

# **THE CREATION OF A SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL**

**by**

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**THE CREATION OF A SUCCESSFUL ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE  
IN AN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL**

by

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## RESEARCHER'S DECLARATION

I, Andries van Renssen, declare that "The Creation of a Successful Organisational Culture in an Independent School" is my own work. It has never been submitted in any form for a degree or diploma before in any tertiary institution. Where the work of others has been used, sources have been identified and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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I, Neels Geertsema as the language editor, declare that I edited "The Creation of a Successful Organisational Culture in an Independent School"

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## ABSTRACT

According to the available literature, schools with a positive organisational culture are more effective and will probably achieve better results. This study investigates the way in which a positive school culture is formed. It focuses on the role of the leadership of the principal in developing an organisational culture of an independent school.

This qualitative study scrutinises one specific school in a group of several independent schools in South Africa and compares the school culture of the original school (between 1971 and 1974) to the current school culture as manifested in the last four years (2009-2012). Data was gathered through interviews with the founder of the school, interviews with current teachers and the current principal, document research of artefacts as well as observations made by visitors to the school in a professional capacity.

The data recorded was analysed in terms of a "levels of culture" model proposed by Edgar Schein (1985) by looking at what "the school" said about itself, what "the school" and the principal did, and what things look like. Furthermore, a study was made of what is seen as acceptable behaviour and unacceptable behaviour followed by what is regarded as important and not important in the school. The answers to these questions were used to determine the assumptions that members of the school community hold about the nature of the school.

The analysis of the school's culture aimed to determine how this school's past is living in the present and what role the leadership of the principal played in shaping the school's culture. All of this was done to determine how school culture is formed, so that other schools can also use the methods identified in this study to identify their own school's culture and find ways of changing it.

The researcher concludes that the formation of a school culture can be controlled and manipulated towards a positive outcome and ways of doing this are identified. It is also found that the culture of the specific school in this study seems to have been well-defined and positive throughout its history and that the leadership of the principal plays a significant role in the success of the school.

## KEY WORDS

School climate/culture/history/ethos/traditions;  
organizational climate/culture/history/ethos/traditions; how to create a school culture;  
leadership and school culture; cultural leadership; symbolic leadership; school culture and  
management.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

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### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1971 Anthony Mowbray<sup>1</sup> started a small school in a large South African city. Since then the school has grown to a multi-campus group of schools, recently celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> year in existence. The current management of the schools group organised a celebratory function at the end of October 2011. At that function, the history of the group was celebrated and highlighted, for as far as the history was known. During subsequent planning sessions and discussions among principals of the different schools, it has become clear that very little is known about the history at all. Different people know bits-and-pieces of different parts of the school, but no-one can answer simple questions in any structured order about who they were and how that was connected to who they are now and where they are heading in the future. During a “going-on-pension” farewell function (at the end of 2010) for a staff member who had taught at one of the campuses since 1972, this fact was highlighted when very little of the school’s history was said and only a few anecdotes that could still be remembered were told about the history of the school

I decided to find the information, write the story and show the current generation of students why they can be proud of their school.

### 1.2 STATING THE PROBLEM

*“In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school...It is his leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning...”* (Sergiovanni, 1984:83). In 1971 the original Mowbray College<sup>2</sup> started as a single school in a very different educational climate to the present one in South Africa and the school moved through the Apartheid era into the current new education system. Along the way, many changes had to be made to the original model that Anthony Mowbray had had in mind, without compromising on its clear focus and uniqueness. Since then, the school has multiplied into several campuses, attempting to duplicate the unique “Mowbray’s way” in different locations across the country. This has been done successfully, but without documenting the history or school culture in any structured way.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms were used for people

<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms used for names of schools

The relationship between effective schools and a positive organisational culture has been proven quantitatively, as the literature clearly shows. The problem is “how”, which is a question that has to be answered qualitatively.

### **1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to investigate and describe the role of leadership in the creation of a successful organisational culture in an independent school.

### **1.4 THE RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

If the organisational climate of a school can have a positive effect on academic outcomes and the leadership role of the principal plays such a crucial role in determining that culture, then an investigation into “how they do it” is a very good reason for research. This is especially the case when a school goes through times of change and transformation.

This study focuses on one specific group of schools that has existed for over 40 years. This time is a long enough stretch over an era where different historical changes took place in the educational, political and other spheres in which the school developed its unique school culture. It could therefore assist in understanding how a school culture is created during times of transformation and what role the leadership plays in shaping this culture.

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS**

How did the school culture develop over 40 years of transformation in South Africa?

- a. How does the school’s past live in the present?
- b. Which crucial transitions and crises did the school have to face?
- c. What role did the leadership of the principal play in shaping the school culture?
- d. What are the assumptions that members hold about the nature of the organisation?

This study aimed at discovering exactly how an organisational culture was formed in a school. A case study of one independent school was done to establish this, by using methods, ideas, research findings and theoretical models from other sources. Specific attention was given to the role and behaviour of the principal in creating this culture, with the hope that principals in other schools (and leaders in different organisations) could use

the same methods and ideas to manipulate their school (and organisational) cultures to lead towards better academic (and organisational) outcomes.

## 1.6 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study I use my own integration of three frameworks as theoretical framework. The basic framework used is the **'levels of culture'** (Schein, 1985), because it focuses on what to look for when searching for school culture.

To get to the deepest level of culture, namely 'level of assumptions', both Sergiovanni (1995) and Schein (1985) suggest that one must look at the history of a school: which major changes took place and how the leadership responded to those events of transformation. To do that, the **'leadership forces hierarchy'** (Sergiovanni, 1984) and **'taxonomy of leadership forms'** (Reeves & Reitzug, 1992) are integrated into the theoretical framework for this study. This will provide a focus to the investigation when observing the current principal's behaviour in shaping the school culture and in looking for behavioural responses of previous leaders to major changes in the school's history.

This research is therefore informed by Edgar Schein's theory that culture exists on different levels, with the highest level (artefacts) being the most visible to any observer and the second and third levels decreasingly visible. In addition, to understand a group's culture, one must attempt to get to its shared basic assumptions and that *"leadership is originally the source of the beliefs and values that gets a group moving"* (Schein, 2004:36). It is for this reason that this study is also framed by the concepts used in Sergiovanni's (1984) theory that leadership *"can be viewed metaphorically as comprising a set of forces"* (1984:84) and that the symbolic and cultural forces of leadership are the two forces needed to distinguish between competent and excellent organisations.

## 1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY IN BRIEF

This is a qualitative study, overlapping some historical research design principles with case study research design principles in order to answer the research questions.

The decision to make use of a qualitative study came after reviewing the literature about school culture. Most of the existing studies focused on visible indicators of school culture and school climate, which could be determined by using quantitative research methods, but in order to find something invisible like "assumptions", a qualitative study seems to be the only solution. In addition, this study comprises both the history as well as the present. For the former, a more historical research design approach is used, but for the latter, which is a case study of one of the current schools in the group, typical case study methods are used.



This study is a subjective interpretation of the social interaction between people and how that contributed towards creating and shaping a successful school culture over time. A qualitative study is therefore a perfect fit.

As a result the methods used to gather data were:

1. Interviews (in person and via e-mail) with former and current staff, students, principals and managers,
2. Document research (content analysis of archives, yearbooks, official documents, newsletters and reports), and
3. Photograph analysis (of students, activities and facilities, both in person as well as in archive material)

Details about the methodology and research paradigm are discussed in chapter 3 (see 3.2).

### **1.7.1 Population and demarcation**

From the five current schools (two in the Western Cape, three in Gauteng) I selected the original school (not there anymore) and one of the five schools (in Cape Town). The inclusion of the original school was needed, to shed light on the original idea of the school and how the idea was realised.

The current school I included was chosen because it is a new school that was established by combining two previous schools in the group, and because its principal had experience in two of the previous schools, before he was appointed principal at this school. He therefore has knowledge about the original school culture that he could take with him to the new school.

The current success of this schools group, both in terms of financial accountability to shareholders and accountability for outcomes that students reach, must be closely linked to the 'organised and structured' approach, and also to the 'relaxed but focussed' environment in which the teenagers and young adults attend school. This is reflected in the advertising material and the feedback from parents at the "Focus group" discussions held with them during the "Building on Excellence" initiative (Building on Excellence, 2012:31-36)

The assumption is therefore, that many elements of the original school 40 years ago can still be found in the school culture of the current schools and that the specific school leaders, over time, were able to direct and shape the schools' culture during times of change, despite all the tensions and challenges experienced.

## 1.7.2 The preliminary literature review

The purpose of this literature review was to identify, clarify and define research terminology, as well as to identify what was written about this topic in general and to find good reasons why the research has significance. I further looked for indicators of school culture and ideas for research methods that could be used. The review would also identify gaps in our knowledge regarding the creation of school climate in independent schools.

More detail of what was found in the literature is described in chapter 2. I first looked at the broader literature to clarify concepts like organisational culture, how the study of culture has evolved (historical context) and how organisational culture and climate were seen differently. I discovered that there were several researchers who claimed that a positive organisational culture could result in better outcomes and that a negative organisational culture could hinder achievement.

The broader literature also provided me with three models, which I could combine to form a theoretical framework: (1) a leadership model (the 'leadership forces hierarchy' by Sergiovanni), (2) a 'taxonomy of symbolic leadership forms' (that provided specifics about leadership behaviour and what to observe when studying a specific leader) and a (3) 'levels of culture' model (showing how organisational culture can be analysed at different levels, according to the degree to which cultural phenomena are visible to an observer). A fourth model ('layers of culture') was also identified which could be used in further studies, especially when multiple campuses of one specific organisation are studied.

I then consulted specific literature about studies that had been done on school culture and found quantitative as well as qualitative studies. One research report gave an inventory of six quantitative studies all using questionnaires (Maslowski, 2006). All six questionnaires used similar scales and items, but in terms of the 'levels of culture' model, none of them measured assumptions, which is what this study is targeting.

I also looked at a specific study that had been done in nine high schools in America to determine what the relationship between a positive or negative school culture and school results was (Kowalski and Hermann, 2008). The outcome of that study gives enough reason to motivate school leaders to study organisational culture, because it is clear that a positive school culture can result in better academic performance.

I also found a qualitative study into school culture of two public schools in America (Willower and Smith, 1986). That research used similar methods to those employed in my study, but their findings were not very convincing.

Lastly I found material about the development of education systems in Africa, including a model that describes 'determinants of an education system' (Nieuwenhuis, 1996). The value of this model might be in further studies of organisational culture, because it shows the different forces and influences within which any school has to develop its own culture. It

includes geographical, economic, political, religious, cultural and other societal factors not included in my study.

The gaps identified in the existing knowledge of school culture suggest that more studies are needed on the school culture of independent schools (especially in Africa and South Africa), as well as on the homogeneity and strength of culture between multiple-campus schools and organisations, including the impact of school history on a school's current culture.

### 1.7.3 Data gathering

The data was gathered in four ways:

- (1) through the collection of documentation and artefacts about the schools like yearbooks; the mission and vision statements; the school's 'manual' (a policy document that explains how the school is operated); newspaper clippings of relevant events that happened at the school; advertisements placed in the press about the school; the school's current website as well as pictures taken at the respective schools of items that relate to the history and the present (e.g. academic scroll with names of achievers),
- (2) through discussions with the current staff (some of whom have been working at the schools almost since from the beginning) and discussions with the founder of the school and some former staff members. Some of these discussions (like the informal interviews with the founder and a former staff member) were for the purpose of gathering information for a 40<sup>th</sup> year celebration function, but other discussions with current staff were telephonic or in person during visits to the current school as part of a "Building on Excellence" programme that the current owners (holding company) of the school initiated.
- (3) via e-mails to the current staff. During one of my visits to the school, I was given the opportunity to talk to the whole staff to explain my research and request their participation. I explained the purpose and nature of my research. I gave them the permission letter and requested them to participate. I also explained that I would send them an electronic set of questions by e-mail, which I requested them to complete electronically and mail back to me. The deputy principal gave me a list of the whole staff and their e-mail addresses. Of the 28 staff members (including the principal), 12 chose to participate, which is almost 43%. I found that this was a sufficient number that represented the opinions of the staff fairly accurately.
- (4) through the "Building on Excellence" report that came to me as an unplanned surprise. I originally did not intend using this as a data gathering tool, but in early 2012 the holding company (to which the school belongs) happened to select the same school that I selected as part of my research, as their 2012 site to run this

programme. The “Building on Excellence” programme is an initiative that has been implemented in a number of schools over the last five years, during which selected staff members from other schools and other school brands from across the country visit this one site, in order to observe their classes and behaviour and write short reports about their experiences. As part of this initiative a random sample of parents is also selected, who are invited to a so-called ‘focus-group’ discussion with senior company members who are not directly part of that school. Questions were asked to these parents about their experiences in the school and their comments were anonymously recorded. All of these answers and teacher-reports are then combined into a report that is given to that school and to all other schools in the group as a document to use to learn from another. The title page of the report states that it is “A Review of Good Practice” at that particular school. I was lucky enough to be invited to form part of the group visiting the school and observing some activities and classes. I also received the unpublished draft report, which I could use as part of this study. Although I don’t know which parents were included, I was able to identify most of the teachers who participated in the class visits. At the time of the submission of this research dissertation, the final report of the ‘Building on Excellence’ initiative had not been published yet .

### 1.7.3.1 Data analysis and interpretation (processing)

I used the following steps in my data processing:

- a. Data collected was organised in an excel computer file by source, chronology and by theme (code).
- b. I started analysing the data while I was still collecting and capturing the data. Report writing also took place simultaneously. The process was “*iterative (cycle back and forth between data collection and analysis*” for example collect stories and return for more info to fill in gaps) (Creswell, 2008:245).
- c. Field notes from my discussion with the founder were transcribed into electronic format and sent to him (via e-mail) for verification of the facts. He responded with some alterations.
- d. Data was read several times to get a general sense of the major themes, while codes were identified (I found a list of  $\pm$  30 ideas/codes).
- e. Codes were combined into themes and themes were grouped until I ended up with 8 themes (see chapter 4).
- f. A visual image was created that represented the data and the relationship between the different themes (diagram 4.2). These themes were used in the main body of the research findings.
- g. A qualitative interpretation of my data was made and the accuracy of my findings checked, by asking certain participants to read the notes and

respond to them. Their responses were evaluated for accuracy of facts versus my interpretation of the facts. I stepped back to gain an impression of the larger meaning of the concepts.

- h. Then I wrote my discussion, conclusions, interpretations and their implications.
- i. Finally I identified the limitations in the study and made suggestions for further research.

### **1.7.3.2 Structured interviews**

Twenty-five interview questions were compiled and sent to all the staff, including the deputy principal, of the school. During one of my visits to the school, I requested to speak to the whole staff during a break and explained to them what this research was about and requested them to participate. I explained to them that they would receive a letter to request their permission (which they had to sign), followed by my interview questions in electronic format (email). The deputy principal received the exact same questions, but the principal received a separate set of questions. I requested them to answer my questions in their own time and to email them back to me. I received back 12 responses (out of a total staff complement of 28), including the responses from the deputy and the principal (a 43% of the staff complement).

## **1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Factors that hindered this research (*and how the effects were minimised*) were:

- a. The founder of the school was interviewed twice in 2011, once by the general manager of the brand of schools and once by myself. The purpose of these interviews was to gather information about the history and first few years of the school for the anniversary celebrations that took place later that year. The questions asked, were therefore, not directly related to this study, and the answers also not quoted verbatim. (*This limitation was overcome by triangulating the content of those interviews by asking the founder to read and respond to the notes made from the interviews*)
- b. A large portion of the history took place in the Western Cape, which is far from where I live. (*I extended my visits to the Western Cape for other purposes for a few days to collect data; I also collected answers to my structured interviews via e-mail correspondence and made a number of telephone calls to respondents to clear up some of their answers. I also received help from my Western Cape colleagues who gathered data for me*)

- c. The principal was very busy and did not have enough time to answer questions, which delayed the research. *(Regular follow-ups were made and some of the work was done on some responses while waiting for all respondents to reply)*
- d. Some evidence and artefacts had been lost (for example through transfer of the school to new owners or closing of a specific campus). I could only find three yearbooks of the first four years of the original campus and only two of the last four years of the current campus included in this study. *(I had to rely on the memories of people involved and cross-checked the information by asking other people the same questions; I also found evidence in other documents and artefacts).*

## 1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, TRUSTWORTHINESS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The main ethical consideration was to respect the rights of the participants, in terms of letting them know the aim and purpose of the study, how the information they offered was going to be used, and how it could impact on their lives. This was done with great care, as described and discussed in more detail in chapter 3, including how they were guaranteed anonymity and how they were offered the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time. Out of a staff complement of twenty-eight people, sixteen chose not to participate.

Trustworthiness and the validation of data for accuracy are also discussed in more detail in chapter 3. I used two primary methods to do this: triangulation and member checking. Triangulation "*is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data or methods of data collection*" (Creswell, 2008:266). I did triangulation by comparing information I received from the principal of the school, from current teachers, from observation made by visitors to the school, from documents, interviews and advertising material, to see if those different sources indicated the same things.

Member checking "*is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in this study to check the accuracy of the account. This check involves taking the findings back to the participants and asking them (in writing or in an interview) about the accuracy of the report*" (Creswell, 2008:267). I did member checking by sending relevant parts of my report back to the people who had supplied me with that information, with a request to check for accuracy of information. I did this by e-mail and gave respondents the option to respond (if information was inaccurate) or to send me back comments with inaccuracies.

The significance of this study applies on different levels: firstly, the content and findings of this research can be used by the school that was the sample of this research, to motivate its own staff, but also as part of an induction programme for new staff (to help them understand the culture of their school). Secondly, it has significance for the whole group of

schools of Mowbray College in that they can use the content to help create homogeneity in school culture between the different campuses of this group of schools, but also when opening new campuses in the same group. Thirdly, it has wider significance for other schools in general, which can use the methods described in this study to determine their own school culture and to change it (more about that in chapter 3). Finally, this research provides information that contributes to the understanding of the ways in which independent schools strive to provide quality and excellence in a transformational education environment. The information contained herein is transferable to any other school or organisation.

## **1.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided a brief outline of the subject and purpose of this research, focusing on the background of the school that was chosen to be researched; why this school and this study were selected; how the literature review directed the general methods and approach to the study and how it was undertaken.

Chapter 2 will look in detail at what the literature reveals about organisational and school culture and school climate; how to identify it; examples of previous studies done and why there is room for a study like this in the world of educational research.

## CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW ON SCHOOL CULTURE

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in the previous chapter, the purpose of the literature review was to (a) identify, clarify and define research terminology, (b) to identify what was written about this topic in general, (c) to find good reasons why the research has significance and (d) to look for indicators of school culture and ideas for research methods that could be used.

From the outset the following terms were researched:

school climate/culture/history/ethos/traditions;

organizational climate/culture/history/ethos/traditions; how to create a school culture; leadership and school culture; cultural leadership; symbolic leadership; school culture and management.

Through a study of types of research, both quantitative and qualitative, I was able to satisfy all the purposes that I had with this literature review.

### 2.2 SECTION 1: BROAD LITERATURE

#### 2.2.1 Historical context

The literature about school culture stretches back as far as 1932, when Waller published a book *“The Sociology of Teaching”*, in which he said: *“There are, in the school, complex rituals of personal relationships, a set of folkways, mores, and irrational sanctions, a moral code based upon them”* (Waller, 1932:103). Much of the literature about school culture, refers back to Waller.

According to Maslowski (2006:6), research into school culture *“lay dormant for several decades after Waller’s treatise and gained renewed attention in the 1970s as researchers searched for persistent barriers to educational change and attempted to construct a framework to understand change processes in schools”*. In this statement (and several similar statements found in almost all literature about school culture) lies a powerful motivation for doing more research on school culture: *“The importance of school culture is an old fashioned idea that great business leaders have known for years”* and *“when culture*



*works against you, it's nearly impossible to get anything done"* (Deal & Kennedy, 1983:14), and *"The main conclusion of this research was that, to explain school differences in school achievement the primary factor is the normative climate of the school, that is, the school ethos"* (Van Houtte, 2005:73).

*"Culture became a major theme in organisational science....and was widely recognised as an important feature in the functioning of schools"* in the early 1980s which resulted in a large number of empirical studies in the late 1980s, *"most of which were qualitative and interpretive in nature, collecting data from a small sample of schools. Since then, however, researchers in the field of school culture have become more amenable to large-scale surveys. Over the past decade, several questionnaires have been developed or revised in order to link school culture to school effectiveness and school improvement"* (Maslowski, 2006: 6-7).

### 2.2.2 Climate versus culture

Mieke van Houtte (2005) makes a strong plea for differentiation between the two terms above. She argues that the definition of organisational **climate** depends on one of three approaches, of which two approaches clearly *"stress its perceptual measurement"* (Van Houtte, 2005: 72). Her argument is that perceptions are not necessarily reality, and therefore, any climate research questionnaire measuring 'perceptions', fails to measure the actual situation. Climate is an individual feature, influenced by an individual's perceptions. It is not an organisational feature (Van Houtte, 2005: 75-76).

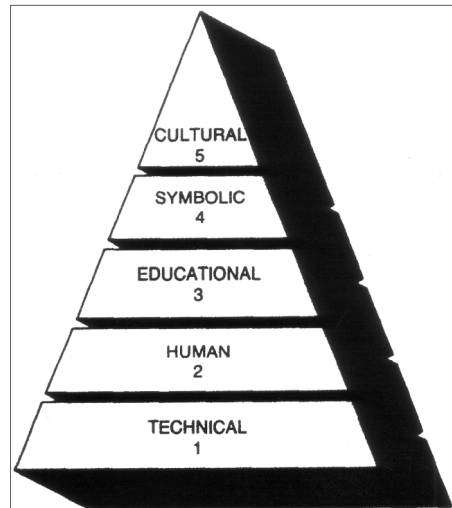
The concept of 'organisational **culture**' is borrowed from anthropology (Glisson, 2000) and most definitions of this concept are similar, for example *"a common set of shared meanings or understandings about the group/organisation and its problems, goals and practises"* (Reichers & Schneider, 1990:23), or *"an informal understanding of the 'way we do things around here' and 'what keeps the herd moving roughly west'. The elements of culture are shared values and beliefs, heroes and heroines, rituals and ceremonies, and an informal network of priests and priestesses, storytellers, spies, and gossips"* (Deal & Kennedy, 1983:14).

### 2.2.3 Theory base

Thomas Sergiovanni (1995:84-93) identified and described five metaphorically viewed 'forces of leadership', namely: technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural. Whereas the first three forces are *"foundational forces that must be provided to ensure that schools will work"*, the last two forces are called *"stretcher forces that help schools rise to levels of extraordinary commitment and performance"*. It is these last two forces, the symbolic leadership and the cultural leadership that should be studied in order to determine how the principal's leadership behaviour contributes to culture forming in a school.

These five leadership forces are presented in the shape of a “hierarchy”, indicating that the symbolic and cultural forces are of a ‘higher order’ and are specifically present in schools that seek excellence, rather than in all schools, where the first three forces have to be present just to ensure that those schools are working.

**DIAGRAM 2.1: THE LEADERSHIP FORCES HIERARCHY**



Source: Sergiovanni (1984:9)

The ‘technical force’ *“is the power of leadership derived from using sound management techniques. This force is concerned with the technical aspects of leadership, and the principal, when using this, assumes the role of ‘management engineer’, including activities like planning, time management, organising, coordinating ... all activities to ensure optimum effectiveness”* (Sergiovanni, 1995:85).

The ‘human force’ is *“the power of leadership derived from harnessing the school’s human resources. When using this force the principal acts as ‘human engineer’”*. Activities are shown in Table 2.1 (Sergiovanni, 1995:85).

The ‘educational force’ is *“the power of leadership derived from expert knowledge about matters of education and schooling. This force is concerned with the educational aspects of leadership”*, and when using this force the principal acts as ‘principal teacher’” (Sergiovanni, 1995:86).

The above-mentioned three foundational forces do not refer to school culture building *per se*, but the next two forces do:

The ‘symbolic force’ is *“the power of leadership derived from matters of importance to the school ... the symbolic aspects of leadership. When using this force the principal acts as ‘chief’, signalling to others what is important and valuable in the school. Presiding over ceremonies, rituals, and rallying the teachers, students and parents to a common cause are actions associated with this leadership force”*. This force clearly comes into play when school culture development is studied (Sergiovanni, 1995:87-88).

The last and most important culture building leadership force is the ‘cultural force’, which is “the power of leadership derived from building a unique school culture. When using this force the principal acts as ‘high priest’ seeking to define, strengthen and articulate those enduring values, beliefs and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity over time” (Sergiovanni, 1995:88-89). Legacy building, transforming the school into a moral community and communicating their sense of vision by words and examples - that is what this leadership force is all about.

Reeves and Reitzug (1992) used the ‘forces of leadership’ framework, to observe the leadership behaviours of a principal and, from these, behaviours they developed a ‘taxonomy of symbolic leadership forms’ as well as a table that summarises the relationship between the five leadership forces and successful schooling.

