Small school leadership in remote rural settings: A matter of collaboration and community acceptance

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature of candidate:…………………………………………..

Date:………………………………………………………………

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ABSTRACT
Nearly four in ten state school principals in Queensland are teaching principal. They work alone or with one other teacher in schools. Yet these teaching principals, located in isolated country areas attract limited attention in research into school leadership. They seem absent in theoretical models of educational leadership built from analyses of principals in large urban schools. In effect, smaller schools are viewed as ‘scaled down’ versions of larger schools, underpinning a false assumption that leadership and managerial approaches in small remote schools are similar to those in larger urban schools. Or the problem is dismissed. If there is only one full-time staff member—the teaching principal—is leadership possible and if so, what influences it?

The purpose of this study was to examine teaching principal leadership as a particular phenomenon of school leadership. This was done by exploring the experiential accounts of teaching principals in one-teacher schools in remote rural Queensland settings. Their accounts describe their experiences and perceptions of the leadership practice needed to lead their schools, the influences upon this practice, their reactions to those influences and what constituted success in leadership.

A case study design was used, guided by the theoretical underpinnings of the symbolic interactionist, who argues that meaning is to be found in the interactions between social actors. Qualitative data were derived from six beginning teaching principals’ perceptions of experiences related to practice. Data were analysed using grounded theory methods, especially with the use of constant comparison. A cross case comparison showed a number of consistent influences on leadership.

Findings from the study extend recent reconceptualisations of school leadership particularly, understanding the importance of relationship building. Relationship building in the remote rural settings studied occurred at various levels: professional, school-based, personal, and community-wide. Principals who understand the importance of relationship building—especially its personal and community-wide facets—who take the initiative in establishing and nurturing relationships and improving them through reflection over time, are more successful at motivating, inspiring, and aligning country people to facilitate change. The acquisition of supportive relationships is presented as a possible precursor to school leadership in small remote rural school settings.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Leadership has been identified as a crucial contributor to school effectiveness (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006) and a broad literature regarding this subject has emerged, largely based on analyses conducted in urban school settings. The intention of this study is to develop further understanding of leadership as it is perceived by rural school principals, because leadership in such schools may not mirror urban leadership. The intention of this first chapter is to outline the nature of small school teaching principal leadership wherein the principal is both teacher and leader. The critical elements that enable leadership to occur are identified in this chapter, followed by a brief discussion of what is currently regarded as school leadership, and these factors are used to justify the author’s motivation for the study and choices for its methodology.

The chapter begins by describing the personal circumstances that acted as the motivation for the subject of the study—teaching principal leadership. This is followed by brief descriptions of literature about the teaching principal, school leadership, research methodologies, an explanation of the research problem and the overall organisation of the thesis.

1.1 Motivation for the study

From the beginning of my teaching career in large urban secondary schools, I became aware of the impact leadership has upon the development and maintenance of an effective school. After moving into rural western Queensland to continue my career and accepting principalship of small remote primary schools, leadership began to dominate my daily thinking and reflection. After a few years I left school practice to lecture full-time in an Education Faculty at a regional university until I reduced my hours to part-time to raise a family. Nevertheless, on five separate occasions during
During my work as a teaching principal in these school communities, I witnessed many highly skilled and well informed teachers fail as teaching principals. Was it possible that being a ‘good’ teacher was not enough for success? Successful teaching principals seemed to possess additional knowledge and skills that needed exploration. On reflection, I realised that I had already formulated several questions from which the present research emerged:

- Was a thorough understanding of the primary curriculum necessary to be a successful teaching principal?
- Was the nature of their teaching important?
- Was the personality of the teaching principal the key to success?
- Was knowledge of rural life important? If so, what elements of rural life appear to be most important?
- Do teaching principals have a leadership role given that they are the only professional members of their schools? If so, what is the nature of such leadership and how important is it in their success as teaching principals?

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1 Education Queensland – An Australian state public education system often called a Department of Education in other Australian states.
To sum up, my interest in leadership has grown from practical questions such as those above to the need to seek a deeper understanding of the knowledge, skills and circumstances that make a successful teaching principal. I was also keen to examine teaching principalship in small rural schools to see if the research results could inform school leadership more generally.

Finally, these questions merged to shape the study focus (teaching principal leadership), its method (using interviews within a qualitative framework) and its data presentation (different perspectives using cross-case analysis).

Having explained the motivation for the study and knowing that its practical questions would need to be connected with research and scholarly writing, I began a search of three literatures: the teaching principal, school leadership and research methodologies.

1.2 Three literatures

1.2.1 The teaching principal

For over 50 years, the teaching principal literature has focused upon the role of teaching principals (Bingham, 1995; Cross, 1987; Gammage, 1998; Katz, 1955; Lester, 2001, 2003; McRobbie, 1990; Roulston, 2003; Wallace, 1998), and the concerns and problems they encounter as they implement the processes and procedures required by this role (Crease, 1991; Nolan, 1998; Weston, 2000). The findings of the Scottish research conducted by Wilson and McPake (1998) described the teaching principal role as one requiring 'situational management' where a realistic assessment of context, tasks and available resources influenced the approach taken to the role. Their findings also highlighted how the skills of ancillary staff, in particular, influenced the individual practice of teaching principals. Australian researchers, Wildy and Clarke (2004) reported that the small rural primary school was the hub of the local community and provided facilities such as photocopying, library resources and a venue for community meetings. The teaching principal became a central figure within the local community by his or her ability to provide these community needs. Brown (2003), in another Australian study, reported that while the role of teaching principal is complex, leadership is not part of the role as there is no one to follow and hence she dismissed the possibility of leadership as part of the teaching principal role. My conjecture, to the contrary, is that the remote rural community appears to ‘own’
its school and thus, if a teaching principal wishes to make changes or improvements, he/she has to involve the community. For this to occur, I argue that a form of leadership is required and therefore dispute Brown’s assertion. I propose that leadership is heightened when there is seemingly ‘no one’ to lead. To test these theoretical speculations, I have chosen to study teaching principals in remote one-teacher primary schools—principals who are at least 100 km from their nearest colleagues. The isolation of the participants highlights their role as teaching principal within their contextual setting.

