community-based learning was dependent on staff seeing worth in what they were doing and fully engaging their students. I needed the project funds to release teachers from their teaching duties so they could learn together about community-based approaches to learning. I also had to be attentive and responsive to their needs to ensure that they felt they had ownership of their work. As Conger and Toegel (2002) might suggest, my leadership was influencing those people within our learning environment and they were influencing me.

Morrison (2002) adds another dimension to this discussion in referring to the way complex adaptive systems have the capacity to develop, extend, replace or change their internal structure so that they can both influence, and respond to, their environment. He draws on the research of Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers (1985) in their book *Order Out of Chaos* to illustrate this point. Prigogine and Stengers examine the self-organisation of the lowest form of life, the amoeba. If their environment doesn't have sufficient essential nutrients to sustain them, the amoebas sense this and cease to reproduce. Instead, they gather together and form a "foot" comprised of about one third of their total number of cells. This foot supports a huge number of spores that remove themselves from the foot and go and search for a new environment to live. The organism's response to the environment is its reconfiguration of itself in order to survive. This process is an example of how an open organism can respond to its environment (as cited in Morrison, 2002, pp.13-14). Schools that are responsive to their environment, Morrison submits, may change to become for example, a resource for the community. In this process, local circumstances determine the thrust of the self-organisation that develops (p. 14). In regard to the Rocky Coast principals, they were coming to understand, through their conversations, the strong influence of local circumstances in determining the thrust of their vision, goals and strategies.

Here is Eve and Matthew again.

*Eve* - The new curriculum initiative focuses on the Lake High School model that will give us more avenues to reach out into the community. The community here is very enthusiastic,

with local businesses keen to be involved in work experience blocks with Leatherwood Heights school.

Matthew - I now want to resurrect the *Rocky Coast Education Advisory Committee* and use it as a conduit for Rocky Coast education and address needs. Liaison with business has been a priority. Through community organisations such as Rotary, you get intelligence on what's happening around town - a territory that principals can't cover because they don't have time. For example, the local engineering firm thinks kids don't want apprenticeships yet kids at school do want them. There's this kind of distinction between schools and industry. Over the last year or two, apprenticeships are on the go again here. We need to address this situation through the new curriculum. There will be units of work based on mining and the world of work, a 'taster' unit. The kids will also have the opportunity to do Vocational Education and Training courses in Years 11 and 12. We are still working through this with the Technical College, but the curriculum units will be definitely on board for 2005.

(Working Paper 4)

The "thrust of the self-organisation" that seems to be emerging on the Rocky Coast is seeing new courses being developed that are particularly relevant to their mining and tourism based industries. This connection to the local context has resonance with my reflection on *Towards a New Curriculum*. For the first time in my five years at River View Primary School, I sensed that we were on the way to becoming what Senge describes as a learning organisation. Senge (1992) describes learning organisations as places where people

continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (p.3)

Three years after securing participation as a project school, our grade level teams continued to collaboratively plan and implement units of work under the leadership of our curriculum officer in a spirit of co-operation and purpose that I could not have previously envisaged.

My experience in encouraging others to take a lead and make things work is the basis of my next proposition.

### **Proposition XII - Leaders nurture leadership in others.**

I go back to Hurley (2003) as he outlines the importance of developing the leadership capacity of others in his report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference.

Principals have the courage to trust other people to do a good job. They also have the courage to admit that sometimes other people will actually do a better job than they will. For this reason, and also because they know that people need opportunity and experience, they commit themselves to dispersing leadership across the school. (p. 33)

The seventh of Duignan's (1996) leadership themes proposes that we can learn from "the flocking of the starlings." Duignan refers to David Whyte (1994) and his book *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of Soul in Corporate America* in sharing the story of the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his fascination with a flock of starlings. "The starlings," Coleridge wrote

drove along like smoke...misty...without volition - now a circular area inclined in an arc - now a globe, now...a complete orb into an ellipse...and still it expands and condenses, some moments glimmering and shivering, dim and shadowy, now thickening, deepening, blackening! (as cited in Duignan, 1996, p. 8)

According to Duignan (1996), the starlings had definite direction but also more than a touch of chaos. There seemed to be a complex relationship between individual starlings and the rest of the flock. For decades Coleridge pondered what to make of the flocking of the starlings. Duignan speculates about what we can learn from the "flocking", particularly in relation to change. He contends that few make attempts to understand what it is that makes individuals "fly" in organisations or to appreciate their inner selves. Individuals are seldom encouraged to nurture their creative spirits whilst maintaining the positive aspects of "flocking". Duignan argues that this form of neglect often results in organisational misadventure where no real learning occurs (pp. 8-9).

For me, *Towards a New Curriculum* demonstrates the value of enabling potential leaders to appreciate their inner selves and encouraging them to “fly” with those gifts and talents that are unique to them. This was certainly so in relation to Jan, our curriculum project officer. Ainscow (1999) examined the motivation behind the efforts of teacher leaders, like Jan, in the Improving Quality Education for All (IQEA) Project. This project involved a team of University researchers working with English schools during the 1990’s to examine ways in which the learning of all members of school communities – including students, staff and parents, may be improved (p. 118). Ainscow’s research on the motivation of teacher leaders revealed two possible motives. First he says they are keen to develop a climate of learning in their schools because of their leadership position. Teacher leaders have a profound belief in the capacity of professional learning to create a particular kind of learning culture in their schools. Second, teacher leaders welcome the challenge and the benefit of creating a collaborative learning culture. They are keen to learn more about how to work with groups of adults to create a climate for learning (pp. 169-170).

The findings of Ainscow’s research on the motivation of IQEA teacher leaders correlate closely with the informal conversations I have held with Jan, our curriculum project officer. Just as IQEA teacher leaders are motivated by their interest in how adults work together to enhance student learning, Jan sees teacher collaboration as the most significant outcome of our project school involvement.

I will now reflect on the propositions on leadership to come forth since my second sideshadow and investigate some evocative possibilities.

### **The Third Sideshadow**

Six propositions on leadership have arisen since my last sideshadow: leaders know when to be collaborative; leaders are learners; leaders are in touch; leaders have passion; leaders are open to change; and leaders nurture leadership in others.

What is the fantastic literature offering for my understanding of each proposition now that I’ve journeyed this far diachronically through stories and diary accounts

and linked them with contemporary literature, professional conversations and the Rocky Coast Leadership Project?

On being collaborative, I look to Hutchins (1952b) as he probes the notion of consensus. He says that an opinion may be either true or false but we never describe knowledge as false. Hutchins argues that it is possible to opine and doubt at the same time, but not to know and doubt. On matters where knowledge rather than opinion are possible, Hutchins explains that, whilst there is still potential for disagreement, it is also reasonable to assume that we can achieve agreement on the disputed point through a re-examination of the facts. He argues that the differences between men that seek resolution through consensus are differences of opinion, not knowledge. Hutchins explains that sometimes we cannot settle conflicts of opinion in any other way. For reasons of practicality, the acceptance of a majority view may be the best outcome that can be achieved (pp. 303-304).

I state this proposition on collaboration very deliberately. I believe there may be times when a leader alone has to 'make a call' and other times when a leader needs to access the wisdom of others before making a decision. For example, collaboration with others may not be appropriate if there is a conflict of interest that may compromise relationships between collaborators. In other circumstances, the best outcome may require the counsel of others, consensus or a majority view, as Hutchins intimates.

Aristotle (384-322 BC), in *Nicomachean Ethics*, points to the influence of character in seeking unanimity.

Unanimity seems, then, to be political friendship, as indeed it is commonly said to be; for it is concerned with things that are to our interest and have influence on our life. Now such unanimity is found among good men; for they are unanimous both in themselves and with one another, being, so to say, of one mind (for the wishes of such men are constant and not at the mercy of opposing currents like a strait of the sea), and they wish for what is just and what is advantageous, and these are the objects of their common endeavour as well. But bad men cannot be unanimous except to a small extent, any more than they can be friends, since they aim at getting more than their share of advantages, while in labour and in public service they fall short of their

share; and each man wishing for advantage to himself criticises his neighbour and stand in his way; for if people do not watch it carefully the common weal is soon destroyed. The result is that they are in a state of faction, putting compulsion on each other but unwilling themselves to do what is just. (1952b, p. 420)

Here, Aristotle raises the issue of with whom do we seek to be unanimous. He makes it clear that we cannot achieve what is just if we seek unanimity from villains because they tend to seek what is to their advantage. Aristotle's reasoning indicates that we need to consider not only when to collaborate, but with whom to collaborate. He explores this language in *Rhetoric*.

Again, that which would be judged, or which has been judged, a good thing, or a better thing than something else, by all or most people of understanding, or by the majority of men, or by the ablest, must be so; either without qualification, or in so far as they use their understanding to form their judgement. This is indeed a general principle, applicable to all other judgements also; not only the goodness of things, but their essence, magnitude, and general nature are in fact just what knowledge and understanding will declare them to be. (1952c, p. 606)

Aristotle (384-322 BC) seems to deduce that the judgement of the majority, or "most people of understanding," is a good thing.

On leaders being in touch and leaders as learners, Hutchins (1952a) argues that the field of knowledge is one of many disputes. He maintains that one area within this field that seems to go unchallenged is the fact that knowledge involves a relationship between a knower and a known (p. 880). Hutchins points out that, for any theory of knowledge, we need to make a distinction between knowledge and ignorance. The difficulty in regard to knowledge and ignorance and between ignorance and error is that not everyone agrees on the difference between knowledge and error. Whilst we might believe that to know something is to possess the truth about something and to be mistaken is to wrongly perceive something as the truth, the problem of what constitutes the truth is more difficult (p. 882). I suggest that acknowledging and working with this problem that has been the subject of 'great debate among philosophers' demonstrates the importance of leaders being attentive to their own learning if they are to be discerning in regard to what constitutes knowledge and truth.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his *Physics*, for example, asserts the transient nature of knowledge and understanding.

And the original acquisition of knowledge is not a becoming or an alteration: for the terms 'knowing' and 'understanding' imply that the intellect has reached a state of rest and come to a standstill, and there is no becoming that leads to a state of rest, since, as we have said above, no change at all can have a becoming. (1952a, p. 330)

Aristotle's "no change at all can have a becoming," provokes me to inquire further into the notion of change and my proposition that leaders are open to change.

Hutchins (1952a) describes how, from the pre-Socratic Greek physicists and ancient philosophers to Marx, Darwin and James in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, change has been a significant subject of speculative and scientific research. He tells how only Parmenides and his school of the early fifth century BC rejected the existence of change. To do so, Hutchins argues, would be to deny the existence of our sense-perception. It is a much more difficult task, he asserts, to define change. What principles or factors are common to every sort of change? How change or becoming is related to permanence or being and what sort of existence belongs to mutable things and to change itself? These are questions to which answers are not attainable merely by observation. Nor will simple observation, without the aid of experiment, measurement, and mathematical calculation, discover the laws and properties of motion (p. 193).

Hutchins narrates how the examination of change or motion has puzzled philosophers of nature. These philosophers seek to define change, classify the kinds of change that exist and examine its relation to being. In contrast, the measurement of motion and the mathematical formulation of its laws have been the concern of natural scientists. Hutchins explains that, whilst natural science and natural philosophy share a common subject matter, they approach their study through different methods and from different perspectives. The physics of the philosopher and the physics of the scientist are similar inquiries into the nature of things, especially in regard to the change and motion. Hutchins says that the evidence from both inquiries has "metaphysical implications for the nature of the physical world and for the character of physical existence" (p. 193).

To Hutchins, philosophers come to this position on being from the study of becoming. He argues that scientists draw on philosophical distinctions to clarify their focus of study. To illustrate this point, Hutchins mentions how some perceive the often used words of “change” and “motion” as well as “becoming” as sharing a common meaning (p. 193). He contests this view, referring to Aristotle’s physical treatises and the way Aristotle holds that becoming is less intelligible than being because change involves potentiality. Hutchins also notes how Aristotle sees that we can understand becoming to the extent that we have the capacity to discover the principles of its being which are the unchanging principles of change (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 198). Hutchins comments that the explanation of change by way of reference to that which does not change is common to all theories of becoming. He also notes that notions of time and eternity have much to do with theories of change and motion (p. 198). Change, he argues, is a fact of life for the natural scientist or the historian. Even the close scrutiny of these subjects will not exhaust our interest and understanding of change. For example, Hutchins explains that change is not only a factor in the analysis of emotion, but is “also itself an object of man’s emotional attitudes.” It is “both loved and hated, sought and avoided” (p. 200).

Are there implications for the way school leaders might think about change following this venture into the wider field of possibilities on this subject? Aristotle draws me to his notion that change involves potentiality. I would like to propose that leaders be open to change of the kind that seeks to fulfil the potential of an organisation. Such openness may help us overcome the polarising attitudes that often afflict discussion in relation to change. Given the reference by Hutchins to the emotions on this subject, it may be timely to scrutinise, in a deeper sense, my proposition that leaders have passion.

Hutchins (1952a) holds that we commonly think of emotions in terms of their connection to the field of psychology and the study of animal and human behaviour. He notes that this is a relatively recent development that appears in the writing of Darwin, James and Freud. He tells how studies in the passions occurred in earlier times and in other contexts during treatments of rhetoric in the dialogues of Plato, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, Spinoza’s *Ethics* and the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas. Hutchins describes the traditional use of the four words “passion”, “affection” or “affect”, and “emotion” to explain the one psychological

state. He argues that if we are to relate discussions that span centuries on this subject, then we must be prepared to use these words interchangeably. To Hutchins, the psychological state that they all refer to is one that all humans experience in times of extreme excitement (p. 413). He refers to Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* who sees emotion stirring when “the soul is drawn to a thing” (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 415). This psychological state articulated by Aquinas describes the context in which passion arises as a proposition from my reflection on the stories well. I see it as the ‘fire in the belly’ that drives a leader towards action. This understanding raises the question of the moral purpose of our action. At one extreme, for example, this action might include the pursuit of power for one’s own ends with the other extreme being more concerned with pursuit of “the good” and making things better for others. The latter may be concerned with, for example, developing the potential of other leaders within an organisation.

What does my sideshadowing of propositions in regard to collaboration, learning, being in touch, passion, change and nurturing leadership in others mean for my understanding of leadership? Aristotle says that “no change at all can have a becoming.” Perhaps leaders need to embrace change through their own learning. My sideshadowing has also revealed the importance of a moral purpose driving the passion and actions of a leader. On matters of judgement, there may be times when a leader needs to act alone and other times when the acceptance of a majority view may provide the best way forward.

What seems clearer as I try to make sense of this exercise in sideshadowing is the insight it has given me into the importance leaders must place on openness and discernment in times of change. Aquinas’ reference to the stirring of emotions when “the soul is drawn to a thing” also entices me to look for something beyond passion that is more enduring and involves a deep affection for my fellow human beings.

## CHAPTER 4

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### THE FOURTH INSIGHT: LOVE

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As my inquiry continues in this chapter I will share stories and develop propositions that illuminate the place of love in leadership. As I learned in the previous chapter, openness and discernment seem especially important to the leadership of today's schools. Pritash (2002) suggests that the challenges facing principals of today's schools include the diverse needs of an ever-changing student population, the changing structure of family and society, accountability for student learning, society's mentality of instant gratification and preoccupation with sex, violence and consumerism (pp. 94-95). Pritash asserts that those who choose to be school principals must have the desire to enact a positive influence on the lives of students, parents and staff. In discussing the principal's role, she refers to the comments of a colleague principal who states that the job is to "do the very best we can to enhance opportunities for student success" (p. 104). This comment reminds me of the earlier words of Tim, the principal leader in curriculum, who said that he has "yet to go into a school and meet a principal who is not working to do the very best they can for kids" (Working Paper 11). If openness and discernment may be helpful to this endeavour, how might a leader envision the way forward?

Ainscow (1999) maintains that the task of school improvement is not a simple one. He explains that the key problem facing schools in their efforts to secure school improvement lies in the tension between development and maintenance. Schools tend to gear themselves towards one or the other through their organisational structures. Those schools geared towards development sometimes take on too much, too quickly. Schools less concerned with development are either reluctant to change or have a poor record in managing innovation (p. 122).

Senge (1992) takes a similar stance to Ainscow, seeing the art of systems thinking as a way of looking through complexity to the underlying structures causing change (p.128). He sees "leverage" as the bottom line of systems

thinking. It enables us to see where actions and changes in structures can lead to profound and sustained improvements. Senge cautions that leverage in most organisations is not always obvious to members of the organisation. They don't recognise the more influential structures underpinning their actions. The way forward, says Senge, is through the work of teams in developing a shared understanding of what is important and what is not (p.114). This takes me back across time to another story.

### Horses for Courses

How do I address issues about the work-related performance of my colleagues and yet maintain their dignity and self-respect? This question is something that I have always struggled with. I have never been convinced that I have done this well.

In late, 2002, I faced a staffing dilemma regarding the most appropriate deployment of senior staff (comprised of two deputy principals, and two teacher leaders) across both campuses. One of them, Bill, led the smaller South campus of River View Primary School. He was an extremely experienced, talented and highly respected senior leader. Apart from managing the day to day affairs of this campus, he also had several other senior staff responsibilities spanning both campuses. It was my belief that the school was missing out on his expertise and leadership in the early childhood and numeracy areas because of the pressures and demands of his role at the smaller campus. My preference was to base Bill at the larger campus so that the early childhood classes could especially benefit from his leadership and skills. I knew another senior staff member, Dan, had the capacity and desire to fill the leadership role at the smaller campus if it became available.

Questions that I faced at the time were: Do I leave the existing deployment of senior staff in place knowing that this arrangement is not in the best interests of the school? If I try to negotiate a move across campus for Bill, how will that affect my relationship with him? How will I go about negotiating such a move? All things considered, will the proposed move make things better or worse?

Because I had harboured a genuine desire for such change over a period of twelve months, I had informally expressed this view at senior staff meetings during this time. Ensuing conversations with Bill told me that he would be

accepting of his move to a new role although he didn't think it was the best course of action. It was in the last three months of the 2002 school year that I developed a stronger stance on the need for change. I sensed it was the right thing to do. I had strong feelings that the school was not realising the potential of senior staff nor fully benefiting from their skills and expertise under the current arrangements. I told myself that, if I was to pursue a change of role for Bill, I needed to be honest and consistent in all my dealings with the people involved.

During November, 2002, I held more informal discussions on this issue at senior staff meetings and with individuals directly involved in the proposed change. Senior staff agreed to hold a special meeting in early December to clarify our prospective roles for the following year.

I secured tentative agreement on the proposed change of senior staff roles at this meeting. I knew that Bill continued to have reservations about his move to a new role. I felt the need to meet with him before making the change known to staff.

Bill was not convinced about the benefits of such a move and he was uncertain about what his new role would be. From my perspective, this was understandable. We talked through the associated issues and confirmed the recommendation made at the senior staff meeting. Bill's peers held him in high regard and his high level of professionalism in accepting the change was in keeping with this regard.

For me, the downside of this process was Bill's sense of unease about his new position. Had it been any more than unease, I'm not sure I would have pursued it as vigorously. The change may not have been worth damaging my relationship with Bill.

It is worth noting that Bill has made an outstanding contribution to the school's numeracy, reporting to parents, special needs and early childhood programs in the two years since renegotiating his role. Dan, the senior staff member who filled the leadership role at the smaller campus, has also flourished in his new position.

Had I not addressed this issue, I doubt that benefits to our school community arising from the gifts and talents of our senior staff would have been as great.

(Working Paper 2)

On reflection, a significant factor in the long-term success of the decision to renegotiate senior staff duties seems to be openness of process to secure this

change. David Coulter (1999) in his article, *The Epic and the Novel: Dialogism and Teacher Research* explores the idea that dialogue is significantly more than an exchange of words, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1963) work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* and his later writings *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (1975). Bakhtin sees dialogue as a verbal expression of human existence, enabling a full participation in life. Ideas develop from an interest in literature, especially the novel, which he sees as a cultural framework rather than a literary genre. No two items of speech are identical because the context will be as different as might the people. The difference between literal and contextual meaning is that the former is more concerned with linguistics and serves to distort communication (as cited in Coulter, 1999, pp. 5-6). William Macaleer and Shannon Jones (2002) seem to agree with Coulter and Bakhtin. In their article *Emotional Intelligence: How Does It Affect Leadership?* Macaleer and Jones submit that a key to sound decision-making is a heightened awareness of our emotions and those of others (p. 10). Communication is more than the words said.

Distorted communication is something I wished to avoid in my conversations with Bill. I needed to be honest and provide a consistency of message in all my conversations regarding the proposed change.

This reflection prompts my next proposition.

### **Proposition XIII - Leaders are true to themselves and true to others.**

Hurley (2003) sheds light on the importance of a leader being honest with the self in his report from the 2002 Leaders Lead Conference.

Perfection - Not being perfect is difficult for many people to accept, and the more public they are, and the more responsibility they have, the harder it can be. Being able to admit a mistake, and still be willing to risk making another, is basic to moving forward. (p. 33)

Hurley's words are sobering for me. They are closely aligned with my earlier reference to Chris Lowney's (2003) Jesuit view of leadership and the fourth of Duignan's (1996, p. 5) themes that advocates we "massage our mistakes." By this Duignan means that we need to acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them

and grow from them. He quotes Oscar Wilde's *Thoughts on Various Subjects* to illustrate this point.

A man should never be ashamed to own he has been in the wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday. (as cited in Duignan, 1996, p. 6)

The words of Oscar Wilde prompt me to compare my conversations with Bill in *Horses for Courses* and those with Rita in *Biting the Bullet*. Both conversations involved potentially contentious negotiations on a change of role. Following these negotiations, my relationship with Bill remains intact whereas my relationship with Rita is in tatters. Why? Coulter (1999) may help me here on this question as he describes Bakhtin's view that language is never complete as it reflects the complexity and chaos of experience. Monologue is the expression of one person's experience whereas dialogue is the meaning made from the interchange of multiple speakers (p. 6). I do ponder how dialogic I was in my last meeting with Bill given my strong desire to make a change. I think the best description of that encounter is that he knew my position, and I knew his. It seems clearer to me now that my dialogue with Bill was more open and to the point than it was with Rita. Bill was not surprised that the change of role eventuated. Rita was.

Max DePree in his book *Leadership is an Art* argues that everyone has a right to open and honest communication. We owe each other truth and courtesy which, DePree believes, "are the qualities that enable communication to educate and liberate us" (1989, p. 105). I believe being more open and honest with Bill than I was with Rita was the fundamental difference between the successful outcome with Bill and the bad feelings emerging from negotiations with Rita.

In reflecting on *Horses for Courses* and *Biting the Bullet*, I have discovered my unintentional marginalisation of Rita. As Stephen Covey (1989, p. 235) says in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "Seek first to understand, then be understood." I think I made a far better effort to understand Bill's position than I did Rita's.