**TABLE 2.1: TAXONOMY OF SYMBOLIC LEADERSHIP FORMS**

| TABLE 5-1 Taxonomy of Symbolic Leadership Forms |                        |   |
|---|------------------------|---|
| Technical                                       | Human                  | Educational   |
| Planning  | Consideration          | Diagnosing educational problems                       |
| Coordinating                                    | Support                | Coaching/counseling teachers on instructional matters |
| Scheduling                                      | Concerns               | Supervision of instruction                            |
| Budgeting                                       | Individuality          | Evaluation of instruction                             |
| Accounting                                      | Autonomy               | Program development                                   |
| Initiating structure                            | Encouragement          | Curriculum development                                |
| forms management                                | Reinforcement          | Staff development                                     |
|   | Growth opportunities   | Discussing instructional program                      |
|   | Building morale        | Providing growth opportunities                        |
|   | Shared decision making |   |
|   | Conflict management    |   |
|   | Discipline             |   |
|   | Team building          |   |
|   | Counseling             |   |

| Actions   | Symbolic/Culture        |                               |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
|   | Language                | Artefacts                     |
| Way time is spent   | Conversations           | Documents                     |
| Where energy is committed   | Questions asked         | Agendas                       |
| Meetings attended   | Topics discussed        | Handbooks                     |
| Where meetings are located  | Announcements           | Letters                       |
| Which items result in follow-up   | Feedback given          | Memos                         |
| Presiding over ceremonies, rituals  | Gestures                | Mission/vision statements     |
| Things rewarded   | Nonverbal communication | Newsletters                   |
| Downplaying one type of activity (e.g., management) in favor of another (e.g., educational) | Stories                 | Policy books                  |
| Modeling  | Jokes                   | School philosophies           |
| Touring school  | Myths                   | Slogans                       |
| Visiting classrooms   | Legends                 | Teacher bulletins             |
| Spending time with students, staff  | Favorite sayings        | Grant proposals               |
| Rituals   | Slogans                 | Written correspondence        |
| Rites of passage  | Recurring phrases       | Other documents               |
| Ceremonies  | Rumors                  | School products               |
| Way that resources are acquired   | Content of documents    | Badges, pins, buttons         |
| What resources are requested  | Songs sung              | Displayed objects             |
| Way that resources are expanded   | Books read              | Bulletin boards               |
| Decisions made  |                         | <i>Artefacts (intangible)</i> |
| Materials distributed   |                         | Heroes                        |
| Gifts given   |                         | Cultural network              |
| Procedures/policies developed   |                         |                               |

Source: Reeves and Reitzug (1992: 192)

Schein (1985) and others described school culture as existing on different levels. Each level refers to a degree of visibility to an observer, from the most visible or tangible level (artefacts) to the least tangible level (assumptions). In his original model, Schein (1985) described three levels namely, (1) artefacts, (2) espoused values & beliefs and (3) underlying assumptions. Maslowski (2006:7) adapted Schein’s model slightly by adding descriptions of what one would look for on each of these three levels, to be able to identify them (his descriptions are indicated in the model below in blue).

Sergiovanni (1995:108) separated Schein’s second level (espoused values and beliefs) into two, namely a ‘level of perspectives’ and a ‘level of values’. Table 2.2 below is a representation of Sergiovanni’s interpretation of Schein’s levels, combined with the adaptations suggested by Maslowski:

**TABLE 2.2: LEVELS OF CULTURE**

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <p><b>LEVEL OF ARTEFACTS</b></p>    | <p>What people say (verbal artefacts), how people behave (behavioural artefacts) and what things look like (physical artefacts).<br/> <i>Artefacts and practices e.g. symbols, rites, rituals, myths, visible and audible behaviour patterns.</i></p>  |
| <p><b>LEVEL OF PERSPECTIVES</b></p> | <p>Perspectives refer to the shared rules and norms to which people respond (what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour).</p>   |
| <p><b>LEVEL OF VALUES</b></p>       | <p>Values provide the basis for people to judge or evaluate situations they face, the worth of their actions and their priorities, not only specifying what is important, but also things that are not important.<br/> <i>It refers to a sense of what ought to be done.</i></p>   |
| <p><b>LEVEL OF ASSUMPTIONS</b></p>  | <p>Those “<i>tacit beliefs that members hold about themselves and others, their relationship to other persons, and the nature of the organisation in which they live</i>” (Lundberg, 1985:172).<br/> <i>Assumptions refer to taken-for-granted beliefs that staff members perceive to be ‘true’ about things like:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- their relationships to the environment,</li> <li>- the nature of reality,</li> <li>- the nature of human nature,</li> <li>- the nature of human activity, and</li> <li>- the nature of human relationships.</li> </ul> |

Sources: Sergiovanni (1995:108) and Maslowski (2006:7)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sections in blue represent Maslowski (2006)’s adaptations of Schein (1985)’s original model

To identify the culture of a school, Sergiovanni (1995:108) suggests the use of these four levels of culture as a framework. *“Because assumptions are difficult to identify first hand, they often must be inferred from what is found in the artefacts, perspectives and values levels. Much can be learned from the school’s history.”*

Schein (1985) also believes that *“an organisation’s basic assumptions about itself can be revealed through its history”*, and he suggests that *“the history be analysed by identifying all major crises, crucial transitions, and other times of high emotion. For each event identified, reconstruct how management dealt with the issue, how it identified its role, and what it did and why. Patterns and themes across the various events identified should then be analysed and checked against current practices. The next step is to identify the assumptions that were behind actions taken in the past and check whether those assumptions are still relevant for present actions”*.

According to Killmann et al “in addition to the layers of school culture three aspects of culture can be identified: (1) content, (2) homogeneity and (3) strength” (Killmann et al, 1986).

**TABLE 2.3: LAYERS OF CULTURE**

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| CONTENT     | <p>This is also called ‘substance of culture’. It refers to the meaning of basic assumptions, norms and values as well as cultural artefacts shared by the school staff.</p> <p>The content is often characterised by means of dimensions or typologies of culture for example a ‘<i>collaborative culture</i>’ or ‘<i>achievement oriented culture</i>’</p>   |
| HOMOGENEITY | <p>This refers to the extent to which basic assumptions, norms, values and cultural artefacts are shared by the school staff.</p> <p>A culture is homogeneous if (nearly) all staff members ascribe to the same assumptions, norms and values.</p> <p>Different values and norms do not imply, however, that a culture is heterogeneous. Across different subject departments (or schools in a group), subcultures may emerge. One single school may be relatively homogeneous, but across schools one might see ‘subcultures’. Maslowski (2001) calls this ‘cultural differentiation’, ‘cultural segmentation’ or ‘balkanisation of culture’ in schools.</p> <p>Meyerson &amp; Martin (1987) calls it the ‘integration perspective’, ‘fragmentation perspective’ and ‘differentiation perspective’.</p> |
| STRENGTH    | <p>This refers to the extent to which the behaviour of school staff is actually influenced or determined by assumptions, values, norms and artefacts that are shared in the school.</p>  |

Adapted from: Maslowski (2006: 8-9)

## 2.3 SECTION 2: DETAILED LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.3.1 Quantitative or qualitative?

Maslowski (2006) did a review of inventories for diagnosing school culture (discussed in greater detail in the next paragraph). He identified six questionnaires on the basis of very specific criteria and discussed each in detail. In his final discussion and conclusion, he says:

*“School practitioners and researchers will, of course, only make use of these inventories measuring the culture of a school when they believe that this culture can indeed be adequately described using quantitative techniques”* (Maslowski, 2006:27). He mentions critics like Steinhoff and Owens (1989) and Schein (1985) who are challenging the purpose of survey techniques in school culture research, and whether questionnaires are suited for *“identifying more deeply hidden underlying aspects of culture”*. Maslowski admits that the six questionnaires discussed in his review *“are most certainly not conducive to directly investigating latent assumptions or the sense-making meanings of events in school”* (2006:27), which means that the deepest level of culture (according to Schein’s model) cannot be determined through questionnaires. Most school culture inventories in Maslowski’s review *“clearly aim at investigating ‘the way we do things around here’ – a measuring of staff behaviour or school practices”* (Maslowski, 2006:27). That means that quantitative techniques can be used to measure some lower levels of culture (according to Schein’s model), and the idea of mixing methods for purposes of triangulation is a good idea for possible further research.

### 2.3.2 Review of quantitative studies

Maslowski (2006) selected six questionnaires on the basis of five criteria. Each questionnaire had to comply with the following requirements:

- a It had to measure basic assumptions, values and norms or cultural artefacts shared by the members of a school. Questionnaires that measured ‘climate’ were excluded.
- b It had to measure different aspects or dimensions of school culture. One-dimensional questionnaires were excluded.
- c It had to be explicitly developed for diagnosing culture of schools. More general instruments for measuring organisational culture were excluded.
- d It needed to be directed at organisational processes in schools and therefore had to be addressed to school staff. Questionnaires that measured normative expectations in classrooms or values teachers show in their relationships to students, were excluded.
- e It had to be validated, so questionnaires which were not analysed for their reliability and validity, were excluded.

The **first** questionnaire selected was “designed to improve school culture”, consisting of three scales: (1) teacher professionalism and goal setting, (2) professional treatment by administration and (3) teacher collaboration, each with a number of statements (24 items in total) that teachers had to rank on a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

The **second** questionnaire selected was designed for superintendents in British Columbia “who wanted to develop and coach their principals”, consisting of four scales: (1) School wide planning, (2) professional development, (3) Program development and (4) School assessment, each with a number of statements (60 items in total) that teachers also had to rank on a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

The **third** questionnaire selected was designed for primary schools to identify professional culture, consisting of three ‘privileged domains’: (1) The principal as builder and carrier of culture, (2) Goal consensus and (3) Professional relationships between teachers. Later a fourth domain was added namely (4) Lack of an internal network of professional support. Each domain contained seven statements (28 items in total) that teachers had to rank on a six-point Likert scale.

The **fourth** questionnaire selected was also designed to measure organisational climate in primary schools in the Netherlands. This questionnaire included fifteen scales (containing 123 items in total) namely: Harmony of the school team, Responsibility for instructional processes, Appreciation of teachers’ qualities and capacities, Emphasis on teachers’ professional development, Flexibility, Emphasis on school growth, Emphasis on public relations, Ability to innovate, Formality of information sharing, Communication on educational matters, Stability, Emphasis on achievement, Emphasis on reaching school objectives, Efficiency, and Trust in own effectiveness. The teachers had to rank each of the 123 items on a Likert scale of 1 to 6.

The **fifth** questionnaire selected was designed for secondary schools in Hong Kong, consisting of ten subscales containing 64 items. The ten subscales were (1) Formality, (2) Bureaucratic control, (3) Rationality, (4) Achievement orientation, (5) Participation and collaboration, (6) Collegiality, (7) Goal orientation, (8) Communication and staff consensus, (9) Professional orientation and (10) Teacher autonomy. This questionnaire used a seven-point Likert scale.

The **sixth** and last questionnaire selected consisted of two parts: the first concerned with what actually took place in the school and the second with what respondents would prefer the school to be like. The six scales it chose (containing 42 items) were (1) Teacher efficacy, (2) Emphasis on learning, (3) Collegiality, (4) Collaboration, (5) Shared planning and (6) Transformational leadership. This questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale.

All six questionnaires chosen clearly show similar scales and items. They all measure more or less similar items like: (1) professional behaviour (by teachers and administration), (2) collaboration and collegiality, (3) goal and achievement orientation and (4) the leadership style of the principal.

Two relevant statements made by critics of the approaches used in these questionnaires are:

1. *“that these questionnaires are not directed towards the diagnosis of school cultures, but measure school climate instead”*. Maslowski’s response is that *“this criticism*



certainly has some merit, as the dimensions or scales used in school culture inventories are more or less comparable to those used in school climate questionnaires” (Maslowski, 2006:28) and

2. “Based on an explicit conceptual framework or theory of organisational culture, these (staff) behavioural aspects can be interpreted in terms of values and norms. In principle, this is not different from qualitative studies where observations, conversations, interviews and document analysis are subsequently analysed and interpreted to depict the culture of a school” (Maslowski, 2006:28).

### 2.3.3 Quantitative study in Ohio (USA)

Kowalski and Hermann (2008) did quantitative school culture research in nine high schools in America. Their aim was to determine whether there was a “*nexus between school culture and student performance*” (55). They used a quantitative research method: the School Culture Quality Survey (SCQS), which was done nationally, but this study compared their nine schools’ results with the national results and with each other.

To determine whether a school had a positive or negative school climate, they looked at the “*homogeneity of employee convictions*” (2008:58), namely “*a standardized instrument relying on teacher perceptions of their work environments*” (2008:60). They also used the SCQS to “*identify the extent to which professional community generally*” exist in schools, and more specifically “*four elements of a professional community: shared vision, facilitative leadership, teamwork and learning community*” (2008:60).

Compared to the national survey, the study group had more positive school cultures on three of the four subscales and were more positive on the overall cultural profile (professional community). Compared to one another, the individual school cultures were dissimilar and varied from weak to strong and negative to positive. The overall cultural profiles varied considerably, even in a relatively small geographical area. The considerable variance supports the contention that school culture needs to be assessed.

The researchers then compared four demographic variables: (1) % disadvantaged students, (2) family income, (3) school enrolment and (4) % minority students with two performance variables: (1) grade 10 test results and (2) school graduation results, to measure school effectiveness. The outcome of the study showed the following:

- the greater the % of disadvantaged students in the school, the less positive the culture profile (strong negative relationship);
- the higher the median family income, the more positive the culture profile (moderate positive relationship); and
- the size of the school (school enrolment) and % minority students did not impact significantly on the culture profile.

On the two performance variables, both variables showed that when the school culture profile was more positive, the academic results of the students were better (strong positive relationship).

The implications of this research are that school culture is associated with school effectiveness and therefore the study of school culture is important. This study proves how school culture research can be done quantitatively, but the researchers admit that *“studies that have reported associations between positive school cultures and higher student outcomes typically have been conducted with quantitative surveys of teacher opinions and self-reported behaviours”* (Kowalski & Hermann, 2008:59). The validity of such studies is challenged by the contention that culture must be *“measured only by observation of the setting using qualitative methods”* (Hall & Hord, 2001:194).

### 2.3.4 Qualitative study

Willower and Smith (1987) did a qualitative school culture study on two public, secondary schools in the north-eastern United States. The purpose was *“to examine selected schools and to search for indicators of culture peculiar to each school”* (Willower & Smith, 1987:88).

They collected data by using both open-ended and structured interviews with teachers, students, administrators and other staff members. In the structured interviews they asked questions to probe for shared elements of culture; questions like *“What does this school mean to you?”* and *“What is most important to you about this school?”* (Willower & Smith, 1987:88). They also did participant observation for 26 school days, *“towards the end of the academic year when graduation and other ceremonial activities might reflect the expression of school cultures”* and *“documents such as newspaper clippings, school yearbooks and artefacts such as bulletin boards and trophy cases were examined in each school”* (Willower & Smith, 1987:88). Later data collection was influenced by earlier data collection, as leads were followed up.

The researchers *“hoped that the data would stimulate speculative explanation concerning school cultures”* (Willower & Smith, 1987:88).

In their findings, mention was made of two categories of observations: firstly those concerning the faculties of the two schools including the administrators, and secondly those concerning the students.

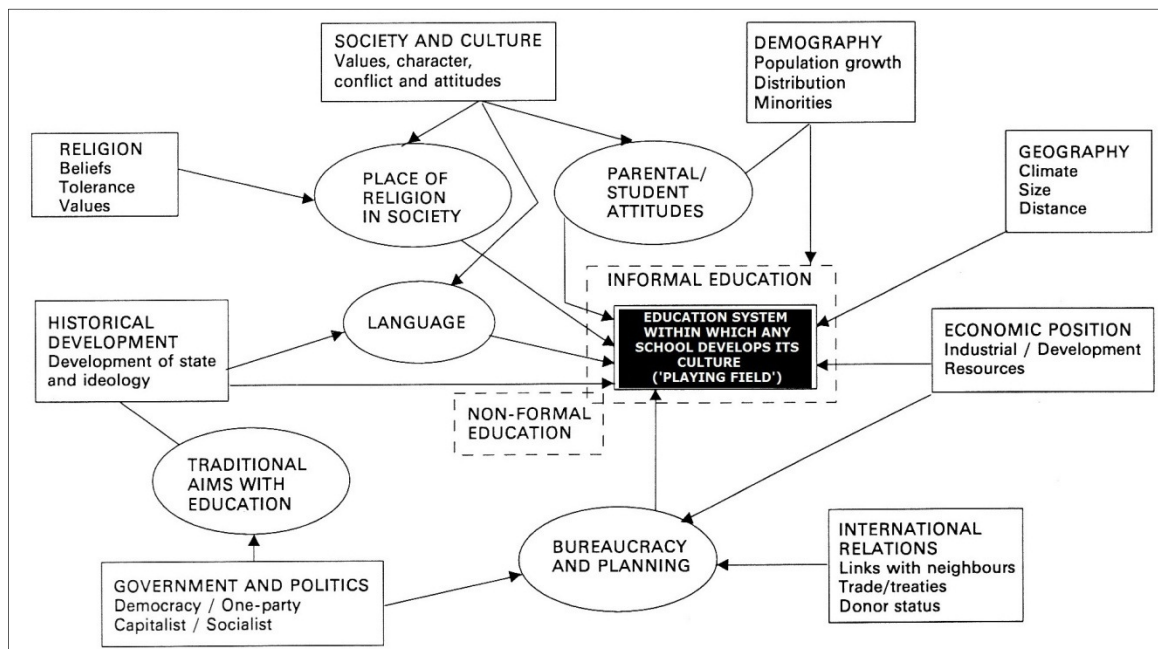
In both the findings and in the discussion, the ‘indicators of culture’ in each of the schools, which they mentioned as the purpose of their study, were very weakly identified and as such this study was not hugely successful. No mention was made of the documents and artefacts that had been observed.

Although the quantitative methods mentioned in the previous two paragraphs were criticised, this qualitative study (one of very few) is, in terms of its significance open for major criticism, such as the fact that it did not clearly solve its own research purpose (to search for indicators of culture).

### 2.3.5 The 'playing field'

Nieuwenhuis (1996) wrote a book about the development of education systems in postcolonial Africa. At one stage he describes “determinants of an education system”: the sphere within which any education system develops. I adapted that model to be applicable to any specific school or group of schools in any country, to give an idea of what I call ‘the playing field’ in which that school develops. It shows those forces and influences that impact on any school. The leadership of the school must manoeuvre and manage and build its unique school culture within the boundaries and forces of this ‘playing field’, constantly adapting and thinking about impacts of policy changes, political-historical changes, geographical and/or cultural changes (for example when a new school is opened in a different city, with a different society) and economic changes (especially when it concerns an independent school whose very existence is subject to the economic position of its clients).

**DIAGRAM 2.2: DETERMINANTS OF AN EDUCATION SYSTEM**



Source: Nieuwenhuis, 1996:125  
Adapted from: Watson, 1994

## 2.4 CONCLUSION

There is a clear difference between school climate and school culture that needs to be kept in mind: whereas school culture is an organizational phenomenon, climate is an individual perceptual one. This is the reason why the research approach must steer away from perceptual questions and focus on what really happened and still happens.

The research has significance, because the literature clearly shows how the school culture has an impact on the school's performance. If a school is aware of its school culture and the principal understands how it is formed, he (or she) can use that knowledge to manipulate a negative school culture into a positive one, which would result in better academic performance of its students. If a new school is started and the leaders in that school use this knowledge, they can create a positive school culture from scratch, which will result in more positive academic results. The same can be said for a principal moving to a school that clearly has a negative school climate. Using the knowledge and methods from this research, he or she can manipulate the climate into a more positive one, with the resulting positive outcomes in student performance.

What is clear from the literature is a sufficient number of indicators of culture, especially in the theoretical literature and the quantitative studies, that can direct this study.

This chapter looked at the historical context of organisational and school culture, the terminology used and at some examples of both quantitative and qualitative studies into the identification of school culture. These studies supply a variety of indicators that I decided to also use in my study. They also supplied a good theoretical grounding, which I could use in my study of the creation of a school culture in an independent school, about the different levels of school culture and to determine exactly how the principal's leadership behaviour influenced this. Finally they provided excellent suggestions of what to look for in a school when school culture is investigated and described.

The next chapter describes how I used these methods, terminology and ideas to design a research study into the way in which an independent school created a successful organisational climate as well as the methods that were used to conduct the study.

## CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

---

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This is a qualitative study, resulting in a narrative report. This chapter details the approach that was used, the way in which participants were identified and the methods that were used to collect the data. It also outlines some ethical considerations, limitations and the significance of this study.

### 3.2 PARADIGM: ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

A paradigm is a set of beliefs and assumptions about reality, about a world view and about the way that a researcher looks at knowledge. This study takes a view of reality described as “interpretivism”, which implies that it “*focuses on people – how and why they interact with each other and their motives and relationships*” (Maree, 2007:54) and the fact that it is “*about the ‘deeper’ meanings of social actions .... and how they have been shaped over time and history*” by a variety of factors to form a new reality. This reality, which does not exist separate from the researcher, is what is investigated in this study.

In an interpretive paradigm, the “*subjective world of human experience*” (Cohen, 2000:22) is investigated to understand and interpret why people acted the way they did and how they created the school culture as it is today.

Maree (2007:55) talks about ‘epistemology’, which “*relates to how things can be known – how truths or facts... can be discovered*”. He explains that qualitative researchers “*believe that the world is made up of people with their own assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs and values*” and that “*human activities must be investigated in terms of meanings – why people say this, do this or act in this or that way - and must be interpreted by linking them to other human events to enable greater understanding*”. Such a study assumes that knowledge is created by social interaction and can therefore be described as subjective in nature.

This study is a subjective interpretation of the social interaction between people and how that helped in creating and shaping a successful school culture over time. A qualitative study is therefore a perfect fit.

### 3.3 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Maree (2007:47) explains qualitative research *“in terms of the range of understanding of use”*. He explains that *“we need to delve deeper into qualitative research as a research methodological paradigm.... as an alternative to positivist thinking that dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century”*.

A qualitative approach is employed because the research report takes a narrative format and focuses on existing information in the form of artefacts like documents, letters, mission/vision statements, newsletters, yearbooks, policy documents, written correspondence, semi-structured interviews with people who were involved, school products, photographs, displayed objects, newspaper articles and intangible artefacts like heroes/heroines.

I could have opted for the route of a quantitative approach with structured interviews and standardised questionnaires in order to get answers on current views on the school culture, but then I would possibly not reach the deepest level of assumptions (Schein, 1985).

### 3.4 EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

*“A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection. ‘Bounded’ means that the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place or some physical boundaries”* (Creswell, 2008:476). I chose a case study, because this study only focuses on one specific group of schools and it does an in depth study of one school in the group, over a limited time period. It is an exploratory case study, because I was not sure what I was going to find and how duplicable this method would be onto other schools, but also because it was a search into ‘unknown territory’. The historical aspect of the study and the forces of leadership that must have played a role in the formation of the school’s culture, made this study a *“historical and leadership analysis”*.

### 3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Early in 2011, the general manager (GM) of the group of schools had an interview with the founder about the early days of his school. Later the GM asked me to have further discussions with him and with other people involved in the early days.

In July 2011 I travelled to the founder city to gather information for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary function that was held in October 2011. These discussions focussed on the school’s history, for the purpose of preparing a speech and a school magazine article on the school’s history.

Some of the information shared in those discussions shed some light on the original ideas and proposed school culture in the early years.

I also had discussions with:

- Anthony Mowbray<sup>4</sup> (founder of the school).
- A former teacher who lives in the founder city, who does not work at the school anymore.

At the celebratory function in October, I met:

- Some alumni students
- Two previous principals
- Some former parents

I studied the following artefacts in the archives and at the school:

- Appointment dates of principals and who they were
- Dates of major events that had impacted on the school
- Previous yearbooks
- Photographs
- Mission/vision statements
- Objects displayed in the school
- Policy books
- Slogans
- Written correspondence (like letters)
- School objects like badges, ties, uniforms
- Advertising material
- Stories about students and memorable things they did
- A report, compiled by the company who owns this school, about activities at the school. This initiative is called “Building on Excellence, A review of good practice” at that school.”

I visited the sites of the original school to get an idea of why that site was chosen and how it could impact on the original idea behind the school (then and now). I also obtained photographs to illustrate the story.

My document research and interviews with people focused on:

1. What was the original idea behind the school?
2. Who was the target market?
3. From where did the students originate?

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym



4. What were the school fees (and how did this impact on who came to the school)?
5. Who were the teachers (and how were they selected)?
6. Who were the students?
7. Which examinations did they write and why?
8. What was the relationship with the Education Department and could I find names of people that were closely involved with the school in its early years?
9. What was the relationship with the Universities?
10. To whom was the school sold? When? Why?
11. The construction of a timeline of the school over the 40 years, to identify major events that could have impacted on the development of the school.
12. Which problems were encountered over the years with examinations (different examinations for different races), multiculturalism, perceptions of the school and who went to the school, legislation regarding foreigners studying at the school, facilities and extramural activities, school rules and older students studying at the school ... and any other problems that might stimulate further questions?
13. Traditions that developed over the years at the schools.
14. Typical events, activities and ways of doing things at the school.
15. Identification of typical 'sayings', stories, statements, products and displays that would complement and confirm what was stated in the mission statements.

To get access to the schools I asked permission from “gatekeepers” (Creswell, 2008:219) namely the Group General Manager, but also from the school principal of the current school.

### 3.5.1 Demarcation

This research is limited to the first four years of the original school, 1971-1974 (to get a historical perspective on the original ideas) and the last four years of one of the current schools in Cape Town, 2009-2012 (to get a picture of the current school culture in that school). For purposes of understanding which “*major crises, crucial transitions and times of high emotion*” (Schein, 1985) had occurred in the years between 1971 and 2012, the years in between were included, but only where they involved events that had had an impact on the school culture that are still relevant for present actions.

### 3.5.2 Sampling

I used a convenience sample (because I have reasonably easy access to the archives and people at the selected school), and also a purposive sample of only one specific school and its principal, because it best helped me understand the history and culture of the school.



Out of a group of five schools in South Africa, I chose the one school because its principal has a link with the original school (before he was appointed principal, he was a teacher at the campus of the original Mowbray College).