1.2.2 School leadership

To gain an understanding of leadership within the teaching principal role, a review of current school leadership literature and research was deemed essential to understand its nature, how it has changed over time and how it influences leadership in the 21st century. This literature review provides a basis for analysis and interpretation of the study data.

Societal influences appear to shape the leadership approach adopted in any organisation, thus a review of the evolution of leadership styles provides guidance to understanding current practice. Before the 1970s it seemed that central educational authorities dictated practice and the principal/headmaster was expected to fulfil these requirements. The principal therefore had a managerial, rather than a leadership role. Personal traits and characteristics of the principal were recorded as variables that influenced success. The theories of this period generally assumed leadership was undertaken by an individual considered competent and with the authority to make all decisions. Interactions were construed as one-way, with defined roles and clear boundaries within which staff members carried out their tasks. The within-school context as an influence upon leadership was well recognised, yet the school setting, local social and cultural contexts were often overlooked as important factors in leadership.

By the 1990s, the increasing plurality and complexity of society and its organisations created a shift in educational leadership style from the individual to the involvement of others in school leadership processes (Boyle, 1999; Cranston & Ehrich, 2002; Gurr, 2001; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Silins & Mulford, 2002). Leadership theories highlighted the ascendancy of the concept of shared or group school leadership and
building a capacity for change within the school wherein the principal and teachers functioned together to lead the school. Five significant variants of this broad approach have developed over the last two decades and they include: moral, transformational, values-led contingency, servant, participative and distributive leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1993; Beck & Murphy, 1993; Bhindi & Duignan, 1997; Duignan, 1997; Fullan, 2001; Greenfield, 1995; Leithwood, 1994; Lyman, 2000; Rolph, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992). Hence, the shifts in theoretical emphasis that have occurred during the last 35 years have focused upon the influences underpinning the need to adapt, the need to build the capacity for change, the need to achieve successful partnerships, and the need to initiate collaboration and networking between principal, staff and parents.

An analysis of the work presented by researchers such as the ones listed above, draws attention to the importance of context as an influence on leadership. When assessing the importance of context as an influence upon how school leadership is enacted, it must be noted that much of the current research has been conducted in large urban primary and secondary schools (Fullan, 2000; Heck & Hallinger, 1997; Leithwood, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Sergiovanni; 2001). The findings from this research seems to have been generalised across all school contexts with scant demur. The style of leadership that is successful in a large urban school may not enable school leadership in a different context. I propose that an investigation of leadership in the small remote rural setting is likely to reveal that leadership in that context differs from that recorded for large urban contexts. This argument is elaborated further in Chapter 3.

1.2.3 Research methodology

The third body of literature explored in this study is methodological. The overarching paradigm underpinning the study design is qualitative. Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 26) define a paradigm as ‘the net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological premises’. In this study the use of qualitative research is underpinned by assumptions about the social world, as well as ways of conducting research within that world. To investigate the knowledge and understandings held by six teaching principals, a grounded approach, symbolic interactionism, was selected to uncover the meanings made by the participants. The methodological literature as it
relates to this study, and justifications for the choices made, are presented in Chapter 4.

1.3 Research problem and guiding questions

Following the examination of literature pertinent to the study, research questions were compiled. These guiding questions ensured consistency between the research subject and the information sought from participants. The questions were:

- Do teaching principals see leadership as an important aspect of their role? If so, how and why?
- What factors do teaching principals say influence their leadership practice?
- What do teaching principals say are the consequences of these factors on their leadership?
- Do some teaching principals see themselves as thriving in their positions while others see themselves as having difficulties?
- Do teaching principals ascribe their success or difficulty to their leadership and if so, what aspects do they think are important?

The purpose of these questions was to guide the collection of descriptive data as well as to facilitate opportunities for theorising how and why leadership may have developed in a particular way. The manner in which the questions influenced the research design is explained in Chapter 4.

1.4 Organisation of the dissertation

The purpose and context of the study have been outlined in this chapter. Personal motivation to undertake the study has also been discussed and an overview of relevant literatures included.

In Chapter 2 the teaching principal literature is examined to address the questions: What is known about the teaching principal context and role? What are the challenges faced by teaching principals? What are the factors that influence teaching principal practice?
A second body of literature is reviewed in Chapter 3. This chapter sets the study in the educational leadership context, firstly, introducing the field of educational leadership, and then focusing on leadership styles. Leadership styles are influenced by the needs and expectations of employing authorities and society at large. This chapter answers such questions as: What is effective leadership in the school setting? Why has the notion of effective leadership changed over the last 30 years? Why is there so much emphasis in recent work on being an effective change-agent? What does school leadership look like in urban school settings?

Within Chapter 4 the research methods chosen for the study are acknowledged as arising from the researcher’s preferences, but encompass the nature of the research problem. The theoretical context that frames the problem is also detailed in this chapter and includes the data gathering and analytic strategies employed.

Data gathered through interviews with six cases are analysed in Chapter 5 in an endeavour to account for the different voices of teaching principals in remote small school locations in Queensland. Individual stories provide different perspectives on teaching principal practice in six one-teacher schools.

The results of a cross-case analysis exploring themes derived from the data are reported in Chapter 6.

The final chapter synthesises the findings, highlights implications, and outlines the lessons that can be learned with the ultimate aim of developing an awareness of the complexity of the leadership practice of teaching principals. The culmination of the study is a discussion of the contribution of the findings to educational leadership. Directions for future research conclude the chapter.