Senge (1992) states that dialogue has the capacity to assist people to "become observers of their own thinking" and notice the collective power of their thoughts. Referring to the research of quantum physicist David Bohm outlined in his book

*The Special Theory of Relativity* (1965) and his series of Cambridge University dialogues, Senge uses one of Bohm's analogies in describing collective thinking. He compares our normal thought processes to the casting of a coarse net into a stream. The coarse net yields only the stream's coarsest elements, which he likens to our thoughts. In contrast, he associates the casting of a fine net into a stream with the sensitivity developed from dialogue with others. This sensitivity acts as a fine net, enabling our thinking to find finer, more subtle meaning. Like the flow of the water, thinking is an ongoing process whereas thoughts are the outcome of that process. He describes how Bohm became interested in the analogy between the collective properties of particles and the way we think. He later saw that this sort of analogy is relevant to the counter-productiveness of thought that is evident in all aspects of our lives. Bohm contends that it is unproductive reasoning that underpins most of mankind's problems. Since thought is primarily a collective endeavour, he maintains that it is very difficult to improve thought individually. As with electrons, Bohm says we need to regard thought as systemic phenomena that springs from our interactions and conversations with each other. Taking into account Bohm's ideas, Senge reasons that collectively we can be more insightful and intelligent than we could possibly be as individuals (as cited in Senge, 1992, pp. 239-243). Here is a more recent story that gives some clues about what can happen when a leader taps into collective thought.

### Pool of Wisdom

My first appointment as Principal was to a school of thirteen students where I was the only full-time staff member. Three other part-time teachers provided specialist early childhood, music and physical education programs. Opportunities for collaboration with staff on key issues were limited. I remember using colleague principals in this role as the need arose. My current school of over five hundred and fifty students and sixty staff members provides ample opportunity to access the wisdom of others in the decision-making process. My main source of collaboration is senior staff, comprised of two deputy principals and two senior teachers. Certain ideas or proposals that the group believes have merit and warrant the consideration of all teaching staff are then tabled for consideration at forthcoming staff

meetings. My diary notes from April 6th, 2005 illustrate a good example of how this process works.

These notes relate to events two days earlier on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Senior staff met to discuss a number of matters, one of them being the agenda for staff meeting scheduled for that afternoon. Because we are a dual campus school, staff from one campus travel to the other campus to attend these meetings. Occasionally, there are insufficient agenda items to justify a meeting. On such occasions, we cancel staff meetings.

During the morning senior staff meeting, the agenda for the afternoon staff meeting looked thin. We were poised to cancel the meeting. Julie, a deputy principal, said that it might be a good opportunity for staff to discuss the new assessment and reporting procedures. Teaching staff had recently been involved in a very intensive professional learning day on this subject and Julie thought they might need to talk about related issues. Sarah, another member of the senior staff team, agreed. She suggested we ask teachers what they thought the positives were from the day as well as the things they found challenging and needed some follow-up.

Bill, my other deputy principal, fed off this conversation, saying it would be good to get some direction from teachers about the kind of support they may need.

I was the listener who was jotting down their ideas as they spoke. It seemed like the scheduled staff meeting needed to proceed. I then read back to them what they had proposed for the staff meeting and asked Bill if he would like to facilitate proceedings. Bill seemed to have a very good handle on the approach we needed to take.

That afternoon, we enjoyed one of the most open and productive conversations on staff issues of importance that I have witnessed. Staff responses to the questions posed detailed their concerns with new approaches to student assessment. Their responses also provided some clear direction for senior staff about the way forward on these issues. I left the meeting feeling uplifted by the openness of conversation and the professionalism of staff. Our new found knowledge of the strategic directions we needed to take in regard to assessment

and reporting would also stand us in good stead for the future. I can thank the collective thinking of my senior staff for making this possible.

(Working Paper 2)

Hutchins (1952b) describes how philosophers like Aristotle see wonder as the beginning of a natural kind of wisdom that is the ultimate aim of human inquiry. This is different to the supernatural wisdom of the scriptures that begins with a fear of God and comes to humankind through a divine gift (p. 1106). Is there common ground with the collaborative form of human inquiry described in *Pool of Wisdom* and the natural kind of wisdom described by Aristotle? I find that the school benefits from the collective wisdom of the senior staff group, which acts as a safeguard against hasty or ill informed decision-making. As American author Linda Lambert says in her article *Building Leadership Capacity in Schools*, leadership “is about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively” (2000, p. 1). Being attentive to the wisdom of others has become a key element of the kind of leader I endeavour to be and is the basis of my next proposition of this study.

#### **Proposition XIV - Leaders access the wisdom of others.**

The words of Hurley (2003) in regard to an earlier proposition, that principals need to have the best information available to them so they make the best decisions (p. 33) is similarly relevant to this proposition. Consider the comments of the Rocky Coast principals on collaboration.

Wayne - I've tried to share everything in terms of decision-making, using senior staff as a sounding board. I make very few decisions in isolation. When people come to me in a quandary, I advise them to take time, reserve judgement, analyse the pros and cons, weigh up the evidence, contact a trusted colleague if they feel the need and then make the decision and move forward. Don't beat yourself up about it. The experience of working together and collaborating with other principals - having mutual trust and showing respect, has been a real plus.

Eve - I ring people like Noel. Last time, he said "I think you know what you need to do." I just needed reassurance.

There's a time and place to access a trusted friend. I trust my colleagues, but there's still the thought of "This might be a stupid question." It's the contextual stuff - Noel knows what's going on - he's been here. It's the trust that's important.

Prue - Have a good collegial relationship and an openness to be professionally vulnerable. You've got to place trust in others - it's no big deal to expose ourselves and be open to sharing strengths and weaknesses with each other. By not exposing our vulnerability, we miss the opportunity to learn.

(Working Paper 4)

School leaders need a trusted colleague to talk to, especially during times of change or turmoil. The following diary notes which feature Phil, a fellow principal, underscore this understanding.

#### **Diary Notes: Professional Loneliness**

I rang Phil, a colleague principal, to confirm a date for me to meet with him and discuss a leadership project in which we both had a stake. In conversation he used me as a sounding board regarding an incident which occurred between staff members the previous day.

Phil - I was really annoyed with two of my teachers yesterday. They've got the television on all day in the classroom with the kids watching the Olympics. I don't mind if there's a purpose to what they're doing, but to just have the television going all day doesn't sit well with me. I'm a bit worried though that I might have been a bit hard on them. I told them that it's not acceptable to have the television going all day and that the kids need to know why they are watching the Olympics. Their work has to have a purpose behind it. What do you think?

Terry - I can only speak from my own experience. At a previous school during the Olympics, we had the television on all day in the corridors and in the library. When there was something special happening or relevant to the work they were doing, we considered it okay for the kids to watch it. It wasn't open slather. I remember even in my first year or

so of teaching twenty years ago that if my class was to be watching the Olympics, there had to be some kind of link to our work and a purpose behind it. I'm in no doubt that you needed to say something. Two weeks is a long time for the television to be running all day in a classroom. The alternative is to say nothing, and then you're sanctioning what they're doing. You did the right thing. Things like this aren't easy. Well done for doing something about it.

Phil - Oh, I'm glad I said something to you. This has been really worrying me. I already feel better.

(Working Paper 2)

This talk only took a few moments yet our sharing of ideas and perspectives with each other had a really positive impact on Phil. How important day-to-day conversations of this kind are! I know I experience angst and professional loneliness similar to Phil's on a range of issues. Whether my advice to him was sound or otherwise, I am confident Phil felt better as a consequence of our conversation which gave him access to a trusted colleague.

This experience aligns strongly with the words of Hurley (2003).

Care - School principals know that a supportive environment is basic to a learning environment. Safety is one of the basic human needs, and people learn more effectively when they feel safe. They do all they can to establish a culture of care in their school community. Without this, it is unlikely that there will be a supportive relationship between staff and students, which is one of the essential elements of improving learning. It is also unlikely that teachers will be willing to take the risks that are needed to establish the collegiality that is necessary for an effective teacher learning community. Teachers need to have professional trust in each other to learn from each other. (p. 32)

And so I arrive at my next proposition,

### **Proposition XV - Leaders are caring.**

Aaron Schutz (1998), in his article *Caring in Schools is Not Enough: Community, Narrative, and the Limits of Alterity*, focuses on the field of "Care" theory and the ideas of Nel Noddings in her *Caring* which calls for an ethic based on natural care

like the care a mother has for her child. Schutz examines the implications of Noddings' ideas about caring for school communities and may add another dimension to my understanding of care in leadership.

Schutz tells how Noddings rejects what she terms "justice" or "principled" approaches to ethics because they are predominantly masculine practices and ignore the uniqueness of individuals. In contrast, the caring that she promotes is one that treats each situation and each "cared for" person as unique (as cited in Schutz, 1998, p. 373). Schutz points out that Noddings' critics imply that caring alone is not enough without an ethic of justice to supplement it against oppressive forces. Noddings answers this by acknowledging that her intention is not to reduce everything in moral theory to care, categorising this approach as reductionist. Later I see why as Schutz outlines Noddings' view that care may be a quality of community that may restrain "darker forces" from emerging (as cited in Schutz, 1998, pp. 374- 375).

Here I reflect on Schutz and his reference to the Noddings view of care because it seems very relevant to the *Tough Times at the Office* and *Horses for Courses* stories. Could there be a link between my efforts to be considerate and caring in negotiations with Bill regarding a change of role in *Horses for Courses* and the positive acceptance of this change by Bill and his colleagues? Might there also be a link between the less considered and less caring way I went about appointing an acting principal in *Tough Times at the Office* and the "darker forces" that surfaced in the hostile acceptance of the outcome by some sections of staff?

Schutz refers to the feminine nature of Noddings' ethic of care, which she sees as a response to the male ethic of justice that has dominated history. He argues that Noddings desires an ethic that works in practice, not in theory and attends to the group as well as the individual. Schutz describes two of Noddings' qualities of caring. The first involves the role of carers in caring with and for the cared for in sometimes complex situations which involve a sense of obligation on the part of the carer. The second concerns prioritising the obligations of the carer. Underpinning this second quality of caring is the call for carers to foster an attitude of care among those who are cared for. Carers help the cared for to

realise their potential to serve others some time in the future (as cited in Schutz, 1998, p. 376).

Schutz prompts me to think about these notions of carer and cared for and my obligation to foster attitudes of care especially towards disadvantaged students. The issue of the things that go on in the lives of some students before they even reach the school gate surfaced during a staff workshop on health and well-being. We held the workshop prior to the beginning of the 2001 school year. It began with Esme, the workshop facilitator, reading aloud about the life experience of a girl fictitiously named Victoria to the River View staff.

### Victoria

"Victoria is the daughter of intellectually challenged parents whose life is centred on the television set. Victoria runs wild, roams the streets and spends as much time as possible at the homes of friends. Despite her unsettled life, she is very smart. However, there is a sadness about her which is a marked contrast to her mischievousness. She follows teachers around on their lunch duty like a sheepdog. The teachers who know something of her life are concerned about her future."

The discussion that followed among staff involved the sharing of stories concerning students just like Victoria. Comments flowed from participants.

Ben (an upper primary teacher) - We are the only constants in the lives of kids like that...

Jan (an upper primary teacher) - Isn't it easy to ignore or pay lip service to the needs of these children?

Julie (a Grade 3 teacher) - I'm becoming far more vigilant to what may be going on in the lives of these kids who crave our attention.

(Working Paper 20)

This story underscores the challenge for me, as school principal, to nurture an inclusive school culture that is attentive to the needs of students like Victoria. To be understanding and aware of the circumstances of students whose home lives may be devoid of the love and care that many of us take for granted, Todd (2001) argues that educators need to be sensitive to the variety of possible responses students may make in the learning situation. Teachers need to expect that some

students are vulnerable and that one's teaching involves provoking their vulnerability by relating to them as individuals. It is the teacher's response to the unique "Other" that, to Todd, "is at once a curricular and ethical matter" (p. 444).

Todd investigates where this understanding leaves educators in relation to ethics in education. She cites two pedagogical possibilities. First, there is the lack of certainty surrounding the pedagogical encounter itself, where the implications for the learner are not easily predicted (p. 444). This uncertainty, according to Todd, obliges the educator to develop thoughtful approaches to the Other rather than simply adhere to a rigid set of ethical rules and procedures. Secondly, it is the relation of the Self to the Other that demonstrates how poignant the relationship is between teachers and students and the impact it may have on the lives of students. For Todd, it is this understanding that may help teachers better recognise how ethically laden their responses are to students (p. 445).

Todd assists my reflection on the story of Victoria, which takes me back to my many experiences of playground duty and encounters with students who have followed me around the school engaging me in all sorts of conversations about their pets, relatives, holidays and so on. I cannot help but think I could have been more interested in their stories and responded better to them as a unique Other.

Relationships underpin much of what leaders do. Another venture into sideshadowing may further my understanding of the most recent stories and propositions.

### **The Fourth Sideshadow**

Care, relationships, otherness and truth seem entwined in my three propositions that have appeared since my last sideshadowing exercise: leaders are true to themselves and true to others; leaders access the wisdom of others; and leaders are caring. I want to unpack these propositions using more fantastic literature to see the possibilities for leadership that may be resting in their sideshadows.

I will resume my sideshadowing with the proposition on truth. In the third sideshadow, Hutchins (1952a) described the problematical nature of truth which he claimed is the source of considerable debate among philosophers (p. 882). For Hutchins, the desire to speak one's mind does not mean that the mind is free

from error or in custody of the truth. Rather, this is where we may find the distinction between the intellectual and social dimension of truth. Hutchins describes moral truth as the obligation to say what we mean. The physical truth, according to Hutchins, depends not on the truth of what we say but the validity of what we mean. He tells how the truth explored in the books of the great scientists and philosophers is more concerned with the physical notion of truth.

Hutchins (1952b) holds that the key issues on truth are whether we can know the truth and whether we can discern the truth or fallacy of something (p. 915). What does this understanding mean for my proposition that leaders are true to themselves and true to others? Hutchins finds that, whilst philosophers and scientists, from Plato to Freud, seem to resist the extreme scepticism that places truth beyond the capacity of man, they do not agree on the extent to which this is so (p. 915). However, Hutchins describes the virtual unanimous agreement between the great scientists and philosophers on the nature of truth as remarkable, he describes it as the agreement of the mind with reality. If we agree too, says Hutchins, we must look more closely at what some of the philosophers say and examine what it might mean for each of us (pp. 916-917).

Let me consider what some of the philosophers are telling us about truth. Plato (428-348 BC) in his dialogue *Phaedrus*, speaks of truth and its capacity to nourish the soul.

The reason why the souls exhibit this exceeding eagerness to behold the plain of truth is that pasturage is found there, which is suited to the highest part of the soul; and the wing on which the soul soars is nourished with this. (1952a, p. 125)

The capacity of truth to nourish the soul and enhance our well-being, as Plato intimates, seems endorsed by Socrates, in Plato's *Gorgias*, as he speaks to Callicles about the importance he places on being true to himself.

And yet, my friend, I would rather that my lyre should be inharmonious, and that there should be no music in the chorus which I provided; aye, or that the whole world should be at odds with me, and oppose me, rather than that I myself should be at odds with myself and contradict myself. (1952b, p. 271)

It is as if these insights of Plato (428-348 BC) and Socrates on truth are echoes that bounce through time. In *St John's Gospel* (8: 31-32), Jesus Christ said

If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

Plato, Socrates and Jesus Christ seem to imply a relationship between well-being and a desire for truth. Do they also reveal a spiritual connection with a desire for truth? The words of Hutchins (1952b) on wisdom may help. He writes that the wisdom of the philosophers and of the religious comprises knowledge of divine things. The special character of wisdom that is "at once speculative and practical knowledge, that it is concerned both with the ultimate nature of things and the ultimate good for man," is embodied in "the gift of wisdom" described by theologians (pp. 1106-1107). Wisdom may have had this character for Plato, but for Aristotle, wisdom is merely speculative and does not direct man towards the leading of a good life (as cited in Hutchins, 1952b, pp. 1106-1107).

Now, perhaps I need to take a closer look at my proposition that leaders access the wisdom of others. Returning to Hutchins, he notes how Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* distinguishes between philosophic wisdom and practical wisdom. Practical wisdom, Aristotle writes, "is concerned with things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate" whereas philosophic wisdom "will contemplate none of the things that make a man happy" (as cited in Hutchins, 1952b, 1104). The highest form of knowledge is concerned with the highest objects. Therefore, it is difficult to propose that practical wisdom is the best knowledge because man is not the best thing in existence. To Aristotle, there are other things more divine than man. Wisdom is knowledge "of the things that are highest by nature" (as cited in Hutchins, 1952b, 1104). Hutchins notes that Aristotle, in the opening pages of his *Metaphysics*, identifies wisdom with the science that examines primary principles and causes. Aristotle calls this a "divine science" or "theology" because he sees God as the origin of all things (as cited in Hutchins, 1952b, p. 1105). In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas (1222-1274) finds wisdom more grounded in the sacred doctrine of the revelation than the sciences or theology of the philosophers, seeing wisdom in the knowledge of divine things.

Again, in the order of all human life, the prudent man is called wise, because he orders his acts to a fitting end: Wisdom is prudence to a man (Prov: 10. 23). Therefore he who considers absolutely the highest cause of the whole universe, namely God, is most of all called wise. (1952, p. 6)

In summarising his synopsis of Western thinking on wisdom, Hutchins (1952b) explains that, to the Christian - theologian, mystic or poet - wisdom and love flourish in Heaven (p. 1109). Might the relationship between wisdom and love and their link to divine things provide a distinction between wisdom and prudence? Prudence seems more aligned with the practical wisdom that Aristotle described as concerned with those things “about which it is possible to deliberate.” Can I say that wisdom - to Aristotle and Aquinas - is on a higher plane and involves the cultivation of the intellect and a love of God? What might this stance mean for my understanding of wisdom in the context of leadership? Intellect and love seem to be very much a part of wise leadership, as does my third proposition that leaders are caring. I am especially interested to probe the notion of care in terms of a leader’s duty of care to others. By law, in most school systems, school principals have a duty of care for the safety and welfare of staff and students. Hutchins (1952a) observes that Locke’s essay on *Human Understanding* sees duty being concerned with an obligation to others rather than obedience to God or the law, which reflects the ancient view where the honest or just man’s concern for others goes beyond the commands of God or state. Virtue is the inspiration which Locke describes as “...the highest perfection of human nature” (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 358). Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas lend support to Locke’s view. Hutchins reveals how Plato in his *Republic* sees justice as inseparable from the virtues of temperance, courage and wisdom. Our sense of moral obligation towards our neighbour may equally attribute towards any of these four virtues, or virtue in general (as cited in Hutchins, 1952a, p. 359). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) highlights the link between the virtue of justice and man’s concern for his neighbour.

And therefore justice is often thought to be the greatest of virtues...And it is complete virtue in its fullest sense, because it is the actual exercise of complete virtue. It is complete because he who possesses it can exercise his virtue not only in himself but towards his neighbour also; for many men can exercise virtue in their own affairs, but not in

their relations to their neighbour...For this same reason, justice, alone of the virtues, is thought to be 'another's good', because it is related to our neighbour. (1952b, p. 377)

Aquinas (1222-1274) in *Summa Theologica* links justice to duty, "Justice alone, of all the virtues, implies the notion of duty" (1952, p.250). Whilst there may be differences in how Locke, Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas see duty in relation to one or all of the virtues, what seems not in dispute is its relationship with our moral obligation to our neighbour.

What has this discussion on truth, wisdom and duty done for my understanding of leadership? I submit that the words of Christ and some of the great philosophers seem to equate truth with freedom, peace and serenity. Wisdom seems concerned with intellect, love and the pursuit of fitting ends. A sense of duty and care for each other may be a moral obligation that we all share.

The words that assist me to draw further meaning from my sideshadowing come from Victor Frankl (1984) in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. He tells of his experiences in a Nazi death camp during World War II and their impact on his understanding of himself and human nature. He recounts how, despite the horrific conditions of the camp, his spirituality deepened. Whilst Frankl and other survivors endured much physical pain, their inner being sustained less damage. They were able to find a place within themselves of great spiritual freedom and wealth. Frankl believes that this is how those of an apparently less hardy nature survived (p. 55). Frankl illustrates this point in relating the tale of an early morning march to his place of work, stumbling over potholes and large puddles in the dark. The man marching next to him discretely commented to him that he hoped their wives were better off than them (p. 56). Frankl tells how, at that very moment, the image of his wife filled his thoughts. Her image was crystal clear in his mind and he could hear her answering him as he spoke to her. Her appearance was brighter than the rising sun. Frankl's next words resonate with me.

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth - that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the

greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. (p.57)

Has this sideshadowing exercise through care, duty, wisdom, truth and intellect revealed possibilities for the role of love in leadership? How might leaders love in today's schools? Love was not one of my propositions considered in this sideshadow, yet the exercise of sideshadowing has revealed to me a connection between wisdom and love often made by poets, philosophers, theologians and mystics.

## CHAPTER 5

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### THE FIFTH INSIGHT: MEANS, ENDS AND “THE GOOD”

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Is leadership about love? In recalling my most recent sideshadowing of wisdom and its connection to love, I've noted Aristotle raising the notion of "another's good" and Aquinas telling us how the prudent man "orders his acts to a fitting end." Their words indicate there is more to leadership than love and that I need to take a closer look at the notions of means, ends and “the good”. In this chapter, more stories are shared and propositions developed that may assist this line of inquiry.

Todd (2001) holds that it is not only the curriculum that matters, but also the way the teacher articulates it. Curriculum comes via the Other, but the meaning cannot be certain or predicted (p. 446). The curriculum needs to embed in the quality of human response between teachers and students where teachers recognise the delicacy of the task of engaging students. Curriculum itself is unstable as it includes a wide range of objects that are outside the subject. It comes not necessarily via the Other and may derive from sources such as films and literature. Curriculum also comes from the otherness of the self, which Todd calls the “unconscious” and gives credibility to the relationships that signify the process of “learning to become”. Our responsiveness needs to be sensitive and mindful of otherness (p. 447).

Early in 2002, in embarking on our journey as a Curriculum Project School, I needed to be very open with staff about an issue that was unexpectedly causing a great deal of tension among them. I suspect the issue arose through my lack of sensitivity to, and mindfulness of, otherness. The following story outlines what happened.

#### *Harmony Day!*

This experience illuminates the importance of attention to detail and not taking staff for granted. It concerns my failure to properly consult staff about

our involvement in a community celebration called Harmony Day. Harmony Day seeks to spread the message of tolerance and acceptance of people of all races and creed by our community. The fallout from my failure to adequately consult was anything but harmonious!

A deputy principal at a staff meeting that I did not attend had initially tabled the idea for the school's participation in Harmony Day. There was no formal decision made to participate in Harmony Day at the meeting.

Two weeks later, I received a phone call that required an immediate response regarding our participation. This was because the celebrity performer who was to entertain us on Harmony Day had other potential commitments on the day. He needed to know whether he was still required to perform at our celebrations. I assumed that staff would be willing to participate, so I gave an answer in the affirmative. Harmony Day celebrations were to be held in the local park. Other than to accompany students on a short walk to the venue, teachers would not face any additional workload through our participation. At the time, I didn't think I had acted unreasonably.

We were not due to hold a staff meeting for a few days, so I published details about our participation on staff notes the next day. Almost immediately, I began hearing murmurings that people weren't happy. Staff were asking questions about who had made the decision. My initial thoughts were that teachers were being a little precious about this issue.

As I reflected more on my decision to involve the school in this celebration without proper consultation with staff, I developed more empathy with their feelings. Had I given staff the courtesy of checking out their willingness to participate, I sensed that they would have responded positively. I suspect that they responded in negative ways because I didn't extend them this courtesy. It didn't take me long to open my eyes more widely to the busy schedule of family and community events our school was already committed to at the beginning of the year. They included an after school family barbecue, parent-teacher meetings and now, Harmony Day. I had scheduled all of these activities during the first three weeks of the new school year.

