SWINGS AND ROUND-ABOUTS: DISCOURSES OF CONNECTEDNESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Education of Murdoch University 2003
Acknowledgments

I am indebted to a number of people for their help and inspiration in completing this thesis. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. James Bell, for his advice and encouragement. Without him, I probably would never have really considered the questions that underpin this thesis. Secondly, I would like to thank my parents, David and Jennifer, for their support, particularly my mother for her proofreading. Thirdly, I would like to thank my sisters Natalie and Rosemary whose own dissertations have been an inspiration to me. Lastly, I would like to thank Maya, for her patience, her understanding, but most of all, her love.

Thank you.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Greg Thompson
Abstract for *Swings and Round-Abouts: Discourses of Connectedness in Secondary Schools.*

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Connectedness is a complex idea that seems to mean different things for each individual. For the purposes of this dissertation, connectedness can best be understood as the ways that an individual feels an affiliation with the community of the institution that he/she experiences. This dissertation seeks to uncover the discourses that various stakeholder groups have within the site of a single school concerning connectedness. One of the precepts that this dissertation holds is that connectedness to school has benefits for the individual as learner, the school as a community and potentially the wider community in years to come. This is a theoretical position in the lineage of such theorists as Plato, Rousseau, and Dewey who have argued that education is a transformative practice that could be a tool in solving some of the issues that contemporary societies face.

To examine the issue of connectedness, focus group research was chosen as the most beneficial methodology, as it allowed the stakeholders to explore their understanding of connectedness in small groups of their peers. It was important that the students in particular were allowed to develop their discourses of connectedness, as they were at the centre of the converging and diverging discourses. For this reason there were four student focus groups. The students selected for each of the student focus groups were targeted because of particular characteristics. They were purposively sampled to examine how, if at all, these discourses changed if the student was a high achiever, a quiet student, a student committed to the co-curricular programme of the school or a student who had been in regular trouble with the school hierarchy. There were also two parent focus groups, two staff focus groups, and a focus group made up of members of the school council.

The contributions of the various focus groups were analysed in the light of the work done by the French theorist Michel Foucault concerning the institution and the way that it deploys discursive practices to govern and regulate the subject. A number of his ideas that have been particularly important in this work. Foucault’s power, discourse and governmentality have informed the analysis of the data and have supported the conclusions drawn. The key finding of this dissertation is that discourses of connectedness are crucial in determining how students feel about their schools. Many of the stakeholder groups hold diverging expectations of what connectedness is. These findings, and others, have implications for the management of schools in Western Australia.
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