Having set the study in context, outlined its purpose and defined its conceptual and methodical framework, Chapters 2, 3 and 4 examine literature underpinning the research.
CHAPTER 2
SMALL SCHOOLS CONTEXT AND THE TEACHING PRINCIPAL POSITION

2.0 Introduction

Among the positions outlined in Chapter 1 was the view that most studies of educational leadership have been undertaken in large organisational environments, making it problematic for understanding leadership as it is enacted within a setting such as a small remote rural school. This chapter examines the task of mapping current understandings of the rural context and the teaching principal position so as to complement existing studies of large organisational settings.

Nolan (1998) argues that for effective research into small rural communities, it is important to understand the remote context within which teachers and principals work. This chapter is therefore constructed using two threads that illuminate both the field of inquiry and the focus of this particular study. The first thread provides a description of the context in which small schools are situated and hence the environment in which teaching principals operate. The second thread provides a description of the teaching principal position.

Discussion of both threads provides a baseline description and interpretation of the teaching principal position so that these can be developed into a framework for understanding the influences at play in small rural school leadership. This is presented within Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

2.1 The small schools context

The world in which children are growing up involves not only the cosmopolitan world of international priorities, but also the immediate world of local community needs. For all primary school-aged children especially, it is the local context where they have opportunities to develop the competence to shape their lives and to respond to the demands and expectations that are placed upon them. The local context for rural children is no exception. Parents in small rural communities see the school and the

8
education of their children as major focuses for the community (Bowie, 1995; Smith & DeYoung, 1998). The experiences children have in community schools contribute to the development of a new generation of local citizens likely to support the values that keep the community alive. Teaching principals within small and often isolated communities share responsibilities for ensuring children’s education and socialisation with parents.

The focus of research in this area over the past two decades has primarily addressed:

- characteristics of small remote communities;
- features of small remote schools; and
- contributions of the small school to the local remote community.

These areas and the related research results will now be discussed in the following sections.

### 2.1.1 Characteristics of small remote communities

The underlying features of rural communities are quite different from urban communities (Lunn, 1997; Martin, 2001; Sher & Sher, 2004; Yarrow, Ballantyne, Hansford, Herschell & Millwater, 1999). Researchers have highlighted three key differences: the conservative nature of rural communities; distrust of urban-based transient professionals; and the insular web of interpersonal relationships. The three factors are now individually examined.

**A conservative nature**

A number of researchers have reported findings that indicate small rural communities, especially those in remote locations, are by nature conservative (Boylan, 1996; Dempsey, 1992; Dunshea, 1998; Hatton, 1996; McLay, 1997; Nolan, 1998) and generally monocultural (Bowie, 1996; Boylan, 1996), making them more resistant to change than urban communities. Rural communities have fewer people to share the burdens of change and this has been offered as a reason for resistance and preference for the status quo (Martin, 2001). Nolan (1998) and the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland (Roulston, 2003) indicate that this conservative nature of most small communities means that change must be introduced slowly to greatly enhance the likelihood of a successful outcome. Wilson and McPake (1998, p. 25) report that
‘Change must be accepted by community members before implementation of change is to work.’ Fifty-two per cent of Wilson and McPake’s respondents identified change as problematic because of its faster pace and the lack of time available for understanding and acceptance by conservative rural community members.

The conservative nature of rural communities is also reflected in their philosophy of learning. Fundamental differences often exist between the traditional approaches held by rural communities (Boylan, 1996; McRobbie, 1990) and the contemporary approaches to learning preferred by today’s teachers. Contemporary teaching beliefs focus upon the processes of knowledge acquisition and how learning occurs, whereas traditional approaches can be explained as didactic or teacher-centred.

A distrust of transients

Rural communities often display distrust towards urban-based transient professionals, and becoming an accepted member of the community takes time (Boylan, Sinclair Smith, Squires, Edwards & Jacobs, 1993; Nolan, 1998; Yarrow et al., 1999). Lunn (1997) found that many problems associated with integration of urban-based professionals into the community arose because of sociocultural dislocation—whereby professionals from urban areas often have difficulty in learning or displaying the types of behaviours expected by rural residents. Lunn pointed to ‘different norms in socio-cultural and political characteristics, values and attitudes’ as a major reason for this sociocultural dislocation. This is confirmed by Carlson (1992, pp. 43–44) who concludes, ‘Rural communities have cultures that often prescribe the behaviour of residents, perhaps notably the behaviour of educators’.

A close-knit interpersonal web

The web of interpersonal relationships in which all rural citizens are inevitably caught ensures that people will always know a great deal about each other (Coombe et al., 1993). The transient members of a rural community are subject to scrutiny by permanent residents. Indeed, Squires and Sinclair (1990) point out that the actions of transient members are often known by all local residents. Rural principals in Californian County schools, according to Hill (1993), have to contend with these community networks, which can be quite invasive and powerful. For rural principals to ensure that their actions are correctly interpreted, they must build ‘visible
networks’ of their own as quickly as possible by becoming active community participants in local organisations (Hill, 1993, p. 80).

In their endeavour to intertwine school and community events, rural principals need not feel constrained by formalised prescriptive mechanisms such as parent-teacher meetings and written communications. The organic nature of the school’s connections to its community encourages verbal communication through its students, its teaching and ancillary staff (many of whom will be long-term local residents) and its dealings with local social, sporting, cultural and business organisations. Discussions during social events are preferred to formal written communications, and the validity of information is judged by ‘who said it’ (Berker, 1986; Stupiansky & Wolfe, 1991; Yarrow et al., 1999). These are elements of rural culture that are overlooked and/or misunderstood by urban-based medical and teaching professionals.