I believe staff had every right to feel taken for granted. At the coming staff meeting, I made the decision to acknowledge our busy start to the year. I explained the circumstances surrounding the Harmony Day decision to participate, but avoided expressing it as any form of excuse for my lack of consultation. I acknowledged that we had set about doing too much, too

soon, and that this had been a learning experience for me. I also pointed out that we needed to honour the Harmony Day commitment that I had made. I said that I would try to do things better next time.

(Working Paper 2)

This experience taught me the perils of failing to properly consult stakeholders in the decision-making process, which is the basis of my next proposition.

### **Proposition XVI - Leaders respect the power of choice.**

Senge (1992) emphasises that leaders must face the fact that there is nothing anyone can do to get another person to enrol or commit. This is a matter of choice. Efforts to do so result, at best, in compliance (p. 223). To Senge, leadership is both individual and collective. He asserts that it is only through individual choice that responsibilities dispersed throughout a learning organisation are meaningfully undertaken. It is through choice that our spirit focuses and we become stewards of a larger vision. A supportive environment alone is not enough (p. 360). As Hurley (2003) said earlier, without the support of the majority of people, change is very difficult to secure.

The Rocky Coast principals discuss different dimensions of the power of choice. First, Sharon described her initial apprehension about Matthew, the Cluster Principal, heading up the Rocky Coast Project as he took up his new appointment. This apprehension soon alleviates.

I think Matthew has been a really good support to the cluster. He's been able to do things we haven't had the time to do. I think his most important comment to me when he arrived was, "I'm based in your school because it makes sense for me given that my house is also here, but if I get in your way, kick me out of the way."

(Working Paper 4)

Matthew's words reassured Sharon that she was not going to lose autonomy in her school simply because Matthew based himself there.

Prue spoke of her hopes for the following year in regard to staff collaboration.

One thing I hope for next year is that a couple of my staff will take on challenges through genuine collaboration. I've

said to them on more than one occasion "Why don't we pool the two classes and work on literacy and numeracy together?" How do you get people to legitimately assess and report in a collegial way if they're not teaching in a collegial way?

(Working Paper 4)

Prue seems very conscious of the need to guide people towards better practice rather than impose it on them. This is my learning from *Harmony Day*. Since that time, I am extremely mindful of the need to consult staff on decisions that I believe they have a right to be involved in. I find staff usually reward such consultations with a positive response.

I see common links between the *Harmony Day* experience and another of Duignan's (1996) leadership themes that we "be alive to the passionate side of organisational life." Duignan tells how the highs and lows, the successes and failures, the calm and the storm are all part of the growth cycle of ourselves and our organisations. To be successful, we need to accommodate both the "fire" and the "ice" in our work (p. 6). We cannot just live for the good times!

Duignan's theme has parallels with Senge's view that many leaders of great purpose and vision have little capacity to nurture systemic understanding. Too often, systemic forces such as unforeseen events and people's reactions to them overpower the vision in organisations. To Senge, these forces will kill the most worthy of visions unless we learn how to recognise, understand and work with them. Senge believes that leaders must have a deep commitment to the truth. He makes clear the capacity of leaders to know the current reality and avoid the trap of pretending that all is well when it is not (pp. 355-357). In relation to these comments, I think my acknowledgement to staff that all was not well in regard to the circumstances of *Harmony Day* helped heal some of the discontent associated with my earlier lack of consultation.

Had I learned anything from this experience that might help me in other efforts to make things better for students? As principal, I was keen to find a way of better supporting children in regard to their literacy development. As principal, I could not feel my school was a good school unless it was doing its very best for students in this area. Would I seek to engage the support of staff this time before

committing them to another course of action? The following story outlines the positive influence of a teacher called Maureen.

### Something About Maureen

Since 1997, River View Primary School has supported student literacy development in several ways including:

1. the provision of a part-time literacy teacher for early childhood students who worked alongside the class teacher for five mornings each week;
2. professional learning programs for teachers on improving approaches to teaching literacy; and
3. the development of a school-based literacy support resource folder that provide a range of literacy support materials for teachers to use with their students.

In 2001, I employed Maureen, an experienced and dedicated teacher nearing retirement, for two days per week to assist students with their reading development. She initiated a Reading Aloud Program, based on the ideas of Mem Fox, an Australian children's author. It involved training parents to work with individuals or small groups of students to hear students read aloud and assist them through appropriate intervention strategies. Students, parents and teachers had high regard for the program.

In 2003, Maureen retired. Because she had been the driving force behind the development and delivery of the Reading Aloud Program, there was some concern that her departure would see the program's demise. I found a replacement teacher for Maureen to cover the final semester of that year. This teacher fulfilled the role with distinction, but found the role to be very challenging. There was little or no documentation that accompanied the program. Maureen's knowledge and skills in the teaching of reading underpinned the success of her work with children and parents.

In November of 2003, one of our teacher aides came into my office and handed me a folder. She said she had just been to a reading workshop and that the reading program described in the folder was worth considering. I had a browse through the folder and I noticed how alike this program was to the Reading Aloud Program. Called the Links Literacy Support Program, it involved the training of a team of staff, parent or community tutors to work

individually with students. Those trained would work under the supervision of a school appointed Links Coordinator employed in a part-time capacity to manage the implementation and ongoing support of the program. The focus of the Links program was broader than our Reading Aloud Program and covered reading, writing, spelling and speaking.

The Links folder contained detailed support materials and information about the program. Training for tutors was on a fee paying basis. I could see that it might provide a more formal structure that could build on the foundation of our Reading Aloud Program. I rang a colleague who had adopted the same program in the previous year. She was very positive in her comments, saying that participating students had progressed significantly in their literacy development.

I shared my interest in the program with senior staff, who suggested we table a proposal with staff at the next meeting. Staff could see that the program aligned closely with our Reading Aloud Program and gave it their endorsement. The only downside was the cost of the training program for staff, parent and community tutors. We would need to find sponsorship to fund the training of a team of tutors. Our parent groups generously addressed this need by funding all training costs.

For the Links Program to be successful, my senior staff and I needed to ensure that we had the right person driving it. In making this appointment, we needed to consider the overall staffing needs of the school whilst also finding the best person for the job. I negotiated the teaching role of the person who co-ordinated our visual arts program and curriculum project each year. She was a very talented full-time employee who could fill a variety of positions. She accepted my offer of the part-time position as Links Co-ordinator in addition to her existing roles. The Links program was in good hands.

By March, 2004, a team of ten staff, parent and community members were working effectively with targeted students under the leadership of the Links Co-ordinator. We were targeting the ten percent of students in Grades 3 and 4 who were having the greatest difficulty in being literate. According to test and anecdotal data, our target group made significant progress in their literacy development over the ensuing months, which also seemed to enhance their self-esteem. A remaining challenge for the longer-term is to ensure the sustainability of the program by training more tutors and addressing the literacy needs of a wider range of students.

(Working Paper 2)

Maureen's gentle yet passionate approach to improving the reading of each child within her care was the inspiration for the later commitment by the school to invest in the *Links Literacy Support Program*. Maureen's efforts typified the words of David McRae (2001) expressed in the Panel Session at the National Quality Teacher Conference in Melbourne, "Magic bullets never work in education. Inspiration and remarkable efforts do. Learning is work" (Working Paper 10). Three of Maureen's personal qualities continued to impact on me and on the school: a love of kids - it was clear to all of us that she really liked our students; a passion for learning - she did whatever it took to help students improve their reading; and purity of motive - no matter what she did, we always knew it was in the best interests of students.

From Maureen's personal qualities, especially her purity of motive, flows my next proposition to arise from this study.

### **Proposition XVII - Leaders seek the greatest good.**

Is this what leaders are there to do - pursue the greatest good? How can we come to know what the greatest good might be?

Noddings' (1998) concern is for moral outcomes. She argues that we must not shy away from the arousal of feeling in this pursuit. We must have a sense of care about the people, issues and problems that are the focus of our critical thinking. She argues that moral development is dependent on moral sensibility as well as on reasoning. Sharing stories provides an ideal starting point for the philosophical study of morality and ethics. In particular, she advocates the episodic use of stories to assist self-reflection on social and ethical issues.

Noddings illustrates this view with a story attributed to Simon Wiesenthal, who spent much of his post-World War II life tracking down Nazi war criminals. The story describes the dilemma of a young Jew taken from his Nazi death camp to the bed of a dying Nazi soldier. The soldier admits to participating in the act of burning alive an entire village of Jews. He begs forgiveness from the young Jew. Torn between compassion and abhorrence for the dying man, the young Jew leaves the room without speaking. After the war, the young Jew visits the dead soldier's mother and hears of her sorrow at the loss of her son and her sadness caused by his involvement with the Hitler Youth. Out of compassion for the

mother, the young Jew remains silent about her son's confession. Years later, the Jew, still troubled by this experience, convenes a gathering of distinguished thinkers and asks them: "Did I do right or wrong in walking away from the dying Nazi soldier?" Most responses expressed sympathy for the Jew's decision to walk away whilst another set of responses centred on the religious tradition of forgiveness. Another approach focused on the symbolism of "all Nazis" and "all Jews", maintaining that forgiveness of the latter to the former was impossible. The last response assured the Jew that his choice not to forgive was not a sign of moral weakness. The very fact that the question of forgiveness still worried the young Jew is more significant evidence of an intact morality than if he had actually forgiven the dying soldier.

In reflecting on this story, I am not sure which course of action I might have taken if in the young Jew's shoes. Noddings contends that this story encourages us to exercise care and ethical imagination. She challenges us to reflect on the story and ask ourselves to reflect on our own morality. "Can we imagine ourselves without an intact morality? On the other hand, is anyone in possession of such a thing?" Noddings proposes that none of us can really claim to have an intact morality, especially if we look back on our lives in a "case-by-case examination." She presents the view that perhaps we may come close if we adopt a "way of being in the world" that enables us to "respond to the other" and act with compassion to what we hear.

Noddings suggests that stories of this kind may help us understand ourselves better so that we may provide a moral climate in which our children may prosper. Through our moral imagination, good fortune has a role to play in the formation of an intact morality. Noddings ponders whether she could have been like the Nazi soldier had she been born into those times. Stories such as these enable us to ethically imagine the conditions that may lead us to lose our way in the world. The key to this approach, says Noddings, is to look at the possibilities for ourselves as both victim and perpetrator. It is this lens that provides a starting point for genuine moral growth (1998, pp.163-168).

Like the young Jew, I question my own moral being in the following story that describes my struggle in weighing up the welfare of the school against that of two

students and their mother. I return to the year 1995 and West Beach Primary School.

### What Would You Do?

A parent who had recently arrived from interstate made an appointment with me to discuss the family circumstances of her child whom she wanted to enrol as soon as possible. A departmental officer later described these circumstances as providing the potential for the most serious critical incident in a school that she had been aware of. My 1995 Diary Notes over a three week period reveal the situation that faced me. I begin with notes from my conversation with the parent, Miriam.

Miriam and her two children (Nettie and Paul) arrived from Victoria following death threats from the father. The children have seen a lot of violence. Nettie (her seven year old daughter) has tried to commit suicide. The father has assaulted Nettie and her brother Paul. The father has joint legal custody. The father has fantasies about siege situations in schools, often staying up late at night to watch news bulletins of such events that have recently taken place in other parts of the world.

The same day, following my conversation with Miriam, I contacted Lorna, a departmental officer with responsibility for student welfare issues. Lorna provided me with the following advice.

Miriam should go to the police and detail the situation as told to the principal.

We need to have a contingency plan should the father contact the school.

If we suspect the father is in Tasmania, then we should consider providing the children with a home program to ensure the safety of the mother's children and students at this school.

We should also inform Wallace, a senior departmental officer, of this situation.

The next day, Miriam again contacted the school and provided me with more advice and information about her situation.

Avoid lying to the father - that will only provoke him and he will remember.

If the children try to escape the school when he visits, it will only provoke him.

If he talks to the children, the children will become upset.

A change of name might be a good idea - Miriam will speak to her solicitor.

A home program for the children was not a good idea.

The next day, Miriam again contacted me with more information.

There is no court or police protection order in place whatsoever.

It will be impossible to protect the children from him.

Three days later, I spoke to Dan, the class teacher who was to have Nettie in his class should she be enrolled. I gave him the following overview of Miriam and her children's situation.

Mum is fleeing from a domestic violence situation in Victoria.

The father is potentially dangerous.

There is the potential he may come for the family.

To ensure safety for all, we have enrolled the children under another name.

The children will start with a home program - mum wants them at school.

Dan seemed unsure of how to respond to my comments. I didn't tell him the specifics of the information I had become privy to regarding Miriam and her children. I would provide Dan with full details of their situation if Nettie was to join Dan's class. I didn't wish to unduly concern Dan unless he was to have direct responsibility for Nettie.

Wallace, the senior departmental officer responsible for our school, contacted me later that week.

Wallace advised me:

If we need exemptions from school for these children, then Head Office needs to approve them.

We need to sit down and talk to the police.

Our agency says that we need to take a neutral stance on this issue and let the police guide us.

I attended a meeting later that day to determine whether it was safe for the children to attend school. The meeting involved child welfare officers, police representatives, senior departmental officers and me. Wallace said that the Department of Education's preference was for the children to attend school as soon as possible.

There had been efforts made prior to the meeting to obtain the most accurate information available about the family circumstances of the children in question. After much sharing of information between the various stakeholders, some of which was alarming but yet unverified, Lorna, the Department of Education officer responsible for child welfare issues, asked Allan, the senior police officer, the following question:

Lorna - What is the risk?

Allan - It's better to act on the side of caution. If we substantiate some of these claims, this may become a criminal matter.

Allan, Lorna and I agreed that the school would provide a home program for the children whilst police continued with their investigations. Over the next two weeks, the mother of the children pressured me to enrol her children at school. I called another meeting to review their enrolment and examine the outcomes of the latest investigations of the police and other agencies. The evidence of the threat to the family was a letter sent by the father to the mother. According to one of the departmental officers present, it confirmed the intent of the father to harm his family.

Lorna (the Department of Education officer responsible for child welfare issues) - Psychological assessments of the father's letter confirm that a risk situation exists.

Allan (the senior police officer present) - We don't have anything concrete on the father. A threat assessment is difficult. My information is that the mother is believable, but she may be overstating the problem. The father already knows where she is living.

Wallace (the senior Department of Education officer) - We will exercise reasonable care, but we can't deny the children an education. We could live in fear in all of our schools with the "what ifs". We need to get the children into school - that is the position of the department.

Allan (the senior police officer present) - If there is a risk, the high risk is now.

At the meeting, against the advice of the Department of Education represented by its senior officer, I made the decision to exempt the children from school because I felt an overwhelming duty of care for my school community. The knowledge that the two children would still be receiving an educational program at their home provided some comfort to me. Those present accepted my decision in good spirit, including the senior Departmental officer whose advice I did not follow. He appeared to have empathy with my position.

(Working Paper 2)

When I revisit this story, I wonder whether I would do the same again if confronted with the same circumstances. I suspect I would. As complex as the situation was at the time, I saw the choice before me very clearly. Which circumstance could I have lived with? Deny two children the right to attend school and provide them with a home program, or place the safety and welfare of staff and students at risk? Ten years on, I cannot see how I would do things any differently.

Another of Duignan's (1996) leadership themes asks us to "frame the confusion and manage the double-headed arrow." He explains that life is full of paradoxes. Today's leaders face a myriad of tensions and dilemmas that Duignan describes as double-headed arrows. They may confuse and frustrate us. Duignan argues that we need to live with these tensions and accept them for what they are - "part of the stuff of life." We need to frame the confusion by seeking understanding about what is happening. According to Duignan, this process equips us well to manage change situations (1996, pp. 10-11).

Looking back, I think I managed to frame the confusion well enough so that I could understand the situation facing me. My real problem was that there was no outcome that I could feel good about. Perhaps I just have to accept Duignan's advice that this is all "part of the stuff of life?" In any case, I am sensing that finding "the good" is no simple task.

I will now see if sideshadowing my most recent propositions on leadership helps frame my understanding of my confusion. Pursuing the good in regard to Miriam, her children and the West Beach community did not make me feel good.

### **The Fifth Sideshadow**

My final two propositions to arise from this study are: leaders respect the power of choice and leaders seek the greatest good.

Let me first inquire further into my proposition that leaders respect the power of choice. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) points out the important role of *choice* in our pursuit of the desired end.

The end, then, being what we wish for, the means what we deliberate about and choose, actions concerning means must be according to choice and voluntary. Now the exercise of the virtues is concerned with means. Therefore virtue also is in our own power, and so too vice.  
(1952b, p. 359)

The themes of “means”, “end” and what constitutes “the good” have become central to a number of issues examined in this study. Is Aristotle implying that we cannot have choice without accepting a moral responsibility for the goodness of the choices we make? Is he also saying that we need to be mindful of the means we take in pursuit of “the good”? Aristotle emphasises freedom of the will to choose and that the source of goodness is in the means. The goodness of the end rests with the virtue of the means.

I will now take a closer look at my proposition that leaders seek the greatest good and turn to Plato (428-348 BC) and his *Gorgias* where Socrates speaks of “the good” in his conversation with Callicles.

Because, if you remember, Polus and I have agreed that all our actions are to be done for the sake of the good - and will you agree with us in saying, that the good is the end of all our actions, and that all our actions are to be done for the sake of the good, and not the good for the sake of them? (1952b, p. 280)

Socrates asks us to agree that the good be present in both means and ends.

Hutchins (1952a) proposes that the problem of finding an objective foundation for our moral judgements cannot be simply determined through an appeal to our “being, nature and reason” (p. 608). So let me recall Aristotle’s (384-322 BC) earlier advice in *Nicomachean Ethics* that suggests the exercise of the virtues not only cautions but also requires me to be mindful of the means I take in pursuit of “the good” (1952b, p. 359). To Hutchins, such considerations are by no means a complete account of the good in relation to human conduct nor do they exhaust the meaning of the term “good”. He points to the metaphysical goodness associated with divine creation and the moral goodness determined through human reason to illustrate this point. Hutchins argues that it is in the moral sense, rather than the metaphysical, that we speak of a good man or good will and of all the things that it may be good for a man to desire or possess (1952a, pp. 608-610). I might say that it is the *moral sense* of the good and its practical applications to educative environments that have flowed from the stories, conversations and literature in my thesis rather than a metaphysical sense of what might be good - as in the divine meta-narratives of goodness.

In the domain of moral conduct, Hutchins (1952a) indicates that there are a number of goods that require closer scrutiny. Some things, he claims, are good to use but not desirable in themselves. Some other things are desirable and good as ends or possessions. Hutchins claims that the separation of goods into means and ends allows a third type of good to come forth that is both a means and end. He calls this the *summum bonum*. It is a good, which is not a means in any particular respect, but is entirely an end, which he describes as the “highest good” we can aspire to (p. 611).

Hutchins, himself a philosopher, argues that there is one distinction in relation to the good that stands alone, although it has an influence on the others. This lies in the distinction between the individual and common good, or the private and the public good. The “common good” has historically enjoyed several meanings. A less significant one, for example, refers to the things that many can share, such as land that a group of people work on and cultivate. We often describe the town “commons” as the practice of this idea. According to Hutchins, we find another meaning of the common good where the welfare of the community involves a common good engaged in by its members. It is a good that benefits every member of the group as well as the collective. A further interpretation of the

common good is where the good each seeks, such as happiness, is the same for all men. We cannot separate the happiness of the individual from the happiness of all. Hutchins tells that the several meanings of the common good reveal the opposition between collectivism and individualism. He argues that all the great books of political theory from Plato to Mill embody this conflict of ideas and is a conflict between self-interest and selflessness. He questions whether the tension between collectivism and individualism is real or simply an opposition between two extremes that serve to conceal the half truths that each possess. To Hutchins, we need not stress the collective aspect of the common good at the expense of the individual. He finds that the good of each person and of humankind may be inseparable (1952a, pp. 612-613).

Hutchins echoes Socrates in response to a question from one of Plato's older brothers Adeimantus in Plato's *The Republic* IV. Plato (428-348 BC) illuminates the close relationship between the good of each individual and the good of humankind.

And therefore we must consider whether in appointing our guardians we would look to their greatest happiness individually, or whether this principle of happiness does not rather reside in the State as a whole. But if the latter be the truth, then the guardians and auxiliaries, and all the others equally with them, must be compelled or induced to do their own work in the best way. And thus the whole state will grow up in a noble order, and the several classes will receive the proportion of happiness which nature assigns to them. (1952c, p. 342)

Socrates seems to be saying that all may benefit if all do their own work in the best way.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (384-322 BC) highlights the difficulty of "being good", which he associates with moral virtue. It seems to be that Aristotle believes that the greater the virtue one possesses, the greater the good that one pursues.

That moral virtue is a mean, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions, has been sufficiently stated.

Hence also it is no easy task to be good. For in everything, it is no easy task to find the middle, for example, to find the middle of a circle is not for every one but for him who knows; so, too, anyone can get angry - that is easy - or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble. (1952b, p. 354)

Directing our goodness "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way," goes to the heart of many of the issues raised in the stories shared in this study. Getting it "right" is no easy task, as Aristotle observes. He offers us an approach that may help us in our efforts to be good.

But we must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away; for some of us tend to one thing, some to another; and this will be recognisable from the pleasure and pain we feel. We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent. (1952b, p. 354)

Aristotle's words again resonate with experiences shared in this study, particularly those involving problems and dilemmas where I argue that my choices made had me 'easily carried away' with my own hopes and desires. To Aristotle, it is our finding of the intermediate state - "the mean between excess and deficiency" - that has potential to help us in our pursuit of "the good".

I have been exploring the sideshadows of possibilities that the great philosophers offer me in regard to my final two propositions: that leaders respect the power of choice and leaders seek the greatest good. The sideshadows of the thoughts of Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and others that have been synthesised and appreciated by Hutchins have given me insight into the importance of means, ends and "the good" in leadership.

What else has my sideshadowing of my leadership propositions arising from this study told me about leadership? Why do I need a theory of leadership? Let me now inquire into these and other questions about leadership as I move to Part Two of my thesis.

In Part Two, I will seek to further distil my understanding of the possibilities for leadership that have arisen from my sideshadowing of my propositions. I have called these possibilities ‘insights on leadership.’ Both contemporary and more ancient sources inform my developing understanding of leadership. In Chapter 6, *The Voice of the Profession*, I unpack more conversations about leadership that I have held with colleagues across different years and in different contexts. I want to compare the understanding of my colleagues on leadership with mine as expressed by my emerging insights on leadership. I seek understanding of the similarities or differences in the way my colleagues and I see leadership. The conversations examined in Chapter 6 entice me to search for a deeper meaning of leadership that has spiritual connotations. In Chapter 7, *The Wisdom of the Ages*, I explore a wisdom that the great religions of the world express in search of something that might help me put the puzzle pieces of leadership together. In Chapter 8, *Coming to Understand Leadership*, I draw together the key threads of my understanding of leadership through reflection on a particularly challenging leadership experience of Mary, a colleague principal. In Chapter 9, the final chapter, I declare my ‘essence of leadership’ that is distilled from my study, which I believe may sustain me in the longer term as a school leader. It is my hope that this essence may also help others in their quest to lead others well.