### 3.5.3 Data analysis and interpretation

The process of data analysis and interpretation was completed along the following route: First, I collected as many documents, yearbooks, pictures, policy documents, mission and vision statements as possible, and as much marketing material and information from previous interviews, conducted with people who had worked there many years ago, as possible; in short, anything that could help in understanding what these schools were doing and why. I also went to the previous sites and visited the current school included in this research. I took pictures, observed the activities on the campus and had conversations with many of the staff members. Finally, I invited all the current staff to participate in a structured interview via e-mail in which they could answer twenty-five questions about their school and what it meant to them.

Creswell (2008:227) discusses the advantages and dangers of using e-mail as a method of data collection. Typical advantages are the rapid access to large numbers of people and the fact that it is an easy method to use in today's technologically advanced world. I did not need to reach a large number of people. The list of e-mail addresses was easily obtainable from the school. Where this method of data collection helped me, was when I had to get access to participants over a large distance. Without having to visit each participant, I could get the information from them, and it provided an opportunity to have an online conversation to clarify questions if there were any. This method of data collection had advantages for the participants as well, because they could answer the question when they wanted, in the convenience of their own spaces (whether at home or at school behind a computer) and they could complete the questionnaire across several sessions: for example, by taking a break to go and teach or do something else, and then return later to continue. It also gave them time to think about their answers, to re-visit and possibly change them and to send them to me only when they felt ready to do so.

*"However, e-mail interviewing raises complex ethical issues, such as whether you have permission for individuals to participate in your interview, and whether you will protect the privacy of responses"* (Creswell (2008:227)). The fact that I did not conduct interviews with any unknown participants (for whom permission could be tricky), and that I went to meet them before the questionnaires were sent out, addressed this ethical concern. All participants were together in the staff room when I introduced myself, explained the research topic, its purpose, and how I wanted them to participate. I explained to them that they were not obliged to participate and that I guaranteed them anonymity. I also gave

them the permission letters to complete in person and explained how the e-mail interviewing would work. All prospective participants were, therefore, prepared in advance to cooperate or to choose to decline the invitation to participate.

After collecting all the artefacts and returned interview answers, I read through all the material gathered, simultaneously making a list of topics (codes) identifiable as important. This resulted in a list of approximately 30 codes. A closer look at the codes and the combination of similar codes resulted in the identification of eight major 'themes'. The same eight themes were identified in both the historical as well as in the current research material. A visual image (diagram) was then created to represent the data (see diagram in chapter 4).

### 3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

As explained briefly in chapter 1, I used two methods to test the accuracy of my data: triangulation and member checking. Maree (2007:39) describes triangulation as "*critical in facilitating interpretive validity and establishing data trustworthiness*". His description of the method is "*to rely on information collected from a diverse range of individuals, teams and settings, using a variety of methods*", which he also calls 'crystallisation' – "*the practice of 'validating' results by using multiple methods of data collection and analysis*" (Maree, 2007:40). Triangulation in this study was done exactly in the way described: getting data from a variety of sources and comparing what these sources said and whether they corroborated one another.

I also used 'member checking' (*the process whereby a researcher takes the findings back to the participants and asks them about the accuracy of the report* (Creswell, 2008:267), as part of my quest for trustworthiness of information. I did it by sending parts of my report back to the people who supplied me with information (the teachers who participated in my e-mail questionnaire), with the request to check for accuracy of information. The participants were given the option to respond (if information was inaccurate) or to send me back comments with inaccuracies. I received two responses back. The first was from the founder, with slight alterations to the field notes I had made when I had met with him in 2011, and the second was from a staff member who looked at the notes I sent her and said: "*Thank you for sharing this chapter of your dissertation with me. I found it really interesting and in fact inspiring – every now and again I had to remind myself that I actually work at this place being described and realised how lucky I am to work with people who are so passionate about educating young people in such a creative and relevant environment. From what I have read there are no inaccuracies.*"

### 3.7 LIMITATIONS

The ‘halo-effect’ was something that could be considered a limitation. People are proud of this school and would tend to say only those things they are proud of and which they consider positive. The whole investigation into this school brought out very few negative comments. I asked the principal why that was, and his surprising response was that there actually were very few negatives that he could identify himself. He also mentioned that sometimes the same question was asked by parents after the enrolment interviews, and that he responded in the same way.

### 3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I was given permission to conduct the research by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria.

To protect participants I offered them anonymity in the research report when sensitive issues were raised. Names were changed or replaced by pseudonyms or codes (both for individuals and for specific schools), but since this study will also be used by the schools themselves and by future generations, I mentioned facts that might result in an impossibility to hide identities because it involves the history of the school. In all instances, I asked permission to use their stories and explained that their identities might not be hidden. I shared my report with them where needed, so they could verify the facts.

I received authorization from the group General Manager. He manages all the Mowbray Colleges in South Africa. He gave his full support to this research, including access to all campuses, archives, documentation and artefacts needed to answer the research questions.

Permission to interview individuals was requested from each participant and they were given permission letters to sign. They were told that they were free to participate and to withdraw at any stage. After almost the whole staff had given me permission letters, half of them opted for the choice not to participate. The reason for this is most probably the length of the e-mail questionnaire, and the time it was going to take them to complete it. Each participant spent at least an hour to complete the questions and to mail it back to me. For their time and efforts I am enormously grateful.

Permission was also granted by the principal to interview himself as well as his staff. Anonymity of the school was promised, by offering the use of pseudonyms. Since the outcome of this research and the content of the research report were going to be available to the staff, the anonymity of the principal was obviously not guaranteed internally (inside the school community). The school only had one principal and references to “the principal” would not hide his identity, irrespective of the use of pseudonyms. This was explained to

and accepted by him. Outside the school community, his anonymity was more guaranteed. Since the content of the research report contains very little information of a sensitive nature, this was not a major ethical consideration.

### **3.9 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The research has significance because the literature clearly shows how school culture can have a positive impact on the school's performance, if a negative culture is changed. This research will have practical use for the management of this group of schools because they can use its content when setting up more schools in different parts of South Africa. It has wider significance, because other school groups (private and public) can use the methods and concepts in their schools too, as it can assist in obtaining better results and higher efficiency. I hope it can help school leaders to understand how they can use their leadership to give direction in the school culture development during times of change and to provide wider understanding of our knowledge of independent schools in a transformational environment.

In the search for "*persistent barriers to educational change*", this research may contribute to the attempts "*to construct a framework for understanding change processes in schools*" (Maslowski, 2006:6), especially where school cultures are concerned.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

Chapter 3 explains how the research was done and what all the considerations were in deciding the scope, the methodology and the significance of the study. What follows in the next chapter is a description of the outcomes of the methods outlined in chapter 3. In chapter 3 the scope of the study is analysed and it is divided in meaningful parts; Firstly into two parts regarding time (a historical and a current perspective); Secondly each of these two is broken down into the four "levels of culture" as suggested by Schein (1985), and thirdly each of these 'levels' is discussed in terms of the eight themes identified throughout the data. Chapter 4 presents all the research data as it unfolds in the different parts as described above.

# CHAPTER 4

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

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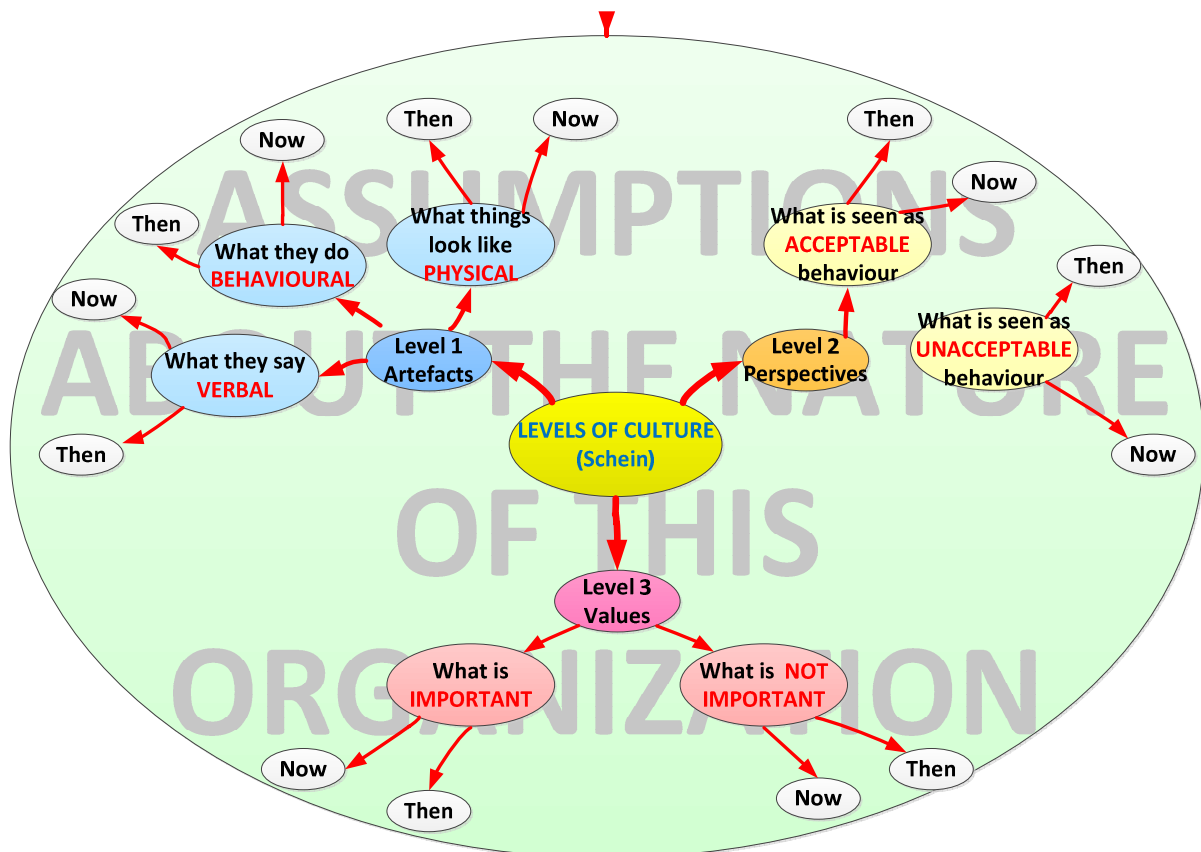
### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is divided into two main parts, corresponding with the demarcation of the study. The first part is an analysis of the first four years of the original school: the historical perspective. The second part provides an analysis of the most recent four years of one of the current schools: the current perspective. Each part starts with an examination of (a) what material the researcher used and (b) the things that he identified, described per theme. However, the second part (current perspective) also has three extra sections: results from questions posed to current staff, a section about stories, and a section about the current principal. The afore-mentioned eight main topics (also see diagram 4.2) are indicated and discussed in the subsequent sections.

In the process of analysing the information gathered, the researcher looked carefully at the four levels of culture as proposed by Schein (1985). The following diagram illustrates how these 'levels of culture' were broken down into parts, level 4 represented by the words in the background.

(The words "*What they say*", "*What they do*" and "*What things look like*" on the diagram, refer directly back to the "Levels of Culture, of Schein (Table 2.2), more specifically the "Level of Artefacts", where these terms are used. Later in this research report, these same phrases are used to refer to "what the school says about itself", "what the school does" and "what things look like in the school".)

**DIAGRAM 4.1: FRAMEWORK FOR INTERPRETATION OF LEVELS OF CULTURE**



On the surface, the first three levels can be seen. Level 1 represents artefacts: what people say (verbal artefacts), what people do (behavioural artefacts) and what things look like (physical artefacts). For each of these types of artefacts, the historical perspective (then) and the current perspective (now) were used. At this level, one can clearly see that the people in the organisation do not necessarily need to understand why certain things are said, done or presented. One can almost not speak about school 'culture' yet, because these are merely an indication of a school 'climate'.

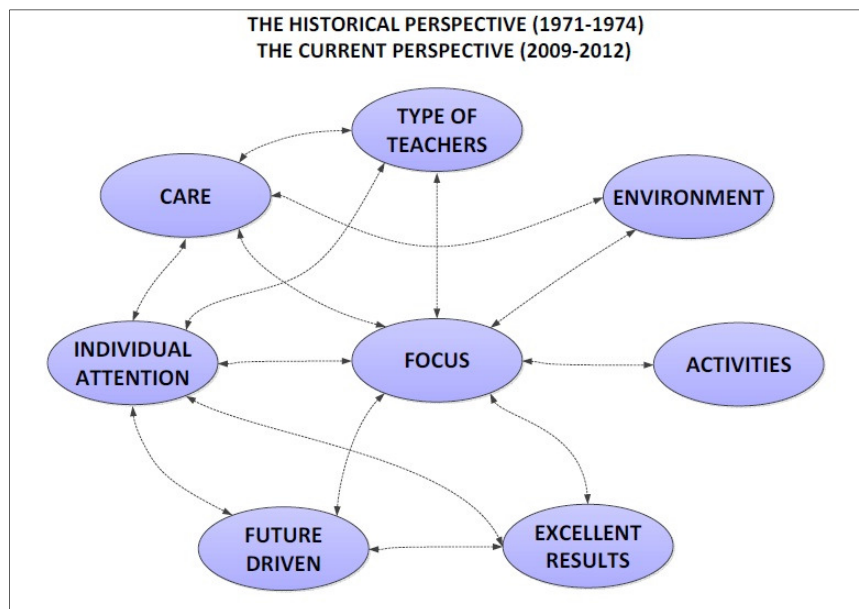
Level 2 represents perspectives: what is seen as acceptable behaviour and what is seen as unacceptable behaviour. Even when one speaks about acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, it is still reasonably clear that the people in the organisation do not necessarily need to understand why. They could merely learn these behaviours and act that way. That is why this level is seen as a lower level of culture.

Level 3 represents values. At this level, 'symbolic leadership' and 'cultural leadership' (Sergiovanni, 1984) start to play fairly important roles. To identify the values (what is important and what is not important), I had to look at what the principal was saying. A certain level of understanding among the people in the organisation had to be present to understand why certain things were more important than others.

The last and deepest level of culture can be seen on this diagram in the background of the other three levels. This level of assumptions (what people in the organisation think about the nature of the organisation in which they live, and the reason for doing certain things) forms the foundation for the other three levels. This level of culture is associated with a good understanding by all the members in the organisation of who they are, what they do, what they should do, how they should do it, why they are doing it that way, and how this organisation views some fundamental issues like the nature of students, the nature of the teachers, the purpose of teaching, what relationships should be like, and a sense of why they are there.

During the data analysis and interpretation stage of the research material, I created the following diagram that represents the eight main topics identified in the data.

**DIAGRAM 4.2: THEMES IDENTIFIED**



In this chapter, each of the eight main topics (as shown in the diagram) are discussed in two parts: the historical perspective and the current perspective.

## 4.2 THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (1971-1974)

### 4.2.1 Material researched

The following five artefacts were included:

- A notes from an interview with the founder of the school (verbal artefact), done in 2011 before the 40th anniversary celebrations of Mowbray Colleges in South Africa.

- B a newspaper clipping (physical artefact) published in a community newspaper after the retirement in December 2010 of a teacher who had taught at the College for 39 years.
- C yearbooks (physical artefact). The researcher was able to find three of the first four years' yearbooks. These yearbooks provided evidence of what had been done in the first few years (behavioural artefacts).
- D photographs taken at the sites of the first campus during its first years (physical artefacts)
- E a wooden scroll, displayed in the oldest school, listing students since 1972 who had been placed first in South Africa in certain subjects (physical artefact).

## 4.2.2 Research findings per themes identified

### 4.2.2.1 Focus

On the first page of the yearbook of 1972 there is a picture of the first school crest. The motto is "Vive et Disce". This motto is translated and explained later in the yearbook: "*to live and to learn, it says, about the motto which evolved during a science lesson*" (Yearbook, 1972:26). In his message, the principal comments on the motto: "*Vive et Disce is a very worthy motto and a very true one*" (Yearbook, 1972:3). This is the first indication that the focus of the school was a combination of living (social dimension) and learning (academic dimension). Throughout the first three yearbooks, one can see from the topics discussed, that the students in the school had great fun (activities like cricket, rugby, squash, cross country and dance) but also that learning played a huge role in the first school (references are made to lunch-time talks, career guidance excursions and actual matric results).

In the foyer of the current school, I found a photograph of the very first class of 1971. I counted 59 matriculants. That represented the whole school, because the school only had matriculants. In the yearbook I counted a wide subject choice - 15 subjects! (Yearbook, 1972:4). For a very small school this seems to be a very wide choice indeed - another indication of the academic focus of the school.

The 1973 magazine mentions "*extra classes on Saturday mornings*" (Yearbook, 1973:2). On the next page the principal writes: "*I hope you have enjoyed your year with us and more particularly I hope you will be successful in the 'main game' at the end of the year*", referring to the examination they wrote at the end of that year. He also refers to "*an imposing record of examination results in its first two years*" (Yearbook, 1973:3).

From the many pictures in those yearbooks, one could say that most of the students were fairly mature: young adults. One of these students, a 'sister Christa', wrote about her experience at the school. She said: "*I had no idea when I applied to do my matric at*



*Mowbray College that I would have such a pleasant year ahead of me. Although great demands are made on the students, it is not a case of all work and no play. There is such a friendly atmosphere among the students themselves, and the staff are obviously keen to make our stay at the college a fruitful one" (Yearbook, 1973:36).*

In the editorial of the 1974 yearbook, the concept of a so-called 'cram college', a phenomenon known in the 1970s, which this school was also labelled to be, is discussed in detail. The article was written by three student authors, who drew pictures of themselves at the bottom: three mature looking faces with long hair. They wrote: "*There are many people who believe that there is no place for the cram college in society...*" and "*... there is such a great demand for the cram college amongst pupils...*". They go on by comparing the 'college' with 'conventional schools' and say: "*The college can teach the school many things; for instance, how not to become caught up in petty regulations... such as length of hair, school uniforms, smoking and school bells; the college can show the school that the most important thing is the teaching, not those tiny minded regulations. Of course, the cram college is not educating its pupils - it does not pretend to, its sole purpose is to get as many people as possible through matric*" (Yearbook, 1974:3). If this is true about what the school's focus was, then the results must have reflected this. In all three yearbooks I was able to find, mention was made of the high pass rate. In 1971 there were 48 out of 58 passes (Yearbook, 1972:5), in 1972 there were 68 passes out of 92 matrics (Yearbook, 1973:6) and in 1973 there were 93 out of 109 passes.

In an interview with the founder of the school - Anthony Mowbray - in 2011, he spoke about the concept of 'cram schools'. He mentioned that in those days the matric exam was written on standard 9 and 10 results (the equivalent of today's grade 11 and 12). There were schools who offered students the option to do these two years in one. These were known as 'cram schools'. Most schools during those years had a strict school uniform policy and rules for appearance (e.g. short hair) and schools that had no such policies did not necessarily have a good public image. Anthony Mowbray said that he tried to change the name and the attitude of the public by having a small dress code and being quite strict with haircuts and '*that sort of thing*'. "*I don't know if I coined the phrase 'private college' - so we were Mowbray 'College', but this was meant to improve the image of the 'cram college'*". In theory you were not allowed to do two years in one, but some schools did that and they were not checked up. Many of the students that came to Mowbray College had failed standard nine. "*I had figured that if a kid had done standard nine and failed it, he was not doing standard 9 and 10 in one year, because he had already done 9*" (Mowbray, 2011).

From the above, it is clear that in the early years, the focus of this school was academic more than anything else. From the wide variety of activities that they also did at the school, it is clear that they did not keep themselves only busy with teaching and learning, but that they also had a fair amount of fun.

#### 4.2.2.2 Teachers

In the editorial of the 1972 magazine one of the editors wrote: "*the teachers are to be thanked and admired for their zeal and superhuman patience and perseverance*" (Yearbook, 1972:2). Two pages further a list of all the teachers along with their qualifications was published. Every teacher had a degree as well as a teaching diploma (Yearbook, 1972:4). The next mention of teachers is made by Sister Vincent, in a report about her experience at the school that year. About the teachers she says: "*the students find it hard to match the enthusiasm of the teachers*" (Yearbook, 1972:49).

The 1973 magazine editorial also recognised the staff thus: "*we would like to thank those wielders of red pens and stinging canes, the staff, for their unwavering encouragement and hard work through the year*" (Yearbook, 1973:2). Two pages later, Anthony Mowbray wrote an open letter to the staff: "*Dear staff, I mentioned that this year had been marked by the particularly 'happy spirit' amongst the students. I am sure that they will all agree with me when I say that this is entirely due to the happy and 'approachable' atmosphere that you have encouraged in your classes. Thank you all for the enthusiasm and effort that you have poured increasingly into your classes*". He then continued by mentioning some names and using words like 'cheerfulness', 'enthusiasm' and 'effort' (Yearbook, 1973:4).

In another report written by an older student who had attended the college (a nun called Sister Christa) about her experience at Mowbray College, she writes about the teachers: "*...the staff are obviously keen to make our stay at the college a fruitful one. I have been deeply impressed by the dedication of the teachers*" (Yearbook, 1973:36).

The 1974 magazine was published in a year when the school moved to new premises. Anthony Mowbray writes in his principal's letter: "*I think it will be many years before I (and I'm sure many of the staff) will forget 1974! The year of the move and the year of the NOISE! I would like to thank you all for the incredible way you have co-operated and just carried on while pneumatic drills, concrete mixers, painters to name a few have banged, rattled and sung their way through your classes*" (Yearbook, 1974:5). From the photograph about the move, where students can be seen carrying desks down the road to the new building 2 km away, a paragraph below the picture mentions: "*in true college tradition, the pupils would have to carry the teachers and assorted literary aids all the way...*" (Yearbook, 1974:7). They obviously had a way 'to make things work'.

In my discussion with Anthony Mowbray in 2011 I asked him about his teachers and where he had found them. His response was that as they expanded and needed more teachers, he would ask the Biology division for example: 'you cannot handle it all alone any more, do you know someone?'. Most of the new teachers were references that joined the college through 'word-of-mouth' (Mowbray, A. 2011 Interview).

The list of staff members in the 1974 magazine confirms that the staff were well-qualified (the qualifications were published) and that a wide variety of subjects were taught. On the 1974 staff there was one teacher with an honours degree and one with a master's degree, the rest all had bachelor's degrees and teaching diplomas.

In 2011 one of the teachers who had taught at the College for thirty-nine of its forty years in existence, went on retirement. A newspaper article was published in the founding city about this event. This teacher, Sarah O'Connor<sup>5</sup>, knew the founder of the school and was one of the staff members during three of the first four years of its existence. She stayed at the school, but moved to different campuses over the years. She is one of the very few links between the historical and current schools. In the newspaper article she is quoted as saying: *"the early years were very different to the school's current format, but the ethos has remained the same"* and *"It was not a traditional teaching background as the students ranged from soldiers who returned from serving on the border to nuns, physically disabled students and even students from Botswana."* She describes the school at it was like back then as follows: *"our background is unique. The students came back to school hungry for a better education. It was inspiring. Everyone blended in with the unity and compassion. Those were fascinating years. And it hasn't stopped. The student body might have changed, but not the ethos. The emphasis has remained on the individual. I will always remember the spirit of Mowbray."*

A past student from the 1970s, who attended the farewell function, commented about her that he *"had learnt more history in English than he did in History"* (she was an English teacher). The article continues to quote *"equally inspiring was that she was an exemplary role model to her colleagues in the profession. Her humility, integrity, compassion for children and ceaseless passion are just a few things that we admire. We have yet to hear Sarah complain about something or harm a fly."* The kind of teacher she was, clearly speaks from the fact that *"As a teacher, she was inspired by her love of English, particularly the literature, and the interaction she had with young minds. No year was the same. The kids are all different and they make teaching worthwhile"* (Fourie, 2010:13).

#### **4.2.2.3 Environment**

The environment can both be described in terms of its physical as well as educational qualities. I visited the two physical localities of the two buildings used during the first four years and took photographs. I went into the buildings to get a sense of the environment. Between 1971 and the first part of 1974, the school was located in a dance hall above a shopping complex. The space was divided into classrooms and offices by temporary structures (apparently polystyrene dividers were used) that had to be removed over weekends, during which the space was used as a dance hall. In the 1972 yearbook, there is

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym

a picture of young men (apparently students and teachers), assembling these polystyrene dividers.

In 1974, the College moved into a seven storey building, 2 km away from the original building. They occupied the fifth and sixth floors. Clearly, the physical environment had a more mature 'office block' feel than a traditional 'school-grounds-with-open-spaces-and-sports- fields' feel. The number of students housed in those facilities during the first four years, were: 62, 114, 131 and 136.

In terms of its more educational qualities, I had to refer to the magazines to get a sense of how things were done. Academic teaching happened in those buildings. It is clear that a variety of other activities were also offered, but seldom in the school's own facilities. Nowhere in the magazines could I find complaints or indications of unhappiness with the facilities in which the school activities took place. What I did find were several references to happy students, a happy environment, pictures of smiling students and an atmosphere in which students felt encouraged.

In the 1974 magazine, in an article describing the move to the new building, one of the students writes: "*Besides the nostalgic few, the only ones who really missed the old college were the proprietors of Sorrento café*" (Yearbook, 1974:7). The student was probably referring to the owners of the shop downstairs from the old building, where students spent their money during breaks. About the new school he wrote: "*At the end of the first term, it was declared that the mass exodus would take place. ...the pupils would have to carry their teachers and assorted literary aids all the way to the graveyard down the drag. Imagine the disappointment when we discovered that Mr. Mowbray had not actually hired the graveyard, but the building across the road. (Oh well, at least we have a permanent view of the dead centre of town!)*" The humour hidden in this comment suggests that the physical facilities did not matter a lot.