The connectedness with the local community provides both the teaching principal and community members with a knowledge of each other that is especially deep and intimate (Dunshea, 1998; Squires & Sinclair, 1990). Owing to these close-knit working conditions, principals in small schools are highly visible within the community (Small Schools Network, 2001). Many urban-based transient professionals have reported that, ‘... it is like living and working under a microscope’ (Martin, 1999, p. 22). This connectedness in rural communities can cause some difficulties, for example regarding the issue of confidentiality. For those in professional positions, such as those held by the local doctor and principal, personal information is often exchanged and this information must remain confidential. But at times, as reported by Hoyal (1995), the professional needs to ‘debrief’: but to whom? The web of interpersonal relationships within a rural community does not allow for this as ‘everyone knows everyone and everyone’s business’.

The studies discussed above have exemplified the importance of understanding the context of small remote schools because every context has specific characteristics that influence the behaviour of people within them. The conservative nature of small remote communities contributes to distrust of urban-based transient professionals making their integration into the community difficult. Researchers report that acceptance as a member of these communities is dependent upon an understanding of each community’s values and beliefs. In addition, the communities often have a
preferred behaviour for transient professionals, and acceptance depends upon compliance with these expectations.

The next section of the chapter elaborates the rural school context further, with particular focus on the nature of small schools located within remote communities. It sets the scene for the description of the role of the teaching principal by discussing the role of the school within its context.

### 2.1.2 Features of small remote schools

Small remote rural schools and their specific features have been the focus of a number of research projects (Hagstrom, 1997; Hatton, 1996; McMichael, Liddell, Thayers & Boyle, 1997; Nolan, 1998; Sher & Sher, 1994; Squires, 1997). Research findings from these studies indicate that these features as they relate to teaching principals can be organised under the ten headings below:

- a student-centred approach to teaching;
- teaching skills;
- the dual mission of teaching;
- increased involvement in educational program design;
- high parental and community involvement;
- challenges of change;
- reduction of personal time;
- professional isolation;
- preparedness for the role; and
- difficulty attracting and retaining teaching principals.

These features and their associated research findings are discussed in the following section.

**Student-centred teaching approach**

Low pupil-teacher ratios allow for individualised instruction and attention to students through the use of teaching strategies such as oral reports, one-to-one discussions, independent study, personalised tutoring, simulations and multi-age teaching (Hagstrom, 1997). (Multi-age teaching covers children across all ages enrolled in a
school.) The potential for student self-identity, participation, leadership and expression is thereby enhanced in small schools (Squires, 1997).

*Skills of teaching staff*

Teaching the same group of students over a period of years has both positive and negative consequences for student learning. The positive impact of excellent teaching is usually self-evident, whereas the negative impact of poor teacher performance is multiplied each year the student cohort and teacher remain together—the effects of both are cumulative. Dunning (1993) states that addressing the problem of poor teacher performance is a major concern for teaching principals in small schools. Teaching principals can experience considerable difficulty in solving the problems of inadequate teachers because their own time commitments in the classroom restrict the time available to monitor a colleague’s performance and to subsequently implement support strategies. For the one-teacher school, the problem can relate to finding time to assess the skills of the relief staff, or specialists such as the language teacher, because while these teachers are working with the class, the teaching principal is generally handling managerial or leadership issues. Parent concern about this situation also needs to be handled tactfully and professionally (Dunning, 1993) because teaching staff in small remote schools are often long-term residents of the community.

*Dual teaching mission*

Rural educators understand the necessity of preparing their students to succeed in an urban context (given that many students eventually migrate to a city) and yet their students must also be equipped for success in the local context (d’Plesse, 1992; Sher & Sher, 1994). This means that learning materials and tasks have to be designed with both purposes in mind, often complicating the process for student and teacher.

*Increased involvement in educational program design*

Smallness, with a minimum of bureaucracy, allows for more flexibility in school decision-making and also permits changes in curriculum and re-organisation in instructional material with relative ease (Wallace, 1998). The result, Wallace claims, is that teaching principals have a sense of control over what and how they teach as they are responsible for designing the educational program.
Parental and community involvement

High levels of parental and community member involvement enable a small school to achieve beyond expectations in relation to budget and facilities. In many cases, this tends to be a strength, but there are also reports of conflict between the school staff and community members that can have an immediate negative impact upon student learning and the status of the school within the local community (Hatton, 1996). Hatton reports that this negative impact can ‘pull a school and its community apart’, resulting in reduced student learning and participation.

Challenges of change

The increasing demand for change is faced by all schools, but for the small remote school the challenge intensifies (Hatton, 1996; McMichael et al., 1997; Nolan, 1998; Raywid, 1998). Having a small staff, and a principal who is often obliged to accept a full- or part-time teaching load, reduces opportunities for reflection upon practice and how changes that are forced upon schools by policy may best be implemented (Ireland, 1993; Millar, 1994; Nolan, 1998).

New curriculum changes, such as outcomes-based education, integration of curriculum subject areas and ‘New Basics’ in Queensland (focus upon the essential teaching areas such as literacy and numeracy) are additional issues layered upon the multi-age teaching that occurs within small remote schools (Wallace, 1998). These curriculum changes bring increased managerial demands as stakeholders need to be continually informed and staff require professional development opportunities (Gammage, 1998; Ireland, 1993; Mason, 1999; McRobbie, 1990; Nolan, 1998; Wallace, 1998). Marland, Gibson, Gibson, Lester and Young (1994) highlight the significant influence upon the workload of teaching principals due to the changing managerial demands of the Queensland teaching context. Further, Nolan and Spencer (1992, p. 13) report that many teaching principals are reluctant to ask for help from superiors for ‘they fear their own vulnerability’ because employing authorities may consider them unsuitable for the teaching principal position.