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**PART TWO:**

**IN SEARCH OF AN UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP**

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## CHAPTER 6

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### THE VOICE OF THE PROFESSION

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My sideshadowing has offered me certain understandings about leadership that the current leadership literature may have missed. I have developed seventeen propositions on leadership that populist writing on this subject often refers to. These propositions, formed from current writing on leadership, my professional conversations with principals, my stories and experiences of the last ten years or so are, without my sideshadowing, insufficient to express and illuminate the deeper insights about leadership that have been revealed to me.

#### **Emerging Insights about Leadership**

In the sideshadows of the fantastic literature of the great philosophers I find possibilities for understanding these propositions in new ways. This literature is fantastic to me because it enables me to envision possibilities about leadership that I mightn't have otherwise contemplated. The propositions in my thesis come from my sideshadowing of them with certain revelations about leadership that I have called insights. *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* describes *revelation* as “the act or an instance of revealing, the supposed disclosure of knowledge to humankind by a divine or supernatural agency or a striking disclosure” (1992, p. 979). My propositions as I interpret them may not be as exalted as the divine; they may not even be striking disclosures. I do believe though that my interpretation of these propositions through my direct reference to the wisdom of the great philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato and Socrates reveal some particular essences that may help sustain leaders for the good times as well as the more difficult ones.

#### **Self-Awareness and Concern for Others**

The first sideshadow revealed possibilities for reflection and self-awareness in leadership. Leaders inquire into their own strengths and weaknesses and exercise a concern for others, especially for those who may be less privileged and at the margins of our society.

### **Virtue, Courage and Vision**

The second sideshadow drew my attention towards the virtuous dimension of leadership and its relationship to courage and vision. It encourages leaders to be mindful of past traditions as they imagine and seek a better world. They can be courageous, noble and beyond self-interest.

### **Openness and Discernment in Times of Change**

The third sideshadow exposed the importance of leaders being open with others and open to their ideas. Leaders are discerning in relation to change and know that their learning can never rest. They have a passion for learning that may inspire others to action. Whilst collaboration with others is desirable, leaders recognise that there may be times when they alone need to take responsibility for a decision.

### **Love**

Wisdom, truth, intellect and love were all prominent qualities in the fourth sideshadow. I come to consider truth as freedom and a source of peace and serenity. I see wisdom embracing intellect and love, and being concerned with a moral obligation towards our neighbour. The words of Victor Frankl (1984, p. 57), “that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire” express the place of love in everything, including leadership. Leaders forgive their own failings and those of others. Leaders love others and self as they seek to embrace strengths and strengthen weaknesses.

### **Means, Ends and “the Good”**

The words of Aristotle and Socrates in the final sideshadow inspired the idea that the challenge for leaders may be to find the “mean between excess and deficiency” and do all that they can to develop “a noble order.” Leaders carefully consider the means in striving for the good that they seek. Thus might be revealed the virtuous and moral dimension of leadership.

Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) in his book *Moral leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement* says that it seems odd to speak about virtue in schooling in an age of technical rationality and school effectiveness. Happily, he says, the two

relate closely in the way effective schools have virtuous qualities that significantly contribute to their success (p. 99). Max Van Manen in his paper *Pedagogy, Virtue and Narrative Identity in Teaching* suggests that the narrative approach of sharing stories and anecdotes is the most appropriate form of reflection if we are to understand the virtuous nature of teaching. Van Manen explains that, whilst a teacher can only pedagogically influence a person in her own particular way and for a limited time, the consequences are lifelong (1994, pp. 161-162).

Aristotle (384-322 BC) in *Nicomachean Ethics* explains his notion of virtue.

With regard to the virtues in general we have stated their genus in outline, that they are means and that they are states of character, and that they tend, and by their own nature, to the doing of acts by which they are produced, and that they are in our power and voluntary, and act as the right rule prescribes. (1952b, pp. 360-361)

What might be a "right rule" for leadership? Van Manen holds that the knowledge gained from reflection on our experience helps us understand good pedagogical action and provides us with good practical guidance for the future (p. 162). Thomas Sergiovanni in one of his books *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* describes how principals practice leadership as a form of pedagogy by helping children grow into the world of adulthood and ensuring the interests of children are well served (1996, p. 93). Is this how current school leaders see right leadership? For example, do they link right leadership with virtuous leadership that takes into account means and states of character? The reflections of current school leaders on leadership may be helpful to my understanding of what right leadership may be in concrete and particular circumstances.

The Tasmanian Principals Association (TPA) President, David Billing, at a meeting to commence development of the Association's statement on professional learning, reveals the enduring and problematic nature of this question.

I have been involved in discussions on leadership for twenty years in the Tasmanian Principal's Institute, National Quality Teaching Project, and so on. The same sorts of things arise. How do you understand leadership and describe leadership? What professional learning would enhance leadership? How can we map

this professional learning? How do we deliver it? How do we ensure maximum participation? Can we do better at delivering professional learning? What is the nature of feedback?

(Working Paper 11)

Like Billing, I regularly join school leaders in other forums to discuss similar questions about leadership. A noteworthy example of such involvement is with Roy Pugh and Bevis Yaxley and their research on succession planning for leadership in Tasmanian schools as part of APAPDC's Succession Planning Project. In their paper *Ethics and Responsibility in Leading Education* (2003), they reflect on their experiences in establishing a series of learning circles with current and aspirant school leaders. At a preceding leadership forum to launch the project, participants posed questions about what it might mean, personally and collectively, to lead in educational settings. Pugh and Yaxley record these questions in their paper which include: What would our school be like? What would our leading be like? What would being a leader be like? What must we do to prepare and sustain ourselves to lead (p. 5)?

These questions stress the importance of an ethical and moral approach to leadership and seem to link with a virtue and rightness that Aristotle (384-322 BC) referred to earlier "as states of character" (1952b, pp. 360-361). Is this an emphasis shared by school leaders? The voice of the profession on leadership as expressed at meetings and forums held between 2001 and 2004 may illuminate my understanding of this question. The conversations I will listen to, or hear summaries of, take place at local, state and national gatherings of principals. I was interested to see if there were common themes or differences in the way these groups of principals saw leadership. I also wanted to hear from a cross-section of principals – including those from city or remote schools as well as those who are leading privileged or disadvantaged schools.

### **The Voice of the Profession**

As I listen to the voice of some school leaders, these voices affirm or question some of the insights distilled so far that relate to, for example, self-awareness, virtue, discernment, love and pursuit of "the good" in leadership.

## **Local Voices: District Principals Meeting - Conversations on Leadership**

Let me first listen to what school leaders locally are saying about school leadership. By 'local voices', I mean the voices of those leaders who are colleagues of mine and lead schools in my District of the Department of Education in Tasmania. They lead large and small schools as well as city, rural and remote schools. I journey back to 2004 when over thirty primary, high and secondary principals of remote, rural and city schools from King District in Tasmania were engaged in processes of dialogue and reflection to determine how the District may support their professional learning needs. Tim (principal leader) and Rod (assistant to the superintendent) designed and facilitated a professional learning session to glean information that might be helpful to the development of a King District Mentoring Program for school principals. Participants responded to the following questions.

In your first few weeks and months as a school principal, what was the most significant change for you as a principal?

What do you wish you had known in the first few weeks and months of your principalship?

What advice would you offer to a principal now in the first few weeks and months of a principalship?

What advice would you offer to a principal prior to taking up the principalship for the first time?

What was your greatest difficulty as an inexperienced principal?

What was your greatest pleasure or joy as a less experienced principal?

What were the questions not asked that we should have asked?

(Working Paper 21)

I engaged in this process as a participant and later assisted the facilitators to collate the feedback received. I base the following collective response from participants to the questions posed on my interpretation of individual responses received. I have taken free license to adequately represent the messages of these responses. Please situate yourself in the meeting and imagine a

spokesperson for all participants rising from her seat to articulate their collective response to the questions.

We believe that one question not asked that ought to have been is "How can we prepare new or inexperienced principals for the pressures they will face in the role of principal?"

We say this in the light of our responses to the questions posed. In our first few weeks and months as principal, we found the complexities of the role and their potential impact on our relationships with others to be very challenging. We wished we had better known our school community before taking up our appointment. Trying to come to grips with school finances, guidelines and protocols was also difficult.

We found the loneliness of the position very difficult - especially when dealing with negative or non-performing staff members. On the positive side of the ledger, we especially enjoyed receiving positive feedback on successes of the school. We also valued the good relationships formed with students, staff and parents.

Given our experience, the best advice we would give to a beginning principal is to:

- Be clear on your values;
- Look after yourself and your people;
- Accept that you won't please everyone;
- Find a balance between home and school;
- Set up a support network as the job can be lonely; and
- Know that you can't do it all!

Remember, the job is about getting to know your community and working with others to make things better for kids.

(Working Paper 21)

The loneliness and complexity of the job was evident in the responses of principals. They also emphasised the importance of values in leadership, the need to access the support of colleagues and finding a balance between home and work. The attention these principals gave to "being clear on your values" seems to support insights on a virtuous kind of leadership that came forth from the sideshadows of my leadership propositions. Participating principals

emphasised the importance of leaders being clear on their own values to guide their thinking and action.

I will now move diachronically through time and travel back to a workshop for principals in the year 2001 that again involves over thirty King District principals, many of whom later contributed to the 2004 discussion on the professional learning needs of principals. I want to see if there are any common threads or new insights among their 2001 and 2004 thoughts on leadership. Two colleague principals and I facilitated the workshop. One of them is again Tim who asked participating principals to respond to this question.

If the principals of King District were working as an effective team, what would they feel, see and hear?

Principals posted their individual responses on large sheets of paper displayed around the room. It was my role once more to use free license in reconstituting the responses received. Here they are.

As a group of principals, we feel a sense of belonging to each other and our District. The taking of risks, acceptance of mistakes and a desire to learn from these mistakes characterise how we work. A sense of trust underpins our relationships with each other.

There is no perceived hierarchy and all feel equally valued as team members. We see principals having access to a wide network of support and them making regular use of that support.

Observers of our meetings see us reflecting on our leadership and listening to, and affirming each other. They hear us seeking advice and accessing expertise on key issues. Observers also hear us sharing the good times as well as the more difficult ones and engaging in dialogue relevant to our role as principals.

We hope that our engagement with, and support of each other continues beyond our scheduled meeting days.

(Working Paper 22)

These views expressed by principals on how they wish to be in relation with each other seem very idealistic! They informed the development of three major themes

on leadership that featured in a *Statement on the Professional Learning of Principals in King District (2001)*. These themes were:

Wisdom - accessing the experience, expertise and ideas of our colleagues and others.

Care - caring for the carer with a focus on nurturing our personal well-being.

Team-Building - supporting our personal and professional growth and having some fun along the way.

(Working Paper 22)

I hear my colleagues saying that they need to look after themselves and each other so that they can do their jobs well. I also hear that they need to be open to the wisdom of others and be good learners so that they can lead others in their learning.

Themes of wisdom and care resonate loudly in the local voices of the profession. Do my colleagues in other areas of my state and nation share this emphasis? I will now hear from principals in other areas of my state of Tasmania and listen to their views on leadership. I am interested to see if my colleagues have more to say about a virtuous and right kind of leadership extracted from my sideshow.

**State Voices: Tasmanian Principals Association - Conversations on Leadership**

By 'state voices' I mean conversations with principals and deputy principals who represent their colleagues on their State Principals Association. They come from the North, South, East and West of Tasmania and lead city, rural and remote schools. Some of these school leaders contributed to the local voices I have just shared with you. I once again return to the year 2004 and listen in on conversations that take place during a series of meetings held to develop a statement on professional learning for the newly formed Tasmanian Principals Association (TPA). Following a merger of the Tasmanian Primary Principals Association and the Tasmanian Secondary Principals Association in 2003, this new association now represents all Tasmanian government primary and secondary school principals and deputy principals. In 2004, eight members had

the task of developing a statement on professional learning for school leadership. I joined the group as both participant and researcher. We met three times during 2004. Participants engaged in a high degree of collaboration and spirited dialogue during these meetings.

The following conversation took place during the first of the meetings held in August, 2004. Participants were discussing the difficulties associated with managing the performance of others. One of them is Tim, who was a contributor to my King District conversations.

Tim - There is the challenge of building professional learning teams at the same time as we assess performance. Most principals will say this is the harder part of their role.

Bob - There are at least four principals on stress leave at the moment because they tried to address the issue of staff inability to do their job. It seems to me that the two main priority areas for us are well-being - there's not much happening on this at the moment, and leading teaching and learning.

(Working Paper 11)

At the second meeting of the group a couple of months later, principals again spoke of the difficulties they face in managing the performance of others.

Bob - Our view is that instructional leadership that nurtures better teaching and learning in schools should be a priority focus for a professional leadership program.

Liz - We need to recognise the challenges that go with asking our colleagues to be instructional leaders.

Bob - Yes, but this is what principals are saying is causing them stress: The lack of time on teaching and learning, departmental initiatives, low levels of funding, inefficient or dysfunctional teachers, departmental accountability mechanisms, the multi-task nature of the role, the unworkability of red tape, complaints management, staff inertia, critical incidents and occupational health and safety issues. I would argue that if principals are better instructional leaders, they endure less stress because they will have fewer problems to deal with!

Mike - Principals are lonely and challenged by a lot of issues, especially managing the performance of staff. I'm not sure they want to hear from their Association that they should be focussing on instructional leadership. Principals want their Association to support them with the tough stuff.

Bob - I would agree, but one reason principals have problems with staff is because they're not good instructional leaders.

(Working Paper 11)

No participants made mention of virtuous and right leadership in relation to supporting staff to do their job better. The earlier conversations of King District principals (2001 and 2004) illustrated the importance of leaders being learners as well as having access to collegial support networks. These conversations also resonated with the views of Mike and Bob respectively that principals need support from their colleagues in the more difficult times but should also develop their skills as instructional leaders so they have fewer staff problems to manage.

At the third meeting of the TPA professional learning group, when they turned their attention to the loneliness of the role of principal, this was their conversation.

Mike - I'm hearing principals just want someone to talk to. The job is professionally lonely.

Bob - There's got to be some structure there.

Phil - Then we need to look at the sustainability of mentoring or professional learning group models. We haven't been that successful with them in the past.

It seems that school leaders may need more than occasional 'chance conversations' to sustain them in their leadership. Later, dialogue turned toward the nurturing of leadership in schools.

Chris - Maybe we should be impressing upon principals that part of our role is to nurture leadership in others?

Liz - What might this mean for what we are saying should happen in 2005?

Mike - That we formalise the responsibility of a principal to nurture the leadership capacity of potential leaders.

Chris - As a professional organisation, we need to take this on as a significant issue.

(Working Paper 11)

The conversations of the TPA professional learning group demonstrate some of the tensions school leaders face. On the one hand, Bob argued that principals need to give more attention to leading teaching and learning. If they did so, Bob explains, they would have fewer problems to manage in regard to the workplace performance of staff. Yet, Mike said that the job is tough enough without placing more demands on principals to be the teaching and learning leaders of a school. Mike and Chris added that principals also had a duty to develop leadership among others. Amidst all of this, there seems general agreement that the job of a school leader can be lonely. Principals and other school leaders need to get together and learn from each other more often.

Whilst my sideshadowing of leadership propositions in the first five chapters has brought forth insights that illuminate the virtuous, ethical and moral dimensions of leadership, my colleagues have, so far, made little mention of them. The 'state voices' of the profession were attentive to the learning and well-being of school leaders as were my local colleagues. However, both groups of principals seem less clear on how they may nurture the learning and well-being of their colleague school leaders. How do principals in other states of Australia see school leadership?

**National Voices: APAPDC Forum - Conversations on Leadership**

I again diachronically return to the year 2001 and now visit the South Australian capital city of Adelaide. The setting is the APAPDC *Leaders Lead* National Forum of Principals. The Forum launched the *Leaders Lead: Strengthening the Australian School* project designed to support the professional learning of school leaders. Over two hundred school and system leaders from government, catholic and independent schools across Australia attended. School leadership was the subject of a roundtable discussion. I engaged in a conversation with ten participants that probed the qualities they saw as fundamental to good leadership in schools. I recorded the following response, presented as a summary of this conversation.

Leadership is about the authentic self and being a willing learner. We need to establish a range of pedagogical repertoires and build values-based foundations that underpin our work as school leaders. Leadership needs to be discerning rather than reactive. Principals have an important role to play in nurturing leadership and attracting others to the principalship. If we are serious about this task, we should celebrate the attractiveness and intrinsic rewards of the role.

(Working Paper 23)

Leadership that is authentic, ethical, discerning, learned and concerned with nurturing the next generation of school leaders seems uppermost in the minds of these ten leaders from around Australia.

These Adelaide APAPDC conversations were part of the launch of a major national professional learning project on leadership. This project culminated in the development of a resource called *Learn: Lead: Succeed - A Resource to Support the Building of Leadership in Australian Schools* designed to assist principals, in every school in Australia, to build leadership aspirations and skills. Feedback gleaned from national and state seminars and workshops on leadership held during 2001-2003 helped shape this resource. A group, including academics, school leaders and professional association representatives, also used this feedback to develop five statements about leadership that underpin *Learn: Lead: Succeed*. (2004, p. 2). They proposed that:

1. Leadership starts from within – effective educational leaders know themselves.
2. Leadership is about influencing others – effective leaders understand the nature and power of change.
3. Leadership develops a rich learning environment – effective leaders know what supports and enhances teaching and learning.
4. Leadership builds professionalism and management capability – effective leaders know that it is their responsibility to promote and support excellence in teaching and learning.
5. Leadership inspires leadership actions and aspirations in others – effective leaders know that they have a responsibility to promote and

support widespread and sustainable leadership throughout the school.  
(2004, p.19)

These statements further illuminate the profession's view of leadership. Whilst I agree with these sentiments, I find myself searching for something more. So what is it I am looking for? Am I looking for some kind of Holy Grail of leadership?

### **My Quest for the Holy Grail of Leadership**

According to the online Catholic encyclopedia *New Advent*, which can be found at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06719a.htm>, the Holy Grail has many explanations. Christian mythology generally accepts that the Holy Grail is concerned with the plate or chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper and its legend is generally associated with the achievement of great things ("The Holy Grail", 2007). In a recent conversation between the current Minister for Education in Tasmania, a university academic and me, we discussed what we thought the Holy Grail of education was.

David (the Minister) - Happiness has got to be part of it. It's also about building a Tasmania that is clever and kind.

Ivan (the University academic) - The Holy Grail of education is the success of teachers and kids working together.

Terry - I can't get away from the words of Nelson Mandela who said that we should judge ourselves by the smiles on our children's faces. The Holy Grail in education, for me, is to do with personal growth and happiness.

(Working Paper 2)

There seemed to be common ground between us on how we saw the Holy Grail of education. This conversation helps me realise that I am searching for something more than nice words about leadership. I am seeking understanding about leadership that might help me be a better leader and assist others in their quest to be good leaders. Have the conversations on leadership held by the profession at the local, state and national level helped me in this pursuit? Are there some common themes emerging? My colleagues seem to emphasise the importance of wisdom, care, ethics, learning and nurturing future school leaders. There seems to be *some* congruence between the profession's view of leadership that is being filtered through my conversations with colleagues and

insights on leadership that arise from my study (Self-Awareness and Concern for Others; Virtue, Courage and Vision; Openness and Discernment in Times of Change; Love; Means, Ends and “the Good”). The profession and I both seem to agree on the importance of wise and ethical leadership that exercises a care and concern for others. I think though that I am coming to a deeper view of leadership than my colleagues. My peers seem especially silent on notions of love in leadership and the idea of means, ends and “the good”. It is almost as if these are things leaders do not talk about in a leadership context. I believe leaders need to! Perhaps my Holy Grail of leadership lies somewhere within me.

My concern for the self seems to resonate with Palestini (2003) and his concern for the moral dimension of leadership that arises from the dilemmas that confront schools and administrators. He asserts that there are three areas of dilemmas that confront schools and their leaders. The first is concerned with control, and involves issues such as the extent to which authority should be centrally based or involve the empowering of others; the second relates to curriculum and concern issues such as the extent to which evaluation is based on standardised tests or teacher assessment; and the third to society as it involves issues such as the competing views surrounding the purpose of schools (p. 37).

The three areas of dilemmas for Palestini - those to do with control, curriculum and the purpose of schools - are evident in stories such as *Tough Times at the Office*, *Towards a New Curriculum* and *Vision and Values at River View*. Palestini argues that the more complex issues inherent in such dilemmas require an additional lens through which to view them - critical humanism and the Ignatian Vision. In this way he promotes leadership as a moral science (p. 39).

Palestini tells how, nearly four hundred and fifty years ago, Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus, known as the Jesuits. In his book *The Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius advocates a way of life and a way of viewing the world that continues to guide the lives of the Jesuits almost five centuries since their foundation. The principles implicit in *The Spiritual Exercises* comprise what Palestini describes as the Ignatian Vision, which requires individuals and organisations to use the process of change as a means of achieving self and organisational improvement (pp. 40-41).

In a recent conversation with Father Mark Freeman, the Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart, I remarked that my study seems to be telling me that leadership is a deeply ethical and moral concern. I expressed an interest in taking a closer look at the teachings of St Ignatius and their relevance to school leadership. In reply, Father Mark said,

That's interesting. One of our problems with this leadership thing is that we get caught up in all the political stuff. We fail to access the wisdom that is here and has been here for hundreds of years. It's not just the Jesuits, either. Benedict was very much in touch with the human spirit.

(Working Paper 24)

What is this wisdom that "...that has been here for hundreds of years?"

I have a feeling that this sixth chapter is acting like Dennis J. Sumara's (1996) hinge referred to earlier that linked the first three chapters of his book with the last three. Although those chapters are related, they are also very different from each other. The hinge chapter enabled Sumara to take the reader somewhere different. So where has this hinge chapter taken me? It began with a brief examination of the five insights on leadership distilled from the sideshadows of seventeen leadership propositions. I formed these propositions in Chapters 1-5 from my inquiry into my experiences as a school principal. In this sixth chapter, I was keen to see if there was common ground between my developing understanding of leadership as expressed in the five insights and the way my colleague principals saw leadership. I was hoping to find strong links between the two perspectives! Instead, I discovered that, whilst my colleagues placed great store on leadership that takes into account wisdom, care, ethics, learning and nurturing future school leaders, they seldom, if ever, referred to notions of love, means, ends and "the good" in leadership that were evident in my insights. I began to think that I may be seeing leadership differently to my colleagues. I believe that my sideshadowing of my propositions using the fantastic literature of the great philosophers has enabled me to survey new territory and develop deeper insights on leadership. As I recall my first few chapters, I am conscious of my deliberate use of words such as 'sensing' when tentatively sensing my way through my inquiry into leadership. My epistemology has looked to writers such as Shields, Senge and Morrison to help me make sense of my stories and

conversations. My reflection on them has thrown up propositions on leadership that are evident in contemporary leadership literature. My propositions illuminate different dimensions to the way contemporary authors see, for example, collaboration, ethics and care in leadership. I know with my being that there is still more to leadership. I am realising another depth of understanding, one that goes deeper than the views of my colleagues on leadership. I am finding this journey almost emancipatory! The essence of my leadership lies within me. It is my very being.

Australian researcher on school leadership, Hedley Beare proposes in his paper *Leadership for a New Millennium* that we probably need to “take one of those quantum leaps in the field of leadership” and explore territory where the maps are still quite sketchy. I agree. He tells of the disenchantment abroad with all fields of leadership.

There is a widespread longing for leaders of substance, leaders with a touch of nobility, vision, and transcendence about them, leaders with soul (2006, pp. 4-5).