I asked Anthony Mowbray where the schools were. He said: "*The two-storey building above KFC. We had most of the upper floor. Upstairs, there is a lovely balcony. That is where the students smoked.*" Because of the mature age of the students (there were only matriculants in his school), they were allowed to smoke during break time, which many of them did. Clearly the school rules did not prohibit this. When asked about the school rules, Anthony Mowbray responded: "*There were only three rules: (1) thou shalt work, (2) thou shalt not bunk school, and (3) thou shalt only smoke in the designated area. Those literally were the rules. They all had to sign a contract at the beginning of the year and if they bunked they would get expelled*" (Mowbray, 2011).

Clearly, the focus was not on facilities, but on what happened inside those facilities.

#### 4.2.2.4 *Activities*

The three college magazines covered a very wide variety of activities other than academic ones. This is understandable if one takes into account that a college yearbook is meant to be something that students use to remember what happened during that year. Not many pictures can be taken during academic class time, but the exciting things that happened around academic affairs are other things that people really remember. While I was paging through the 1972 yearbook, I noted that the following college activities were covered in pictures and articles:

Cricket: Three matches were played on the opponents' fields. The first two matches were lost, but *"the highlight of the season came when we played Bishops' tennis team... played one fine Sunday morning on Bishops' A-field. The author ends by saying: a big thank you to Mr Mowbray for arranging the games - some of the most enjoyable I have ever played"* (Yearbook, 1972:8).

Rugby: A few games were played, two against another 'Cram College', another against the second team of a neighbouring school (which Mowbray College won) and a game against the students from the previous year. They also had a rugby tour to Windhoek, which was clearly a highlight, if the enthusiastic articles and pictures are anything to go by. Clearly winning was not the motive, judged by the descriptions of events like: *"the outstanding feature of the season was the happy spirit that prevailed amongst the players"* and a comment from the coach: *"I would like to thank both the first and second teams for the enjoyment they gave me during the year and for the fine spirit in which they played all the games"*. A colourful article about the rugby tour to Windhoek talks more about the fun they had in the games they played, and the fact that the team was referred to as 'the long haired hippies', as well as a picture of the coach with a speech bubble saying 'no practice - no beer' followed by a picture of a neat rugby player, dressed in a Mowbray blazer with a speech bubble saying 'no beer - no practice'. One can deduce from pictures and comments like this that the students in the school were older than 18 and were treated like adults, because they were mature (Yearbook, 1972:9-13).

Two pages are also spent on a very entertaining 'girls versus boys match', which became an annual college tradition. The boys were paired up and had their ankles lashed together and the girls won the match. *"Municipal ambulances were called in and ran a shuttle service transporting spectators dying of laughter to and from the local revival clinic"* (Yearbook, 1972:18-19).

Tennis: These matches were friendly games played at nearby courts and included a match against the teachers (Yearbook, 1972:14).

Squash: On Friday afternoons the students played at nearby squash courts. They played three matches that year and a college squash championship between seven students of the

college. The one match that they won is described as: "highly enjoyable and amusing" (Yearbook, 1972:15).

Debating: The debating report describes the aim as: "a fair number of debates have somehow been squeezed into the already full programme so as to entertain us - but, more than that, also for the purpose of encouraging more of us to develop the ability to speak effectively in public" (Yearbook, 1972:16).

Dance: The school had a dance committee that organised the matric dance, which was held in September that year. The dance theme was 'Greek Mythology' and the event is described as: "*the people gathered at the chambers of the College and there were festivities and merry-making and there was wine and food and all were happy ... into the small hours of the following day*" (Yearbook, 1972:17).

Cross-country: This annual event held in the streets near the school was organised to collect money for a charity. In 1972 they collected R350 and donated it to the local charity for Nursery Education. It was a great deal of money in those years. The girls started first, followed by the boys a few minutes later. "*The wolf-whistles of those misinformed that the girls had been sent out as bait, died down as they prepared themselves for the chase*", is the way they describe this fun event (Yearbook, 1972:20-21).

Lunch-time talks: "*The introduction into our curriculum of a series of lunch-time talks on Wednesdays has certainly been in keeping with this spirit - the speakers have expanded our understanding and awareness of the many exciting facets of careers and life itself, so that we can now feel better equipped to meet our challenges*". This article, unlike most other articles, was not written in a humorous way, suggesting that this was a serious activity. The guest speakers and topics are also listed: a news editor, a computer management consultant, a manager of a bank, a magistrate, someone from a film studio, a game ranger, a shipping correspondent from a local newspaper, a youth social worker, a sales manager, a Springbok rugby player, an exchange student from Australia, a well-known author and an MD of Pick & Pay. The report was followed by two reports of trips to a local newspaper and an exhibition at the local university, where many of the students went to study after school. This last activity indicates the attention that the school gave to career guidance and job opportunities (Yearbook, 1972:22-25).

The 1973 magazine reported on the same activities as the previous year: Cricket, rugby (including the old boys match and the girls versus boys match), squash, debating, matric dance and cross-country. Other added activities are snooker, chess, hockey and drama (Yearbook, 1972:8-28).

The reports were written in a similar way as the previous year: "good entertaining rugby" and "the most important fact is that we all enjoyed our rugby whether we lost or won". Typical comments that caught my eye as I read through the 1973 magazine included:



- *"One of the most important things in a team game is fellowship. It is the spirit in which a sport is played by its players. Basically, it is the joy of participation"* (Yearbook, 1973:12).
- *"The versatility of the Old Boys team was demonstrated when John Walker<sup>6</sup> ran nearly 60 yards only to collapse, twitching, a metre from the line"* (Yearbook, 1973:12).
- *"Pre-match conditions were tense. A variety of girls (many shapes and sizes) were rigged out in most unusual clobber" and "the scrums and penalties seemed to dominate the game much to the enjoyment of players and spectators"* (Yearbook, 1973:15).
- *"An atmosphere of suppressed excitement pervaded the college. Was it exam time? No! The snooker championships were being held."* (Yearbook, 1973:16)
- The three topics debated that year in the Debating Society were: *'Should military service be abolished?', 'A woman's place is in the home', and 'Euthanasia should be abolished'* (Yearbook, 1973:19).
- About the cross-country (R400 was raised for charity) someone said: *"the walk is entirely voluntary - everyone has to walk!"* (Yearbook, 1973:22).

From the 1974 magazine, I gathered that the college activities were dependent on what the students wanted. Similar activities to the previous two years were reported on, except that this year they also had an inter-schools dabchick race (sailing) and soccer. The girls versus boys rugby match still took place (boys playing with their legs tied together) as well as the old boys match (this time called the *'old boys mash'*) and they had a rugby tour to Bloemfontein. The cross-country for charity raised R300 that year.

*"Once again the college had a scintillating season (of cricket) and we think that no less than quite a few games were played! Unfortunately (?) the school book got lost in the move and no-one can (or wants) to remember who played and what, if any, the scores were"* (Yearbook, 1974:11).

The pictures of the matric dance and a humorous account of what happened there showed that this was now a highlight on the college calendar.

In my conversation with the founder (in 2011), I asked him about sport at the college. His reply confirmed what I had gathered from the magazines: *"Sport all depended on the staff that we got. I had a guy that loved water polo, it was fabulous, he wanted to do it and he did it. That did a hell of a lot for the spirit of the college. I was keen on rugby, I was playing rugby then, but I'm a useless coach. I got other people to come along and coach"*. He also mentioned that later they started with an annual *'sports day'* - a concept with which one of his senior teachers came up. The sports day became a tradition and all students participated in a variety of fun sports and activities on that day (Mowbray, A. 2011 Interview).

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym

#### 4.2.2.5 *Excellent Results*

In the 1972 magazine there is a list of students who passed the National Senior Certificate examinations for the previous year. Five names have an asterisk in front of them and the indication that it “denotes First Class”. There are also seven distinctions indicated. The note below the results says: “*I would like to congratulate the students and particularly the staff on this outstanding achievement in getting 48 passes out of a possible 58. Special congratulations to Mrs Botha who got 4 out of the 7 distinctions*” (Yearbook, 1972:5).

The 1973 magazine also published a list of all the National Senior Certificate passes of 1972. Ten first-class passes are indicated and nine distinctions. The comments about these results said: “*Once again we did very well in the final examinations. Of our 92 matric students, 68 passed (no fewer than 42 with varsity passes!). To cap it all Carla Wilson<sup>7</sup> came 1st in South Africa in Botany - congratulations to her and to Ann Peters<sup>8</sup>, her tutor, on a great effort. In fact, thanks and congrats to all the staff for maintaining our unrivalled record of results*” (Yearbook, 1972:5).

The 1974 magazine followed the same pattern. The heading above the results says: “*1973 EXAMINATION RESULTS THE BEST EVER!*” and “*Our results for 1973 were by far and away the best ever and certainly have not been equalled by any College in the Province. Out of 109 pupils 93 got their Matriculation Certificate. There were 17 distinctions and 12 firsts. Congratulations to us all - aren't we great!*” It is also followed by a full list of all the students who passed, including who earned first-class results and distinctions (Yearbook, 1973:4-6).

When asked about the fact that there the good results Mowbray always had were often mentioned, Anthony said that he used to publish the results. He explained that “*local schools would say: ‘so many passes, so many distinctions’, but they won't tell you how many they entered. I published how many I entered and how many passed. We didn't always have 100% pass*” (Mowbray, 2011). This fact was confirmed in the statistics I found in the yearbooks.

In a storeroom at the oldest campus, we found a wooden board (like the ones you see at many schools in their halls) with golden lettering on it. At the top there is a school crest and a heading saying “*MOWBRAY COLLEGE. STUDENTS PLACED FIRST IN SOUTH AFRICA*”. Then, one below the other, there is a list with a date, the name of a student and a subject in which the student came first in South Africa for 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978. Seventeen names are listed, and the subjects are Botany, German, French, Botany again, Physiology, Botany, Accountancy, Best English Essay, Physiology, Geography, Science, Physiology, Economics, History, Afrikaans, French and the last one is a student who was first in both Physiology and Latin.

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<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>8</sup> Pseudonym



I also asked the founder about the way that they reported those results. He said that they had reports every fortnight. Every teacher had a slip to write down the results, which were converted to standard scores on the reports. He said that he could just look at the standard scores and see how the marks improved. *"You could reward those teachers, because you could see who showed improvement. All you had to do was to discuss these results with teachers and the marks would go up"* (Mowbray, 2011).

#### **4.2.2.6 Future Driven**

In the section above, headed 'Activities', mention is made of lunch-time talks by guest speakers who came from different career backgrounds, as well as excursions, to a newspaper and a local university. In the article about the lunch-time talks it is stated: *"...the speakers have expanded our understanding and awareness of the many exciting facets of careers and life itself, so that we can now feel better equipped to meet our challenges"* and *"From each talk it becomes evident that no goal will be realised by coasting along, wishing that what should be done, was done already"* (Yearbook, 1972:22).

At the end of each of the three magazines, I found a section about all students and what they were now doing after school. Reference is made to the effort that went into finding old students: *"We managed to scrape up nine old students ... for the old boys match"* (Yearbook, 1972:60-61). This refers to the annual rugby match between current and previous students. The list is followed by a sentence saying: *"Please complete and return the enclosed form as we are interested to hear from you, or better, pop in and say hullo!"*

The school's interest in where the old students went after school is echoed in the comment: *"Please remember that we shall always be interested to know how you are getting on, so I hope you will keep in touch"* (Yearbook, 1973:3). If one looks at the list at the end of the 1973 magazine it now lists the first for the *"71 Mob"* and the second for *"Matric 72"*. The list goes into surprising detail about what people study or where they are working. In a comment it is also evident that the old boys were invited not only to the rugby match but also to the year-end college dance (Yearbook, 1973:52-53).

The 1974 magazine has three lists of old students. These lists are not complete and I doubt whether this was something that they carried on doing for many years later, because it would take too many pages. Above the list of names the heading says: *"SOME OF THOSE WHO HAVE WRITTEN OR VISITED"* (Yearbook, 1974:52-53).

#### **4.2.2.7 Individual Attention and Care**

It seems that students who attended this College were not necessarily of normal school going age. They definitely had 'older students' too, like Sister Vincent (a nun who was –

apart from going to school – “*looking after 24 children, the boys ranging from 6 – 12 and the girls from 6 – 18.... mostly orphans ...*” (Yearbook, 1972:49).

In the newspaper article published after the retirement of Sarah O'Connor, she confirmed the variety of students that this College accepted:

*She explained that the term ‘College’ was adopted as the students were older than the current matrices and grades weren't part of their structure. It was not a traditional teaching background as their students ranged from soldiers who returned from serving on the border to nuns, physically disabled students and even students from Botswana”... and further... “The students came back to school hungry for a better education. Those were fascinating years. And it hasn't stopped. The student body might have changed, but not the ethos. The emphasis has remained on the individual. I will always remember the spirit of Mowbray (Fourie, 2010:13).*

### **4.3 THE CURRENT PERSPECTIVE (2009-2012)**

#### **4.3.1 The researched material**

The following ten artefacts were included in the study:

- A advertising material (physical artefacts), in which the present school makes statements about themselves i.e. what they say (verbal artefact).
- B the school's constitution (physical artefact), another presentation of what they say (verbal artefact). This document was included in the College Manual.
- C staff conduct (physical artefact), a document included in all staff contracts. This document is an expression of what they say they intend to do.
- D Terms and Conditions of Enrolment (physical artefact), another document that expresses intent and creates an expectation of what can be found at the school.
- E the school's values (physical artefact), a document from their manual indicating what they believe.
- F the school's vision and mission statements (physical artefact), another expression of what they believe.
- G a "Building on Excellence Report" (physical artefact): the report of a recent project done at the school, in which several staff members from all over South Africa visited the school and noted their views. This project, initiated by the holding company, was aimed at identifying and duplicating excellence. The value of this document for this research is that it provides perspectives of several relatively independent people about what the school says and what it does.

- H interviews with the principal, deputy principal and ten staff members (verbal artefacts), sent to them via e-mail, asking questions about what they believe and what they do.
- I an unpublished press release interview, done by a Public Relations Company Cutting Edge – asking the principal questions when the new campus was opened in 2009.
- J school yearbooks (physical artefacts). The researcher was able to find two of the last four years' yearbooks. These yearbooks provided evidence of what they did in the last few years (behavioural artefacts).

In the following sections the phrases “what they say”, “what they do” and “what things look like” refer directly to diagram 4.1 and table 2.2 (levels of culture), where “they” refer to the school (Mowbray College) and “what things look like” to what physical artefacts look like in that school.

### 4.3.2 Research findings per themes identified

#### 4.3.2.1 Focus

The Colleges' Mission Statement is displayed in the foyer, staffroom and a few other places in the school. It states: "*We recognise the individual needs of our students and strive to use our unique methods and systems to develop their full academic potential in a caring and focused environment*". (Vision and Mission Statement, 2012).

In an advertisement published in a local magazine about schools in South Africa, Mowbray College states the following under a heading 'Description and History': "*... During its proud history it has become established as the leading senior high school in South Africa, focusing exclusively on grades 10, 11 and 12. Mowbray College is recognised as one of the top feeder schools to universities and universities of technology throughout South Africa*" (Knipe, 2011).

In their Constitution, a document included in their Manual, there is also a references to their unique system and reputation: "*The unique system used by Mowbray Colleges ensures that students improve their grades significantly in all subjects when they attend Mowbray College*" and "*Mowbray has an established international reputation and now has five hostels accommodating over 200 international students*" (Manual, 2006).

The Constitution also includes a 'statement of purpose' in which the focus is clearly indicated:

- "*to promote and encourage the maintenance of teaching and providing excellent educational services to students under the supervision, control and authority of the local and national departments of education...*
- *...for all South Africans as a non-denominational, non-racial progressive school...*

- ... to ensure optimum matriculation and end of year academic results
- ... to ensure that all students leave the school as well-rounded and well-adjusted individuals
- ... to equip each student to succeed at tertiary levels of further study in the pursuit of well-defined career goals
- ... to encourage participation in the affairs of the community and
- ... to provide education in accordance with Mowbray's Mission statement" (Manual, 2006)

The principal of the school (in his mid-year newsletter to parents in 2012) makes the following comments to his students at the start of the mid-year holidays: *"It is a time for you to reflect and get answers to some very pointed questions: Are my results reflecting my true academic potential?; Have I tried my utmost best?; Do I need to do some revision during the holiday?; etc. Your answers to these questions should guide you to whether you may pat yourself on the back and have a relaxing holiday OR whether you should re-evaluate your existing approach and start applying yourself. True academic success will only be achieved if the mind set ('head space') is right"* (Newsletter 22 June 2012).

At the opening of the new school building of Mowbray College in January 2009, the principal said: *"Although the primary reason for many students coming to Mowbray College is to achieve academically, we work towards empowering students so that they leave school as independent young adults. We want them to take ownership of their lives and have the resources to face the future with confidence"* (Yearbook, 2009).

The public relations company asked the principal how he defines his role in the community. In the response the principal wrote: *"As teachers, we are required to guide our students, not only academically, but also socially and morally. In the context of the college, my main role, therefore, is to ensure that the campus continues to live by its vision and mission statement"* (Cutting Edge, 2008).

### What they reward

The report of the grade 12 Awards Evening in the yearbook indicates what prizes were given to students, because they list the names as well as the prizes of all the recipients. I note Subject Prizes (one for the top achiever in each subject), Special Merit Awards for the three most improved students, the top three students in the college, a Good Fellowship Shield and a shield for 'exemplary commitment'. There are also 11 awards for 'consistent hard work' (good effort ratings), two 'service awards', two 'diligence awards' and finally six special Principal's Awards for 'phenomenal perseverance' (Yearbook, 2009:13). When I asked the principal what 'phenomenal perseverance awards' were, he responded that these awards were made to students who had excelled in spite of difficult circumstances or obstacles that they had to overcome to achieve success like poverty, recovery from

substance abuse, medical conditions and the like. The names were kept confidential because of the sensitivity of the issue, but he was willing to show me examples of the last 15 Principal's Awards handed out in the past 6 years:

One of these awards reads:

*Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which one has overcome. This quote by Booker T Washington rings very true in the life of this young lady. Nine years ago when she was nine years old she lost her dad. During her early teens, like many other young people she succumbed to peer-pressure and began experimenting with drugs. She became addicted to TIK (a drug ...) and entered a very dark phase of her life. Her mother reacted swiftly. The insistence that she went to Noupoort Rehabilitation Centre was a very difficult decision, but was instrumental in her road to recovery. She receives a Principal's Award this evening, not because of the obstacles she has faced, but because of the way in which she has overcome them. She has tackled her grade 12 year with maturity and commitment. The positive approach, determination to succeed and high moral standards speak of the complete turnaround she has made in her life. We honour her for her strength of character, for the example she has been to other young people and wish her all the best for 2009, when she will be giving up a year of her life to work for the church.*

The other awards were given for reasons like *"domestic and economic difficulties"; "overcoming drug abuse"; "having to live alone in a foreign country away from her parents"; "severe academic challenges"; "severe medical conditions, pain and allergies"; "living extremely far from the school, getting up extremely early on the morning and travelling long hours in public transport to get to school"; "having to be a parent to her sister"* and a few unknown reasons (Examples of Gr.12 Principal's Awards, 2012).

The report on the 2010 awards function is very similar to the 2009 one, except that the Principal's Awards, *"awarded to a student for phenomenal perseverance and effort in the face of difficult circumstances"* went to 11 students, and a College Shield was awarded *"to the student who, in the opinion of the staff, has most consistently displayed a good work ethic, exemplary behaviour, confidence, a sense of positivity and is well-balanced"* (Yearbook, 2010:16).

The college Manual includes a section that prescribes the content of their awards functions and prize-giving ceremonies. It explains two separate functions, one for the grade 12s and a separate one for grades 10 and 11. The awards and awards criteria are consistent with those described above. They reward the following:

- Merit awards for consistent hard work;
- Subject Merit Prizes for high academic achievements;
- A Good Fellowship Award for students displaying the College's core values;
- A College Shield for displaying good work ethic, exemplary behaviour, confidence and a positive approach; and

- A trophy for Good Progress (Manual, 2006: S12/1).

The principal's response to a question from a public relations company about the difference between public and private schools, suggested the focus of Mowbray's College: "*We focus on the important issues that are essential for successful living after grade 12. This also minimises any alienation between the student and the educator, resulting in an open and honest relationship based on mutual understanding and respect*" (Cutting Edge, 2008).

#### **4.3.2.2 Teachers**

##### What they say

In the advertising material the following is said about staff: "*The colleges are fully staffed with well-qualified, experienced teachers*" (Knipe, 2011).

On the website the principal refers to the teachers as: "*highly dedicated and professional staff*" (Website, 18 Sep 2012).

In an article about the teacher, Sarah O'Connor, who retired after 39 years teaching at Mowbray College, the author says that "*her dedication and passion for teaching has been phenomenal and admired by all*". One of her colleagues, a fellow teacher who was also a previous student in one of the classes, writes about this teacher and how she inspired him to want to become a teacher (Yearbook, 2010:4).

There is also an article written by a matric student about his teachers: "*A couple of years ago if someone said to me that I would feel sadness at the closure of my school years, I would have scoffed at him and said that they were deluded. But tonight we are experiencing a mixture of emotions - jubilation that the end is in sight ... and sadness at leaving teachers behind. Didn't think I'd ever say that! But it is only as I stand on the threshold of my adult life that I begin to comprehend and appreciate the labour of love that teaching truly is*" (Yearbook, 2010:5).

On the magazine page where the staff, who are leaving the college at the end of the year are greeted, the following comments were conspicuous: this teacher "*had touched many students' hearts with her fresh and dynamic approach to education*" and about another leaving teacher they write: this teacher "*has enriched many students with her passion for the English language in her relationship with Mowbray over the last 10 years*" (Yearbook, 2010:6).

What I also noted in the College Manual is a document used twice during the year (mid-year and year-end), whereby students are given the opportunity to assess their teachers. They assess teachers on 12 items: "*Punctual, Organised, Consistent, Hard-working, Friendly, Approachable, Considerate, Caring, Supportive, Knowledgeable, Understandable, and Inspiring*". They also have a space to make a general comment (Manual, 2006:S15.1 F1).



When new staff members are appointed, their contract include a policy document called 'STAFF CONDUCT'. This document lists 12 expectations of teachers:

- that they always communicate a positive image of the college;
- that they are loyal to colleagues and handle confidential information professionally;
- that they participate enthusiastically in all aspects of the school;
- that attendance is required at all major college functions;
- that their dress, appearance and grooming reflect a high professional standard;
- that they are punctual and never allow students to leave class early for any reason, including bad behaviour. It specifically states *"It is a special feature of Mowbray Colleges that the teachers are seldom away and that we do not leave a class unattended"*;
- that admin tasks are completed timeously and efficiently;
- that lessons are well prepared, stimulating, motivating and that they foster student participation; also that teachers are *"prepared to review, develop and evaluate their own teaching methodologies with a view to constant growth and improvement"*;
- that positive, enthusiastic interaction with students is vital and that *"the educational ambience in the classroom must be one of warmth, excitement, interest and mutual respect. Fear is never used as a means of control"*;
- that student tests and any other work are reviewed and marked as soon as possible;
- that teachers are willingly available on request to give extra help to these students, and supply students with their home telephone numbers so that essential homework assistance may be provided after hours;
- that they are responsible for the good condition and safekeeping of equipment in the classrooms.

The principal, who has nineteen years of education experience, three years as principal of Mowbray College, said the following when interviewed by a Public Relations company about the differences in working with children today compared to when he started: *"Society has undergone dramatic changes over the last two decades: the Cold War came to an end; the Apartheid legislation no longer exists; South Africa has come out of isolation and joined the global village; the face of communication and social networking is vastly different; our current grade 12 students have just completed the first exit examinations based on the new FET curriculum... All these changes have impacted hugely on the psyche of our youth. Some old school practices have lost their effectiveness. As teachers, we must remain on the cutting edge and up to speed, to ensure the success of our education"* (Cutting Edge, 2008). He also spoke about some of the biggest misconceptions about being in the teaching profession: *"Sadly, teachers in South Africa, in general, are not seen as professionals. They*

*are not treated with the necessary respect. The cliché ‘teachers work half days and have four holidays’ is still around and remains like a red tag to a bull” (Cutting Edge, 2008).*

#### **4.3.2.3 Environment**

What they say (i.e. what Mowbray College ‘says’ about themselves in verbal and documentary artefacts)

In an advertisement the following is said about the environment: "*DISCIPLINE. Mowbray College prides itself on its well-organised structure and sensible discipline. Students are treated as young adults and a well-defined code of conduct governs student behaviour*" (Knipe, 2011).

It also talks about facilities: "*State-of-the-art computer facilities as well as modern art, design, photography and hospitality facilities can be found at every college*" (Knipe, 2011).

On the website the following is said about environment of the school: "*Well-equipped classrooms are grouped around a central atrium*" and "*The college also boasts a modern computer room, science lab and fully equipped kitchen and restaurant*" (Website, 18 Sep 2012).

The school’s Code of Conduct says the following about the environment: "*The Code of Conduct aims to create an environment in which it is possible for the individual student to achieve the best possible results*" (Terms and Conditions of Enrolment p.8: s1.2). Under the heading ‘General Conduct’ reference is made that the ambience of the classroom "*must be warm and mutually respectful*", similar to what is said in the staff conduct document. Both students and teachers are responsible for creating this environment (Terms and Conditions of Enrolment p.9: s8.3).