In addition to changing teaching approaches, greater devolution of responsibility for resource management at school level has also had a major impact upon the small rural school principal. This policy change involves greater parental support for school
programs in areas such as curriculum development, resource management and strategic planning (Bowie, 1995; Brown, Carr, Perry & McIntire, 1996; Lyall, 1993; Russell, 2001; Weston, 2000). Traditionally teachers and principals have stated: ‘We are the experts; leave the children in our hands’. However, due to recent policy changes, parents are encouraged to participate in the planning and the delivery of their children’s education. Case study research by Hatton (1995) explored the impact of shared decision-making with parents upon teaching principals’ practice in isolated, disadvantaged one-teacher schools in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. The findings reveal that changes that involve making corporate managerialism work (as explained below) in small primary schools create a significant additional load for teaching principals.

In 1989, all New Zealand schools became ‘self-managing’ and it was intended, according to Russell (2001), to provide greater local involvement in governance and management. While the opportunity for involvement brings some advantages, the schools participating in Russell’s study have not been able to find people willing and able to commit time and energy to the local school. Small one- and two-teacher school communities are so small that self-management directives require almost every family member not only to be represented on the school board but also to be willing to undertake training.

**Personal time reduced**

The ramifications of increasing demand for change have the potential to affect the quality of life of teaching principals in remote rural locations (Coombe et al., 1996; Wallace, 1998). Stress resulting from work overload detracts from job satisfaction, and can negatively impact on family and personal life. Remoteness precludes the ability of teaching principals to escape their work environment, hence reducing the benefits of recreation time (Clarke, 2002; Roulston, 2003).

**Preparedness for the teaching principal role**

Focusing upon the quality of life of teaching principals, Lester (2001) investigated the past teaching experience and preparedness for the role of all Queensland teaching principals. The findings indicated that: 34% had five or fewer years of teaching experience, 30% had multigrade/age teaching experience, 60% had attended a three-
day seminar focusing on management training before taking up their first teaching principal position, and none were enrolled or had studied postgraduate level educational management. This study suggests that many teaching principals appointed to small rural schools in Queensland have limited knowledge of the complex task ahead. With increasing demands for change due to the need for accountability, effectiveness and efficiency, small school principals appear to lack appropriate training. Poor preparation and training can lead to low performance levels, frustrations and a feeling of inadequacy. Moreover, Dean (1988) and Wallace (1998) report that employing bodies expect teaching principals to possess procedural skills such as school policy writing, knowledge of legal issues, and meeting procedures, which further burden the ill-equipped teaching principal.

Professional isolation

A number of researchers have listed professional isolation as a characteristic of small remote schools (Crease, 1991; Garber, 1992; Hill, 1993; Nolan, 1998; Roulston, 2003). Internally, the problem may impact in two ways: restricting opportunities for interchange of views and practice because of small staff numbers and conversely, oppressive differences of perspective when interchange does occur (Dunning, 1993). Externally, the issue of distance arises in that colleagues and fellow teaching principals are often many kilometres/hours distant, so relaxing opportunities for discussion over coffee or a meal are impossible. As a solution, many individual principals create a professional online network with other teaching principals that helps to reduce isolation. Weston (2000) suggests that, without such a network, there are few opportunities to discuss practice.

Difficulty attracting and retaining staff

Martin (1994) reports that many principals in New Zealand request transfer soon after the commencement of their appointment to an isolated rural school because there is limited professional interchange and little support offered by the employing authority. A similar study conducted by Russell (2001) records that the situation has not improved because small rural New Zealand schools are still faced with the challenge of attracting and retaining high quality teachers. In one region alone in Queensland, Lester (2001) reported that 45% of teaching principal positions were vacated in a one-year period. Of these, 65% asked to return to the classroom while the other 35% left
the profession. The enormity of the teaching principal role, professional isolation, emotional and cognitive exhaustion, and isolation from friends and family were the major reasons given by participants for changing their job. Nolan (1998) and Dean (1988) also detail the difficulty of retaining staff due to the increasing complexities of the role resulting in no time for self and reflection.

Summary

Some research in small rural schools emphasises the ability of such schools to focus upon individual students’ needs, to increase staff participation in curriculum planning and to involve parents at a managerial level. However, other findings highlight the fact that many teaching principals are poorly prepared for the position and thus experience difficulty in handling the demands of the job on a day-to-day basis. This impacts on their ability to implement the change that is required of them by employing bodies.

The studies reported here, with their focus on the features of small remote rural schools, have expanded understanding of the importance of the context of these schools. The complexity in the context that appears to be unique to small remote schools requires additional examination. To this end, the following section provides a detailed interpretation of the contributions small schools offer their localities.

2.1.3 Contributions of the small school to the remote local community

The contributions of small schools to local communities are varied and can be considered under two headings: school contribution to the local economy, and school contribution to the continued health of the community.

School contribution to the local economy

The school is central to rural communities (McSwan & Steven, 1995; Manges & Wilcox, 1997) and as Clarke (2003) and Newmann and Wehlage (1995) report, it is the hub. As such, the rural school plays a key role in the long-term sustainability of the local economy (Lambert, 1994; Nachtigal, 1994; Shelton, 1994) through its role as a significant business enterprise in many communities. It generates demand for labour (ancillary staff), goods (resources, consumables), and services (transport, catering). School personnel are a salaried labour force with regular cash income in communities
where this may not be common (Nunn, 1994; Squires & Sinclair, 1990), and moreover, teachers and school executive staff, all tertiary educated, represent a pool of skills, competencies and talents that might not otherwise be available in the local area. Schools, as part of their charter, develop in their students the levels of education and skills that are required by an increasingly sophisticated rural economy. Where schools are situated close to the families they serve, the availability of those services represents important cost savings to rural families and is an important contributor to the viability of many local enterprises.