Jay Casbon, in his paper *Turning Toward a New Leadership*, relates a discussion he had with a leader in the Nez Perce tribe of Oregon. The leader tells of her tradition’s difficulty with the concept of leadership defined by modern Western culture.

Our people are more focussed upon the past than the present. We experience America as a country that places an inordinate emphasis on the future. Our people have trouble with this concept, and that is why your notion of leadership does not work for my people. Our people count upon present and historical relationships, we always consider the truth in a situation, and how that truth speaks to present action and the well-being of our tribe. Living always in the future is a role we give fools in our mythical tribal stories – roles that elicit laughter and comic relief. (2005, p. 234)

The insights of the Nez Perce tribal leader help open me to an understanding that the kind of leadership I aspire towards may have ancient rather than modern origins. Jorge Ferrer in his book *Revisioning transpersonal theory* propounds that a full understanding of reality and human nature needs to take into account

spiritual insights and perspectives (2002, p. 1). My conversations late in this hinge chapter with Father Mark and also with university academics and a leading politician provoked me to think that maybe I am looking for some kind of Holy Grail of leadership. Perhaps I need to take what Beare described as “one of those quantum leaps in the field of leadership” and go somewhere different in search of the wisdom that Father Mark referred to earlier that may help me become the person I wish to be, the leader I wish to be.

Philosopher William F. Losito in his paper *Philosophizing about Education in a Postmodern Society: the Role of Sacred Myth and Ritual in Education* gives me confidence to pursue this direction.

Educational philosophy, as well as general philosophy, must develop a “new key” for considering the meaningful role of the aesthetic and ethical in cultural life and education. In particular, a study of ancient and traditional cultures reveals the centrality of sacred myths and rituals as means for creating inspiring, coherent patterns of meaning which foster communal and individual well-being (1996, p. 76).

I believe I need to consider the insights and perspectives of ancient and traditional cultures if I am to understand the kind of leadership that may sustain me in my efforts to foster individual and community well-being in a scientific age.

## CHAPTER 7

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### THE WISDOM OF THE AGES

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My chance comment to Father Mark about St Ignatius described in the previous chapter seems like one of those moments when seemingly unrelated events come together to help us in unforeseen ways. As I was driving to the first meeting of the TPA Professional Learning Group in August of 2004 with Mike, whom you met in the previous chapter as a member of this group, I told him about my conversation with Father Mark and its relevance to my study. He, replied, ‘I’ve got a couple of books that you might be interested in. Are you familiar with the work of Jaworski or Greenleaf?’ Mike had completed his Ph.D some years earlier with a focus on schools as communities. It turned out that he had a feel for what I was looking for. Joseph Jaworski (1996), in his book *Synchronicity: the Inner Path of Leadership*, describes events like these conversations as moments of “synchronicity”. In these times, it is as if “hidden hands” assist us (p. ix).

#### **Wholeness**

Mike was pointing me in a direction that might inform my developing understanding of leadership. I want to find out more about the wisdom that Father Mark refers to. Before explaining how Jaworski and Greenleaf might help me, I want to share with you some of Peter Senge’s *Introduction* to Jaworski’s book. It once again builds on my developing belief that love is fundamental to good leadership. Senge describes leadership as creating a domain in which we continually deepen our understanding of reality and become better able to participate in the unfolding of the world. Leadership is concerned with the creation of new realities (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 3). Senge recounts a conversation with Jaworski and his words concerning the importance of seeing the world as open and relational as opposed to a world that is fixed and lacking connection.

When this fundamental shift of the mind occurs, our sense of identity shifts, too, and we begin to accept each other as legitimate human beings. (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 11)

For Senge, when our minds are in a fixed state, we tend to see the stored up images and interpretations of the other. However, when we actually begin to embrace the dignity and worth of each human being it is a truly amazing experience. Senge proposes that this is perhaps what love means. He asserts that virtually all of the world's major religions have acknowledged the power of love and its capacity to embrace the legitimacy of every human being (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 11). Can you hear, as I can, the words of Victor Frankl (1984) in my fourth sideshow, that the "salvation of man is through love and in love" (p.57)? There may be merit in taking a look at the major religions of the world to see if there is anything there that may inform my understanding of leadership. Perhaps later.

In exploring the meaning of leadership, Jaworski (1996) refers to an essay by management consultant and researcher Robert Greenleaf called *The Servant as Leader* (1973) where he describes the essence of leadership as "the desire to serve one another and to serve something beyond ourselves, a higher purpose" (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 59). Jaworski maintains that this perspective is an important piece of the jigsaw that he is trying to put together in relation to leadership (p. 59). He describes how he later comes across an article in the *Sunday Times* on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1980 that reviewed David Bohm's book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980). The article described a general theory that goes beyond the contradictions exposed by relativity theory and quantum theory. Jaworski recalls this review.

The Implicate Order (from the Latin "to be enfolded") is a level of reality beyond our everyday thoughts and perceptions, as well as beyond any picture of reality offered by a given scientific theory. These, according to Bohm, belong to "the explicit order."

In the Implicate Order, the totality of existence is enfolded within each fragment of space and time - whether it be a single object, thought or event. Thus everything in the Universe affects everything else because they are all part of the same unbroken whole.

Bohm thinks that the current trend towards fragmentation is embedded in the subject-noun-verb structure of our grammar, and is reflected at the personal and social levels by our tendency to see individuals and

groups as “other” than ourselves, leading to isolation, selfishness and wars. (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 78)

Perhaps the article on Bohm’s work provides me with another hidden hand of guidance through the schemata of my understanding? In the previous chapter, I found that the epistemology of my professional colleagues on leadership did not illuminate my own understanding. Instead of deeming my colleagues and their views on leadership as ‘other’ than my own, Bohm affirms my feelings that our differences are emancipating. I see these differences as “all part of the same unbroken whole” that encourages me to wholeheartedly investigate a view of leadership not embraced by my colleagues. Shortly after reading Bohm’s article, Jaworski makes contact with Bohm and recalls his words on the nature of the implicate order.

Yourself is actually the whole of mankind. That’s the idea of implicate order - that everything is enfolded in everything. The entire past is enfolded in each one of us in a very subtle way. If you reach deeply into yourself, you are reaching into the very essence of mankind. When you do this, you will be led into the generating depth of consciousness that is common to the whole of mankind and that has the whole of mankind enfolded in it. The individual’s ability to be sensitive to that becomes the key to the change of mankind. We are all connected. If this could be taught, and if all people could understand it, we would have a different consciousness. (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, pp. 80-81)

Jaworski was fortunate to make contact with Bohm as he died in 1992 not long after their encounter. Fortunately, Jaworski’s dialogue with Bohm was not lost forever. Perhaps things do come together in the implicate order. Jaworski walked away from this conversation with Bohm with a belief in the power of the universe to influence local events and the power of local events to influence the universe, citing Bohm’s words, “Everything starts with you and me” (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 83).

## **The Spiritual Dimension**

Jaworski says it is the ground of being of the implicate order that is part of the unfolding process of the universe where we live our lives by doing, by being

active. Our lives are concerned with what we need to do each day and the events happening around us shape our actions. Jaworski holds that this state of being enables us to take on the most difficult of challenges as if they are part of our destiny, and illustrates this point with reference to the words of Carl Jung taken from his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1961).

I had a sense of destiny as though my life was assigned to me by fate and had to be fulfilled. This gave me an inner security.....Often I had the feeling that in all decisive matters, I was no longer among men, but was alone with God. (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 134)

Jaworski expounds on the notion of the ground of being after a meeting with Francisco Varela, a Chilean biologist, philosopher and neuroscientist. Varela passed away in 2001. The ideas of Varela and friends on the “biology of cognition” which is concerned with “knowing how we know” intrigued Jaworski (p. 175). The ideas suggest that cognition is a bringing forth of the world through the act of living. The only world we can have is the one we create for ourselves through our language and relationships. Our world cannot change unless we change (pp. 175-176). Jaworski recalls a conversation with Varela and his emphasis on the spiritual dimension in creating a better world.

“What I want to describe to you next,” said Varela, “is the spiritual realm - spiritual because it has to do with human hearts. When we are in touch with our ‘open nature,’ our emptiness, we exert an enormous attraction to other human beings. There is great magnetism in that state of being which has been called by Trungpa ‘authentic presence’.” Varela leaned back and smiled. “Isn’t that beautiful? And if others are in that same space or entering it, they resonate with us and immediately doors are open to us. It is not strange or mystical. It is part of the natural order. (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 179)

From the Eastern tradition Varela recalls Chogyam Trungpa, a Tibetan Buddhist teacher and author to illuminate the spiritual nature of opening our hearts and minds to the presence of others. I return to Jaworski and his recalling of his conversation with Varela, who continues.

“Those that are in touch with that capacity are seen as great warriors in the American Indian tradition, or the Samurai in the Eastern

tradition. For me, the Samurai is one who holds the posture in the world - someone who is so open he is ready to die for the cause. That capacity gives us a fundamental key and is a state of being known in all great traditions of humanity.” (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 179)

As Jaworski’s story continues, Varela describes another way of understanding Bohm’s implicate order and wholeness.

Later in the conversation, Varela warned. “There is a great danger if we consider these people to be exceptional. They are not. This capacity is a part of the natural order and is a manifestation of something we haven’t seen previously, not something we do not have. This state is available to all of us, and yet it is the greatest of all human treasures. This state - where we connect deeply with others and doors open - is there waiting for us. It is like an optical illusion. All we have to do is squint and see that it has been there all along, waiting for us. All we have to do is see the oneness that we are.” (as cited in Jaworski, pp. 179-180)

Bohm’s wholeness is Varela’s oneness. Perhaps “hidden hands” helped Jaworski meet up with Bohm and Varela before their deaths! I wish to pause for a moment and reflect on Varela’s notion of a state of being as a state of oneness. To Varela, it is one that we can all enter and involves a deep connection with others. This state of being, of oneness with others, is profound to my understanding of leadership. This is where it seems so right for me to invoke a leader’s love for others as a fundamental quality of leadership. How can a leader have a deep connection with others without love?

Jaworski proposes that leadership is the creation of a realm where those around us continually expand their understanding of reality in seeking to shape the future. It involves a “process of collective listening” to what is emerging before us and having the courage to do what is required (p. 182). I believe that the process of collective listening is to do with our being open to possibilities that we cannot yet see through, for example, conversations with colleagues. With Jaworski, in this environment, I believe that a “sense of flow” operates where we no longer act as individuals but “out of an unfolding generative order.” This is the “unbroken wholeness” of the implicate order where things happen and doors open. Life becomes a series of predictable miracles. The kind of leadership that allows this

environment to thrive is more to do with *being* than *doing* (p. 185). It is about orientation of character. For me, leadership is even more than this. It is about orientation of spirit. Is this where this journey of mine through hundreds of conversations with colleagues in real life and with writers and philosophers in virtual life has been leading me? This journey of mine has thus led me into new realms where I can release myself from earlier traditions of understanding. I seem to have progressed from notions of character and values to one of spiritual direction.

Jaworski, in reminiscing on his own leadership journey, tells of his invitation from Peter Senge to engage in a dialogue with himself and another colleague on issues emerging from their work. It takes place at a three day gathering of about three hundred and fifty people who are actively concerned with the development of learning organisations and communities (pp. 187-192). During their presentation, Jaworski tells his story of predictable miracles and “of the doors opening one after another.” At that point in the presentation, a member of the audience asks Jaworski about the “undiscussable” matter of the Spirit or the Supreme Being in a business environment. “Should we speak of God in the corporation?” the audience member inquires. A little later, another member of the audience, in response to Jaworski’s reference to servant leadership and service to something higher, asks him what he thinks the role of God is in all of this? Jaworski describes his disappointment with the answer he gave and his difficulty in responding to such questions in a secular business environment. The next day, he contacted a colleague and asked for advice on how to respond to such questions. His colleague’s advice told him about a sign that hangs over the entrance to Carl Jung’s home in Switzerland. It says, “*Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit* - Invoked or not invoked, God is present” (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 191).

Jaworski relates a later conversation with his co-presenters at another three day gathering where they did reflect on the question of the life of the spirit in a secular world. He describes how they spoke of the importance of language in finding the words that bring people together rather than alienate them. Senge used the word “numinous” to describe those things that connect with matters of the Divine that may be beyond our understanding and not easily be explained (pp. 191-192).

So, I am interested to examine, more deeply, Jaworski's (p. 59) idea that leadership is about serving one another and also serving something beyond ourselves, a higher purpose. What might such a higher purpose be? Bohm (1980) refers to Aristotle's concept of causality that outlines four kinds of causes: "material", "efficient", "formal" and "final". He explains this in terms of something living, such as a tree. The material cause is the matter from which all the other causes function and from which the thing composes. In a plant, for example, the material cause is the soil, air, water and sunlight which form the body of the plant. The efficient cause is the actions that enable this whole process to operate such as the planting of a seed. Bohm explains formal cause with reference to Ancient Greek philosophy and its meaning of the term *form* which means "an inner forming activity" that is the cause of the growth, development and differentiation of things (p. 12). He provides the example of the growth of an oak tree and its formal cause explained in terms of the whole inner movement of sap, cell growth and branch that is unique to that tree and different to other varieties of tree (p. 12). Bohm argues that it is not possible to relate the inner growth of an oak tree from an acorn without referring at the same time to the oak tree that is going to develop from that growth. Therefore, to Bohm, formative cause implies final cause.

"Design," according to Bohm, is commonly known as the final cause, which the mind consciously holds through thought. This notion sees, for example, God as the creator of the universe according to a grand plan. Bohm points out that design is but one example of final cause. He highlights the way men often aim towards one thing but find something that is *implicit* in their actions but different to what they originally intended.

According to Bohm, the ancient view of formative is of the same nature for the mind as it is for life and the entire cosmos. He explains how Aristotle sees the universe as the one organism where each element grows and develops in relation to the whole. Each element has its own position and function (p. 13). Bohm argues that the current trend in modern physics is resistant to the idea of formative activity "in the undivided wholeness of flowing movement" (p. 14). He contends that our fragmentary way of thinking and being has implications for every aspect of our lives (p. 16). To Bohm, what is required is an understanding of the formative cause of fragmentation (p. 18).

Bohm tells how the idea of measure does not play such an elementary role in the East. The philosophy of the Orient sees the primary reality as the immeasurable. He refers to the study of words and meaning of the word *matra* in Sanskrit. It means *measure* in the musical sense and carries a fluent quality that is close in meaning to the Greek word *metron*. Bohm also points to the word *maya* which is derived from the same root as *matra* and means *illusion*, (p. 22) implying an illusive quality. Bohm argues that this is of extreme significance because, to the West, measure underpins reality whereas, in the East, uncertainty shrouds measure in some ways.

Bohm observes that the ways Eastern and Western societies have grown and developed is consistent with their respective attitudes to measure. In the West, society places great importance on science and technology and their corresponding emphases on measure. In the East, religion and philosophy and their concern for the immeasurable have a far greater prominence (p. 23). Bohm indicates that it is impossible to go back to the wholeness existing prior to the split between East and West. He argues that we need to start afresh by taking account of the past, assimilating it and then moving on to a new understanding of wholeness that is relevant to our current condition of life (p. 24). David Cooper, in his book *World Philosophies: An Historical Introduction* (1996), suggests that many of the ideas in non-western philosophies are very relevant to Western contemporary culture. Rather than exclude one tradition at the expense of another, he advocates we consider "the best items" of both (pp. 1-2). Cooper explains that contemporary students of philosophy argue for an appreciation of the medieval influence that should be separate from the religious context from which it originates. If you search for "Medieval philosophy" in the online source <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/B078>, Scott MacDonald and Norman Kretzmann describe the medieval influence as the philosophy of Western Europe from about AD 400-1400, spanning the time between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance (*Medieval Philosophy*, 2007). Cooper sees the one defining feature of the medieval influence in the western world as the extent to which opposing philosophical views were brought into dialogue with each other. He reasons that this debate seems to concede medieval thinking as largely theological in shape (p. 147). Cooper indicates that the efforts of medieval writers to distinguish theology from philosophy were problematic. He refers to the German philosopher

Hegel in seeking to advance this discussion. Cooper tells how Hegel in his *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* sees God as the common subject matter between religion and philosophy. Theology and philosophy differ in their form of understanding God. To Hegel, the medievalist never rises to the higher and more philosophical form. Whilst philosophy recognises God by means of *pure thought*, theology does so in more *imaginative* terms aligned to the realm of mythology (as cited in Cooper, 1996, p. 148). Whilst acknowledging Hegel's account of medieval thought, Cooper argues that trying to affirm or deny the link between philosophy and theology will achieve very little. He advocates that we consider issues like the compatibility of divine omnipotence with human freedom as belonging to "philosophical theology, or theological philosophy" (p. 149).

Is this point of Cooper's helpful as I research the virtuous, even spiritual dimension of leadership? As previously stated, my study of school leadership has thus far led me from notions of character and values to one of spiritual direction. I am keen to examine the link between the virtuous dimension of leadership arising from my journey and what Senge (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 191) describes as "numinous" - matters of the divine. Hegel's treatment of the link between philosophy and theology helps me be less concerned with trying to prove or disprove such links. I am more concerned with what I may learn from their exploration. I suspect I may not only find these matters of the divine in the Western tradition. Ninian Smart (1997) in his book *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, explains that, through exploring the common patterns of the world's widely ranging religions and ideologies, we can begin to understand how religion serves to enliven the human spirit (p. 1). And, by the way, Bill Clinton, whom I referred to earlier, lends support to this line of inquiry in describing the capacity of church and state to contribute to the strength of a nation.

Government is, by definition, imperfect and experimental, always a work in progress. Faith speaks to the inner life, to the search for truth and the spirit's capacity for profound change and growth. Government programs don't work as well in a culture that devalues family, work, and mutual respect. And it's hard to live by faith without acting on the

scriptural admonitions to care for the poor and downtrodden, and to "love thy neighbour as thyself." (2004, pp. 558-559)

Smart (1997) makes three key points in justifying the comparative study of religion. Firstly, it provides a balance to the cultural tribalism that he says is prevalent in Western universities and theological schools. Secondly, it offers a source of fertile questions for scrutiny by religions and other worldviews. Thirdly, the comparative study of worldviews has the capacity to provide a rich source of insights (p. 6). This last point is of particular interest to me, considering Western and other religious traditions must have such a capacity for understanding of leadership and the human condition.

Smart cautions that comparisons between religions on any particular feature needs to take account of their context. He argues that details of context may give quite diverse flavours to two apparently similar phenomena. He concedes the difficulty of finding a vocabulary that can adequately express the many different cultures of the world. This does not preclude us from exploring the common feelings and perspectives of the human condition that may be evident in the world's religions and worldviews (p. 6).

Amongst the common threads that weave between religions in morality and in the motivations to be good, Smart states that we may find "certain autonomy" of morals within a cross-cultural context. He detects a similarity between virtues and rules in societies that are traditionally unconnected. Smart says the autonomy of morals becomes a little more complex when we bring into the equation the motivation of ordinary people to be good. For example, if one believes in reincarnation, then the gradualism of moral progress over several lives implies that "wickedness is not completely fatal." There is always the next life to exercise a higher level of morality. This is not so for those who live in the belief that they have a single life that ends with the judgement of God (pp. 197-198).

Smart reflects on the virtues implicit in the major religions and investigates connections between their traditions, examining the four virtues of Buddhism: friendliness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), finding pleasure in the joy of others (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkha*). He tells how Buddhists see the calm of equanimity as the foundation from which we may pursue the other three virtues.

Self-awareness is essential to those seeking a state of equanimity as it helps balance inclinations towards greed and anger (pp. 208-209).

The Western church, in its classical phase up until the time of the Reformation, inherited the ethics of Aristotle and the Greeks. In philosophy, theology, ethics and social orientation, Christianity is now highly westernised (Smart, p. 211). The relationship between the religious experience of the Christian tradition and the ethical dimension expressed in the virtues of the great philosophers, like Aristotle, emphasises the classical theological virtues of faith, hope and charity and the place that love has at the core of Christian ethics (p. 210). "Superior man" regards heaven as a moral force and lives according to the will of heaven by loving others, being courageous, wise, studious and keen to do what is morally right (pp. 210-212).

Eastern ethics are also deeply concerned with politics and a vision for superior leadership. Smart explains how Confucius sees virtue as bestowed from above and involves a vision for a higher life. Images of love span the theistic religions as well as quasi-theistic forms of Buddhism (p. 186). Whilst there are significant differences in the way various religions see virtue, there are also discernable overlaps (pp. 213-214).

Epistemologically, it is now becoming possible to see that the virtues of the religions described by Smart overlap with the virtuous kind of leadership that my study is tending to favour – a leadership that embodies and enacts self-awareness, concern for others, courage, discernment, love and working for “the good”. Bede Griffiths (1994) in his book *Universal Wisdom: A Journey through the Sacred Wisdom of the World* adds another dimension to this understanding. He takes the position that today’s major religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam - are part of the problem of our divided world. They need to redeem the ancient wisdom that is their inheritance. Griffiths argues that each of these religions has their own understanding of ultimate truth and reality. Our challenge is to see our own religion and cultural understandings differently through reflection on the texts of the other great religions. We need to open our hearts to the transcendent truth that each of them reveals in different ways (p. 10).

In my fourth sideshadow, Hutchins (1952a) acknowledged the millennia-old arguments about the nature of truth (p. 882). I shared the perspectives of Plato, Socrates and Jesus Christ on truth. Hutchins (1952b) suggested the key issues are whether we can know the truth and how we can ever decide whether something is true or false (p. 915). For example, religion, philosophy and different eras from the ancients to the present all have their truths. Pugh (2000) refers to Gadamer's idea of truth that is concerned with "disclosure of possibilities for being and acting that emerge in and by means of...the self-enrichment and self-realisation that occurs as a result of the play of meaning" (as cited in Pugh, 2000, p. 208). To Gadamer, we come to truth from all perspectives. I am not searching for an eternal or universal truth. I believe that my journey of understanding is opening my heart to the 'transcendent truths' of the great religions that may help us find ways to understand the numinous nature of leadership that I am seeing as love of humanity. As Griffiths (1994) maintains, it is through mutual understanding that our humanity may grow (p. 10).

### **Myth and the Origins of Religion**

To Griffiths, the comparative study of religions, especially of pre-historic and tribal religions like that undertaken by Mircea Eliade in *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958), enables us to discover the basic experience of all religions. Griffiths describes how Rudolph Otto comes close to revealing the hidden origins of religion in his *The Idea of the Holy* (1917). Otto emphasises the "mystery" that marks the awe, fear and fascination of human beings with the immense and unknown vastness of their world that, in turn, provokes a desire to survey and understand its immensity. Human beings, faced with the incredible size of the mysterious universe, awaken to what he terms *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, a fearsome, fascinating mystery (as cited in Griffiths, 1994, pp. 10-11). Through the ages humankind experiences the same sense of wonder in regard to nature, especially in the writings of poets and philosophers during the romantic period of nineteenth century Europe. Griffiths points out that, prior to this time, people such as Kant speak of their awe in the company of "the starry firmament above and the moral law within" (as cited in Griffiths, 1994, p. 11).