Under another heading ‘General’ in the Code of Conduct, several points are made to describe the environment in which students are expected to learn:

- *that students are encouraged to take pride in their campus*
- *that no student may hinder the learning process of other students*
- *that teachers and visitors should be treated with courtesy, dignity and respect at all times*
- *that fellow students should be treated with dignity and respect*
- *that while students are encouraged to think independently and to question, insolent or insulting behaviour towards teachers and fellow students is not acceptable*
- *that the College encourages courteous and civil behaviour*
- *that no initiation practices of any student is allowed* (Terms and Conditions of Enrolment p.10: s10.1-10.8).

What things look like (i.e. what things look like in Mowbray College pictures and physical artefacts as observed by visitors or by the researcher).



The website has pictures of this training kitchen, which clearly shows a very modern, clean and professional environment.

In the 2009 Yearbook a grade 11 parent wrote an article about the official opening of the new school, and quoted the principal as having said: "*The development of the new campus provided us with an opportunity to customise our environment to best suit our educational objectives from a student and a teaching perspective*". The CEO of the company also made a speech saying that the company pledged their continuous commitment "*to creating an environment where the students can become the best they can be*", while the MD said: "*The new campus goes a long way in expressing what we stand for. We influence lives, and change people*" (Yearbook, 2009).

On the walls, at several places in the school building of Mowbray College, I found a document headed "MOWBRAY'S VALUES", listing eight values that the school stands for: "*Quality, Respect, Caring, Personal Responsibility, Transparency, Honesty, Individuality and Accountability*". Under each of these values was a short sentence describing what they meant.

What they do (i.e. what Mowbray College staff 'does' and how they behave as witnessed by visitors, the researcher and from comments made by students and parents)

In 2009 this campus of the College started the year in a new building, after they had occupied part of a shopping centre for 10 years. For the last three years of those 10 years, the current principal was also the principal at the other site of this college. This change to a new, custom-designed building was a major event in the history of the school. A Public Relations company did an interview with the principal about himself, about Mowbray College for the past few years and about this new campus building. When asked why the college was moving campuses, he responded that "*With the years, the student numbers have steadily increased and this has resulted in our occupying more and more space. A definite need for our own custom-designed campus very quickly became evident. Approximately two years ago the research and planning of every location of the campus was initiated. We are now very happy to say that on 19 December 2008 we shall be occupying our new premises*". They also asked him what the move would do for Mowbray College. The principal responded in the words of one of the students. He said: "*Very recently a parent on enrolling a second child made the following comment: 'Now you will have it all! - brilliant education and an excellent space to provide it in'. That sums it up for me. The move will result in many positives: plenty of natural light, outside space for students to relax in etc.*" (Cutting Edge, 2008).

A past student, who delivered a speech at the opening of the new campus, "*described the ethos of the school when he said that despite the sand and bricks of the new building, it was always the people who mattered. Everything I have learned here I use in life. I was given an*

*opportunity to show responsibility and teachers showed me respect. That was really cool. Here we learn so much about each other and ourselves"* (Yearbook, 2009).

A matriculant wrote a reflection in the 2010 magazine, which gives an extensive picture of the school environment. He says: *"When I was in grade 9, my parents spoke to me of taking me to a new school; one where uniforms were unheard of, where you could go home early if you did well, and where there were no draconian hair regulations. It sounded utterly different to where I was at that stage. It also sounded very attractive. It was then that they added subtly, that smoking was allowed..."*. He carries on... *"There was a new feeling at Mowbray, one that I did not have at my old school - a feeling of personal responsibility and freedom. The fact that Mowbray kept its promise and that I started excelling in academics made the whole experience so much more worthwhile... It's important to remember that a school is so much more than just an academic institution. It is a social one as well, a place where you spend a large part of your young life, while wanting to be somewhere else... So in closing, in three years I haven't worn a uniform, I haven't cut my hair, and to be honest, I feel as if I have grown more in these past three years than I truly thought I would. Mowbray has given me the environment in which to grow and to strive to reach my full potential"* (Yearbook, 20010:16-17).

#### **4.3.2.4      Activities**

##### What they say

The advertisement mentions two types of activities: Curricular and Extra-Curricular. Under curricular activities it states: *"Homework is given in every subject, every day. On four afternoons a week, supervised homework classes are held. This ensures that every aspect of the syllabus is fully understood and students can feel confident and comfortable with the curriculum"*. Under Extra-Curricular activities they say: *"The College offers sport, cultural activities and field trips according to the requirements and needs of the student body"* (Knipe, 2011).

The website makes the following comments about the activities on offer: *"Also offered are appropriate extra-mural activities that ensure students are well prepared, not only for examinations, but also for the work place. Sport is offered in response to the interests of students. Indoor cricket, soccer, sailing and surfing are just some of the activities that are enjoyed"* (Website, 18 Sep 2012).

In addition, mention is made that *"Every year we have a Sports Day, and the College Matric Dance is a further highlight"*.

### What they do

The newsletter on the website has a short report on touch rugby (apparently the college team are currently top of their league), an event called 'Mowbray Live' which seems to be a talent show organised by the students and lastly a design competition in which the students from the school participated and achieved second place (Newsletter 22 June 2012).

On their website there are pictures of a Sports Day, held at an Action Sport facility. Students are playing in normal casual clothes. A similar report was found in the yearbook with pictures and comments like: "*It was a memorable day of tremendous teamwork, stunning spirit and fun!*" (Yearbook, 2009:9).

The 2009 Yearbook carries an exciting report with pictures about a grade 10 camp, as well as a grade 11 beach day. It seems that the aim was: "*There were many new students, so this gave them a chance to bond and get to know other students*" (Yearbook, 2009:5-7).

It seems that the Student Representative Council (SRC) organised a number of activities on the campus. In their magazine report they mentioned 'dress-up days' (for the purpose of fundraising for charity), the annual school 'talent show', a Matric 'fashion show' and a 'Community Outreach' (collection of cat and dog food for rehabilitated stray cats and dogs) (Yearbook, 2009:15). In the 2010 magazine they also write about 'theme days' to collect money for charity. In 2010 proceeds went to CANSA (Yearbook, 2010:7).

The Acting Brand Manager of the schools group writes in his 2010 magazine report about the activities: "*On all campuses it has been a year of frenetic activity with Career Days, Open Days, Art and Design exhibitions, Dramatic Art practicals, Hospitality Studies restaurant evenings, talent shows ... and, what we do so well ... hard work on the academic front*" (Yearbook, 2010:3). At the campus included in this research, the magazine shows the boards and pictures of more than one sports day, adventure camp, career day, matric dance, student exchange trip to Sweden, hospitality evenings, drama shows, a design exhibition and an art expo (Yearbook, 2010:8-44).

#### **4.3.2.5      *Excellent Results***

##### What they say

An advertisement makes reference to their matric results: "*Mowbray College is renowned for excellent matric results. After the 395 matriculants in 2008, a 100% pass rate was achieved with 534 distinctions and 75% of students achieved bachelor's degree passes. This unique feature of Mowbray College is the 'money-back guarantee' which guarantees students entrance into tertiary studies. Eight reports are provided every year*" (Knipe, 2011).

On the website, attention is drawn to one of the subjects - Hospitality Studies - and the fact that many of their past students are excelling in their chosen careers now after pursuing their passion for this industry.

#### What they do

The website article then emphasizes two examples of students that did make it far in the Hospitality industry: one student that went on to study at the South African Chefs Academy and is now a part of the school, working with the students during practical sessions and restaurant evenings, and one of their current Grade 12 students, who recently won the International Hotel School Bursary competition where he competed against students from all over the province for this prestigious award.

The website has a picture, as well as the results of the previous year's top student and it claims that the school had a 100% pass rate. This particular student had an average of 91.28%

In the newsletter, of which a modern, full-colour copy is carried on the website, the principal starts with the following comment: "*We celebrate the academic achievements of our students. We are referring to those who have attained high collective effort scores and achieved results reflecting their academic potential*" (Newsletter 22 June 2012). When asked about these "effort scores", the principal explained that this was a value printed on a student's report, indicating his/her level of effort. Effort scores are very important in Mowbray Colleges and these scores are added together at the end of each year to give a "collective effort score", which is used to reward hard working students. The top 10 students in each one of the grades 10, 11 and 12 are also listed by name in the newsletter.

#### **4.3.2.6 Future Driven**

##### What they say

According to the principal, in a statement on the Mowbray College website, after each enrolment interview "*a programme is designed to ensure that each student will enjoy College life and be given the best opportunity to enter his/her chosen career*".

In the advertising material, I noticed the following mantra being used: "*Your future, our passion*".

I found the following quote at the end of a set of 10 tips on studying, listed on the website: "*Goals can only be achieved through hard work and sacrifice*".

The principal's response to a question from a Public Relations company was: "*Although the primary reason for many students coming to Mowbray College is to achieve academically, we work towards empowering them so that they leave the college as independent young*

adults. *We want them to take ownership of their lives and have the resources to face the future with confidence*" (Cutting Edge, 2008).

#### What they do

In the newsletter on the website there is also a short report about a student exchange programme to Sweden. It is stated in the article that *"one of the objectives we hoped to achieve was affording students the opportunities for independent growth"*, and one of the students who was working alongside people in a Swedish restaurant wrote: *"I was working as a fully functional chef and it was the most empowering feeling in the world when you are at least 10 years younger than anyone else in the kitchen and you are doing just as good a job as they are.... and when Kelly and Rick walked into the kitchen I was not even nearly ready to leave my new little 'job' behind. I would go back in a heartbeat. That night I saw that I could do this as a career and be perfectly happy"* (Newsletter 22 June 2012).

In a motivating message to the matriculants of 2009 at the graduation evening, the principal says: *"You and only you are making the choices about your responsibilities, and you have no 'should' to live up to unless they are your decisions. Turn your 'should' and 'must' into your own personal options and carry them out with a strong sense of your own character, strength, and most important, aliveness"* (Yearbook, 2009:1).

In the Life Orientation report on one of the pages in the yearbook, there is a list of responses from individual students about a so-called 'job shadowing' experience namely: *"I loved every moment of my job shadowing"* and *"my job shadowing was quite an experience; I learned how to bake, cook and had a feeling what it feels like to work"*. Another student said: *"Afterwards I realised how important it had been to do this in order to find out whether a career suited one's personality and preferences"* (Yearbook, 2009:8).

The student counsellor's report in the yearbook also refers to a grade 12 *"careers day in the first term, with a fantastic showcasing of tertiary institutions from all over town"* and they report on grade 11s completing their Myers Briggs Personality Inventories, *"discovering more about their personalities and possibilities in the world of work"* (Yearbook, 2009:30).

#### **4.3.2.7 Individual Attention**

##### What they say

The advertising material for Mowbray College states the following referring to individual attention: *"EXTRA CLASSES. Extra lesson teacher support and teacher contact are features of Mowbray College. Students are encouraged to engage with their teachers and teachers are even 'on call' to assist with homework queries after hours"*. It also mentions *"a wide range of subjects [that] are offered and individual timetables ensure students can take a variety of subject combinations"* (Knipe, 2011).

According to the Mowbray College website, each student starts his career at Mowbray College with a personal interview: *"Each prospective student attends an interview at the college with his/her parents. At this interview the subjects which best suit the student's needs and aspirations are selected"*.

In the College Manual, a section is included entitled 'Structure of the Interview' where the interview mentioned above is described. It is claimed that during the interview the interviewer will ask the student to talk a little bit about himself or herself, followed by an explanation of how the college operates. This explanation includes that:

- *Students should be self-motivated, responsible and will be held accountable for their actions*
- *careful monitoring and individual attention by the staff takes place and*
- *supervised homework (individual attention from teachers) is a feature of the school (Manual, 2006: S2/1).*

The newsletter on the Mowbray College website carries a quote of Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the typical quotes that the principal will use: *"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment"* (Newsletter 22 June 2012).

In his awards function message to the grade 12's, the principal's message focussed on *"an important aspect of our ethos: the focus on the individual"*. He then continues by talking about success and what that means. *"If you don't know the meaning of success how will you be able to achieve lasting success?"*... *"Forget about what other people think and live out your own version of what success means to you"*. He ends off his speech as follows: *"May God bless you all in your future INDIVIDUAL endeavours"* (Yearbook, 2010:2).

In his interview with a Public Relations company during the College's move to a new campus building, the principal was asked about some of the differences between public and private schools. He responded: *"The immediate difference that comes to mind is the educator student ratio. A key to the true academic success of the student is the individual attention and it is for that reason that we have never let our class sizes ceiling exceed 24"*. The principal went on to talk about the key to Mowbray's success: the key is *"our individual approach. We reward students for the individual efforts and that allows all our students across the academic spectrum to achieve. A child's self-image is important and needs to be nurtured all the time"* (Cutting Edge, 2008).



#### 4.3.2.8 Care

##### What they say

In the advertisements the claim is made that: *"The Mowbray College system allows for students to express their individuality and, therefore, the needs of all students can be met"* (Knipe, 2011).

In the constitution, under a heading 'Support and Guidance' it is stated that: *"Mowbray College runs a comprehensive Life Skills program which incorporates a wide variety of aspects including Career Counselling, Health concerns (particularly AIDS, Drug Awareness, Alcohol abuse as well as anti-smoking campaigns), social outreach programmes, health and safety as well as mutual respect and moral education"* (Manual, 2006).

##### What they do

The principal says the following in his newsletter: *"We wish everyone a healthy and safe holiday! We also look forward to seeing every student next term re-invigorated and focussed on achieving their goals"*

Interviewed by a Public Relations company about some of the challenges that his position presents, the principal commented: *"The exciting aspect of my job is that no day is ever the same. Often having to become a surrogate parent to some students has made the job emotionally more demanding"* (Cutting Edge, 2008).

A past student who made a speech at the opening of the new school said: *"The staff don't just invest in the subject, they invest in us as people and bulk into the life of the student. I believe in generational leadership. Anyone can lead someone, even on the wrong path. Mowbray helped me become a leader on the right path"* (Yearbook, 2009).

In his speech at the awards function for the grade 12's, the principal focused on *"an integral part of our ethos and code of conduct - celebrating and caring for the individual"* (Yearbook, 2009:1).

According to the magazine, the school has two counsellors. The report states: *"As counsellors, we aim to be available for any student who is having difficulties, be it at home or at school. We are here for you and we want to help you grow, learn and progress"*. They also refer to *"study skills workshops for those students who might be under pressure because of exams"* (Yearbook, 2009:30).

Answering a request from a PR company to share some of Mowbray's success stories, the principal mentioned that *"there are countless stories, each one unique, that capture the essence of true success. They all play a pivotal role in keeping the fires of passion burning within the teaching staff. To understand fully the extent of the students' successes one would need to contextualise them. I shall not divulge these as we must protect their privacy. In general, however, we have had students at one end of the spectrum achieving brilliant*

*results allowing them to achieve scholarships in their first year at a tertiary institution and then last year, for example, we had a young man joining us in a third attempt to pass his grade 12. The success was a comfortable pass with a matriculation endorsement" (Cutting Edge, 2008).*

The principal also spoke about 'the best piece of advice he has received from working with children'. His comment: *"Listen to them!! I learn from students on a daily basis. It is in listening to them that we get to understand them. This in turn allows us to make well informed educational decisions" (Cutting Edge, 2008).*

### 4.3.3 Answers from current teachers

The teachers at the current campus were given a set of 25 questions, which they were asked to answer via e-mail.

This section is a summary of the answers, including references to the eight main topics that were identified throughout the study, as discussed in the previous section. These references were made through underlining and single words in brackets.

The first question asked **what the school meant to them**. Question 7 was a similar question and wanted to know **what Mowbray College is all about**. This is what the staff had to say:

- An environment where students should feel comfortable expressing their individuality while learning, interacting and focusing on developing their sense of self (Teacher 1).
- A place (environment) where the school ethos and rules are not explicit and students are encouraged to take responsibility for everything they do, for example being punctual for lessons even though there are no bells (Teacher 1).
- Individuality and second chances (Teacher 2).
- Individual attention, better control of the classroom and working more effectively with all the parties concerned in the upbringing of the students (future driven) (Teacher 3).
- Not only a job but also a place (environment) where I have met amazing colleagues and get to work with great students... A place (environment) which allows me to practice doing what I love, giving one a sense of belonging (Teacher 4).
- An important place of learning (environment) (Teacher 5).
- This school addresses the needs of students (individual attention) and this is my main motivation for being involved with young adults. It is easy to marry my objectives and those of the college (Teacher 7).
- A good place (environment) to work at due to: smaller class sizes, opportunity for career advancement, opportunities for skills development and more flexibility and freedom to teachers (Teacher 9).



- A place (environment) of creativity, because it allows individuality of both students and teachers to shine through. Instead of just thinking 'out of the box', we create a 'boxless' feel (students can be who they are through clothing, choice of living etc). We encourage the student to set a high standard for him/herself (academic focus) instead of us as teachers setting the standard and him/her only having to abide and follow (Teacher 10).
- It has become a home to me where I feel accepted and challenged (environment). I feel that my values and principles are in line with those highlighted at the school and so I can easily uphold systems and rules with integrity (Deputy).
- A place which focuses (focused environment) on empowering students in their chosen academic field (future driven) without the bother of all the rules and regulations that apply in public or other private schools (Teacher 1).
- New beginnings (future driven) (Teacher 2).
- Recognising the individual needs of students and using unique methods such as homework sessions to develop their full potential in order to be academically successful (future driven)(Teacher 3).
- We try and prepare students for the world after grade 12 (future driven) and we also look after their emotional well-being (care) (Teacher 4).
- Treating the child as an individual with no history so that they may start again (future driven) (Teacher 6).
- We focus on the academic improvement of each student (academic focus) (Teacher 7).
- Mowbray aims to provide excellent education (excellent results) to young people in a supportive (care), accepting and stimulating environment (Teacher 11).

The second question asked what **acceptable behaviour** was and what **unacceptable behaviour** was. Questions 14 to 16 asked the participants how they would describe "**the way we do things here**" to a new staff member, a new student and a new parent. These questions tested 'perspectives', which is the second level of culture, according to Schein (1985).

### **Acceptable behaviour**

- Respect and mutual tolerance (Teacher 1).
- A focus on academics (Teacher 1).
- Accepting everyone for the individuality, walking towards a common goal to achieve great success at the end of the year (Teacher 3).
- Students are treated as young adults. Respect for each other, staff and other peoples belongings (Teacher 4).
- Being professional in class and in the staff room (Teacher 8).
- A big focus is not only placed on the A candidates for example. All students are encouraged to do their best and individual progress is acknowledged (Teacher 9).

- Acceptable behaviour revolves around displaying mutual respect and having regard for individuality (Teacher 11).

### **Unacceptable behaviour**

- Disrespect in any form (Teacher 1) (several teachers mentioned this)
- Slack work ethic (Teacher 1).
- Not 'showing up', mentally and physically (Teacher 2).
- Always being in class and on time (Teacher 3).
- Lack of respect, anything illegal and also acts such as bullying will not be tolerated (Teacher 4) (several teachers mentioned bullying).
- Being rude and not completing academic tasks (Teacher 7).
- No place for disrespect, disregard, discrimination or bullying (Teacher 10).
- Unacceptable actions include judging those two are different, acting in an authoritarian or top-down manner and belittling or undermining staff or students (Teacher 11).

### **The way we do things here (explained to new staff)**

- No one looks over your shoulder to check that you are doing your work, but you are accountable for everything (Teacher 1).
- The bottom line is: be professional at all times (Teacher 1).
- All I can say is 'good luck'. It's a school where you need to pour your heart and soul into, but when you see you help students, the 'pay-back' is out of the ordinary. It's the best thing ever to really make a difference in someone's life (Teacher 2).
- It is a flexible environment and each situation is handled in a unique way (Teacher 4).
- We tend to do it quite differently to most places, but it works (Teacher 5).
- The systems that are in place are crucial to success: daily homework, timetable the same every day, regular assessment, homework sessions in which students can consult with teachers, fast intervention if students are not complying with academic requirements, each student is an individual and treated as such, few rules but applied consistently, academic focus (Teacher 7).
- Work very hard and care for our students (Teacher 8).
- Not a government school, disciplinarian approach - we treat students like young adults (Teacher 9).
- We work WITH the students to assist them in achieving the very best and it is no 'us and them' mentality. We must aim to understand our students and allow them to feel respected and accepted - they need to FEEL the difference in the classroom atmosphere (Teacher 11).

### **The way we do things here (explained to new students)**

- You will experience a relaxed environment with no uniforms or bells or teachers yelling at you - but you work very hard - every single day (Teacher 1).
- You will feel comfortable in all of your teachers' classes and they really do care about you (Teacher 1).
- The principal and deputy's door is always open (Teacher 1).
- Being unique is key here and using the extra help and resources to the best of their ability and to appreciate and respect it (Teacher 3).
- Every situation and student is different so the way we do things with one student may differ from the way we might handle the same situation with a different student (Teacher 4).
- The mentor is there to provide assistance and support (Teacher 7).
- You will work very hard here, but it is definitely worthwhile! (Teacher 8).
- Fast pace due to all the assessments taking place, so do not fall behind and do homework every day (Teacher 9)..
- We have brilliant systems at Mowbray, but no MAGICAL systems - things will not automatically change for you as you walk in the gates. You will need to take advantage of everything on offer at the school in order to achieve your best. We are not focused mainly on your marks, but mainly on your EFFORTS as without this the system cannot be effective (Teacher 11).

### **The way we do things here (explained to new parents)**

- Your son or daughter will be very stressed, because of the work load and high expectations from every single teacher, but they will be happy because we create an environment where they feel comfortable and secure enough to express themselves and we constantly encourage them to strive to improve themselves (Teacher 1).
- Their child's individual and unique needs will be cared for and nurtured to the best of our ability (Teacher 3).
- Qualified and experienced teachers (Teacher 7).
- Parents need to inform us about any matter that could have an effect on the child's performance or concentration ability. Open door policy - we are only an e-mail or phone call away (Teacher 9).
- Our aim is to assist your son/daughter to achieve their very best results possible. In doing this we aim to get to know them well to ensure that there is nothing holding them back - emotional problems, learning barriers etc. need to be explored in order for us to provide the most appropriate environment for their success (Teacher 11).

The next questions focused on the third level of culture according to Schein (1985) namely values. On this level questions were asked about (1) **what is most important to you in the school**, (2) **what is not important in the school** and (3) **how those (important) things are communicated by the principal or how the teachers knew this**. The questions also

explored (4) the **three most important things that the teachers had to do** (and how they knew that) followed by (5) **things that happened in this school's history that shows them what is important**. Finally teachers were asked to state (6) **what is most important to the principal** (and how they knew this) as well as (7) **what is not important to the principal** (and how they knew this).

#### **What is most important to you in the school?**

- Bringing out the very best in every individual student (Teacher 1).
- Respect, understanding and caring (Teacher 2) (several teachers mentioned 'respect').
- The students' well-being (Teacher 4).
- Small classes and the availability of teachers after hours (Teacher 5).
- The caring for the students and the chance for them to achieve their potential and the striving for excellence in all spheres (Teacher 6).
- The fact that I can focus on my content, the students as individuals and teach in a manner that is most suited to my subject and my own style. Academics are of utmost importance and being real about expectations and work ethic (Teacher 7).
- The miracles we often do - an under-performing student with a bad history being changed to a successful young adult with a future by the caring and hard work of teachers (Teacher 8).
- Individualism and quality teaching (Teacher 9).
- Freedom, good relationships, communication, mutual respect, acceptance and to be appreciated (Teacher 10).
- The code of conduct makes sense - all of our rules are based either on ensuring maximum academic performance or on protecting every individual's right to feel free to be themselves in this environment (Teacher 11).

#### **What is not important in this school?**

- Every student starts off at Mowbray with a clean slate, and we emphasise that passed misdemeanours or mistakes are not focused on at all (Teacher 1).
- Race, social class (Teacher 1), status, background, financial situation, family set up - all of the students are treated equally and given the same opportunities (Teacher 4).
- Students' nationality and skin colour; their different religious beliefs; their appearance - the clothes they wear, their hair, nails etc. to a point of course! (Teacher 8).
- School sport and uniforms (Teacher 5).
- Petty issues (Teacher 6).
- Whatever falls outside the academic performance of students – hair styles, clothing etc. (Teacher 7).
- We do not waste time and energy on unnecessary rules (Teacher 9).

- All the finicky stuff, like having your hair tied up with the correct colour pin, or having your skirt a certain height (length) (Teacher 10).

### **How does the principal communicate what is important and what not?**

- General staff meetings, shorter staff meetings during break, one-on-one interactions in passing and e-mails (Teacher 1).
- We are notified of these short meetings by SMS (Teacher 8).
- He is very direct and I know exactly what is important and what can wait for later (Teacher 2).
- One can also tell if it is a very important issue as one can sense the emotion when he addresses these issues (Teacher 4).
- The ethos comes across clearly as we are constantly trying to better the academics of the individual child with a mentoring programme which is encouraged by the principal (Teacher 6).
- Verbal communication during meetings and informal discussions. He is very vocal about what is important to him in the college (Teacher 7).
- The principal would say things in meetings about the college ethos (Teacher 9).
- We have weekly e-mails, monthly meetings, termly enrichment days (Teacher 10).
- Through his actions as well as through what he says at staff meetings (Teacher 11).

### **What are the three most important things that you must do?**

- Well-prepared lessons, be in touch with students academically but also with regard to their head-space and to maintain the highest level of professionalism (Teacher 1).
- Care; Get the work done; Get results, but at the same time be a 'safe place' (Teacher 2).
- Friendly and good service to parents and students; work efficiently; meet deadlines (Teacher 5).
- Be excellent in the classroom; the caring as a mentor; be administratively efficient and stick to deadlines (Teacher 6).
- Teach and manage my subject - this is the main focus and is the focus of all discussions with the principal and other management members. Interaction with students; manage an ever-changing environment (Teacher 7).
- My work, to the best of my ability; Caring for my mentees; To be an example of good behaviour (Teacher 8).
- Teaching; Grade Head tasks; Liaising with parents and students (Teacher 9).
- Educate them for the future; Inspire and ignite their passion; Respect them for who they are (Teacher 10).
- Remain on top of my game in the classroom at all times; treat students and colleagues with dignity and respect; develop an understanding of the needs of each student. I know this through my years of teaching and in particular through my

experience at Mowbray which has installed these important values in me (Teacher 11).