These benefits can be extended when schools make a deliberate commitment to their role as community centres (Bowie, 1995). The physical facilities of the school are a major community asset and many notable examples now exist of cooperative arrangements whereby schools share their facilities, and perhaps their educational resources, with other community groups. Particularly in small remote communities, schools can provide a central meeting place and a standard of physical provision that would otherwise be beyond the resources of the local population (Nolan 1998; Smith & DeYoung, 1988; Squires & Sinclair, 1990). The school has other resources that can be applied to the task of maintaining and strengthening local communities. Most obviously, the children contribute a great deal to the life of their community through social, sporting and cultural events—occasions they organise and produce and that are valued by the older generation. ‘Events sponsored by the school affirm a sense of community, not just a connection between parents and the school’ (Bell & Sigsworth, 1996, p. 36).

As rural communities confront the increasing challenges of service provision in their districts, more are coming to realise the potential of the school’s resources to fulfil the role as an employment and training centre (Boonie, 1993; Nelson 1993). Providing a local ‘newspaper’ for their communities is an example of this kind of cooperative self-help approach (Squire & Sinclair, 1990).

School contribution to the continued health of the community

Reflecting the importance of schools to small remote communities, Education Queensland (1999) has indicated that rural schools should remain open wherever possible. Furthermore, it argued, that where feasible the network of schools throughout rural Australia should be extended. Research on school–community links
conducted by the international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 1995), indicated that there is a significant relationship between the strength of community–school links and the definability of the community.

Positive and meaningful community–school links provide ‘a sense of belonging to place’ for rural, and especially remote rural residents (Barth, 1995; Bowie, 1998; Brown et al., 1996; Bryant & Grady, 1990; Reynolds, 1995; Sher & Sher, 2004). This sense of place provides identity for individual residents and gives the community as a whole its identity. As Radbourne (2002, p. 23) detailed in her research into identity of small Australian towns, ‘the sense of belonging is generated through strong links between community organisations, arts programmes and the local small school . . . without these ties the health of the community suffers’. Radbourne further detailed the importance of the community members, how schools can often socialise new families into the community and how, through rural education, small communities flourish.

Rural education is personal education. Because many of the amenities of urban life are not available, personal interactions among students, school staff and the school community can operate to enhance learning in the best traditions of humanistic education (Hagstrom, 1997). Education is highly personal and deeply rooted in human interaction. This human interaction is provided by small local schools, reports Hagstrom (1997), because engagement with the students’ learning is frequently facilitated through connections with community activities, local events and district happenings.

School is a big part of the lives of many rural students. Students can develop a positive self-concept because they have an identifiable, useful position in their families and in the townships (Bowie, 1994; Squires, 1987; Squires & Sinclair, 1990). For example, older students are part of the local cricket team and join in on tennis days, either by playing between adult games or being ‘ball persons’ and organising refreshments. The most important factor in wellbeing is optimism itself. This optimism is provided by small local schools, report Sher and Sher (2004) because the sorts of challenges that affect today's rural communities will often require, for their solution or amelioration, the participation of a range of agencies, organisations and individuals. Schools that are ‘in touch’ with their communities are in a good position
to provide the necessary liaison and coordination (Dean, 1998; Lester, 2001; Nolan, 1998; Wallace, 1998).

**Summary**

In adopting such economic and health development roles, schools are making an investment in the communities they serve (Millar, 1994; Nachtigal, 1994; Squires & Sinclair, 1990). The dividend on that investment lies not only in the existence of stronger, more viable local communities, but also in the nature and quality of the support that community members can give each other, to the students in whom they share an interest, and to the educational programs of schools.

The conceptualisation of the remote rural community, the predominant beliefs held by residents and the place of the school viewed from a local perspective, all provide a platform on which the second thread of this review begins. This second thread provides a brief review of the teaching principal position in the world context, followed by more specific details and explanations of the role of teaching principals in small communities. This approach provides a framework for understanding the complexities at play that may influence teaching principal leadership.

2.2 *The teaching principal position*

The second thread addressed in this chapter provides a description of the teaching principal position. I begin with a brief explanation of the position the small rural school teaching principal holds in countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Scotland. This information places the teaching principalship in an educational position of importance as a key player in rural children’s schooling.

2.2.1 *Brief review of the teaching principal position around the world*

In Canada, due to the nature of the population distribution, the rural school is prevalent. Two examples illustrate the importance of the teaching principal position in rural Canada. In Saskatchewan, over 40% of primary school children attend small rural schools. Within the Province of Ontario, the Canadian Catholic education system (Adams, 2001, James, 2001) serves over 37% of all children enrolled, of which 46% are in rural settings.
The small rural school is also an important feature of the education system in the United States of America (USA). In Alabama, there is an association of 29 small public schools in 25 rural communities whose goal is enhancing performance through academic and community development (Brown, 2001). Montana has 151 small rural schools with enrolments ranging from 2 to 174 students; 83 of these schools have fewer than 19 students (Morton, 1999). In Alaska, over 60% of all schools are small rural schools.

Other countries such as New Zealand, Ireland and Scotland have numerous small rural schools with teaching principals. Over 40% of New Zealand’s primary schools are situated in rural regions and are run by teaching principals (Martin, 1994; Russell, 2001). In rural Northern Ireland, the North-eastern Education and Library Board runs forums for the staff of small schools with less than 100 pupils (Northern Ireland Board, 2001)—all of these Irish schools have teaching principals. In Scotland, 47% of primary schools are small schools with teaching principals (McMichael et al., 1997; Wilson & McPake, 1998). Many governments worldwide including the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand are encouraging the growth of rural populations and realise that keeping small schools open is an essential facet of this commitment (Education Queensland, 2001; McMichael et al., 1997).

Providing equitable educational opportunities for children in the vast rural regions of Australia has been, and remains, a challenge for educational providers. Small primary schools have played a significant role in community life across the nation (Lester, 2001). In the 1930s there were 7,000 small primary schools; but by 1935, nine out of ten primary schools in Australia had an average attendance below 200. Teaching principals in charge of small schools were ‘heroes in the building of the nation’ (Beare, 1998, p. 23).

