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# **Growing a Sense of Place**

## **STORYTHREAD AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SCHOOL**

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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

### Refereed journal articles

Tooth, R., L. Wager, and T. Proellocks. (1988). Story, Setting and Drama - A new look at Environmental Education: *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 4, 31-34

Tooth, R. C., 1997, The Pullenvale Storythread Model: *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 6, 247-251

### Refereed conference presentation

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### Education Department Publications

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is premised on the idea that schools can be described as complex self-organizing systems where networks of interacting values mix together as part of a web of dynamic human relationships. For schools to maintain their viability and vitality, it is assumed that they must continue to innovate at the creative edge of chaos. But this is a dangerous and challenging place to be, and even the most resilient of reformers and innovators may become weary if they are not supported. Complex organizations demand and produce change, and this generates not only creativity, but also significant levels of anxiety. This anxiety can easily breed resistance and does not always lead to renewal and transformation. What is certain, however, is that leaders must find ways to deal with both this creativity and anxiety if they are to be successful in initiating and maintaining transformative change that brings benefits to a whole organization.

There are growing demands in society and in schools for the formulation of a new purpose for education that offers leaders, teachers and students a way into more sustainable ways of living and learning. This is part of the move towards more ecological and culturally situated approaches to whole school reform where environmental education and sustainability are seen as critical to implementing mainstream educational agendas. How this transition might actually be achieved, is however, anything but clear - more detailed studies that describe how leaders have actually used environmental education to achieve a vision of sustainability are needed. One such study of whole school reform is presented in this thesis. It provides insight into how an educational leader used Storythread (an arts and place-based approach to

environmental education) to move an educational community through a process of profound cultural change.

What this thesis proposes, based on insights drawn from a nine year journey of change in a school, and building on understandings taken from a combination of Complexity, Psychoanalytic, Activity and Socio-cultural theory, is that effective leaders must find ways to deal with the creativity and anxiety generated by change by providing the right mix of 'transitional objects' and 'cultural tools' that provide teachers with the 'emotional support' and 'practical mediation' they need to stay engaged. In this case, the principal kept Eco State School willingly balanced on what often felt like the creative edge of chaos as teachers experimented with new forms of place-based teaching and learning. In this way, the principal created a 'safe space' where teachers felt free to experiment and a 'practical space' where they could begin to master new forms of practice. What emerged almost spontaneously from this, was a re-vitalized and invigorated learning community.



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