The duality of this mystery is important. Griffiths explains that the distinction in understanding inherited from seventeenth century scientists such as Rene'

Descartes of an inner world of subjective experience and a physical world outside us is illusory. The division of the inner and physical world goes back to the days of the Greek philosophers of the fifth and sixth centuries B.C. In these times, Griffiths argues, the rational and analytical mind comes forth to reveal a separation between mind and matter. Prior to that time, humanity had a more unitive view of reality where the world is seen as an integrated whole. Even if we go back to the ancient religions, Griffiths contends, the original vision of the universe is always seen as an integrated whole with humanity living in harmony with the universal Spirit. This Spirit immerses in the human and physical world (pp. 10-11). These ideas prompt my recall of Varela's state of being and oneness that involves a deep connection with others, Jaworski's "sense of flow" where we no longer act as individuals but "out of an unfolding generative order," Smart's notion of an "autonomy of morals" that transcends the great religions of the world and Bohm's desire for an understanding of wholeness that he suggests is relevant to our current condition of life.

Griffiths says that we form images of everything around us and it is through these images that we get to know the universe. The root of all religion and knowledge, he propounds, is in the myth. As examples, he cites the stories of the Bible that are still influential in Christian communities today, such as the Creation and the Fall as well as the great myths of Ramayana and the Mahabharata that depict historical events and still impact on the minds of people in India today. To Griffiths, the great myths have a profound wisdom comprised of reason which is implicit rather than explicit. Akin to these myths is the imaginative wisdom of the great poets such as Shakespeare and Homer that seizes reality through concrete images or enactments of imagined histories. Griffiths tells that this is the way the great scriptures of the world such as the Vedas, the Quran and the Bible convey their wisdom. He argues that understanding of myth requires a total immersion in a way of life. In this immersion we may find the meaning of human existence (pp. 12-14). I believe that the project of understanding our humanity may be helpful to leaders who choose to exercise a humane, numinous kind of leadership that this study is leading me towards.

## Leadership and the Great Religions

Griffiths explains that the great religions of the world share three fundamental characteristics. First, they all have an Ultimate Truth beyond name and form such as the *Nirguna Brahman* of Hinduism or the *Nirvana* of Buddhism. In the Christian tradition, the Supreme Being or Ultimate Truth manifests in the form of an eternal word or Wisdom that resides in the character of the universe and in the human heart. It communicates through a divine energy, the greatest of which is love. All human wisdom and love is an expression of the Wisdom and Love of the Supreme Being. The revelation of Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross represents the fullest expression of this love. I am seeing the 'transcendent truth' of love as central to the wisdom that Father Mark referred to earlier. The divine energy of the Ultimate Truth of the great religions personifies this love.

Griffiths describes the second characteristic shared by the great religions as the manifestation of the hidden Reality that, for example, the *Buddha* of Buddhism, the *Yahweh* of Judaism and the *Christ* of Christianity all embody (pp. 41-42). Griffiths explains that each religion tends to worship one particular form such as Islam's *Allah* or Christianity's *Christ*. The Supreme Reality is nameless and exceeds all human understanding (p. 20).

The third characteristic shared by the great religions is the Spirit, which Griffiths says includes the *Atman* of Hinduism, the *Breath of the Merciful* in Islam and the *Ruah* in Judaism.

Griffiths tells of how, in each of the great religions, the Universal Truth is present in a community that provides it with a particular ritual and doctrine that makes each religion unique. In Christianity, for example, the divine revelation of Christ is the church which Christians see as a universal community. Griffiths refers to the *Letter to the Ephesians* which describes the Church as "...his Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (as cited in Griffiths, 1994, p. 42). Griffiths sees this description of Church as a vision embracing of all humanity that draws all of us together to live in harmony (p. 42). My idea of a school community is one that embraces difference and brings people together to work and live for the benefit of all. Why then, do people in organisations such as schools and the followers of the world's great religions all struggle to find the harmony they seek?

Griffiths acknowledges the reality that the Christian Church divides into many different strains, many of which differ from wider religious traditions. The challenge ahead, he argues, “is to respond to the needs of humanity by rising above this division and opening ourselves to the values and wisdom of other religions” - which is the cornerstone of what Griffiths describes as the “Universal Wisdom” (pp. 42-43) and what I am portraying as the wisdom that Father Mark referred to earlier. Chris Mitchell in his Christmas editorial of *The Weekend Australian* (2005b) helps me illustrate the values and wisdom of the great religions.

The great religions, like the great ancient myths of ancient Greece and Rome, tell us that fundamental human concerns such as preferring peace over war, human companionship over isolation and freedom over constraint are, indeed, universals. This is why there has been so much cross-fertilisation between the ancient religions...Family is what Christmas is all about, but it is also another element held in common by Christians, Muslims and Jews. The innocence of children, and their need for nurture and protection, is as central as any other value to the story of human concern told by the ancient religions. (p.12)

The words of peace, companionship and freedom, and the nurture and protection of children draw me closer to the love, wisdom and virtue immersed in the teachings of the great religions and ancient philosophers that Griffiths described earlier (p. 11). This wisdom sees the universe as an integrated whole with humanity living in harmony with the Universal Spirit. These words seem to relate well to Bohm’s (1980) understanding of wholeness, which he argues is relevant to our current condition of life (p. 24), one that illuminates our connectedness and interdependence.

What does this interpretation mean for my understanding of self, as a leader, and leadership in general? I have been a little like a yacht vying with the winds of philosophy, religion and science, tacking back and forth, uncertain of the yacht’s destination. I have been allowing myself to do this, wanting to see where the winds take me. They have led me to reflect on my own leadership experiences and develop insights on leadership that spring from the sideshadows of the great philosophers. The values and wisdom of the great religions have breathed new

life into the sails and evolved a view of leadership that is ethical, moral and embracing of our humanity. At its core is love.

I want now to return to Gadamer (1992) who helps me unpack further what it might mean to lead others in an ethical, moral and loving way. He makes reference to Aristotle and his concern for the role reason plays in regard to moral action. The definitions of *reason* in *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* include “the intellectual faculty by which conclusions are drawn from premises,” and “a faculty transcending the understanding and providing *a priori* principles: intuition” (1992, p. 949). Maybe Gadamer can help tap my intellectual faculty and intuition to draw conclusions from the premises heretofore outlined. He explains that Aristotle sees Plato’s idea of the good, expressed as the measure of perfection in all things, as an empty generality. Aristotle, instead, argues that human good is to do with human action. Gadamer refers to Aristotle’s view that, whilst ethics is unable to achieve the exact measures of mathematics, it is able to provide a framework to assist one’s moral consciousness (p. 313). Gadamer finds that the nature of this framework is problematic. He argues that a moral act means that the person acting must know and decide. Nothing can take this responsibility away from him (p. 314). Here Gadamer takes us nearer to the heart of leadership - knowing and deciding as best we can from a deeply ethical and moral perspective.

Gadamer (1992) compares Aristotle’s view of the relationship between moral being and moral consciousness, as described in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, to those held by Plato and Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*. He indicates that Aristotle remains Socratic in his stance that knowledge is a key element of moral being. Understanding is an historical event because of the interpreter’s attachment to the tradition he is interpreting. Gadamer argues that moral knowledge, as described by Aristotle, is not objective knowledge. This is because the knower is not merely observing a situation. He is “confronted by what he sees” and has to act accordingly. To Gadamer, Aristotle’s view of knowing does not align with science. He argues that Aristotle’s distinction between moral knowledge, *phronesis*, and theoretical knowledge, *episteme*, is a simple one, especially if we see the mathematical nature of science as understood by the Greeks. Gadamer explains that the human sciences align more closely with moral knowledge than the “theoretical” kind of knowledge. He describes the human sciences as “moral

sciences". They are concerned with man and his knowledge of himself. Gadamer points out that man knows himself as "an active being," and knowledge of the self does not seek to determine what this knowledge is. He describes an active being as one who is interested in those things that are not always the same where he may "discover the point at which he has to act" (pp. 313-314).

I am sensing I am getting closer to the harder edge of leadership. How do I know when to take action? Can I ever be sure I am right to take action at that time? Are my actions right? What is right? How might I go about judging what is right? How do I know I am right? Can I ever be sure?

Gadamer (1992) asserts that, to Aristotle, it is the determining of the action where the problem of moral knowledge lies. He likens the exemplary form of knowledge that determines the concept of action to the Greek notion of *techne*. Gadamer compares *techne* to the knowledge and skill of the craftsman that enables him to make a specific object. Gadamer questions whether moral knowledge is knowledge of this kind. If it is, according to Gadamer, this means man has the knowledge of how to construct oneself (p. 314). Gadamer describes how Socrates and Plato also apply *techne* to the concept of man's being. He acknowledges that both find some truth in this inquiry. To Socrates, whilst the knowledge of the craftsman is not the true knowledge that is the essence of a man and a citizen, it is real knowledge. This knowledge is more than a higher degree of experience. Real art and skill is required to craft the things of a craftsman (as cited in Gadamer, 1992, p. 315). Gadamer sees common ground between the practical knowledge required by the craftsman and the true moral knowledge that Socrates seeks. To Gadamer, both include the application of knowledge to a specific endeavour. He also points to the tension between the *techne* that comes from being taught and the *techne* which comes through experience. Gadamer holds that prior knowledge which a person has when taught a craft is not necessarily superior to the knowledge we receive from someone who has had extensive experience but no formal training. He says that we cannot call the prior knowledge involved in the *techne* "theoretical" because experience comes in using this knowledge. In arguing that knowledge is always concerned with practical application, Gadamer aligns himself with Aristotle who said in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "*Techne* loves *tyche* (luck) and *tyche* loves

*techne*” (as cited in Gadamer, 1992, p. 315). To Gadamer, this means good things come to those taught well.

Gadamer explains that a genuine mastery of the matter develops practically in the *techne*, which provides a basis for moral knowledge. Experience alone is not sufficient for making the right moral decisions. To Gadamer, moral consciousness requires “prior direction to guide action” (p. 316). This statement provokes in me memories of errors of judgement and angst in stories such as *Tough Times at the Office*. I suspect I was a little short on experience and shorter still on some “prior direction” to guide my management of the more difficult human issues. My attention to the lessons of past experiences and a subsequent involvement in professional learning with a moral and ethical flavour has guided my leadership since those tough times. I wish to now leap from my deliberations of struggle with profound philosophies and spiritual influences and return to the lived experience. A continuation of one of these stories illustrates the practical application of knowledge gleaned from a past experience.

### Ghosts from the Past

As you might remember, the most difficult and stressful period of my career occurred when selecting an acting principal to replace me when I was to take a period of study leave in 1996. A selection panel that I was a member of appointed my “third in charge” to the position of acting principal over my “second in charge”. The fallout from this appointment opened wounds that had been festering beneath the surface for some time. It brought out the worst in the character of some staff and caused me to question my whole self as a person and as a leader.

Eight years later, my answer to the question “How would I have acted differently with the benefit of hindsight?” is very clear. In the context that existed at the time, I would not have set up a selection process where there was to be a winner and a loser from within the ranks of my staff when there were other options available to me. I would have advertised the position state-wide or at least across the District. I left myself too open to allegations of nepotism and favouritism by excluding potential leaders from outside of the school from applying for the position. There may be other times, of course, when there is little choice but to select a winner and loser from within the ranks of a school staff. This was not one of those times.

I hear lightening never strikes twice in the same place and yet I am again poised to take some extended leave. And would you believe it? In relation to filling a vacancy for a senior position resulting from this leave, my Department of Education supervisor asked me to advertise this position from within my school - excluding applicants from outside the school. He also asked me to accept the transfer of Rebecca from a neighbouring school onto our staff and told me she would be a likely candidate for the advertised senior position. I immediately heard warning bells. This scenario would most likely set up another 'win or lose' situation between a new staff member and John, a current staff member with strong claims to the senior position. He had successfully filled the position on previous occasions. There seemed to be some eerie similarities between this scenario and the one described in *Tough Times at the Office*. I had a strong gut feeling that I needed to resist this proposal.

After some discussion, I counselled my supervisor against this action, recounting my previous experience. To his credit, he accepted my advice. Rebecca did not take up a position at the school. John, who was the only applicant, filled the senior staff position.

I never thought I would benefit from my previous nightmare, but I think it saved me much angst this time around!

(Working Paper 2)

Had I been unreflective on this occasion, I wonder whether I would have again been open to staff perceptions of unfairness regarding a senior staff appointment arising from my taking a period of leave? To Gadamer, linguistic tradition is something handed down to us through direct telling or in the written tradition. He contends that a written tradition is not a relic of a past world but rather has already transposed itself in this world through the meaning it expresses. A past human existence becomes present to us (pp. 389-390). Thus, my Ghost Story.

### **Finding My Compass**

I also continue to work on the *techne* through professional learning and conversations with colleagues and others as I try to develop what Stephen Covey (1992) describes in his book *Principle Centred Leadership* as a moral compass. Covey explains.

Principles are like a compass. A compass has a true north that is *objective and external*, that reflects natural laws or *principles*, as opposed to values that are subjective and internal. Because the compass reflects the verities of life, we must develop our value system with deep respect for the “true north” principles. (p. 94)

I became acquainted with Covey in the late 1990’s after my wife had read his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which I briefly referred to earlier in this study. I was attracted to his emphasis on “universal principles” such as responsibility, mutual respect and mutual understanding that act as a guide, like a compass, through the complex situations that confront us in our daily lives. I was interested to speak recently with a friend of mine who is a former commercial airline pilot. He described how a compass wavers as it seeks to find “true north”. “True north” is relational and directional. You may not ever get there or even want to get there. “True north” is a guide (Working Paper 2). My attentiveness to the teachings of the great religions and sideshadowing of the great philosophers reveals a wisdom that may be a moral compass of the kind that Covey speaks of. This wisdom, in all its forms, is perhaps the “true north”. And yet, much of my study has articulated the uncertainty of leadership so it seems a paradox to suggest any wisdom as “true north”. Perhaps this is why the compass wavers in its quest to find it.

In this chapter, I have heard Jaworski (1996, pp. 78-83) detail Bohm’s emphasis on wholeness and his belief that we are all connected, Smart’s “certain autonomy” of morals evident in the great religions of the world that are based around virtues such as love and compassion, Griffiths’ three characteristics shared by the great religions that include the love and wisdom of their Supreme Being and Gadamer’s reference to “prior direction to guide action” that emphasises the influence of experience on all that we do.

In previous chapters, I sideshadowed propositions on leadership formed from my school experiences. The sideshadows of the great philosophers drew me to the deeply ethical, moral and even religious dimensions of leadership. The great religions and philosophers of the world now point me towards a “true north” that is akin to what Gadamer (1992) describes as *phronesis*, a practical moral wisdom (p. 314). This wisdom instils and reminds me of right principles of leadership that

may sustain me in a scientific age and, perhaps, in the more difficult times of leadership.

## CHAPTER 8

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### UNDERSTANDING VIRTUOUS LEADERSHIP

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What are my “true north” principles of leadership that may provide me with a practical and moral wisdom to lead others well? Are they to be found in the insights on leadership emerging from this study that reveal the importance of self-awareness, vision, courage, openness, discernment and love? Mary’s story came at a time when I was looking to deepen my understanding of the place of “true north” principles in leadership, especially in the tough times. Mary is a colleague principal who challenged the status quo in seeking to make things better for the students within her care. I need to listen to her.

#### **Understanding the Lived Experience**

I attended a meeting in the company of Mary and shared with her that courage is a recurring theme in my study on leadership. I was aware that Mary had been in the public spotlight over the preceding eight months after she had made some very difficult decisions about the future directions of her school. I expressed my regret that I had not yet had a really good conversation with her about her experiences. Mary hinted that it might be good for her if she was able to talk to someone about them. I set a date for me to hear her story, and she gave me permission to tell it here – my telling arising from my notes.

#### *Mary’s Story*

Mary took up her appointment as principal of St Anne’s College at the beginning of the year 2004. St Anne’s is a Catholic community whose members work together in the education of young people. Mary had been a member of its senior staff team several years earlier during a time of significant change and turmoil when the College formed after a major restructure of State Catholic education. During the intervening period, Mary was principal of St Raphael’s College from 1998 to 2003. On return to St Anne’s, new challenges await Mary.

Where to begin, said Mary.

I suppose if this is about leadership of the heart, one needs to be in touch with the heartbeat. It goes back to my early days and my ministry of service - my responsibility to give of myself. In giving, you do indeed receive a great deal in terms of your vision, spirit and commitment. I guess this grew out of my experience of Catholic education and my joy in being in the company of other educators at university. I remember one of them saying to me "anything is possible."

We didn't have much materially, but I had a wonderful upbringing, especially in my education. I'm about enabling our students to explore whatever is possible. In serving others, I've recognised I wanted to take opportunities and give of myself. I wouldn't change any of it. I wouldn't look back and say I wouldn't have been involved in any of this or that. It's widened my thinking about what is possible. I was a very shy person who lacked the confidence to speak up in tutorials. For someone to say "anything is possible" - that was so encouraging and inspiring - being in touch with really significant people who were entirely committed to taking me as far as possible.

As an educator, if there was a job to do or a need that arose, I would be there to do just that. I always had a leaning towards those who were poor in spirit - those low on self-worth, even dysfunctional. I've been concerned with a curriculum to be dynamic - to do what it is set up to do - make students do their best with their learning.

The Salesians and their view of the sacredness of learning influenced me. In learning, we discover the truth - that is indeed sacred. I learned the importance of genuine relationships, care and respect, and learned what community really is. The Salesians knew what community is about and really lived it.

When this college, St Anne's, formed a few years ago, there was much hurt and anger around the restructure of Catholic schools. This was my first experience of the need for strength and conviction. You don't do those sorts of things lightly. You need to believe in the future. I've never been one to hold on to tradition for tradition's sake. I've been one for change if the outcome is worthy. My severing of ties with the old tempered the excitement of the new. Kids in Catholic education deserve the best. We were struggling to provide that at the time.

With a real sense of going through the hellish bit, we knew we were doing it for the benefit of young people. They had that right. There were people

struggling with the change and angry at the people who made the decision. It was important for me to work with them.

I learned you could be the empathetic colleague, but I learned some distance appeared. You almost have to accept that part of what you have to do will remove you from good relationships with your colleagues. That's a lonely place in terms of human relationships. I feel that most deeply. I remember there was so much depth of anger, lack of confidence and trust that I was on the receiving end of some threats. I carried a letter around for three years that threatened me and my children. I don't think I've ever dealt with that properly.

The building of a new place happened, and it happened in an extraordinary way. People have this marvellous ability to find strength in themselves and remove agendas and work together in order to survive - "remove the blackness and find the light." I remember in the first few years of this college, it was dynamic. We were building. In constructing something worthwhile we had little sense of hierarchy. A sense of collaboration was real. No-one was grandstanding. You had to reach out to others to get the job done.

In my third year at St Anne's, the principal position became available at St Raphael's. It seemed people identified a capacity in me to do the job in another place. I hadn't had experience in primary or junior secondary, but what drew me to the job was that I heard the message from within that "I've been chosen to do this". With a sense of service and fear - I was frightened - I took up the appointment. It took me from a lower working class environment to a community with a different set of values. I sensed they felt I had come from the wrong end of town. There was an elitism that made me struggle with their Catholic identity. I detected a whole agenda there that we needed to address fairly seriously. Enrolments were going down, and the school was in financial difficulty. There was also an expectation of me to break down the hierarchy that existed. I felt I had to roll my sleeves up and get to it. We identified, addressed and changed things entrenched in protocol that had tied people up in knots. Much territorialism had side-tracked what needed to happen.

When I look back on those years, the whole leadership support at St Raphael's changed. People began to understand what working in a supportive team with a common purpose meant. Stakeholders fell by the wayside, bringing through young people to take up new opportunities. I felt that job was very much about serving my colleagues. That said, I insisted that

pastoral care of students and families found me available at the front line for them. Enrolments rose with building projects identified to accommodate the rising student population. St Raphael's began to thrive.

Mary's emphasis on leadership that is more concerned with collaboration, less concerned with hierarchy and strong on reaching out to others reminds me of Senge's earlier description of what an amazing experience it is to embrace the dignity and worth of each human being. He suggests this is what love may actually be (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 11).

Mary continues...

When I got the call to move on from St Raphael's, there was again sadness. During that time our family broke up. My husband left us. It was a real shock. I had lived in an abusive situation for twenty years. I developed courage to live with that abuse and have the courage to deal with things in my professional life. Eight months later my father, whom I worshipped, also died. My family, my students and colleagues, and my relationship with them enabled me to survive. People saw my vulnerability, and because my leadership of the heart appeared to them in my vulnerability, their respect for me strengthened. Leadership of the heart is also about declaring vulnerability. Some, unfortunately, will take advantage of it.

After six years of struggle, because I had never lost my ties with St Anne's and my desire for it to provide an extraordinary education for young people, I returned there as principal. I didn't want to sit back and think what I could have brought to the job. At that time, there was an increasing tendency to bring people from interstate for these big roles. I didn't want to sell out my own state. I kept hearing the voice "put yourself forward - anything is possible."

I remember when I shared the news with my St Raphael's community, we shed a tear together. I remember the openness of the little children and the families. Going back to St Anne's College was, in a sense, a coming home to something that I really believed in.

Within two months, I realised the College was over-staffed. The resource provision was also lacking. There was sadness about the place. Some great things were happening, but a new set of eyes saw things that needed to change. I sensed a comfort that kept people from seeing the reality. The

over-staffing was significant. With the assistance of the Board, I made the decision to declare the fourteen positions above our staffing ratio redundant.

This decision, which was without precedent, shocked people. Enrolments were dropping and our clients were voting with their feet. If we didn't act, the staffing problem would get worse. The process played me into an industrial nightmare. The union strategy was to undermine me as a leader. This resulted in people avoiding me in corridors. Public meetings aimed to destroy my character. Hostile communication from the union followed. For someone who put so much store in truth, I struggled with having my truthfulness questioned.

The negotiated process between the central administration of Catholic Education and the teacher union proved to be flawed and led me into very difficult territory. I found myself in various courtrooms. The legal advice was that we had no right to ask people to take up other appointments. The result was that St Anne's had to pay out significant amounts of money for every year of service for all staff whose positions would no longer continue.

At the same time, I headed into dark waters within our own system. I rejected support from central administration because I didn't have confidence in it. I felt I needed to be able to rely on expert advice. I needed a clear pathway by removing myself from the umbrella of my system. I employed the service of an industrial advocate who turned out to be a true conciliator. I will never forget when things were really tough and I was working day and night churning out correspondence, he was in constant contact giving me professional advice and tremendous support. At that time, the Chair of our Board took on a significant leadership position by being at my side - attending court hearings and so on. Certain people also made it clear that the system was not happy with me.

For a shy young thing who felt she could not pass a university course, I wonder where the stamina comes from. I was committed to the cause, even though I was amidst devastation. I never imagined people would call me heartless. However, I knew what needed to take place in order to save the College. The St Anne's community has the right to rely on us, to know we're giving them a positive experience.

Mary's desire to give the people of St Anne's a positive experience seems akin to Jaworski's earlier reference to Robert Greenleaf who described the essence of leadership as "the desire to serve one another and to serve something beyond

ourselves, a higher purpose” (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 59). Although self-interest clearly did not drive Mary’s efforts, I find it difficult to reconcile the goodness of what Mary is trying to do for her students with the pain her actions are causing for herself and others. I look to my earlier references to Varela, Bohm and Jaworski in Chapter 7 for assistance here. You may remember that I saw Bohm’s wholeness as Varela’s oneness. It is one that we can all enter and involves a deep connection with others. Right now, I am struggling to feel good about the directions that Mary is taking her school and the extent to which her actions are deeply connecting, in a positive way, with others. Yet I feel supportive of her actions! Her school is in danger of slowly withering on the vine if Mary takes no action to address the school’s over-staffing problem. As Jaworski described earlier, leadership involves enabling others to expand their understanding of reality as they seek to shape their future. This seems Mary’s greatest challenge. Leadership involves a “process of collective listening” to the reality of our circumstances and having the courage to do what is required (p. 182). Mary does not lack for courage but others are finding it difficult to accept the rightness of her actions. Let’s return to Mary’s story.