Today the teaching principal still remains a significant person in Australian education. For example, within the NSW Department of Education and Training in 2001—the largest school system in the southern hemisphere (Murdock & Schiller, 2002)—there were 623 teaching primary principals representing 34% of primary principalships in this education system. In addition, there were a further 133 teaching principals in the NSW Catholic school system, the fourth largest education system in Australia. In combination, teaching principals in these systems constitute a significant proportion
of the NSW primary school leadership base. A similar situation is evident in Queensland where, of the total Queensland student population, some 30% attend rural primary schools (Education Queensland, 2002). There are over 500 Queensland State Government rural schools, as well as over 100 schools operated by religious organisations. Currently, of these 600 rural schools, 416 small schools are operated by teaching principals whose student numbers range from 4 to 120 (Education Queensland, 2002b). These numbers reflect the significant contribution made to education in Queensland by the small rural school with a teaching principal.

Within the countries in the western world considered in this review, the small school with a teaching principal plays a significant role in the education of children. In addition, as indicated in the previous section, the small school with the teaching principal is a major player in the local community. Given this importance, it is now appropriate to review the teaching principal role to determine the tasks expected of this educator.

### 2.3 Teaching principal role

Many researchers have documented the role of a teaching principal (AISQ, 2003; Bingham, 1995; Coombe et al., 1993; Crease, 1991; Cross, 1987; Gammage, 1998; Katz, 1955; Lester, 2001, 2003; McRobbie, 1990; Wallace, 1998; Weston, 2000; Wildy & Clarke, 2004). To facilitate an analysis of the research findings, the role of the teaching principal has been broadly divided into four categories—classroom teacher, curriculum leader, school administrator and manager of miscellaneous tasks. These broad categories are justified and informed by research findings in the following section.

#### 2.3.1 Classroom teacher

As a classroom teacher, a teaching principal’s duties range from full-time teaching, five days a week, to a reduced teaching role of up to three days a week. In Queensland, the teaching principal can be a full-time teacher with student numbers under 27, or one with a considerable teaching load, a small staff, and a student population up to 250 (Coombe et al., 1993; Education Queensland, 2004; McRobbie, 1990; Roulston, 2003). The teaching task is complicated by the fact that classes do not always involve students studying single year levels (Marland et al., 1994; Wallace,
1999). Queensland classes could consist of up to four year levels with as many as 22 students or, if the teaching principal is the only teacher at the school (a one-teacher school) there can be all eight year levels (Education Queensland, 2000). Cross (1987) in discussing the context of New Zealand and Canada, found that rural multigrade teaching was difficult for three reasons: maintaining pupil interest; planning instruction in science and social studies; and implementing individualised reading. Dean (1988), Anderson and Pavan (1993), Gaustad (1992) and Bingham (1995) have all stated that the extra demands of planning for multigrade classes leads to stress and frustration. Their findings indicated that many teachers had applied for principalship of a small school because they thought themselves to be ‘a pretty good teacher’ (Dean, 1988, p.13). Once in the position, however, they felt they ‘were simply managing children and curriculum rather than teaching in a creative and self-satisfying manner’. The implication for the rural teaching principal is a level of stress that can threaten the very satisfaction they anticipated when they applied for the position. Further, principals within schools where there were fewer than ten children all cited lack of personal motivation as a contributing factor in their overall difficulties (Dean, 1988). The above elements make the planning and teaching workload generally much greater than for a single grade class, and 40% of teaching principals in rural and remote locations report spending 20–40 hours per week on school matters in addition to the formal school day (Clarke, 2003).

To further complicate teaching in Queensland, students with physical and mental disabilities are integrated into the general classroom (The General Provisions Act, 1989). This means that rural teaching principals often have the additional care of disabled students as part of their role (Crease, 1991). This additional demand adds another level to day-to-day operations, management and education of all the students in the school. Specialist assistance is very limited (Braddy, 1990) when compared with the assistance available to urban and large regional schools. Moreover, developing programs to suit able students is often very time-consuming and further complicates teaching (Renihan & Hosking, 1996).

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2 The General Provisions Act requires all school age students to be included into normal classrooms and all students to be treated equally.
2.3.2 Curriculum leader

The teaching principal is expected to keep abreast of all current educational trends and be able to implement all key learning areas (Emmett, 1982; Giles, 1982; Ireland, 1998; Renihan & Hosking, 1996; Roulston, 2003). In addition, it is expected that the teaching principal will support part-time staff (visiting specialists: music, physical education, art and relieving classroom teachers) in their teaching through the provision of direction and alignment to these trends (Coombe et al., 1993; Education Queensland, 2004). Curriculum leadership can occur in three ways: through support and encouragement of teaching staff as they implement new curriculum, by informing and guiding the parent body towards an understanding and acceptance of educational trends, and handling curriculum change suggestions made by staff and/or parents.

A review of educational authorities’ documents detailing the teaching principal position, disclosed the importance placed on the teaching principal as the agent to inform, direct and guide part-time staff to an understanding of current curriculum trends (Robinson, 2004; Education Queensland, 2004; Martin, 1994; Nolan 1998). Initially, the teaching principal must not only be aware of curriculum change but be able to determine the best way of adapting and presenting change. Change must be negotiated in such a way that part-time staff are able to understand the required changes and overcome their indifference and resistance (Robinson, 2004; Martin, 1994). Wallace (1999) reported that part-time staff are resistant to change that may alter their 'comfortable' days in the classroom. Part-time staff can view their school time as simply an 'income day' rather than a day for professional commitment (Wallace, pp. 5-7, 1999). Wallace noted that it is the acceptance of change and the support of it by the part-time staff that confirms the teaching principal's curriculum leadership. The leadership task does not end there, however. The teaching principal must be able to observe and guide part-time staff to ensure they fully implement the intended changes (Nolan, 1998; Wallace, 1998).

