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**TRUST AND THE CAPTURING OF SCHOOL-BASED POTENTIAL**

**Pamela Winsome Bishop, M.Ed.**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

*School of Early Childhood ~ Primary  
Education*

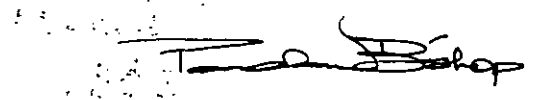
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pamela W. Bishop', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pamela W. Bishop

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## ABSTRACT

### TRUST AND THE CAPTURING OF SCHOOL-BASED POTENTIAL

by Pamela Winsome Bishop

The importance of collegial trust to organisations has long been recognised. In school settings the achievement of trust between principals and teachers can be a vital ingredient in the development of school culture and effectiveness. Yet the nature and rapidity of changes being required of schools, plus the context in which principals and teachers are expected to implement initiatives, may test collegial trust. Despite the challenges which many principals face in the course of their work, some are more trusted by teachers than others.

This study investigated what four principals did or did not do to engender and maintain trust with teachers. As well, the study considered how externally-driven initiatives, which principals were required to implement with teachers, affected mutual trust. An examination of how trustworthy leadership contributed to school culture was also made.

An interpretive multiple-site case study framed the investigation. The researcher spent approximately ten weeks in four inner urban Melbourne secondary schools. During this time, each school's principal was shadowed for four days and interviewed extensively. The balance of the fieldwork consisted of observation, document analysis, and interviews with 112 teachers.

A combination of principals' personal and professional characteristics plus

work practices engendered and maintained trust with teachers. Trusting teachers, being knowledgeable, hardworking, caring, confidential, and having integrity were commonly favoured characteristics that attracted teacher trust. Work practices which engendered trust were non-exploitative, de-emphasised principals' power differentials with teachers, and encouraged controversy and critical dialogue. Teachers' perceptions of trust in their principals were evident along four dimensions: absolute, domain-specific, relational, and comparative.

The extent to which teachers thought their key interests were being advanced or diminished was often the standard which teachers used to determine trust in their principals. That standard came into play especially when principals implemented non-negotiable initiatives with teachers. When teachers consistently perceived trustworthy leadership from the principal which was congruent with the school's culture, mutual trust was enhanced and a strengthening of shared expectations occurred.

Results of this study highlighted principals' trust-engendering characteristics and practices. The study also found that when teachers were unable to discern the need for an externally-imposed key initiative, they often questioned the educational competency of those associated with its development. Such questioning frequently extended to principals who were actively involved in the initiative's implementation even though the rhetoric of much current educational change emphasises devolution and school-based management, and teacher participation in decision making. These findings have implications for the ongoing trust between principals and teachers and the capturing of school-based potential.

To Bill,  
for believing in possibility, sovereignty,  
and leading by example,  
with thanks.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The goodwill and efforts of many individuals contributed to this project.

A debt of thanks is owed to participating teachers from Kandos, Ruthven, Sarina East, and Sarina North Secondary Colleges (all pseudonyms). They generously gave of their time and views. Particular appreciation is extended to the four principals from those schools who, in keeping with the spirit of organisational learning, allowed their leadership practices to be scrutinised. Their willingness to entertain open questioning, criticism, and feedback about their work was impressive. The personal and professional courage involved in their gesture of openness was noted by many of their school-based colleagues as well as the researcher.

Special gratitude is extended to my Supervisor, Professor Bill Mulford. His caring manner, expert guidance, and integrity provided an enduring source of inspiration. It was both a pleasure and privilege to work with him. Special thanks also go to Dr. Neville Grady for the insightful and supportive reviews of my work. The thesis was strengthened as a result of his endeavours. In addition, thanks are offered to Sara Brain, Maureen Colarossi, Rev. Tim Costello, Chris Scott, Cathi Walker, and Jan Wood, all of whom are exemplary professionals in their respective fields. Finally, I remain grateful to my close friends for their support and companionship.

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