### **Things that happened in the school's history that shows them what is important.**

- At the inception of Mowbray College, it started off as a college for young men who had done their stint in the army. Age and appearance, etc. were not criteria for acceptance - rather the importance of equipping young adults with the necessary academic skills for achieving (Teacher 1).
- A teacher had a disciplinary hearing due to inefficiency and this was necessary as well as a lesson to all the staff (Teacher 6).
- In Mowbray history, soldiers could become students again, after coming back from the Army – i.e. they had a right to education even when they weren't considered the traditional age to receive basic education (Teacher 10).

### **What is most important to the principal?**

- A key feature that the principal always stresses is that we as teachers should always show the necessary respect for our students and be aware of their 'head-space'. The sound emotional well-being of students is more important to him than academic achievement (Teacher 1).
- Helping students and not giving up on them, even if the rest of the world gave up already! (Teacher 2).
- The urgency and emotion is evident when he is dealing with issues that deeply affect students and/or the staff members (Teacher 4).
- Ensuring all staff are performing to their potential (Teacher 5).
- Best interest of the students. The way he handles difficult students - he has the talent to 'win' students over.
- The well-being and improvement of the students; Quality of the work; Successful functioning of the campus. These are the aspects that he mostly addresses and discusses during meetings or informal discussions.
- The well-being of the students (Teacher 7). He is passionate about young people and would like to give all arriving at Mowbray a fair chance in life (Teacher 9).
- Ensuring that we look out for the best interest of the students (his actions and decisions are governed by this underlying principle) (Teacher 11).

### **What is not important to the principal?**

- He is non-judgemental: he is not interested in what you've done wrong in the past, he wants to move on and he expresses this in many one-on-one meetings with students (Teacher 1).
- Conforming to the norms that other schools adhere to, for example: if a student applies to come to Mowbray who has a loaded history of drug abuse and expulsion

he will look past that in most cases and look towards making the future better for that student, obviously while putting the necessary support structures into place. Once again, I think as long as he acts within the best interests of the college staff and students he does not care what other people may think or how they would have handled the situation (Teacher 4).

- Administration is perhaps not the strongest point of our principal (Teacher 6).
- Little nonsense things (Teacher 8).
- The history of the students as he believes most students change when they come to Mowbray. He is not concerned about petty rules on things (Teacher 9).
- Petty rules which do not affect the achieving our goals. Status (Teacher 11).

To summarise the e-mail answers received back from the teachers, the following topics featured repeatedly:

The focus of the school is clearly academic. The fact that the school has the same timetable each day and that students have daily homework periods and regular assessments as well as the fact that almost all the staff indicate that their most important thing to do is teaching, highlights this fact.

The type of teachers seems to be people who are (in the words of Teacher 1) regarded as professional (they are not being checked up by someone “looking over their shoulder”), who are expected to be well prepared for their classes and who are accountable for everything they do. They are qualified and experienced and they can “focus on content and teaching”.

The environment is mostly described in terms of the ‘emotional’ space, where individuality is allowed, where there are no bells or uniforms and where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own success. Very few comments refer to the physical environment.

Almost all the activities that are mentioned refer to academic activities such as quality teaching. One teacher mentioned “school sport and uniform”, when asked what is not important. From their answers it is clear that sport does not play a significant role in this school.

Excellent results were never mentioned in the teachers’ answers. Only one comment referred to the high academic standards that were set (when asked how they would describe “the way we do things here”), but several answers referred to the fact that students work hard and that the best possible results for each student individually (in terms of what they can achieve) is what was important.

The future focus came through in several answers referring to the fact that in this school your past was not important, but the future was. The common goal is ‘future success’, which reflects in the comment from about what is not important to the principal: “*he is not interested in what you’ve done wrong in the past, he wants to move on and he expresses this in many one-on-one meetings with students*” (Teacher 1).



Individual attention is clearly one of the biggest themes in the school, expressed in answers about how Mowbray College gives students “*second chances*”, or that “*students can express their individuality in clothing and hair*”, or that “*it was not only A-candidates who were important, but that all students are encouraged to do their best*”

Another major theme is ‘care’ as can be seen from comments like “*students are treated like young adults*” and “*mentors are there to support*”. One teacher, when asked to state what was ‘most important’ said “*respect and care*” (Teacher 2). Several teachers, when they listed the three most important things they were expected to do, listed ‘care’ and their work as ‘mentors’. Besides ‘teaching’, this looks like it is the second most important expectation from them. One can even see that from the answers about what is most important to the principal: “*best interest of the students*” and “*helping students and not giving up on them*”.

It is also clear that the behaviour of the principal is very focussed on the items listed above and that he communicates this in many different ways to his staff: e-mail, sms, direct talks and in meetings. “*The ethos comes across clearly...*” (Teacher 6) and “*through his actions as well as through what he says ...*” (Teacher 11).

#### 4.3.4 Stories about the school

The staff was asked several questions prodding them about stories and events that are most typical of the school. One question asked them to describe something that happened in the school's history that illustrates what is important. Another question required them to describe a major crisis, or crucial transition that the school had to overcome and how it was done. There was also a request to tell a story that is most typical of the school. This is what came out:

- The school had a large contingent of Botswana students until recently. The Botswana government withdrew them. This was possibly because of political changes and a change in the curriculum at the time (Teacher 1). (Another teacher also mentioned this story and mentioned that the students definitely improved the academic standards as they were students wanting to get into universities and worked hard to achieve that) (Teacher 6).
- The only major change that I have experienced so far is the fact that the lot of foreign students come to our school with language barriers as they cannot communicate properly in English or even understand it. The school offers extra English classes to these students (Teacher 3).
- A very recent issue is that there are many Korean students and they really struggle with English, which effectively has a negative impact on all their subjects, hence their results do not reflect actual ability because of the language barrier. Our campus is now looking to get someone in to specifically help these students (Teacher 4).



- Mowbray Live is almost like a talent show that is held once a year. This year we had students performing ballet pieces, to heavy metal bands, to hip-hop, to pop, to poetry and even drama pieces to name a few. There was a great turn out of students and they were all so supportive of each other even though they may not be friends. Students that we least expected blew us away with their talent. I think it just shows the diversity yet the unity that Mowbray has managed to achieve (Teacher 4) (several teachers referred to this same story and the principal also mentioned that this was one of the highlights in the school).
- A very well-liked and popular student died in a motorcycle accident. Counselling was available to all students and a time of mourning was allowed - students asked to have an area where they could light candles and remember the student. This was allowed until after the memorial service (Teacher 5). Another teacher also told this story and added: it was an incredibly sad time but demonstrated the 'family' nature of our campus (Teacher 11).
- Several teachers mentioned the move from the previous 'shopping-centre-campus' to the current new campus (Teachers 5, 6, 8, 9). One of them explained that when the second campus in the group was opened, four staff members were sent across from the original campus to continue the same ethos. When they moved to their new current campus, most of the staff moved across and this was an easier transition (Teacher 6). One teacher said: the students will have a healthier environment to study in now (Teacher 8).
- About the same move one teacher explained: Our previous campus in the shopping centre had a different appeal and was very much seen as a school for 'drop-outs' and 'misfits'. However with this new campus came a new upmarket look, a new focus (also regarding the target market) and making the transition in the New Year also meant a new beginning and I think we have embraced it beautifully! (Teacher 10).
- Another teacher described the move to the new campus as: A brilliant move as we now have a far more impressive building, which attracts a wide range of families (Yes, appearance and image do matter!) (Teacher 11).
- A typical story: We let a grade 12 Chinese girl change from Economics to Geography in the middle of the second term. She had never done Geography before in South Africa. She received 37% for her third report and has just received 53% in June examination. This is due to strategies that were put in place so that she could reach her potential. This is also credit to her work ethic (Teacher 6).
- Another typical story: I had a foreign student who started at Mowbray in grade 12 this year. She had not yet done my subject before and ended the year as the top student (86%) in the subject. Students enter my class with a failing result (12% for one student this year) and achieve much higher marks (43% in the June examination). Students comment that they enjoy college and are happy here (Teacher 7).

- Many students came to us with emotional, learning and even drug problems. After they spent time at Mowbray, they almost always leave with a positive attitude and future plans that are reachable (Teacher 8).
- Students come to us as ‘a last resort’ at times OR they have been expelled from other schools - they come to us and they flourish (Teacher 9).
- Students were upset about the Mohawk hairstyles and they drew up a petition. The principal addressed them in the hall to explain the rationale and concerns regarding the Mohawk hairstyles. This was much appreciated by the students as they felt their complaints were listened to (Teacher 9).
- Students love Mowbray as it is: the heartbeat, the living, the breathing of students - the fact that they can look the way they want to, feel what they do, be who they are and not be discriminated against for it, for example: students often come into the Art classroom during break time (especially in winter), to come and paint, draw or just be (as soon as they have smoked their siggie!)(sic), chat about whatever... take photos, or... (Teacher 10).
- A few years ago a young man joined us at the start of grade 12. He had two previous attempts at passing matric and was determined not to give up. The staff were very sceptical at first, but as the year unfolded his determination to succeed and his ‘buy-in’ to the Mowbray system soon became evident and he achieved a Bachelor pass at the end of that year (Teacher 11).
- The principal was also asked which stories he regarded as typical of the school. He said: “There are so many! They all generally shared a similar journey: a negative dependent reality evolving into a positive independent reality.”

From the stories told about the school, the following themes filter through:

Hard work is celebrated: This is evident from the stories about the foreign students who used to come from Botswana and who worked so hard to get into tertiary institutions – their work ethic improved the academic standards.

Individual attention: Many foreign students with language barriers are helped to overcome that and achieve academic success. Twice there was mention made of a “typical story” of a student who was given a chance to try a new subject and who made a success of that. This is what the principal echoed when he said that all the stories have a similar tone – “a negative dependent reality evolving into a positive independent reality.”

Care and support: The mentioning by more than one teacher about the way that students support each other at the talent show (Mowbray Live), but also the explanations of the care students received and gave each other when a fellow student died in an accident.

The environment is not the most important, but it matters: The stories of the old campus that was in a shopping centre (a place with a different feel), but also the positive effects that the move to their new campus had.

### 4.3.5 The current principal

Referring back to Sergiovanni's "Leadership forces hierarchy" (Sergiovanni, 1995:84-93), I wanted to look into the current principal's symbolic and cultural leadership behaviour. As "symbolic" leader, the principal signals to others what is important and valuable in the school. Using the "cultural leadership force", he articulates and strengthens *"those enduring values and beliefs and cultural strands that give the school its unique identity over time"* (Sergiovanni, 1995:88-89).

To determine these behaviours, Reeves & Reitzug (1992:192) suggest in their "taxonomy of symbolic leadership forms" how to observe the leadership behaviour of a principal.

Questions were asked to the current teaching staff and deputy principal about the principal's actions, similar to those actions suggested by Reeves & Reitzug (see tables 5-1 of this research report). Similar questions were also asked to the principal himself. The responses to these questions were as follows:

#### 4.3.5.1 *What he says and does*

When asked about what they thought their principal is doing most of the time, the staff answered:

- Administrative issues and interviews (Teacher 1).
- He is interacting with everyone. He is everywhere at once! (Teacher 2).
- Have interviews with possible new students and have interviews with ill-disciplined students and their parents (Teacher 3).
- One teacher said it is difficult to answer that question. I'm unsure what the principal does most of the time. I do know that is often very busy with prospective student interviews, parents and students meetings - should there be a problem with a particular student - and that he keeps an eye on every aspect of the college (Teacher 4).
- Ensures the campus is running in line with the Mowbray<sup>9</sup> College conduct (Teacher 5).
- Deal with issues of the students and work with Head Office (Teacher 6).
- He works very hard, spends a lot of time on interviews with new students as well as students who need extra help (Teacher 8).
- He spends a lot of time focusing on the bigger picture of our campus. Time-consuming activities like monitoring the budget and planning new marketing strategies are all an effort to ensure that we remain viable. He also spends plenty of

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<sup>9</sup> Pseudonym

time in interviewing new students and meeting with those two are not performing (Teacher 11).

The principal himself was also asked this question about how he spends most of his time and on which tasks he spends most hours:

- Interviews: The cliché "First impressions are lasting impressions" is very relevant in the context of the educational review of a child. The experience of an interview needs to resonate with the marketing message sent to the public. The parents are making a very important decision; it is an investment in their child's future. A significant amount of time is spent unpacking the student's past to ensure that sound decisions are made based on all the relevant background information.
- Planning and strategising: Things are forever in flux in the educational realm. One needs to react swiftly when faced with these changes. Time and energy must be spent on learning from our students (the clients).
- Day-to-day management of the varied challenges (often unplanned) one faces in this people-orientated environment (parents, students, staff, debtors and service providers).
- Staff TLC (Tender Loving Care): The staff members play a pivotal role in the success of the campus. One needs to be in touch and available to support, nurture, affirm and simply care.

The principal confirmed that most of his energy is committed to "the building of human relations." He regards attendance of the following meetings as important: Education Department principal meetings (to stay in the loop), regular "General staff meetings" (to keep communication channels open), "Parent meetings" and "Mark reading meetings", where student results are discussed.

Meetings at school are normally held in the Computer Room, where PowerPoint presentations are possible and student images and information can be screened for everyone to clearly see, while general staff meetings are held in a Mini-Hall where seating can be arranged according to the nature of the meeting (such as cinema style, circle seating or addition of tables when workshops are necessary).

When asked about the ceremonies over which the principal presides and why, he responded: "I don't think the word '*preside*' is really appropriate in the context of management of this school. Members of the management team will have different key roles to play during the ceremonies. Other staff could also be playing significant roles; it varies and depends on the particular ceremony. Our approach is very democratic and the focus is always *team work*. We often rotate portfolios and it is important that staff members are afforded opportunities of planning and orchestrating the ceremonies. For example: If someone is responsible for the grade 12 awards function, I expect that they take ownership and make it their own. The rest of the staff are therefore guided by the staff member in

charge. The tone and the message are always guided by the ethos of Mowbray. I will therefore only intervene and redirect the staff member if this criterion is not met. The style does allow for errors, but I strongly believe that people must be allowed to make mistakes as it is conducive to confidence building and empowerment.

The principal regards *'teaching'* as always the top priority, and students are rewarded for academic results, great effort and living the true *'Mowbray spirit'*. Staff are also rewarded for great efforts and a display of team work.

Asked whether he was deliberately modelling behaviour to others, the principal mentioned that mutual respect is core to the Code of Conduct and that it was therefore essential that he always displays this in his dealings with both students and staff. He was aware that he was an important role model in his capacity as principal and therefore he always tries to nurture a passion for education and unconditional care for the students.

I asked him what he would show, if he was taking someone on a tour around the school. I wanted to know what is most important to him, and whether he avoided showing certain things. His response was that he would show all the specialist venues, one ordinary classroom and he would not avoid anything except the smokers' section.

Regarding questions about the resources that they need and how they were acquired (including teachers, staff, educational materials and other resources), the principal indicated that staff was normally acquired through word-of-mouth or advertising and that other resources were normally budgeted items. He is given clear budget targets every year to which he needs to adhere.

In considering how he made his decisions and what governs his decision-making he firmly answered that decisions around students and staff are very much guided by the answer to the following question: *"What is in the best interest of the individual and not to the detriment of the college?"*

I asked him about procedures that he developed at this campus in the last four years. For him the need for new procedures is either as a result of reflection and then the identification of a need for a procedure OR the creation of the procedure in order to actualise a vision in future planning. He used the following two examples to illustrate this: The increase in bullying demanded a strategy for coming up with a procedure to deal with it effectively in a true Mowbray manner. Also, recently they came up with a procedure to deal with academic accountability/integrity more effectively.

Finally I asked him what his favourite saying was. His staff mentioned to me that he was often quoting and that he had many sayings, but he responded he did not really have any. He did mention one: *"It's what you do in the present that will redeem the past and thereby change the future"*, which is a quote from his favourite author Paulo Coelho, who wrote "The Alchemist" and "Aleph".

One of the aims of this study is to identify and describe the role and behaviour of the principal in creating the school culture. In the things he said himself about his behaviour as well as what his staff said about what he says and does, the following became clear: The principal spends a great deal of time on daily principal's duties like managing the school, the budget and the daily program (the first three forces of leadership according to Sergiovanni – see diagram 2.1), but that he also spends time on the so-called stretcher forces – the symbolic and cultural leadership. According to his staff, the principal spends a lot of time on interviewing new students, where he explains what the school is all about (cultural leadership force). It is also clear that he communicates a lot and in many different ways with his staff, the students and the parents, in which he 'signals what is important and valuable' (symbolic leadership force) and he says himself that *"the tone and the message are always guided by the ethos of Mowbray"* or *"decisions around students and staff are very much guided by the answer to the question: "What is in the best interest of the individual and not to the detriment of the college?"*.

#### **4.3.6 Observations and comments from various outsiders visiting the school**

During the week of 14 to 18 May 2012, the Mowbray College campus included in this research underwent a programme called "Building on Excellence". This programme was designed and implemented in several schools all over South Africa, that form part of the group of schools owned by the holding company. In 2012 it was the turn of this campus of Mowbray College. The purpose of this programme is "A Review of Good Practice at Mowbray College", with the intention to send teachers and other staff members from various schools and campuses to this college to observe what they do well and how the other schools in the group can contribute to making it even better. This year (2012) Mowbray College received 14 visitors from all over South Africa: one principal, one deputy principal, ten teachers and two staff members from the head office in Johannesburg. A report was published internally, and distributed to the various schools in the group to read and learn from one another.

The report was of particular interest to this study, because it gave a relatively independent insight into what was really happening at the school, and not only about what was being promised or said. The visitors were asked to write down their first impressions when visiting the school (in the report these 'first impressions' were recorded anonymously). Each of them also went into classrooms and experienced teaching first-hand. They wrote separate reports about each of these class visits. Finally a mixture of parents was invited by the head office staff to come to a meeting called "Parent Focus". The parents were asked why they chose this school; what they thought the key characteristics were that defined this campus of Mowbray College and, finally, to make some general comments about the quality

of reporting, communication and systems at the school. The identity of the parents was also kept secret in the report.

The details of these discussions follow later in this report (see 4.3.6.3).

#### **4.3.6.1 First Impressions**

One of the teachers from another campus of Mowbray College in South Africa, commented that "*the students looked like the average Mowbray student that we are teaching in our province - very individualistic and some also a bit eccentric*" (Building on Excellence, 2012:5). When I read this comment, I immediately thought of the "Layers of Culture" in the model of Kilmann *et al* (1986) that was mentioned earlier in this report (chapter 3, Table 3.2) and that referred to the level of homogeneity, content and strength of culture in a group of schools like Mowbray College.

Other staff members said:

- The staff room is comfortable and homely, yet professional at the same time. The teachers were very busy during breaks, photocopying and so on and there was a general air of productivity.
- Although a relaxed atmosphere is evident throughout the campus, there is also a clear structure which provides stability and a secure environment to all. The students know the boundaries and are aware of the consequences when they do not achieve their potential.
- An atmosphere of openness exists between staff, as well as between students and teachers. This contributes to a positive learning environment.
- The general impression of the school is that of good organisation, neatness and discipline. Students are relaxed, but aware of what is expected of them.
- It was nice to see the principal mixing with his staff at break. He seems to have an easy rapport with them.
- The students, though I was unknown to them, greeted me! I was impressed!
- The students appear to be typical "Mowbray" types who, while polite and friendly, did not appear to "own" the space.
- As the day began, I learned that the school operates without bells and was so impressed at how well this works.
- I quickly observed that this is an environment where pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and that the focus is purely academic.
- Students were friendly but exactly the same as at our campus regarding manners, looks, ideas, and way of acting, communication and dress code. (Building on Excellence, 2012:5-8).



#### 4.3.6.2 *Subject excellence*

Relevant comments made in the Afrikaans class were:

- The atmosphere in the classes is relaxed and class sizes range from 10-22 students.
- One of the classes was attended by a student with extremely bad eyesight and one of the other classes had a student with hearing disabilities (Building on Excellence, 2012:9-10).

A visitor in the Art Department commented:

- The teacher provides a safe environment for students to express themselves and develop as artists. Students are encouraged to interpret projects in their own way. It is evident that students take the art making process seriously.
- The teacher is a passionate and knowledgeable Design teacher, and delivers expert information and pertinent advice to her students. Her approach is open and warm, and she has a good rapport with the students. They feel heard, and the teacher constructs her lesson time in such a way that there is student input and feedback. Each student opinion and artistic idea was considered by the teacher before she offered helpful advice and other options that could be explored (Building on Excellence, 2012:11-14).

About the Drama class the following was said:

- I was very impressed by the practical work performed by this teacher's grade 12s. They are clearly working at a very mature level of understanding this form of performance, and this could only have come about due to the teacher's level of expertise and confidence in teaching this section of the syllabus. She is an incredibly enthusiastic teacher, very animated in her approach to students and knowledgeable in the subject. She has a warm rapport with the students and they in turn, are responsive to her.
- When I observed her grade 11 theory class, I noticed how easy and confident she felt using technology (PowerPoint) and resolved to improve my skills. I also liked the way she could cover the content quite quickly using this visual aid. She is so adept, that she also added video clips to further stimulate her audience. She came across as knowledgeable and approachable and handled questions with ease. Even her 'difficult' students seemed engrossed in the lesson.
- I was also impressed with the other Drama teacher's grade 10 students and the practical piece. He has inspired them and has a high expectation of them that they are capable of delivering work of this high standard and they can deliver it! I am very impressed and inspired to see both teachers working at this level of depth and skill with their students. He is also very at home with using technology to explain things to the students and they responded well to it.



- I observed a practical drama class and was so impressed by the intrinsic motivation of these grade 10 pupils and how they were tackling a difficult task with enthusiasm. Their warmth needs to be commended as they were very happy to ask my opinion of what they were doing and in so doing include me (Building on Excellence, 2012:15).

A visit to the Mathematics Department evoked the following comments:

- Both teachers have a very friendly approach. They are very soft-spoken and are not perceived to be a threat in any way to the students. This is crucial in a “threatening subject” like Mathematics. They have a calm and easy manner which encourages the students to be themselves.
- There were no students late for class.
- Students have confidence to ask questions immediately when the need arises and participate in the lesson.
- One teacher has developed the technique, while still facing the students, to write on the board. Therefore eye contact is maintained with the class.
- An atmosphere is created where students are willing to ask and to learn.
- Even though I was on a different campus with a different building, students and teachers, the soul of the college felt the same! This is one of the strong points for me. I totally identify with the philosophy of Mowbray College to create a unique opportunity for learning as well as for teaching (Building on Excellence, 2012:16-19).

The visitor to the Hospitality Studies section had the following to say:

- Observing the activity in the kitchen was a highlight. The pupils were inviting and happy to explain what they were doing (Building on Excellence, 2012:19).

In the Physical Science classes, the visitor noted the following:

- The teacher is clearly a highly experienced Physical Sciences educator who has a very good rapport with her students yet commands their respect. She sets homework on a daily basis and tests the students every week. It was a lively, interactive lesson and one which the students enjoyed.
- I enjoyed both lessons, particularly observing the interaction between the teacher and her students as she has an excellent working relationship with them. She is a highly proficient, innovative Physical Sciences educator and her students can only benefit from her considerable expertise and background knowledge of her subject.
- The management of the college is empathetic towards and supportive of their staff and there is constant communication on all levels as well as regular staff meetings. There are firm discipline policies in place, and teachers can freely call on management to intervene when they deem it necessary. Issues with an individual student can be written in a book in the staff room for ready reference, and a student can be placed on a daily report when the need arises.

- The compulsory homework sessions or “clinics” allow time for students to catch up work missed or for revision and consolidation purposes. This allows the educator to spend time with individual students who might need extra help with a particular topic or concept.
- As far as the two teachers are concerned, the Physical Sciences department is in excellent hands. They are both specialists in their field and unquestionably have the best interests of their students at heart.
- I enjoyed my time on this Mowbray campus and was very impressed by the high standard of the facilities as well as the friendliness and professionalism of all the staff I met. The principal and deputy principal were very hospitable and obviously very proud of the campus with good reason (Building on Excellence, 2012:24-26).

The Life Sciences visitor made specific mention of the atmosphere in that class:

- The students seemed relatively motivated and needed little encouragement to start the worksheet in class.
- The atmosphere was non-threatening and the students responded well to the teacher. They were also friendly and well behaved. I was surprised that she held the attention of the class so well (Building on Excellence, 2012:26-27).

The final report was from a teacher visiting the English Department:

- The teacher welcomed the grade 12s into a bell free environment! No one was late and all knew that they would be reviewing a number of questions around a past paper.
- I hope that this interesting and pleasant group of young men and women achieve the success they deserve, with the huge support of their excellent teacher. They quite clearly are really enjoying English!
- The poetry teacher's superlative general knowledge added a special quality. My overall impression here is that the pupils are enjoying inspiring poetry lessons and that that they are being well taught (Building on Excellence, 2012:27-29).