So here we are at the beginning of a new year (2005) and there is still a lot of union activity. There’s still much distrust. I’m again in the process of putting my heart on my sleeve and trying to convince them I’m genuine. It takes time to deal with the rejections, but it won’t stop my invitations. There’s a great long agenda to fulfil. The essence of the place, the quality of teaching and learning, is emerging as a quality for us. Out of the devastation will come the resurrection. Whilst I can see that it has created a death, it had to happen to remind us of what our character is, what our mission is - to replace the comfort with a sense of exhilaration. If we’re not doing it well enough, I change it. Senior secondary is not an easy environment compared to down the road in the primary area, where the teachers have an enormous capacity to change gear.

Mary pauses, and a silence enters the room. I don’t want to interrupt her train of thought, but the silence seems to invite me to ask a question that I feel compelled to ask - “How did you get through this. What sustained you?”

Mary responds, I knew you would ask me this.

Mary pauses then continues...

My family. My mother, who is now eighty years old, still tells me what I need to do whether I like it or not and my gorgeous daughter who greets me with a glass of wine and a meal on the table. My family is reclaiming peace. I have some really, really good friends, and I extend that group beyond Catholic principals whom I've known for a long period of time. It's the "How are you Mary?" I'd have never gotten by if I'd gone through the "Why me?" I knew I couldn't open the door to counselling. There were so many things in there that I might not get through. In actual fact, when the battle's on, leaders can't indulge in too much reflection. There's something inside you that enables you to get on and do it. I use the word faith and I had to be able to draw on that. I was surrounded by so many people who sent me signals in so many ways, who were saying "You're doing the right thing; you're doing the right thing." I remember before a meeting, out in the kitchen, one teacher, Mark, came to me and said "You're going well." You have done the same - the constancy of the friendship, the very deep concern. I pick up on that. I'm very, very lucky that I've got people around me who are very careful with me. That said, I know this has seriously knocked me around. That also said, I've got more to do.

Such exchanges remind me of Jaworski's moments of "synchronicity", referred to in Chapter 7 that seem as if we are being assisted by "hidden hands" (1996, p. ix).

Mary continues...

I didn't know much about redundancy. It alerted me to the big wide world and how separated schools are from it. If there's a big company and they want to make four hundred people redundant, they fly someone in and ask them to hand their keys in. Here, we told people that they were redundant in July, but they remained for another six months. In that time, there was no permission to smile or speak about planning for the next year.

Now, all of a sudden, people feel they have been relieved of all that has compromised us. I remember having Christmas lunch with staff at the end of the year. Only three of the people made redundant came. It was my one and only opportunity to say something. I relied on my love of the environment to help with these words. I'd been to a book launch, "The River Runs Deep", or something like that. I used the analogy of the river and referred to the young, vibrant river, hurtling along. As the river progresses and matures, it meanders. Before you know it, there's a rapid or waterfall to negotiate. You're plunged

into a tumultuous nothingness – a water that engulfs you. You don't know which way you're heading, but off you go again. Each person leaving is as significant as that water which is significant and gives life to us. They go. They will give nourishment to another place. The depth of our river will never change and they will always be part of our story.

I also said "sorry." I was conscious that there were people hanging on my every word. I was conscious of the space between me and those I was speaking to. I was aware there were some people who would have dismissed every word I said. I felt vulnerable. There were obviously people here who could see my pain but who were conscious of how their concern for me may look in the eyes of their peers. For example, an assistant popped in, after looking both ways, and said "Mary, I didn't want people to see me and think I was giving you support, but I just wanted to ask you how you're going?"

The other difficulty for me here at St Anne's is the community's perception about the removal of my predecessor, who actually taught me, because she was an ineffective leader. Unfortunately, I've heard the call and stepped in as a significant leader, someone who listened to others and responded quickly. I've now got myself in a position which isn't a good one for capacity building, but it's where it needed to be.

Mary's conviction that she is taking the school where it needs to go brings me back to Gadamer's (1992) thoughts about self-knowledge expressed in Chapter 7. He describes a person with self-knowledge as "an active being" unconcerned with what knowledge of the self actually is. The active being is interested in those things that are not always the same and is keen to determine the point at which he has to act. The knower is not merely observing a situation. He is "confronted by what he sees" and has to act accordingly (p. 314). Mary seems compelled to act as she has by the circumstances that confront her. I return to Mary.

At the beginning of this year, we had Jill with us for a professional learning day designed to help us start the year on a positive note. She's gorgeous and knew my pain. I rang her at the end of last year and asked her to be the star act. She worked magic. On the Thursday, Father John shared the "Road to Emmaus."

The Road to Emmaus refers to the pain and loss associated with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ referred to in Luke 24:13-24. Father Dennis Byrnes (2003), in his article *The Road to Emmaus: Coming to Terms with the Hard*

*Reality of Loss*, asked who “has not said farewell to someone, felt a great heartache and deep sadness, wanted to stop the process, or wondered when the ache inside would ever leave” (p. 20)? These words seem to capture the impact on staff of Mary’s decision to make some of them redundant. Staff are grieving for colleagues who will not return to their workplace.

Mary continues...

At the end of that day, one of our teachers, Peter who is an eloquent writer, wrote me something. He wrote that he couldn’t believe that, even after my ‘crucifixion’, I had such an enormous capacity to love.

Silence appears again, which I interrupt. I sense Mary is nearing the end of her story. I ask her if there is anything else she would like to tell me? Mary responds...

When you talk about sustenance and sustaining, what I was able to grab hold of was the written word - notes and letters like that. There were people who didn’t want to be seen with me, but it was enough that they had concern for me. The kids knew, deep down, that you were on about good.

(Working Paper 3)

The reality of life as a school principal hit home as another person unwittingly enters the room in readiness for another meeting. I leave my time with Mary in awe of all that she had endured and inspired by her love, courage and sense of commitment to those she serves.

Mary’s story came at a point in my own journey where I was seeking to be clearer on my own understanding of leadership rather than simply interpret someone else’s view. Her experience touches on a number of the key propositions, insights and themes on leadership to surface from my study. There are grounds to suggest that some of her actions were not consistent with propositions arising from my own leadership experiences such as leaders establish a vision and values with others. I could argue that many others did not share Mary’s vision. On the other hand, Mary’s actions certainly support the propositions that leaders have passion and leaders are courageous and take risks. What Mary’s story does make clear is that leadership is complex. There are no recipes for successful leadership that I can simply glean from the seventeen propositions on leadership arising from my stories. Nor can I extract such a recipe from the views of the profession on leadership as expressed in Chapter 6. You may remember the

emphasis of my colleagues on leadership that is, for example, caring, wise, self-aware and attentive to learning, well-being, change processes and the nurturing of other leaders. I am searching for something that might sustain me as a leader that I may use as a compass to navigate my way through the complex challenges that I and others face as a school leader. This is why I have gone to the sideshadows of the great philosophers to find deeper insights about leadership that have been revealed as Self-Awareness and Concern for Others; Virtue, Courage and Vision; Openness and Discernment in Times of Change; Love; and Means, Ends and “the Good”. But Mary’s story provokes more questions about leadership that entice me to go deeper still in search of understanding. What motivated Mary to take the action she took? What sustained her in these difficult times?

Mary is passionate about student learning and optimistic about the future. She has a strong belief in the capacity of people to put other agendas aside and strive for the greater good. She sees the principal’s role in terms of service to others and leadership of the heart. To Mary, this means changing things for the better. Leadership of this kind may expose leaders to hurt and vulnerability. Mary draws on her leadership experiences from previous schools, the wisdom of those who have provided encouragement in her life and the faith and love from family and friends to get through these difficult times. As Peter, the staff member, said in Mary’s story, Mary has an enormous capacity to love others. Her experience helps me further distil my understanding of leadership.

#### **Understanding 1 – Self-Knowledge and “the Good”**

When listening to Mary, I could detect her inner conviction that she was right to take the action she took. There was a moral certainty about Mary that indicated to me she had a strong knowledge of herself. To Gadamer, the making of a moral being requires a different kind of knowledge not bound in theory, one that Aristotle describes as self-knowledge - the knowledge of oneself. Gadamer (1992) identifies several distinguishing features between moral consciousness and the capacity to make something – that is, the *techne*. He argues that man is unable to make himself in the same way that he may make something else. Gadamer indicates that the knowledge of oneself separates the self-knowledge of the moral consciousness from knowledge that is either *theoretical* or *technical*.

He suggests that a person who knows how to make something good takes the “right” materials and adopts the right means to make it. He is able to apply his learning to the concrete situation (p. 316). Gadamer then asks, “Is not the same true of moral consciousness?” A person endeavouring to make a moral judgement has always previously learned something through his education and tradition so that he knows what is right in a general sense. Gadamer holds that the task of making a moral decision involves taking the right course of action in a particular context (pp. 316-317). Is there a link between this kind of self-knowledge and the decisions I make as if by instinct? I recall my strong gut feeling described in *Ghosts of the Past* that told me to resist the proposal put to me by my supervisor regarding the senior staff appointment. Might this gut feeling be similar to those of Bill Clinton and his reflections on the Waco siege described in the *Introduction* that draw our attention to the role of instinct in leadership? Is the well-spring of instinct self-knowledge? I believe I develop instinct as I wade through the waters of my experience.

The Rocky Coast school leaders may help me here as they respond to a question concerning the personal qualities that sustain them in their leadership.

Matthew - It's the moral stuff - integrity and so on. I can't fix every kid or every problem. At the end of the day, I have to know I've done everything I can do. I need to respect the way locals lead their lives in the context of the project. There's also the desire to make things better for communities - not for recognition, but for self-fulfilment.

Sharon - I like to support people and I'm also quite gentle. I always try and see the good in the person.

Eve - I didn't realise my interpersonal skills were a strength, but they've gotten me through some pretty sticky situations. I've also learnt to acknowledge my mistakes. I don't have wisdom. I know I stuff up and try to learn from it. I'm finally realising my job isn't a popularity contest. I'm here for the kids. You can only do what you can do.

Prue - You've got to have a very clear belief on the rightness of what you promote. You need to have a belief in the intrinsic merit of what you're doing. You've got to live with your decisions. I also need to take a risk, be brave

and not stick to old models. I need an enormous capacity to work, enormous energy.

Wayne - I have a network and knowledge base that helped me. I've also had experience in high schools, primary schools, district high schools and secondary colleges. It is this experience that has sustained me. It's also so important to have someone to debrief with.

(Working Paper 4)

Their responses clearly emphasise the ethical, moral and collaborative dimensions of leadership. I especially note the importance that Matthew, Eve and Prue place on doing what they believe to be 'right' rather than popular. This is a hallmark of Mary's story. Wayne and Eve also place particular emphasis on experience and their capacity to learn from it. Matthew's response seems to follow the Gadamer view of self-knowledge: the kind of self-knowledge that embraces a moral consciousness in taking the right course of action in a particular context (p. 317).

Mary's story of moral consciousness and self-knowledge leads me to reflect on the life of the late Pope John Paul II in the context of Chris Mitchell's newspaper editorial featured in *The Weekend Australian* shortly after his death.

It is fair to say that that in the majority of theological and moral utterances he has made, the Pope has been condemned by majority Western opinion. But from the Pope's point of view, it has not been necessary to have the numbers. It has been much more important to speak the truth.

The Pope has preached discipline, restraint, and submission to legitimate authority in spiritual matters. This was never a contradiction of his insistence of human freedom in the political order. For even his view of the spiritual life has been based on the centrality of human freedom, the freedom of the human conscience to choose what is right. It is not the place of a church leader to give in to social fashion. (2005a, p. 18)

Mary was also one to choose what she believes is right rather than give in to the *status quo*. This approach to leadership seems to connect with Gadamer's view of moral decision-making that is characterised by taking the right course of action

in a particular context. Gadamer reasons that a person must manage his conduct throughout the process of choosing the right course of action according to the context in a way similar to that of the craftsman.

Gadamer raises the question of why Aristotle's "self-knowledge" of the moral consciousness is different to the theoretical and technical forms of knowledge. He examines this question by referring to the *techne* and the way we can learn it but also forget it. He asserts that this is not so for moral knowledge as we do not learn it nor forget it. Instead, we are always in a position of having to act. We must have already acquired moral knowledge and be able to apply it. To Gadamer, this understanding goes to the heart of the problem of application. He explains that we can only apply something we already possess. We do not possess moral knowledge "in such a way that we already have it" which enables us to apply it to given situations. Gadamer acknowledges that man's images of what he aspires to be are often associated with his ideas of right and wrong and may well guide his conduct. He argues, however, that this is still very different to the guiding image of the craftsman and the plan of the object he is going to make. Gadamer contends we cannot fully grasp what is right independently of the situation that asks for a right action. The intention of use determines what a craftsman wants to make (p. 317).

Let me reflect on Gadamer's ideas. He suggests that the task of making a right decision comes down to the context before us and the moral knowledge we acquire to that point in time. Gadamer also takes the view that there is no general rule for getting a decision right. In Mary's case, she saw two choices. The first was to remain with an over-staffed school that was bereft of appropriate learning resources and watch the school die as enrolments declined. The second was to address the problem of over-staffing by shedding staff and freeing up the finances to provide resources fundamental to the high quality education St Anne's students deserved – knowing this would cause much pain for those involved. Might there have been a third choice not considered by Mary? It is difficult to imagine any general rule for resolving such a dilemma.

Gadamer highlights the view of Aristotle that man lives in a moral and political context and acquires a perception of the situation from that position. He explains that Aristotle regards guiding principles such as the virtues as schemata that

concretise only in the concrete situation of a person acting. We cannot teach them. Here, Gadamer sees the underlying relationship between means and end where moral knowledge distinguishes from technical knowledge. He explains that moral knowledge is concerned with right living and has no particular end. Technical knowledge is more specific and addresses specific ends. To Gadamer, where there is a *techne*, we learn it so that we are able to determine the right means. Moral knowledge, too, requires such self-deliberation, but even if we develop this knowledge perfectly, it is perfect deliberation with oneself - not knowledge in the manner of the *techne*. Gadamer reasons that moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance in the way we teach knowledge. The right means cannot be determined in advance because the right end is not an object of knowledge. There is no certainty about what constitutes the good life. For me, this is a powerful statement and helps me understand even better the difficulties facing Mary as she contemplated the means to address the dilemma that faced her. How could she determine the “right means” when the “right end” is not known? Gadamer explains that Aristotle’s theory of virtue describes common forms of the true mean observed in human existence. The moral knowledge that these virtues influence is the same knowledge for use as a response to the demands of any given situation. The consideration of the means is in itself a moral consideration. It is this consideration that gives form to the moral rightness of the end (pp. 320-322). This is a sobering message for me. It is not enough to pursue the greatest of good if I fail to adequately consider the means by which I pursue it. I need to make a serious effort to consider the moral knowledge that I have learned from my human existence in considering the means. This act, in itself, will help me determine the moral desirability of educational ends.

How might Gadamer’s words on moral rightness in relation to Aristotle’s theory of virtue relate to the role of conscience and ethics in the principalship? Let’s return to the Rocky Coast principals and hear the thoughts of Matthew, Wayne and Eve on conscience and ethics.

Matthew - You know how people talk about the loneliness of the principalship. Maybe that’s how we have to live in this moral world because there is little affirmation for our actions. For example, when I have excluded students, I know I have done everything possible to support them. My peace is in this knowledge because no-one will be affirming my

actions. This is to do with the loneliness issue. If you've been through a traumatic parent interview with a parent really gunning for you, it helps to have someone there to talk it through with. My worst periods of stress were related to feeling out of control and the obligation you feel to people to have the answers. During this time, I was still in a heroic leadership style and hadn't developed a team around me. An acting principal that I know has come into a school and tried to be nice to everyone and it blew up in his face. I think leadership is more about leading with integrity, making decisions (hard or not) but enabling people to see that things have changed for the better.

Wayne - I'll wake up at 2am and not be able to go back to sleep. I'll go for a walk in the rain and go over stuff. I try to go through tough decisions - workshop the positives and negatives and come to a position. I then try to live with the decision and not flog myself over it. I also try not to ask people to do things that I wouldn't be comfortable doing. I had a colleague who had a persona at work that was different from who he was outside of school. That's not me. I am who I am.

Eve - I'm very big on the gut feeling. I was the chair of the panel that interviewed a recently terminated teacher. At the time of the interview, I knew she wasn't right for our school. I said so at the time but did not voice this view strongly enough to other panel members. We granted her permanency and she was eventually appointed to my school. Unfortunately, my gut feelings proved correct. Following on from this, it became much more obvious to me that she didn't have the right qualities to be a teacher.

(Working Paper 4)

To Gadamer (1992), Aristotle's idea of "self-knowledge" involves its perfect application within the immediate context of the situation. He argues that the knowledge of a particular situation is important to self-knowledge if we are to see it in the light of what is right (p. 322). Do Eve's comments illuminate the difficulties of leading even when "the light of what is right" is detected? During the selection process, other panel members did not share her view of the eventually

terminated teacher. They made the appointment despite Eve's misgivings. Might Eve's knowledge of a particular situation have equipped her with a keener and more instinctual level of self-knowledge than her selection panel colleagues?

Gadamer sees moral knowledge as a special kind of knowledge that embraces both means and end (p. 322). I believe this understanding goes to the heart of the things that can make or break leaders. It is to do with the difficult stuff. Do the ends justify the means? If I take this course of action, will it be for the better or worse?

How can I develop this "special kind of knowledge" which Gadamer speaks of that embraces both means and end? Is it a self-knowledge of the kind described by Aristotle that involves a perfect application within a particular context? I've learned to believe it is. For this interpretation to assist my exercise in understanding of what it takes and means to lead schools today, I must pay particular attention to Aristotle's theory of virtue. As earlier stated, this theory describes common forms of the true mean observed in human existence. As a leader, I must develop a sense of the right way to go about things that I learn and observe from my experiences. I need to learn from my successes and failures and apply this learning in my future dealings. If I fail to do this, then the moral rightness of the end is in question.

#### **Understanding 2 - Love**

Robert Greenleaf (1991), in his book *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, propounds that those on a journey of personal growth must accept that the world in which they live may provide obstacles that inhibit such growth (p. 317). Greenleaf writes about Robert Frost's poem *Directive* which suggests that the rationality and sophistication of today's world tends to separate us from a greater connection to the cosmos. Greenleaf quotes Frost to illustrate this point.

The road there, if you'll let a guide direct you  
Who only has at heart your getting lost, (as cited in Greenleaf, 1991, p.  
318)

To Greenleaf, these words imply that a guide to help us get lost will assist us on our journey of personal growth. Why does Frost make such a suggestion, he

asks? Greenleaf holds that Frost's poem provides hope to those who "are lost" but aspire to drink of the waters of wholeness. He illustrates this view with more of Frost's poem.

Here are your waters and your watering place.  
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion. (as cited in Greenleaf,  
1991, p. 326)

Frost's wholeness may lead those who aspire to it beyond confusion but will not bring certainty or serenity. They will not be confused because they will be at one with the circumstance. *Rightness, responsibility and courage* will define their character. They will be bound to the cosmos and be at peace with the world. To Greenleaf (1991), this may be beyond modern people but is something that we can move towards. Greenleaf argues that to be on this kind of journey requires an attitude of "being lost" when we are open to receiving something new, beautiful and unforeseen, the greatest of which is *love* (pp. 326-327).

Remember the words of Mary's staff member who wrote that even after Mary's 'crucifixion', she "had such an enormous capacity to love." Mary's story helps me see how her love for students, staff, and the school community was visible to others even in the most difficult of times. Ironically, at this late stage of my thesis when I am putting together the finishing touches, a homily on love by Father Jim McMahon, a Catholic priest in my hometown of Ulverstone, sheds further light on how we may express love.

#### Father Jim's Homily

What is love? We toss the word love around so often in songs, movies, books and our culture that it tends to lose its meaning. Yet to love is hardest decision we can make. Love means looking beyond ourselves, rising above our own needs and reaching out to others – even to those we haven't met. Love asks us to be there for those who desperately need our love, to get out of our comfort zones and give of ourselves to them. Love isn't easy, but it is the one thing that can make our world a better place.

(Working Paper 25)

To Father Jim, love is about reaching out to others, giving of ourselves to them and placing their needs above our own. Only a couple of months after Father Jim

spoke about love, Father John Harmon read parts of a letter from St Paul to the Christians of Corinth, Greece during his Sunday homily.

Love is patient and kind; it is not conceited, jealous or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary... (1 Corinthians 13: 4-8)

As I sat there listening to Father John read St Paul's letter on love that was written around the time of Christ, I could feel the "hidden hands" that Jaworski spoke of earlier helping me to express what I mean by love in leadership. Both Father Jim's and Father John's thoughts and words on love seem akin to Aristotle's notion of friendship. Thomas Alexander (1997) in his paper *Eros and Understanding* refers to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Aristotle's belief that "Friendship also seems to hold states together, and lawgivers devote more attention to it than to justice"(as cited in Alexander, 1997, p. 337). In the highest kind of friendship, there exists a mutual goodwill for each other's excellence and happiness and an ability in each to achieve that end. Such partnerships seek to realise the fullest and deepest aspects of human life. To Aristotle, friendship is an underlying disposition where each partner wills the good of the other as his or her own (as cited in Alexander, pp. 337-338). Aristotle's view of friendship resonates with Joseph Jaworski's earlier reference to the Peter Senge notion of love as the embrace of each human being's dignity and worth. Senge also highlighted the world's major religions acknowledgement of the power of love and its capacity to embrace the legitimacy of every human being (as cited in Jaworski, 1996, p. 11). Remember also Bohm's wholeness and Varela's oneness, which both involve a way of being and a deep connection with others. I believe this state of being, of oneness and deep connection with others is how I may express love in the context of leadership. Love is the glue that brings us together to achieve the fullest and deepest aspects of human life, which I believe is the challenge of leadership in today's scientific age.

Love, wisdom, means and end have come to inscribe the heart of leadership of the kind that flows from this study. Robert Greenleaf (1998) in a later book *The Power of Servant Leadership* explains that leaders, in their conscious

rationalisations, are not always aware of why they choose a certain way forward, often relying on a sense of intuition. The difficulty for leaders, he argues, is that we cannot easily explain such intuitions. This is problematic because, according to Greenleaf, we live in a world that places high value on rational thinking and logic in human affairs. He argues that manipulation "hangs as a cloud" over the relationship between leader and follower. Greenleaf suggests the way through this murkiness is for the leader to clearly demonstrate a desire to build a more honest relationship with his followers. To Greenleaf, this is the essence of leadership (pp. 84-85).

Greenleaf's words help me understand why I found it difficult to make judgements about the way Mary handled the extraordinarily difficult and complex situation she found herself in at St Anne's. In my private reflections on Mary's story I sometimes experienced a tension between judgement and non-judgement of her actions. I believed she was right in acting as she did but questioned whether there could have been other ways to address the problems which might have involved less pain for staff. I suspended judgement but, in the end, I've learned that Mary's essence would guide her to do what she sees as right. I've come to see and admire the strength, honesty and love in Mary that is her essence.