It is significant to note from all the visits to various classes and comments made about what they observed, that almost every visitor talks about the “*relaxed but focussed environment*” in the classes, the expertise of the teachers and the fact that there was a non-threatening and friendly atmosphere in almost every class they visited; in the words of the visitor to the Mathematics class: “*An atmosphere is created where students are willing to ask and to learn.*”

This reflects well on what the principal communicates to his staff about what is important and what the most important things are that he expects his staff to do: Teacher 7 (in the email interviews) said about the most important things she must do: “*Teach and manage my subject - this is the main focus and is the focus of all discussions with the principal and*

*other management members; as well as interaction with students...".* Another teacher, when asked what is most important to the principal, said: *"The well-being and improvement of the students; Quality of the work; Successful functioning of the campus. These are the aspects that he mostly addresses and discusses during meetings or informal discussions."*

#### **4.3.6.3 What parents had to say<sup>10</sup>**

A group of various parents were asked why they chose Mowbray College as their child's education provider. Their comments were made verbally and anonymously in a group discussion called 'Parent Focus'. This discussion was facilitated by an outside visitor from the Head Office in Johannesburg and recorded anonymously by another outside visitor. The comments made were published in the 'Building on Excellence' report. Some responses were as follows:

- One father said that he had heard of the college through a friend of his daughter's. They contacted the school and after the interview with the principal, they were completely won over. They have never looked back and their daughter is doing very well. Since then, another friend of their daughter's has joined the school. Word-of-mouth is definitely very strong.
- *"We moved from a private school which follows the IEB system where the child was not happy as there was no structure. Since being at Mowbray College, the child is in a structured environment, which he thrives on. Homework supervision is the best thing ever!"* The parents have seen a huge difference in their child.
- The child was at the same school as his sister who was a high achiever. He was not doing well academically, so they looked for a school with smaller classes and more individual attention. They came for the interview with the principal and have not looked back.
- This mom mentioned that her son was the lowest (academically) in his class at his previous schools. Since joining Mowbray College, he has won the award for the most improved student. He has become a more open child and communicates better. The structure of the environment and homework supervision is what he needed. She heard about the school through word-of-mouth.
- *"My son has grown up a lot. He has matured, takes more responsibility and has a sense of accountability"*, one parent said.
- The students are treated like adults.
- Staff members are approachable and students are able to voice an opinion in an understanding of mutual respect.
- There is a value system that is entrenched here - it is wonderful. Students have an appreciation for what is being done for them; they are more mature and have better manners.

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<sup>10</sup> None of the parents in the report were coded. They are therefore not identifiable in the report.

- One mother said that she had been paying for extra lessons for all of her son's subjects at the previous school. She wanted structure. She heard about 'homework periods' and loves 'time management'. *"I can't get it right to get him chained to a chair. The college has managed to get him to work without me having to motivate him. He has blossomed. He has become a whole person and he cannot disappear through the cracks as he did at his previous school"* (Building on Excellence, 2012:31-32).

When asked, in their opinion, what the key characteristics were that defined this campus of Mowbray College, they responded:

- The principal is 'cool'! Students can talk to him and his accessibility does not take away his authority. He relates on their level.
- One father mentioned that the students attended a workshop at a tertiary institution at five o'clock on the Saturday evening. The principal popped in to show his support. They were overwhelmed by this.
- Parents feel that the teachers are very approachable. Every child is loved.
- Homework supervision and the mentoring process. Parents stressed how fantastic it was that each student had their own mentor.
- Effort rating system (best thing ever!) - Parents feel that this is a good indicator. One can speak to the teacher on a more informed basis. Effort rating was mentioned a few times.
- Awards ceremony - they love the fact that so many students received awards and in particularly the Principal's Award for the student who has overcome huge obstacles in his/her life.
- Structure and daily routine - the timetable is always the same every day. Students work very well in this kind of environment.
- Subject choice offered here was not available at my son's previous school. Several parents mentioned several subjects.
- Another parent said that the principal is very astute in reading the student. He accommodates individuality, calls a spade a spade, is impressive and that the healing starts from that initial interview. One parent said that she wished the principal was her psychologist/therapist.
- Four parents agreed that Mowbray doesn't contact parents for everything. The college handles issues by first speaking to the student. One mother said that when her son had tested positive for drugs, she didn't have to get involved. She was included in the meetings but the son had to shoulder the responsibility for his actions. The son had to telephone the mother and explain his actions.
- There is a tolerance for individuality and/or eccentricities. One mother said that after being in top schools in three different countries, her son feels understood at the college. He is excelling academically and he wants to work. Mowbray can easily accommodate students from an international background.

- The discipline style and work ethic expected of the students make students more responsible, able to work independently and gives them a sense of accountability.
- Whilst the college is expensive with regard to fees, it gets excellent results in all grades, for example one parent said that her son changed to Economics and is now getting more than 70% in the subject.
- Parents/students enjoy the fact that the students are allowed to wear casual clothes and do not have strict rules regarding hairstyles. No petty issues. (Building on Excellence, 2012:32-34).

Comments on the quality of the reporting and effectiveness of their communication systems are:

- Receiving eight reports a year is brilliant. The parents know all the time how their child is doing. It is never a surprise to them if something is wrong - they are always informed.
- The college is like a little community to help new students - even if they find each other strange. The atmosphere is one of embracing diversity.
- There is a sense of professionalism on the campus. Parents are happy to attend parent-teacher meetings.
- A number of parents enjoyed the fact that Mowbray did a survey amongst the students to get their input regarding what they considered respectful behaviour towards each other and their teachers (Building on Excellence, 2012:35).

The comments from parents (as expressed above) provide a very good evidence base for whether what this school is 'saying' about themselves and what they 'promise' in the advertisements and enrolment interviews, correspond with what they actually do. It is also clear from especially the comments about the principal, that he is providing very clear 'symbolic' and 'cultural' leadership whereby he helps to shape the school's identity. Some of the most relevant comments were that: *"there is a value system that is entrenched here"*. Several parents refer to the principal with comments like: *"The principal is 'cool'"* and *"...he is very astute in reading the student. He accommodates individuality, calls a spade a spade..."* and *"...the healing starts from that initial interview."* Another very relevant comment is that *"the college is like a little community to help new students - even if they find each other strange. The atmosphere is one of embracing diversity"*.

#### 4.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter contains the presentation of data gathered from artefacts, interviews with teachers, the principal and reports by visitors to the school. The next chapter puts all this data within the context of the levels of culture, as proposed by Schein (1985). Chapter 5 will detail the researcher's conclusions and recommendations based on these findings.

# CHAPTER 5

## OVERVIEW, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### 5.1 OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 provided an orientation to this study and an introduction to Mowbray College, where this school came from and where it fits in on the South African educational landscape. It stated how the literature clearly shows that the relationship between effective schools, and a positive organisational culture has been proven quantitatively, but that this study would try to solve the “how” problem through a qualitative method. It also explained that the method would be to look at the principal’s leadership behaviour and the school’s history, to see how – over time – he responded to changes, how he articulated the values, beliefs and cultural strands that give this school its identity and how he signals what is important and valuable.

Chapter 2 delved into the literature about school culture to clarify and define research terminology, to identify what has been written about this topic in general, and to look for indicators of school culture that could be used. Literature from as far back as 1932 was identified, when Waller (1932) published the first works on organisational culture; secondly the difference between the concepts “organisational climate” and “organisational culture” was investigated; thirdly several models on leadership and leadership behaviour were identified that could be used to give this study its theoretical grounding, and lastly some examples of both qualitative and quantitative studies into school culture were consulted, which assisted in finding some indicators of culture that could be utilised.

Then chapter 3 was focussed on an explanation and discussion of the research methodology of this study. The reasons for choosing a qualitative method were outlined, why only one school and one campus was selected, how the data was going to be collected, and what the ethical considerations, limitations and significance were, as well as how the issues of trustworthiness were overcome.

In chapter 4 of this research report, all the findings gathered on the first three levels (levels of artefacts, perspectives and values) as Schein (1985) described them, were detailed. These findings were identified and discussed per theme over two separate periods in the history of the school. Documents and other artefacts were examined, along with answers from teachers, and the principal himself as well as reports from visiting teachers to the school and current parents.

Chapter 5 has three main sections: findings, conclusions and recommendations.

In section 5.2 (findings) the findings of chapter 4 will be related to the **aims of the study** and used to show what Mowbray College's school culture looks like according to the first three Levels of Culture (Schein:1985). It also indicates how the school culture developed over the past 40 years; how the past still lives in the present, and what the principal's role was in shaping the school culture. Finally this first section of chapter 5 expresses the identified assumptions that members of this school have about the nature of the organisation.

In section 5.3 (Conclusion) a conclusion on the veracity or not of the working assumption will be formulated.

Section 5.4 (Recommendations) articulates how culture is formed, and how anyone can identify their school's culture and change it. It contains recommendations for improvement of practice and for further research and the recommendations are firmly based on the findings. The last section contains conclusive remarks about the author's assessment of the dissertation.

## 5.2 FINDINGS

### 5.2.1 Mowbray College's Current School Culture

Schein (1985) and others described school culture as existing on four levels. Sergiovanni (1995: 108) suggested the use of these four levels of culture as a framework to identify the culture of a school, but he also stated that the fourth level (level of assumptions) was difficult to identify and that it had to be inferred from what was found on the first three levels.

#### On the first level: Level of Artefacts

On this level, this report shows "what they say" and evidence of whether that is true ("what they do"):

The school says that they focus on grades 10, 11 and 12 and that they treat students like young adults. A number of parents said that their children were treated like adults (with respect) and how their children had matured. The enrolment numbers clearly showed that there were only grade 10, 11 and 12 students in the school, which brought with it a fairly 'mature' environment.

The artefacts indicate that every student gets an interview at the beginning of his career at Mowbray. Several students talked about their initial interview, before they started at Mowbray, and how that interview changed their future. In the group discussion with various



parents (during the “Building on Excellence” programme) one parent spoke at length about the excellent entrance interview that ‘won him over’. The college manual includes a document stating the procedure and content of the initial personal interview. It proves that this is happening.

The school says that they focus on academic results, effort and that marks will improve. The records from awards functions show that they reward academic excellence, effort and hard work as well as improvement. One of the past students testified how his marks improved and how many students excelled academically. In his newsletter on the website, the principal praises people with high efforts scores. Several parents testified that their children are doing well (good results) and one parent explained how his child (who was very weak academically) received an award for most improved student, and how that motivated him to work hard. The results published on the website indeed indicate excellent results.

The school says that they focus on the individual, that there is no discrimination and that they care for every student. The awards handed out prove that they reward commitment and individuals who persevere as well as individuals who overcome difficulties. Past students testified that teachers treated them with respect, and that they were given the opportunity to take responsibility and be individuals. In the interviews with staff they all expressed similar answers when asked what the school was all about: A comfortable and focused environment; a focus on developing the student for his future; a focus on academics and excellent results; individual attention; allowing students to express their individuality and care. Visitors to some classes reported that they saw students with hearing and sight problems, indicating that a variety of students are accepted in the school. One parent testified that “each child is loved”. The school’s values, displayed on the walls, confirm that quality, respect, care, individuality and accountability are important in the school. In the yearbooks, there are reports from counsellors - people looking after the students and caring about their general well-being. A parent also gave an example of how the principal cared, by citing his presence after hours at a function where some of the students participated. In his newsletter on the website, the principal expresses the wish “that the students will be safe in the holidays” – that is evidence of care.

The school says they have excellent teachers who are well-qualified, dedicated, professional, passionate and caring. The College’s motto even refers to passion: “Your Future Our Passion”. One of the visitors to the staffroom (during the “Building on Excellence” programme) experienced an “*air of productivity*”, which indicates that the teachers work hard. Several visitors mentioned how passionate and knowledgeable the teachers were, and that good teaching was taking place. A past student testified about the teachers’ passion and dedication. Students also evaluate their teachers twice each year on their hard work, compassion, care and apparent knowledge. Teachers sign a contract in which they undertake to be loyal, professional, enthusiastic, punctual, efficient, well prepared, hard-working and available after hours.



The “Building on Excellence” visitors, who went into several classes reported: In the Drama class there was “enthusiasm”. In the Mathematics class they mentioned a non-threatening teacher and students who were on time and seemed to be confident. In the Physical Science class the expertise of the teacher was conspicuous and the students were clearly hard-working. Special mention was made that they had specialists teaching students and that the teachers clearly had the students’ best interest at heart. The outstanding feature of the English class was that both teachers were very passionate.

They say they have ‘state-of-the-art’ facilities and that the environment is warm and mutually respectful in which students can achieve their best. The pictures on the website confirm that they have excellent facilities. A student also testified that Mowbray created an environment where he could grow and reach his full potential. Upon arriving at the campus, an outsider noted that the staffroom looked “homely yet professional”, which indicates that care is also extended to the teachers. Several visitors mentioned the relaxed but focused atmosphere in the school in general. One said: “There is clearly a positive learning environment.” Most visitors also mentioned that the open and warm class atmosphere motivated students to participate.

The College says they offer sport, cultural activities and field trips according to the needs of the students. They also say they have an annual sports day and matric dance. The newsletters, website and yearbooks show evidence of a variety of activities, sports and excursions with lots of happy faces on them. Many of the activities are out of the ordinary such as dress-up days, charity events and all the sporting events look like they are non-competitive and only for fun (students are wearing civilian clothes)

They say they offer career guidance, job shadowing and career exhibitions. They say they focus on the future (what happens to the students after school). Many of the principal’s speeches and quotes refer to the future and how students can change their own futures by changing their current behaviour. As an example, in his speech at one Graduation Evening, he talks about motivation, hard work, responsibility and accountability. Reports about job shadowing experiences and career exhibitions are evident in the yearbooks. The fact that they took students on a trip to Sweden, where they were exposed to possible future careers also confirms that they do what they say.

They say they offer assisted homework classes after school, small classes (fewer than 24 students per class) as well as a wide subject choice. The classroom visits from outside staff highlight that what they say and what they do is actually very much in line with one another, namely the classes that people visited were ‘small’ (the numbers mentioned were always smaller than 24) and the testimony from parents (parents focus) also indicated that what they say and what they do correspond: the success of homework classes, the regular

reports, the effort rating system, the wide subject choice and small classes were all mentioned.

The “parent focus group” had special praise for the principal, such as the fact that he was accessible and that he related well to the students. In several places the principal expressed the need to ‘listen to the students’, because what they say mattered. Both parents and visitors reported that there is a “sense of professionalism” on this campus.

### On the second level: Level of Perspectives

Schein (1985) describes this as “*the shared rules and norms to which people respond*” (what is seen as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour). The culture of Mowbray College on this level was inferred from answers that teachers gave to questions sent to them.

The following was seen as acceptable and the way they do things there:

Respectful and courteous behaviour (several people mentioned respect); to focus on academics and to help each student reach success (within their own abilities); to allow individuality - not focusing on differences between students and not making an issue about dress and what they regard as ‘unimportant rules’. Being professional is an important issue: teachers are expected to be present, available for help and be accountable for everything they do.

The environment is flexible and each incident is treated on its own individual merit. There are some crucial activities in which everybody participates, like daily assisted homework periods, regular assessments and regular reports; teachers are available after hours, they do mentoring and they follow the same timetable every day.

What is unacceptable behaviour and the way they do not do things there is:

Disrespect in any format, towards any student, parent or staff member (many teachers mentioned this); slack work ethic (as opposed to hard work); not to be there (physically and mentally) and to be late (some people mentioned this). Any form of bullying (several teachers mentioned this) is a clear ‘no-no’.

### On the third level: Level of Values

This level of culture indicates what they value at Mowbray College. Schein describes this as “*the basis for people to judge or evaluate situations they face, the worth of the actions, their priorities ... not only specifying what is important, but also things that are not important.*” Maslowski (2006:7), in his adaptation of Schein’s original table, did not distinguish between a level of perspectives and a level of values; he put those together. Initially I could not understand why, but after I had seen the answers that teachers had given about the things they value, it was clear that many of those answers corresponded and that they did not see those as different.

From the answers the teachers gave, the following were identified as being important:

- respect towards everyone;
- to bring out the best in each individual;
- to be available after hours and to help students;
- to care for every child;
- to treat all students equally;
- to focus on academics, good teaching and content;
- to offer quality teaching;
- to be professional and to teach in your own way; and
- to accept individuals for who they are (and not hold their history against him ... to give them a chance).

Teachers were also asked to list those things that they had to do, from which one could also identify what they regard as important:

- teachers must be well prepared and teach well;
- they must maintain a high level of professionalism;
- they must be aware of a student's 'head space';
- they must be efficient and meet deadlines;
- they must be friendly and caring;
- they must be flexible in a changing environment; and
- they have to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

From the list of things that teachers thought are important to the principal, one could only add another two important things: not giving up on students and to do everything in the best interest of each child.

From the stories that people told, and what they thought was most typical of the school, one could confirm by way of practical examples which things they valued:

- there were several stories about students who struggled with language barriers and how they were being helped (showing that it is important to help each individual)
- the stories about the annual talent show and how the students supported each other (showing how students accepted everyone, even those that were different)
- the story about the student who died in a motorcycle accident (it showed immense care)
- several stories about students with 'histories' starting with low marks at the school and ending with much higher marks (showing how the individual attention and the disregard for 'where they come from' made a difference in these students' lives)
- stories about students who had arrived with emotional or drug problems and overcame these during their time at the school. This was also seen in the Principal's

Awards, showing that it was important to give people a chance and not focus on what they did wrong previously.

- the story about the Mohawk hairstyle-incident (showing that students are treated like adults and that they are listened to)
- the story of a grade 12 student who tried matric for the third time and then passed with access to bachelor's degree studies (showing that perseverance and academic success was important).

From the interview with the principal, it was possible to get a sense about how he thought about this:

He mentioned that he spends most of his time building human relationships (students, teachers and parents). This was important to him.

In his description of the Mark Reading meetings, it was evident that each individual was important to him. He mentioned that each student's photograph was displayed as well as his/her progress record at Mowbray, for all teachers to see.

His staff meetings were held in a Mini-Hall, where he could control the seating arrangements. This fact displays his sensitivity towards the effect that seating arrangements could have on the atmosphere of a meeting.

When asked about modelling behaviour, it was clear that he was aware that his behaviour as principal must be modelling, but I did not get the impression that he did it deliberately.

The question about what he would show if he had to show his facilities to a new parent, it appears that it was important for him to show the excellent (specialist) facilities and what an ordinary classroom looks like, but he was not proud of the smokers area (as if he knew this was something that might not resonate well with a new parent/guest).

His decisions are strongly based on the principle of "what is best for the child" and "what is not to the detriment of the college". It was remarkable that he specifically did not say: "... and what is best for the college". There is a difference.

From several quotes, it emerged that the 'future' and 'changing behaviour towards a better future' was important to him.

### What is unimportant

From the teachers' answers, the following was listed not to be important:

- a student's history;
- race, social class, status, background, financial situation, family set-up, nationality, religious beliefs or appearance;

- school uniforms;
- competitive sport;
- petty issues (unnecessary rules); and
- anything that falls outside the academic performance of students.

The teachers also indicated what they thought was not important to their principal:

- the past (the history of a student);
- conforming to norms (it was not important to try to be like other schools);
- status; and
- petty rules.

The interview with the principal indicated that for his 'presiding over meetings' was not important. I got the impression that this meant that it was not important for him to be in the limelight. He would take the lead in the background - it was important for him to build his staff and 'push them forward'.

### **5.2.2 Crucial transitions and crises that the school has had to confront.**

In my quest to answer the main research question – how the school culture had developed over 40 years of transformation in South Africa - I had to compare the current situation with the historical one. I looked at what has changed, but also at what has stayed the same.

Firstly I investigated the crucial transitions or crises that the school had to confront. There had been some, but it does not look as if these had a major lasting impact on the culture of the school. In the historical perspective, the two major events were the Education Department's change to a system with Higher Grade and Standard Grade. The second major event was a move to new accommodation.

The first event (the move to a system with higher grade and standard grade) had the potential to give the new school a lethal blow - the original school was specifically there to help students who had previously failed to improve their marks and pass. With the introduction of standard grade it was clear that failures were going to 'disappear', which could have taken the school's target market away. The solution came when universities started to require students to have better marks. As a result, the founder of Mowbray College changed his strategy and started focusing on "getting better marks" and "improving results". This was exactly what the universities wanted and Anthony Mowbray had a new target market, which 'saved' his school.

The second challenge (a move to new accommodation) was one that was overcome in 'true Mowbray College style': the first campus, which was located on the second floor of a

shopping centre, moved into an office building to the fifth and sixth floors. This was not a traditional school environment, but it worked because the focus of all activities was academic, and that could easily happen inside an office block. For social activities, the school used existing facilities at other venues. The fact that students were asked to carry their own desks to the new building (approximately 2 km away) was something that is described as 'true Mowbray style'. What is interesting to note is the fact that this 'habit' to put the school in office buildings is something that has lasted throughout the 40 years of this school's group's existence. There are several campuses of the school in South Africa today, and at least two of them are still situated in former office buildings.

Crucial transitions or crises that the current school had to confront were, interestingly enough, very similar to those of the original school - firstly a move to a new campus and secondly a change in the education system.

The first major transition (the move to a new campus) happened when the current school moved from premises in a shopping centre, to a newly custom designed building inside a business park. The move was mostly positive: some students had to get on buses to get to the new campus, but they received a superb new campus with more space and a much better image. As some of the teachers mentioned, this helped improving the perceptions people had about Mowbray College, but the ethos and what happened inside those buildings stayed the same.

The second crucial transition (the Education Department's change from the old Senior Certificate to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) in 2008) had a much smaller impact than the introduction of standard grade at the original campus in the 70's. The introduction of the NSC meant that students now had to complete all three years in this "further education and training" (FET) band, but the advantage was that Mowbray College was already a school for grade 10, 11 and 12 and this change suited them perfectly.

### **5.2.3 How the school's past still lives in the present**

Comparing the historical school with the current school, it is quite interesting to note that the changes are mostly minor ones, and that the things that stayed the same are the crucial aspects.

Of little importance is the fact that the school crest changed (this happened when the school was sold to a different company) and that the motto changed from "Vive et Disce" (To Live and To Learn) to a new mantra "Your Future Our Passion".

The focus of the original school was definitely academic, but there was clearly a much stronger social aspect attached to what they did - more specifically: sport. Their activities included many typical traditional school sports like rugby, cricket, tennis and squash and a fair amount of them were team sports played competitively, but also for fun. They introduced a sports day in the early years and that is a tradition that was successfully carried forward to this day.

The school rules have definitely changed. Anthony Mowbray mentioned that they only had three rules: (1) thou shalt work, (2) thou shalt not bunk and (3) thou shalt only smoke in the designated area. The current school has a complete "Code of Conduct" with approximately 60 rules. This is in line with the requirements of the South African Schools Act, but what is worth mentioning is the fact that many teachers, students and parents who were asked about Mowbray College mentioned the fact that they have no petty regulations. In line with the original school's few rules, the focus at the current school is clearly not on rules and regulations. It is interesting to note that smoking is still allowed at the current school, and that the Code of Conduct states that "*Smoking on Mowbray College campuses is restricted to the specifically demarcated areas*".

One thing that has changed is the fact that the original school was only meant for grade 12 students (and the founder felt strongly about that) but that the current school stretches across the last three grades. This was mainly done for economic reasons (more students meant more income and made the school more viable), but as already mentioned, this fact is currently working well for the school who is offering the National Senior Certificate, which stretches over the last three years of high school.

There are a number of things that have stayed much the same:

- the good results and high pass rate;
- the wide subject choice;
- the academic focus;
- the happy spirit among students;
- the teachers who are widely described as: approachable, encouraging, dedicated, inspiring and well-qualified;
- the emphasis on individuality and care;
- the absence of a school uniform;
- the many students from a non-traditional background;
- the attention given to careers, career guidance and career exhibitions; and
- the focus on the future (and the interest in alumni students).

It seems that the words of Sarah O'Connor, one of the only people who worked and taught at both the original as well as the current Mowbray College, on the day of her retirement could be very true: "*The student body might have changed, but not the ethos. The emphasis*

*has remained on the individual. I will always remember the spirit of Mowbray"* (Fourie, 2010:13).

#### **5.2.4 The role that the leadership of the principal plays in shaping the school culture**

The importance and the influential role of the principal in shaping the culture of a school is something that is well known from the literature and several studies into 'organisational culture'.

In this study there are two principals: the (1) principal and founder of the original school and (2) current principal of Mowbray College. The role that Anthony Mowbray played in shaping the culture of the original school is difficult to determine, because very limited material is available that actually shows how he was exercising his symbolic and cultural leadership. What is clear though is that he had a well-understood vision and that this vision governed what was done on the campus and where the energy was spent. In brief, that vision included:

- Only matriculants; treating students like adults; creating a mature environment;
- Focusing on academics and hard work and students taking responsibility for their own success;
- A strong social side for fun;
- Have very few rules and not spending time on petty issues;
- Regular reports; and
- Caring about individuals' success and their future careers.

It is worth noting that most of these principles are still visible in the current Mowbray College.

To determine the role that the current principal's leadership plays in shaping the current schools culture, I examined how he exercised his symbolic leadership role (acting as the chief, and signalling to his staff what is important and valuable) by way of presiding over ceremonies and rituals and how he rallies his teachers, students and parents to a common cause. I investigated how he exercised his cultural leadership (acting as high priest and seeking to define, strengthen and articulate those enduring values, beliefs and cultural strands that give this school its unique identity). For this, I attempted to determine how he was building legacy, how he was transforming the school into a moral community and how he was communicating his sense of vision by means of words and examples.



## Symbolic leadership

The principal is not one of those leaders who are constantly in the limelight, but he is definitely not invisible either. He does preside over some ceremonies, but he will often let other people, who are leading a specific activity or function, take the lead. In doing this, it clearly communicates that he is not the only leader and that he is not threatened by the idea of other people leading. He is clearly not concerned with the status coming with being the 'person in charge', but he is definitely so visible that everybody knows who the principal is. He sees his main role as the person who must ensure that the tone and message are in line with the ethos of Mowbray. He stated himself that he would only intervene and redirect the staff if his criteria were not met. He obviously has a clear picture of what this ethos (vision) is and in doing things the way he does, he is passing on this vision to his staff and in doing so, strengthening the ethos.