So what is my 'essence of leadership'? It is time to declare it.

## CHAPTER 9

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### SUSTAINING THE SELF AS A LEADER

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If you've made it this far with me, you'll have shared my quest to understand what might sustain others and me in our leadership. My narrative has become something of a travelogue. So far, it has a beginning and middle but no end yet. My intent has been to capture a living dialogue that, I hope, connects readers with the circumstances that confronted me as a leader at different times and in different places. My travelling time is nearly finished and I find myself at a different place from where I started.

#### **A Dialectical Turn**

I have conscientiously interpreted my experiences through the lenses of stories, literature, professional conversations and the Rocky Coast Leadership Project. I haven't attempted any kind of discourse or linguistic analysis of what these people have said or written, nor have I drawn generalisations from their contributions and attributed authority to them. Having immersed myself in the waters of leadership and developed seventeen propositions, I've come to understandings about leadership that are different to those I discovered for myself. I found myself looking for something more in my quest to understand what sustains me.

I have brought new meaning to current understandings of leadership through listening to others. I have taken a dialectical turn from contemporary writers into sideshadows of the ancient wisdom of the great philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and Aquinas. Like an archaeologist, I have entered their original works to dig deeper into my propositions and develop five insights about leadership. My understandings may come out differently to those conveyed by scholars of these people. Nevertheless, I have persisted in testing the meaning I take from engaging with them. I have also referred to philosophical interpretations of their works by R. M. Hutchins, who has helped me greatly and in whose debt I remain. Hutchins and the great philosophers have drawn me towards notions of virtue in leadership that I have explored further through the wisdom of the world's

major religions. I have found that the only thing I can influence with any certainty as a leader is me - how I relate to, and lead, others. This is why I see self-knowledge, love and “the good” as inextricably entwined in the leadership that I wish to exercise. Love in Western Society, in the public space, is not a word often used. My journey has so convinced me of the presence of love in public leadership that love has to be admitted. Love gives me much confidence to enact love for the public good. There is a better self that lies within me that recognises “the good”.

In this final chapter, I hope to bring together what this interpretive journey has meant for me. And so I continue my narrative.

### **The Gift of Hindsight**

At the time of writing, I am Senior Adviser to the Minister for Education in Tasmania. The Minister’s role is to make decisions on educational policy and practice affecting all schools in Tasmania and carry responsibility for them in the public arena. My role is to provide advice to the Minister on these matters. I sometimes think back to a younger me as I took up my first appointment as a school principal back in 1988 in the tiny country hamlet of Coalville on the Sun Coast of Tasmania. Thirteen children from pre-school to Grade 6 awaited me. If only I understood then what I understand now! Rene` Vincente` Arcilla (1995), to whom I referred to earlier in this study on the importance of being attentive to our “inner voices”, quotes from Charles Taylor’s essay *The Politics of Recognition*, which argues that the quest for self-knowledge has a dialogical character.

We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. For my purposes here, I want to take language in a broad sense, covering not only the words that we speak, but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the “languages” of art, of gesture, of love and the like. But we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others. People do not acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us – what George Herbert Mead called “significant others”. The genesis of the human mind is in this sense not

monological, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical. (as cited in Arcilla, 1995, p. 163)

According to Taylor, self-knowledge depends on the dialogical recognition of others because we can only understand the self in a language that is learned. Learning a language is only possible through dialogue with a significant other (as cited in Arcilla, 1995, p. 164). I have travelled in dialogue with many significant others – colleagues, authors, philosophers – who have mattered to me. What I have accomplished has not been on my own. I have never been alone. I have come to know leadership in the ways of experience and the language of philosophy. In dialogue with my self, I find other selves. There is the Terry of now who was, and is, still craving understanding. There is the younger Terry who I remember stepping out as a leader of a school for the first time. What if I were to meet up with the younger Terry and enter a dialogue with him? What might I say? How might I say it? Can I be so self-assured and satisfied that I could ‘give advice’? I hope not. Rather, could I take the opportunity to share with him what I believe would sustain me into the future as a school leader if I had to start all over again at Coalville? I cannot tell anyone how to lead – not even a younger Terry. But I could try to share with him and others what I have learned along the way. How might I do that then?

I’m going to imagine such a sharing is possible with a younger Terry and invite you to watch and listen as we walk along the wild Rocky Coast’s Roaring Beach in the year 1988. I will try my best not to be any of the patriarchal, patronising or gratuitous selves that I once could have been as we walk and talk. I know now that I can never claim satisfaction that what I have to say will make a difference to the way a young Terry and others may lead. I do hope, though, that my dialogue with Young Terry may trigger further inquiry by others about what might sustain leaders on *their* journey of leadership.

### A Walk with Myself

The day is overcast and, as we stroll onto the beach from the car park and turn west, wind gusts of forty kilometres an hour hit our faces. I just love the feel of the wind against my face! Young Terry was less impressed. He pulled his anorak around his ears. At least the sand was wet and not flying into our

eyes. I asked him how his first week had gone as acting principal at Coalville. His response caught me by surprise.

"It was a disaster." He sauntered on, as if he was waiting for me to prompt more details from him. I didn't let him down.

"In what way?" I asked.

"I called a joint meeting of the Mothers Club and the Parents and Friends to outline my plans for the school and community. Even though there are only thirteen children in the school, there must have been at least eighty people who turned up from the surrounding district. I talked about my plans for the school and community. People appeared to really like what I said. I could smell the pies heating up in the pie heater. The meeting was just about over. The room was full of smiling faces and nodding heads. I was feeling good about myself. I asked if anyone had any questions before we enjoyed our supper. A neighbouring farmer who was also a parent of three children at the school asked me if I would ever take strike action if my teacher union was engaged in an industrial dispute. He said that the principal before me had refused to take strike action in the previous year. I should have given a diplomatic answer because this community is very conservative. Instead, I said that my only problem with the strike action taken the previous year was that we didn't strike for long enough! You should have seen the look on their faces. The heads stopped nodding and the smiles dropped from their faces. At that moment, I felt sick. I still do. The next day, another farmer who lives next door to me came over to school and gave me some friendly advice. He said that it's not a good idea to talk about taking strike action in this community and that I wouldn't last very long if I did. So that's my first week as a school principal. I'm not looking forward to going back there on Monday."

I really felt for Young Terry. It seems like only yesterday I was in his shoes. During the intervening years, I have enjoyed the most amazing rollercoaster of a career, most of it an absolute joy but some of it very challenging. The gift of hindsight is a wonderful gift.

"Don't be too hard on yourself," I said. "There are some things I'd do very differently if I had my time over again."

Young Terry looked engaged by the idea of someone else also making mistakes. "How have you managed to be a principal for nearly twenty years? I've been one for five minutes and feel terrible," he said.

Seagulls hovered overhead as I thought about what I might say. Young Terry appeared to sense my hesitancy to answer. He stopped walking and looked at me intently. I said, "There's no simple answer. Leadership is not about how long you are in the job."

Young Terry pressed further. "So, what is school leadership about then? I don't want to have any more experiences like last week."

"Are you sure you want to spend your time with me listening to what I've got to say about leadership? I don't want to spoil a nice walk," I replied.

"Yes!" Young Terry exclaimed. He was clearly losing a little patience with me.

"Well, let me say this first. Some of the things you hear from me may not mean very much to you now. I'm going to draw on my Ph. D study which looks back over most of my career as a school leader. I've reflected on key stories that I believe have shaped my seventeen years of school leadership. There have been many good times, but let me assure you, I've also made my fair share of mistakes. My study helped me focus on my own stories of leadership and learn from them."

"What did these stories tell you about leadership?" he asked.

"I've come to realise that leadership is so complex, so personal and so contextual that I don't feel comfortable telling anyone how to lead. The best I can do is share what I have learned and hope it might be useful to others. My reflections on my stories helped me develop seventeen propositions on leadership. They included statements, for example, that point to the importance of leaders having vision, embracing tradition, being passionate, acting ethically, caring for others and being courageous. I examined my propositions in some detail by reviewing current knowledge about leadership. They cast light on how I might conduct myself as a leader. But I found myself wanting to understand more. For example, I'm sure the passion you brought to that meeting with the parents at Coalville would have impressed those present. But, as you've learned already, there's more to leadership than passion!"

"You're not wrong about that," Young Terry said ruefully. "So, what else did you find out about leadership?" he enquired.

"Good question," I replied, watching a large wave rise up and look at me before breaking onto the beach with a thunderous roar. "Well, I found that my

seventeen propositions were very similar to ideas that can be found in contemporary books and articles on leadership. I wanted to dig deeper. That's why I put these propositions through a process called sideshadowing."

Young Terry was still with me. "What is sideshadowing?" he asked.

"Sideshadowing involves imaginative play with possibilities. It is a process that I borrowed from a writer by the name of Evgenia Cherkasova. Sideshadowing encourages the idea that every situation, whether real or imagined, comprises not only what happened, but what might have happened. She advocates the use of what she calls "fantastic literature" to explore further possibilities. Are you still with me?" I asked.

"Not really. Can you give me an example of sideshadowing?" Young Terry replied.

I thought of Borge's story *Funes, His Memory*, the one Cherkasova used. "Well," I said, "She found this piece of fantastic literature where the main character had a serious head injury resulting in his mind developing an incredible eye for detail. Instead of seeing a glass of wine as we would, he sees every grape squashed into the glass complete with the stalks! So, in a similar way, I used some fantastic literature to see other possibilities for my seventeen propositions on leadership."

I hadn't lost Young Terry just yet. He wanted to know more about sideshadowing. We pushed on further into the wind.

"Would you say sideshadowing is a little bit like 'thinking outside the square'?" he asked.

"Yes, I suppose it is."

Young Terry pressed me further. "What about fantastic literature? How do you know which literature is fantastic?"

"This is a matter of opinion," I replied. "The literature of the great philosophers and writers such as David Bohm is fantastic to me because their ideas help me see leadership differently, through particular lenses," I said. "I've used their ideas to help me research more deeply what my seventeen propositions are saying about leadership. Bohm, for example, helped me to see leadership as complex and uncertain. Instead of sometimes feeling bewildered and disillusioned, I'm now more inclined to look for order within chaos. My sideshadowing worked like a sieve on these propositions to

reveal five insights about leadership that point to the importance of things like self-awareness, virtue, discernment, love and “the good” in leadership. Then I found that these insights share common ground with the virtues and wisdom inherent in the great religions of the world.”

“Mmm,” Young Terry mumbled, gazing out to the horizon seemingly deep in thought before returning to his original question. “So, what do you *really* think school leadership is about?”

This was a *really* hard question. I looked into the sky, searching for clarity of thought. Clouds were gathering and the weather was becoming more threatening. “There are three things in particular that I’ve drawn from my study that go to the heart of what I believe about leadership. I need to know myself well, love well and do “the good”. I believe these things can sustain me through the highs and lows of leadership.”

Young Terry had the look of challenge in his eyes. “Surely there’s more to leadership than that!!” he said.

How ironic, I thought. To think that Young Terry had so swiftly dismissed all that had unravelled before me on my journey! I wanted to challenge him back – somehow.

“I’m sure there is,” I said, “but that’s how I see leadership. I’m interested in how you see it. You haven’t become a school principal without knowing something about leadership!”

Young Terry hesitated for a moment before responding.

“Well, at Coalville last week, I was hoping the community could see that I was trying to make a difference. I told them of my vision for the school, you know, all those things I wanted to get going at Coalville. I’m keen to work with the community and make things better for them and the kids.”

We stopped talking as we huffed and puffed our way up and over one of the beach’s huge sand dunes. I was sure Young Terry had impressed the people of Coalville with the enthusiasm and passion that he took to last week’s meeting at Coalville. I was tempted to say that I see vision as more than simply sharing one’s own aspirations, no matter how worthy they may be. To me, vision is about working with others to create a picture of how we wish to be. I also wanted to mention the importance I place on the wisdom of a trusted friend or group of people to help me through the dilemmas and problems that I always seem to find. Perhaps I might mention these things at another time, I

thought. After gathering my breath, I said, "I'm glad you're keen to work *with* the community because they can be a great ally for you and the school. But if you really want to know what I think about leadership," I said, "then I need to explain what I mean by self-knowledge, love and "the good". I'm not concerned whether you agree with me or not. Leadership is a very personal thing and what works for me mightn't work for you."

Young Terry interjected. "You said before that those things sustain you. What do you mean by sustain?"

"By sustain, I mean that some things support me in my leadership for the long haul. If I am willing to engage with others and learn from my experiences, love those I lead and not focus on their shortcomings and work for the greater good, then I have every chance of leading well. I'll still make mistakes, of course, but I find people are more forgiving when they have a sense of who you are," I replied.

"This sounds very different to what I thought leadership is about," Young Terry said. "Tell me more."

I was pleased that he was still interested. "Well, for me, self-knowledge is the wisdom acquired over time and grows from reflection and dialogue with others on experiences like yours at Coalville. Self-knowledge includes acknowledging uncertainty and seeking dialogue with others when things trouble me. For example, how do I know when my emotions are overriding reason? How do I know when it is time to challenge something that I know isn't right? How do I know what is right? How can I be attentive to my own biases when making important decisions? On my own, I can't always see what I need to see. Dialogue with others helps me get to know my strengths and weaknesses. I need to use my strengths and those of others to advantage whilst working on the things I'm not so good at. I like the way you've been keen to talk about Coalville. I suspect that your self-knowledge has already grown."

Young Terry nodded. "What about love?" he asked. "I haven't heard about love in leadership before."

"I don't know how anyone can lead without love," I replied. "I'm no longer shy of the word 'love' in leadership."

"What do you mean by love in leadership?" Young Terry queried.

“Love, for me, is a genuine and deep connection with others.” I paused to check his reaction.

Young Terry sensed my surveillance. “Okay. Keep going. What else?”

“We need to reach out to people and be there for them, placing their needs above our own. Love is about embracing the dignity and worth of every human being. There can’t be any second class citizens.”

“Gee. I’ve never consciously thought about those things in leadership before,” Young Terry reflected.

“I really think love in leadership can help us serve others well and achieve great things together,” I said.

“What about when people treat you badly?” Young Terry asked. “What if a teacher or parent is bad mouthing you? How does a leader love in those times?”

“I don’t have all the answers here,” I acknowledged. “I’m not saying others have to love me but I have to try to love them. Love has to start somewhere. For me, I’ve got to find a way to develop esteem and love for my students and staff. Sometimes I might have to accept that others won’t ever treat me as I’d wish, and just get on with the job.”

I could tell that Young Terry hadn’t yet dismissed what I had to say. Next he led me on to the notion of “the good”. “I can see what you’re getting at but I’m not sure how love can help me be a good principal.”

It was my turn to do the challenging. “What’s your idea of a good principal?” I asked.

Young Terry wandered on in silence, holding his jaw with his thumb and forefinger, deeply immersed in thought. He wasn’t going to just blurt out the first thing that came to mind. “I think children have to be happy and do well,” he said. “Anything a principal does to make that happen is what being a good principal is about.”

I dug a little deeper. “How do you help children be happy and do well?”

Young Terry looked at me then looked away, lapsing again into thought before replying. “Teaching children well and providing a happy environment would be a good start, I suppose.”

“How do you know you’re teaching children well?” I asked.

“Do you *have* to ask that question?” Young Terry protested.

“No, but I just wanted to get you thinking about what you mean by the word ‘good’ when you say you’re trying to be a good principal. I’ve found that doing or being good isn’t always easy.”

Another wave dumped itself with a roar onto the shore as I looked at Young Terry to see if he was still listening.

Young Terry grinned back. “You’re making this leadership thing sound pretty complex! How do you think I should go about doing good at Coalville?”

“All I can say is, consider the means and the ends in trying to make a difference at Coalville. How you do something is just as important as what you do. Good intentions are not always enough.”

As we reached the end of the beach, Young Terry turned to face me with the wind now at his back. He asked one more question. “So, if you were to say in one sentence what it is that might sustain me as a leader for the next twenty years, what would you say?”

I guarded my reply. Looking out to sea, I saw misty curtains of rain falling from the clouds, which had continued to build up. The wind was dropping. It was time to turn back. “There’s not much I can say in one sentence that will sustain anyone in anything for any amount of time.”

“That’s taking the easy way out,” Young Terry said. “Just tell me what your best advice would be to me, as a leader just starting out as a school principal!”

I was happy to share what my Ph. D journey had revealed to me. “Okay, I’ve learned that I’ve got to know myself well, love well and do “the good”. I wish I had known myself better in my early days as a leader and been more able to put a handbrake on my behaviour. I might not have veered off the road into the gravel so often. I’m sure I would have had fewer tough times and done more good.”

I suspect Young Terry would have heard this advice and still not believed it. I think the older Terry had better listen to Older Terry! Taylor maintains that by adopting the terms of that other to define myself, that other becomes an internalised part of my self who may become, for example, an element of my psyche. To me, Taylor is suggesting that I can stay true to myself by staying in dialogue with this element of my psyche (as cited in Arcilla, 1995, p. 164). Young Terry is inexperienced and sometimes naïve yet his idealism reflects what Taylor describes as “this better self as a regulative ideal” (as cited in Arcilla, 1995, p.

167). Thus, this imaginary tale becomes a realistic dialogical narrative. All I can be sure of is that as a Young Terry grows, his dialogue will deepen. He will be open to the terms of others as he seeks to define himself.

Old Terry is now assisting the Minister for Education to provide the best education possible for the children and people of this state. The current context in Tasmanian education is one of unprecedented change. An election held amidst a period of turbulence in education saw the government returned to office. The successful and highly regarded Minister of the previous eight years, with whom I worked during the last few months of her tenure, chose to take on a new portfolio. My role was now to work with the new Minister, Head of Office and other advisers at the beginning of a new Ministry – an exciting prospect.

An early task of our office was to restore public confidence in education. It had been undermined by public perceptions of a jargon-packed curriculum lacking “the basics” of reading, writing, spelling and maths; reports going home to parents on their children’s progress using language that parents did not understand; unhappy teachers whose role was now dominated by new assessment practices rather than teaching and learning; and parents of children with special needs complaining that support for their children’s learning had been reduced. Our new job was to restore the health of the Education Department and regain public confidence in it.

### **Enneagrammatic Self-knowledge**

In *Gadamer: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Chris Lawn describes Hans Georg Gadamer’s take on health and the art of medicine. To Gadamer, a doctor may have knowledge of all the intervention techniques in the world but it is the dialogue between the doctor and patient that helps the doctor decide what will assist the patient and what she leaves to nature. The good doctor is not simply technically proficient, but also has Aristotelian “virtues” such as trustworthiness, care and a good “bedside manner” that encourages the patient to share knowledge of the illness with the doctor so the healing process can begin (as cited in Lawn, 2006, pp. 114-115).

To help with the healing, those of us within the Minister’s office needed to learn to trust each other. The energetic young Minister with a fresh, new approach to

government organised Michael, a former Premier of Tasmania, to facilitate a retreat for his staff. The Minister saw this event as an opportunity to develop a highly skilled team around him. He had a number of strategies at his disposal but he asked Michael to guide staff through a process of self-discovery called the *Enneagram*. In *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*, Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson (1999) tell how the Enneagram is a nine point geometric figure that derives from the Greek words for nine, *ennea* and figure, *grammos*. It outlines nine basic human personality types and their intricate interrelationships (p. 9). Riso and Hudson describe how the Enneagram “invites us to look deeply into the mystery of our true identity. It is meant to initiate a process of inquiry that can lead to a more profound truth about ourselves and our place in the world (p. 17).” They explain how the origin of the ideas that led to formation of the nine personality types has ancient roots that go back at least as far as the fourth century A.D. and possibly further (p. 19). I enjoyed the Enneagram experience because, on reflection, it has been pivotal to developing our dialogue in the Minister’s office. I coin the word *enneagrammatic* because the enneagram helped us find the words to express our shared understandings of our selves.

As New Zealand born writer Stephanie Dowrick says in *Intimacy and Solitude*, the better we know our own selves, the more we can trust ourselves to act with good will (1991, p. 59). We bonded as a team and sometimes jokingly refer to our retreat as a “love in”. We know ourselves more intimately and our trust in each other has grown. The love in our office is present. It sustains me each day.

### **Finding My Better Self**

Taylor associates self-understanding with the statements we make about who we are. As we reflect on those statements and the extent to which internal and external dialogues with a range of significant others influence them, Taylor says we can discern whether our statements are authentic. When we realise that some of our statements may be contradictory, we are coming to understand that inauthentic words of recognition do not easily describe our true being. Taylor states that we may even describe our authentic true self as “an unrecognisable stranger” (as cited in Arcilla, 1995, p. 167). Whilst an authentic true self is not easily recognised, we know it exists because we are able to recognise our own contradictory statements about ourselves. In engaging in dialogue with the

Minister and other advisers, I feel as if I have some kind of inbuilt detector, perhaps a moral compass, that alerts me to statements I make that are not in keeping with what Taylor describes as “this better self as a regulative ideal” (as cited in Arcilla, 1995, p. 167). I try to stay true to what I believe in, which has at its heart a love and concern for others and a desire to do good. I know when the needle of my compass wavers. I can feel it in the way my stomach churns. When I am true to my better self, I experience a feeling like that described by one of Carl Jung’s colleagues, Marie-Louise von Franz in her book *Carl Gustav Jung: His Myth in Our Time*. Franz spoke of the sense of self as “a feeling of standing on solid ground inside oneself...” (as cited in Dowrick, 1991, pp. 8-9). Dowrick comments that when we experience such a feeling, it is easier to trust and love ourselves. We are also more likely to reach out to others. When we feel less sure of ourselves, self-love and self-trust are more elusive (p. 9).

Arcilla says the history of philosophy reveals “an important moral lesson about human nature: that of our infectiously shared vulnerability” (p. 170). Indefiniteness “calls philosophers into dialogue about what their self-knowledge is exposed to” (p. 170). Indefiniteness is like my uncertainty about leadership that I spoke of at the beginning of my thesis. I hope that my dialogue with my reader has created what Arcilla describes as a certain kind of friendship, of *philia*, through my sharing of identity. Arcilla sees this indefiniteness “as a disarming source of good to be celebrated, a *sophia*” which delivers the gift of intimacy (pp. 170-171). As Dowrick (1991) says, intimacy – whether it is with oneself in moments of solitude or with others in times of sharing – reflects our inner world like almost nothing else (p. 5).

In my quest to understand myself as a person and leader, I have delved into my inner world. I have been more intimate with you, my reader, than I might have originally envisaged. I’m not aware of anything about myself as a person or as a leader that I have consciously hidden from you which might be relevant to this study. My leadership travels show my capacity to lead well and not so well. At different moments and in different places, I have discovered a number of different selves that I often could not recognise. Some selves were, for example, ambitious, naïve and less considerate of others whilst other selves were good intentioned, caring and considerate. Through intimacy with myself in my reflective writing and in intimacy with others through my story sharing, I am more able to

recognise that unrecognisable stranger who is my better true self who sustains me as a leader. I am also more aware of my less worthy selves who are never far away from me and whose company I still work hard to avoid.

With Arcilla, I find myself appreciating *philosophia* less for its capacity for certainty and more for its power to raise questions that are difficult to answer. I have felt that in the silence of my struggle to find answers, I have been “mysteriously, side by side” with other travellers (p. 171). It is my hope that you, the reader, have been one of them.

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