How does he rally his teachers, students and parents? For the parents, it all starts with a very important initial enrolment interview. More is said about that later in this report.

His staff and their welfare are obviously very important to him. He expresses clearly that they play a pivotal role in the success of the campus. He therefore spends time caring for them and staying in touch with what is happening in their lives. He tries to be available for support, nurturing, affirmation and simply caring. I asked him for what and how he rewards them, and he answered that he rewards them for great efforts and teamwork by giving chocolates or special mention, and sometimes through the HR process (such as good remarks in an appraisal document, leading to possible financial rewards). One gets the impression that the size of the rewards he gives is not that important, but the fact that he rewards is. One gets the idea that communication with the staff is regular and through a wide variety of methods including through technology available to him like SMS and e-mail, but often through direct talks in short staff meetings at break or other longer meetings. The fact that staff say he is very vocal about what is important, that the ethos comes across clearly and that the urgency and emotion are evident when he talks, indicates that the principal has a strong impact on his staff.

The way he rallies his students clearly starts in the enrolment interview, which also indicates how he communicates his sense of vision through words. From all the comments his staff made about 'what-he-does-most-of-the-time' it is clear that he spends considerable time in enrolment interviews. The principal himself explains that he takes time to unpack the student's past and then redesign his/her future (to get focus and motivation). They (the teachers) also indicated that he has regular meetings with struggling students, students who need extra help or those who are not performing. It is through this (often) one-on-one attention that he pushes his students forward in the direction of his vision.

## Cultural leadership

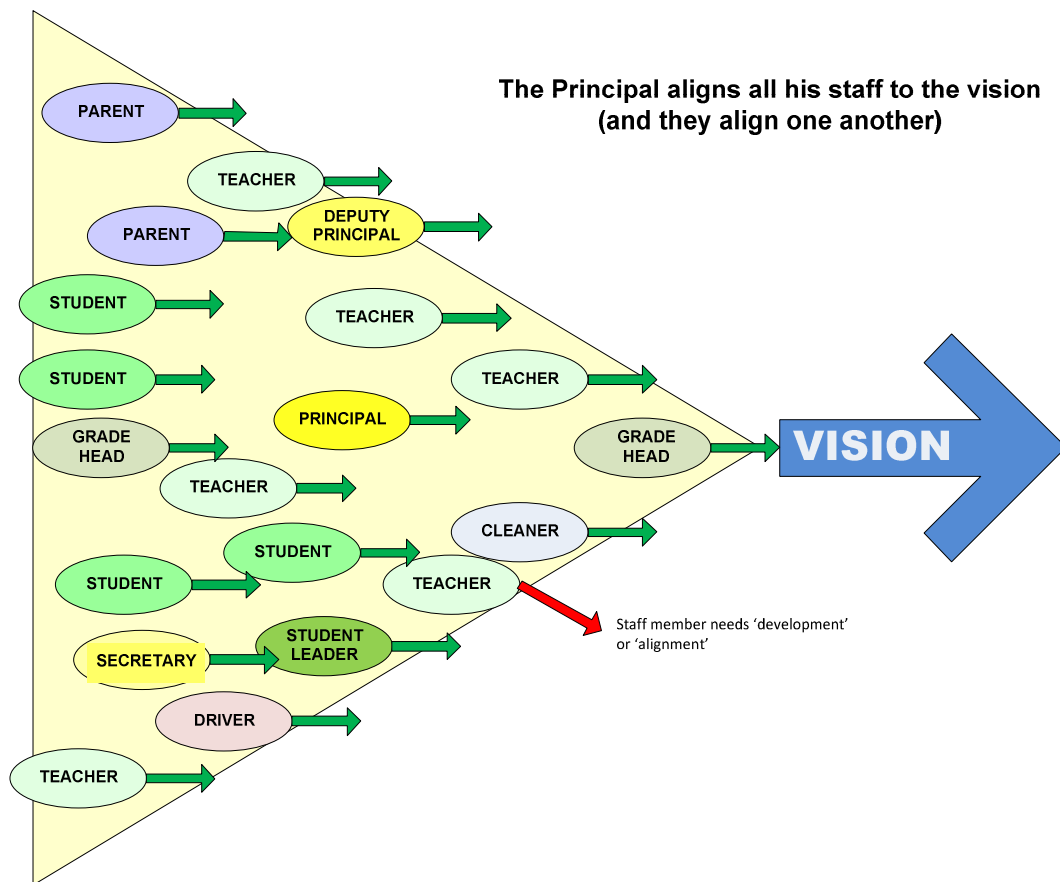
In an effort to describe how the principal is building a legacy, transforming the school into a moral community and how he communicates his sense of vision by words and examples, it is worthwhile to notice that staff mentioned "he is everywhere at once" or "he keeps an eye on every aspect of the campus". This indicates that he is visible.

Comments like: "he has the talent to win students over" and "he ensures that we look out for the best interest of the students" and "his actions and decisions are governed by this underlying principle", again shows that much culture-building happens through discussions, meetings, and behaviour that models what he believes. I asked his staff to describe their principal's typical behaviour in meetings. The answers indicate how he does this:

- He always motivates us in his PowerPoint presentations and brings his message across in that way (Teacher 3).
- Generally, he will address a topic and then later the staff will interact and discuss the issue in a group setting. Should we be going off-track or be unrealistic he will guide us back to the topic. Should there be disagreement about the way forward there will be a vote or further discussion. He is firm in meetings yet also listens to everyone's views and opinions (Teacher 4).
- He lets the person chairing the meeting take control and adds value if necessary. If he is chairing the meeting he is usually encouraging but is also not afraid to be controversial or challenging (Teacher 6).
- He is focused and to the point (Teacher 7). Very professional, calm and collected (Teacher 2).
- He treats his staff with respect. He has a good sense of humour. Even if he needs to talk about negative things, he stays polite (Teacher 8).
- Attentive in mark reading meetings and he gives his input when he feels he needs to share information with staff (Teacher 9).
- He is very professional, but open to new ideas and reasonable. He facilitates a meeting rather than dominate it, although he is always well-prepared (Teacher 10).
- He listens a lot, respects opinions of others, encourages honest dialogue and allows plenty of discussion. Occasionally he "calls the shots" when he feels staff members have not been pulling their weight (Teacher 11).
- He is open to criticism (Teacher 1).

From everything that has been said about the principal and his leadership, I designed a leadership model that illustrates the way in which he is leading his school. This model is illustrated in the diagram below.

**DIAGRAM 5.1: VISIONARY-SERVANT LEADERSHIP**



It is not an autocratic, top-down way of leading, but rather a type of servant leadership, where the principal 'serves' his staff, students and parents by leading and by facilitating leadership in his school. He is therefore not the only person leading all the time. He empowers a wide variety of leaders in his school to lead on occasion. He ensures that everybody knows who the leader is at that moment. He is among his staff and everybody knows who the principal is, without him having to say so. He says his main role is to show the direction, his vision. He articulates that vision very clearly and very often. He uses that vision as the guiding principle to everything he does. When he notices anyone going 'off-track' he sees it his duty to get them back on track. This results in a school community which clearly knows who they are, what they stand for and what the direction is. Even if the principal is not on his campus, other people leading in his place can carry on and point each other in this direction - the vision of the school. It makes a strong community that is not dependent on one person alone.

### 5.2.5 Assumptions that members hold about the nature of this organisation

The fourth and 'deepest' level of culture is the level of assumptions. These have to be inferred from the other levels of culture, already identified and described. These

assumptions become entrenched inside the thinking of the people in the organisation and are shaped by the leadership of the principal. Besides the vision and ethos of the school, these assumptions will impact on how teachers, students and parents act. The following assumptions were identified:

#### **5.2.5.1 Assumption 1:**

##### **Each individual has unique potential.**

By being flexible (with school rules), accommodating (with subject choices, by treating every individual according to their circumstances and not by a pre-defined set of rules) and motivating (positive encouragement) students will achieve better results and goals.

#### **5.2.5.2 Assumption 2:**

##### **Each human has dignity and self-worth.**

Respect (in talk and in treatment) brings mutual respect and a positive ambience / culture into the school. This reminds one very much of section 10 in the Bill of Rights (South African Constitution) which describes human dignity, where it states that: "Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected" (South Africa, 1996). Every student, teacher and parent has an opinion and these are worth hearing.

#### **5.2.5.3 Assumption 3:**

##### **Activities must focus on what is most important.**

For a student this means 'focussing on academic achievement'. Therefore there will be excellent teaching, academic contact time, very little disruption (bells, intercoms) and no 'petty' rules (like school uniform and hair rules). All other issues are 'side-issues' and treated as such: they don't get dominance. Sport will remain non-competitive with focus on fun and enjoyment. Attention will be given to future careers and the future value of the education that a student receives at this school.

#### **5.2.5.4 Assumption 4:**

##### **Teachers are professionals.**

This is reflected in the way that teachers treat the students and do their own work. This freedom to express their knowledge, experience and professional status breeds accountability, hard work, effort, enjoyment of their work and environment, individual care, enthusiasm, passion and interest in others.

These assumptions are reflected in all the systems implemented in this school.

### 5.3 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE ASSUMPTIONS

I conclude, from these four ‘assumptions that members hold about the nature of Mowbray College’, that the way that people are treated plays a decisive role in the success of the school. The fact that people are seen as individuals, each with his or her own potential and that they are not forced into ‘boxes’ where a ‘one-size-fits-all’ mentality is forced upon them, motivates them to achieve their own best potential. This is not only applicable to the students, but also to the teachers.

Assumptions 2 and 4 also refer to the way that people are treated – all people with dignity and teachers as professionals. Throughout the discussions with and reports from teachers, the word “respect” featured.

Assumption 3 refers to activities and the way the school separates important things from things that are not important. This ‘focus’ also plays a significant role in the success of Mowbray College.

It appears that the two major focal points in the assumptions behind the success of this school are the way “they” treat their people and the way “they” focus on their main task: teaching well.

The ‘working assumptions’ (not to be confused with the ‘assumptions’ identified on the fourth level of culture of Schein (1985) and Sergiovanni (1995), as articulated in 1.7.1, namely *‘that many elements of the original school 40 years ago can still be found in the school culture of the current schools and that the specific school leaders, over time, were able to direct and shape the schools’ culture during times of change, despite all the tensions and challenges experienced’* (see par.1.7.1 on page 4), has also been clearly proven.

### 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the afore-mentioned facts and description of how the culture at Mowbray College was formed, and in view of the fact that the school climate can have a positive effect on the successful functioning of a school, as well as the fact that the principal plays a major role in the formation of the school climate, my recommendations are divided into parts: (1) What principals and governing bodies can do practically to identify and change their schools’ cultures and (2) Recommendations for further research.

### 5.4.1 How to identify a school's culture and change it

A school culture is formed irrespective of whether there is a good leader or not. Even if the school has a very weak leader, a school culture will still develop. In any school there will always be people who are regarded as significant and who are seen as worth leading and worth following. The formation of culture happens automatically and will be based on what significant people at that school (or in any organisation) do, say and how they behave. Over time certain behaviour will become seen as acceptable or unacceptable. If nobody communicates a strong message about what is regarded as important and what is regarded as not important, the people in that school will form their own opinion about this and they will start acting, judging and evaluating situations they face on those values. In total this will shape their beliefs about themselves, about others, about their relationship towards other people and about the school in which they operate.

All of this will result in either a positive or a negative school culture (or something neutral in-between). If the leaders in the school are aware of this process and use this deliberately to direct the formation of that school's culture, they are able to determine what that culture would become and even change it.

If a new principal arrives at a school and notices a negative school culture, it is possible to follow some basic steps to change that culture into a positive school culture, over a period of time. The end result of such an action would not only be a 'happy environment' but, and my research has proved this, it could also result in better academic performance by the students of that school.

The process to identify a school's culture is very similar to the process that this study followed. I would recommend the usage of the four levels of culture as described by Schein (1985). The ultimate goal would be to identify people's assumptions, namely the beliefs that they have about who they are, where they fit into the organisation, what the organisation is all about and what the purpose is.

The starting point is at the level of artefacts:

- One should investigate what people say, how they behave and how things appear.
- The advertising material and what the school says about itself should be investigated.
- Determine what people say about the school and try to see what they think the school is all about.
- Scrutinise the buildings, the awards, the yearbooks, and any item that would indicate what the school regards as important.

Consequently, one can proceed to the second and third levels of perspectives and values:

- A list can be compiled of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This will indicate the 'shared norms' to which people respond.
- Determine what the people regard as important and not important. This can easily be done by asking every staff member and every student to write this down. It is useful to ask the staff what they think they are supposed to do and what they think is most important in the school.
- The same question needs to be asked to the management of the school, especially the principal, and a comparison should be drawn to see if 'what management says' resonates with 'what the teachers and students say'. If the answers are very different it is clear that some staff development is needed to get everyone aligned and working towards the same goal.

To then change the school culture, it would be best for the principal to:

- Involve the staff in defining exactly what that school is all about.
- If there are some negative aspects, it would be wise to remove those and replace them with the desired positive outcomes.
- If the staff are part of the problem and not willing to cooperate in restructuring the vision, one might have to get rid of those negative influences and replace them with people who are willing to work together towards the desired vision aimed at by that school. (This is a process that cannot be done, without following the appropriate labour codes and without considering employee rights).
- Implementing the new vision will involve a lot of communication. In this the principal must take a leading role. He/she is a person that teachers, students and parents will follow. He/she is the one that must articulate and strengthen the values and beliefs held by the school.
- The teachers must follow the principal in their words and actions in class. In enabling them to do so, a lot of staff development might be needed, so that they start making this part of their 'make up' and start living this as an example to the students and parents.

Like a big ship on the ocean that turns slowly yet inevitably, the direction of the school will start changing. Any person working against this vision (whether it is a teacher, a student, a parent, a secretary, a groundsman or anyone coming onto the campus) should be provided with development or alignment, and if they refuse that, should be eliminated, because 'one hole can sink the ship.'

#### 5.4.2 Recommendations for further research

It is recommended that further study be conducted into the implementation of this process (of changing a school culture), in a school with a 'negative' school culture. Such a study can then show how the culture of that school is changed over time, and prove conclusively that this recommended process, of changing a school culture, works. I would recommend that such a study be combined with the monitoring of academic results, to indicate whether it can result in an upward trend in that school's performance.

Another recommendation for further study is to do research into "layers of culture" in multi-campus schools (as represented by Table 2.3 on page 17), to determine the content, homogeneity and strength of a school culture between different schools that are supposed to be similar.

### 5.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study into the formation of a school culture in a specific Independent school over time, has shown that it is a process that can be controlled and manipulated towards a positive outcome. It also showed that it is something crucial and valuable to do. In a country where educational outcomes are not always as desirable as one would desire, it is a question of how much can be attributed to negative or weak school cultures. This study has shown that (1) school culture can be created, (2) changed, (3) sustained and also (4) explained the process of **how** it can be established or changed. It is also evident that the culture of this specific school always seems to have been well-defined and positive.

In the very first paragraph of this research report, I mentioned that I discovered that the history of this group of schools (Mowbray Colleges) was not well chronicled or archived, and that I decided to find the information, write the story and show the current generation of students why they can be proud of their school.

Was it only to be able to tell interesting stories at a celebratory function of the school?

This research proved that it is about much more than just the history. It is also 'what the school is all about', what it regards as important and not important, what it values and how the assumptions that people in the organisation hold about the nature of reality, humans, human activity, human relationships and the environment impact on the organisational culture. History plays an important part in the process of the formation of a school culture. It is therefore valuable and recommended that schools put in a greater effort to write down, archive and display their histories and use it to build their school culture towards a more positive outcome, not only because it creates proud students, but also because it proves to result in better academic achievements.



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<sup>11</sup> Article name changed for confidentiality purposes

<sup>12</sup> Name of newspaper withheld for confidentiality purposes

<sup>13</sup> Page number withheld for confidentiality purposes

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## INTERVIEWS

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<sup>14</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>15</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>16</sup> Website URL withheld for confidentiality purposes

<sup>17</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>18</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>19</sup> Codes used to replace participants' names for confidentiality purposes

<sup>20</sup> Pseudonym

# APPENDIX A

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## PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT LETTER



Faculty of Education/Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Department of Education Management and Policy  
Studies/Departement Onderwysbestuur en  
Beleidstudies

(Date)

The Staff  
(Name of school)

Dear (Name of participant)

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ON SCHOOL CULTURE

I am busy with a Masters degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Pretoria. The research topic of my dissertation is **“Genesis of a unique school culture. How did they do it?”**. The purpose of this study is to investigate and describe the role of leadership in developing the organizational culture of an Independent School.

You and this campus have been chosen as the sample of the study, because of its links with the original school of 1971, but also because of your principal’s experience at different campuses of this College.

My research questions are:

How did the school culture develop over 40 years of transformation in South Africa?

1. How does the school’s past live in the present?
2. Which crucial transitions and crises did the school have to confront?
3. What role did the leadership of the principal play in shaping the school culture?
4. What are the assumptions that members hold about the nature of the organization?

I need your written consent to interview you. I plan to do this in various ways: via telephone, e-mail but possibly also in person if I get a chance to visit the campus.

**My undertaking to you is that your name and the name of the school will remain anonymous. In my research I will make use of pseudonyms. I will also guarantee confidentiality in that I will not discuss any of your answers with any of the other staff.**

My questions will focus on determining what the school's culture is, how it compares with the original ideas of the founding school and how your principal's leadership plays a role in creating this culture. It is however possible, that any individual, when reading this report, might be able to draw his/her own conclusions about the identity of others, because of the small scale of the population involved. None of the data in this research, though, involves sensitive or confidential information and I undertake to take great care that any such data will be handled with the most possible confidentiality.

**Participation is voluntary and you may choose at any time to withdraw from the research, in which case your answers will not be used.**

Please afford me your permission by signing the letter in the space provided below.

Kind regards

\_\_\_\_\_  
Andries van Renssen  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof Johan Beckmann  
Supervisor

**PERMISSION**

*I hereby give my written consent for Andries van Renssen to interview me. I agree that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name & Surname*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## APPENDIX B

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### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### (e-mail with interview questions)

Dear (Name of participant)

Thank you once again for being willing to be a participant in my research. As explained in the letter of consent: the topic of this research is: “**Genesis of a unique school culture. How did they do it?**”. The purpose of the study is to investigate and describe the role of leadership in developing the organizational culture in your school. You will understand that the questions I ask will therefore focus on your experiences and perceptions of leadership and the school culture in (Name of School). It involves answers about students and staff.

To answer my research questions, I need some information from you. Please respond to this mail, by answering the questions below as honestly as possible. You can type the answers below the questions (on this mail) and forward it back to me. Some of the questions might sound vague or very wide. Some might require some thinking. Please give me your views without discussing it with your colleagues – I need to understand YOUR thinking and the assumptions that YOU have about the nature of your school. You will need some time to answer all the questions. If you have answered some questions and run out-of-time before you could complete them all, just save them in your ‘draft’ mail folder until you have time again to finish the questionnaire. If you have questions about any of my questions – don’t hesitate to e-mail me (I’ll answer as fast as I can).

**I want to stress to you again that I guarantee confidentiality and anonymity, by not discussing any of your answers with other staff. In my report I will use pseudonyms.** For your time and participation I am grateful beyond words.

Kind regards

Andries van Renssen

## STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. What does this school mean to you?
2. What is acceptable behaviour here? And what is unacceptable behaviour?
3. What is most important to you in this school?
4. What is not important in this school?
5. How does your principal communicate what is important and what not?  
How do you know?
6. What are the 3 most important things that you must do? How do you know that?
7. What is (Name of school) all about?
8. Can you think of anything that happened in this school's history that shows you what is important?
9. Which major crisis (or crucial transitions) did this school have to overcome? How was it done? Why was it done like that? (think about population changes, location changes, economic changes, international links, policy changes, political changes)
10. Can you think of any time of high emotion in this school? What happened? How was it handled? Why was it handled like that? Describe.
11. Does everybody in the school work together towards a common goal?  
How do you know that? (what do they do to show that)?
12. What is the common goal? And how do you know this? How is it achieved?
13. How are people who don't cooperate treated?
14. How would you describe "the way we do things here" to a new staff member?
15. And to a new student?
16. And to a new parent?
17. What does the principal do most of the time?
18. What is most important to the principal? How do you know?
19. What is not important to the principal? How do you know?
20. Can you tell me a story that is most typical of this school?

21. Describe your principal's typical behaviour in meetings.
22. What is his favourite saying? Or sayings? Why?
23. How does your principal model behaviour? Think of some examples.
24. What does this school do that makes it successful? How do you define success at this school? What must you do to make it more successful?
25. Of what are you most proud about this school?

**Thank you for your time and for your participation.**



## APPENDIX C

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### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH – PRINCIPAL



Faculty of Education/Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Department of Education Management and Policy  
Studies/Departement Onderwysbestuur en  
Beleidstudies

(Date)

The Principal  
(Name of School)

Dear (Name of Principal)

#### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ON SCHOOL CULTURE

I am busy with a Masters degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Pretoria. The research topic of my dissertation is **“Genesis of a unique school culture. How did they do it?”**. The purpose of this study is to investigate and describe the role of leadership in developing the organizational culture of an Independent School.

You and your campus have been chosen as the sample of this study, because of its links with the original school of 1971, but also because of your experience at different campuses of this College.

My research questions are:

How did the school culture develop over 40 years of transformation in South Africa?

1. How does the school’s past live in the present?
2. Which crucial transitions and crises did the school have to confront?
3. What role did the leadership of the principal play in shaping the school culture?
4. What are the assumptions that members hold about the nature of the organization?

I need your permission to do this research and to interview and observe you, but also to access some data and artefacts on your campus. I plan to do this in various ways: via telephone, e-mail but also in person over a few days (possibly during examination time in June 2012).

I also need permission from you to access your staff and to have interviews with them. This will mainly be done by e-mail and phone, but some face-to-face interviews might be needed at the same time when I visit you.

**My undertaking to you is that you, your staff and the name of your school will remain anonymous. In my research I will make use of pseudonyms. I will also guarantee confidentiality in that I will not discuss any of your answers with any of your staff or your staff's answers with each other.** My questions will focus on determining what your school's culture is, how it compares with the original ideas of the founding school and how your leadership plays a role in creating this culture. It is however possible, that any individual, when reading this report, might be able to draw his/her own conclusions about the identity of others, because of the small scale of the population involved. None of the data in this research, though, involves sensitive or confidential information and I undertake to take great care that any such data will be handled with the most possible confidentiality.

If you want, I will give you a copy of my research report relating to your campus, for you to verify and confirm that I have my facts right and that I may use the material in my final report.

**Participation is voluntary and you (and any of your staff) may choose at any time to withdraw from the research, in which case your (or their) answers will not be used.**

Please afford me your permission by signing the letter in the space provided below.

Kind regards

\_\_\_\_\_  
Andries van Renssen  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof Johan Beckmann  
Supervisor

**PERMISSION**

*I hereby give my written consent for Andries van Renssen to interview me. I agree that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I may withdraw from this research at any time.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name & Surname*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## APPENDIX D

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### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH - GENERAL MANAGER



Faculty of Education/Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Department of Education Management and Policy  
Studies/Departement Onderwysbestuur en  
Beleidstudies

(Date)

The General Manager  
(Name of group of schools)

Dear (Name of General manager)

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AND INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH ON SCHOOL CULTURE

I am busy with a Masters degree in Educational Leadership at the University of Pretoria. The research topic of my dissertation is **“Genesis of a unique school culture. How did they do it?”**. The purpose of this study is to investigate and describe the role of leadership in developing the organizational culture of an Independent School.

(Name of principal) and his campus have been chosen as the sample of this study, because of its links with the original school of (*founding year*), and also because of his experience at different campuses of the College.

My research questions are:

How did the school culture develop over 40 years of transformation in South Africa?

1. How does the school’s past live in the present?
2. Which crucial transitions and crises did the school have to confront?
3. What role did the leadership of the principal play in shaping the school culture?
4. What are the assumptions that members hold about the nature of the organization?

I need your permission to do this research and to interview and observe him, but also to access some data and artefacts on the various campuses. I plan to do this in various ways: via telephone, e-mail but also in person over a few days (possibly during examination time in June 2012). I might also need to interview you, and request your written consent for that.

I also need permission from you to access some staff and to have interviews with them. This will mainly be done by e-mail and phone, but some face-to-face interviews might be needed at the same time when I visit the campus.

**My undertaking to you is that you, all staff involved and the name of the school will remain anonymous. In my research I will make use of pseudonyms. I will also guarantee confidentiality in that I will not discuss any of the answers with any of the other staff or the staff's answers with each other.** My questions will focus on determining what the school's culture is, how it compares with the original ideas of the founding school and how the principal's leadership plays a role in creating this culture. It is however possible, that any individual, when reading this report, might be able to draw his/her own conclusions about the identity of others, because of the small scale of the population involved. None of the data in this research, though, involves sensitive or confidential information and I undertake to take great care that any such data will be handled with the most possible confidentiality.

If you want, I will give you a copy of my draft research report, for you to verify and confirm that I have my facts right and that I may use the material in my final report.

**Participation is voluntary and you (and any of the staff) may choose at any time to withdraw from the research, in which case your (or their) answers will not be used.**

Please afford me your permission by signing the letter in the space provided below.

Kind regards

\_\_\_\_\_  
Andries van Renssen  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Prof Johan Beckmann  
Supervisor

PERMISSION

*I hereby give permission that Andries van Renssen may approach the staff of (School) for purposes of his research.*

*I also hereby give my written consent for him to interview me. I agree that my participation is voluntary.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name & Surname*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*