It is by identifying suitable professional opportunities for part-time staff that the teaching principal ensures opportunities are appropriate for furthering staff knowledge and increasing their professional commitment to the school (Lester, 2003; Nolan, 1998).
Informing and guiding the parent body towards an understanding of current educational trends is the second area of curriculum leadership. Roulston (2003) and Wallace (1998) have reported that teaching principals are more successful if they inform the parent body of planned changes to the curriculum and lead them towards acceptance of these changes. Educational authorities such as Education Queensland (2003), the New Zealand Education Department (Martin, 2004) and the Alaska Department of Education (U.S.A., 1999) all direct teaching principals to keep their parent bodies informed and guide them towards an understanding of how altering the school curriculum will improve student learning.

Upon occasion, a part-time staff member or parent may describe a curriculum change that s/he thinks could improve student outcomes. It is up to the teaching principal to research this possibility and to decide how best to further the idea. Leadership skills will enable the principal to select a course of action so that the idea can be fully researched and discussed with the school community. If deemed appropriate for the school, final acceptance will depend upon the other leadership skills of the teaching principal noted above (Nolan, 1999; Roulson, 2003).

### 2.3.3 School manager/administrator

Many researchers have commented on the management role of teaching principals, sometimes referred to as the administrative role (Brown et al., 1996; Coombe et al., 1993; Emmett, 1982; Giles, 1982; Katz, 1955; Lester, 2001, 2003; McRobbie, 1990; Mason 1999; Nolan, 1998; Sturman, 1983). As the sole manager of the school, the duties demanded of the teaching principal by the employing body and the public include all the managerial tasks that non-teaching principals perform (Coombe et al., 1993; Ireland, 1998). Gammage (1998) reports that most parents and community members are not aware that a principal of a small school is primarily a teacher and that limited time is designated for managerial tasks with little assistance provided. Way (1989) and Nolan (1998) indicate that the duality of the role of teaching principal renders the management of a smaller school significantly more complex than a larger school. Teaching principals have few opportunities to delegate tasks to others due to low staff numbers. Small schools do not have full-time non-teaching staff such as deputy principals, assistant principals, registrars and permanent administrative personnel. Delegation is possible usually to a casual Administrative
Assistant who may retain considerable accountability and responsibility; yet long-term continuity of this position is rarely guaranteed (Wallace, 1998).

As an example of what happens in small schools, managerial tasks can be grouped into three areas: school-based management, managerial accountability and staff management. In general, school-based management involves the implementation of an annual school plan within the school’s allocated budget (Nolan, 1998); control over all spending including energy resources, employment of casual teaching and non-teaching staff, funding curriculum requirements (Hagstrom, 1987; Renihan & Hosking, 1996); and funding professional staff development (Education Queensland, 2001). Managerial accountability includes keeping informed of legislation relating to child protection, workplace health and safety, and duty of care. Additionally, there is ongoing building maintenance reporting, preparing financial statements for auditing, staff review of programs (Renihan & Hosking, 1996), parent review of curriculum (Squires, 1987), school press releases (Millar, 1994), guest appearances at meetings to outline programs, discussions with peers and superiors on programs and how they may be improved (Ireland, 1993; McRobbie, 1990). Once principals have established and are maintaining this educational machinery, they must ensure it performs the tasks as intended. These tasks constitute a full-time position in larger schools (AISQ, 2003; Coombe et al., 1992; Wallace, 1998), but in a small school they must be conducted in addition to the teaching and other managerial duties by the sole full-time person—the teaching principal.

Some researchers consider that staff management involves a number of dilemmas. Being a teacher-administrator creates a ‘schizophrenic’ dilemma, according to Renihan and Hosking (1996) and Law and Glover (2000). On the one hand, the teaching principal is a teaching colleague, part of a teaching team; while, on the other, s/he must supervise staff and cope with the collection of evidence that accompanies the supervisory role (Lester, 2003). Teaching principals in the study conducted by Renihan and Hosking indicated they found this situation very stressful.

Three major research projects have recently investigated the managerial role of teaching principals in Scotland (Wilson & McPake, 1998) and Australia (Lester 2003; Wildy & Clarke, 2004). Wilson and McPake (1998) conducted a study of teaching principals in Scotland and described the teaching principal’s managerial role as one of
‘situational management’. This style is reportedly based upon an assessment of context, tasks and available resources. The researchers argued that the context of the small school influenced the work carried out by the teaching principal. The context dictates the availability of both the physical (buildings and grounds) and human resources, with the human element being particularly important. The pool of skills and knowledge held within the local community helps define the tasks that the teaching principal must personally undertake to successfully manage the dual role.

The outcomes of Wildy and Clarke’s (2004) study, which viewed small school principalship from a within-school perspective, concur with this view. Novice principals of small schools located in rural and remote areas in Queensland and Western Australia were interviewed to determine how they prioritised, and dealt with the complexities of their work. The Queensland element of this study was detailed in a paper by Clarke and Stevens (2004). Four teaching principals recorded their practice and how they dealt with their managerial and teaching workload in their own context. Available human resources to assist with the workload influenced their managerial role but as this was very limited, considerable out of school time was required to complete tasks.

Research conducted by Lester (2003) examined the dilemmas and tensions faced by teaching principals in remote rural Queensland schools. Using the approach taken by Day, Hall and Whitaker (2001), Lester reports that prioritisation of tasks and time management are key influences on teaching principal management (p. 90):

> The teaching principals acknowledged that they faced increasing demands upon their time and as a result were tempted to, and indeed did, deal with those issues or problems that were most immediate and pressing. They indicated they spent much time being reactive (management). But reactive they have to be, for that is the nature of a small school with one full time staff member who has the responsibility for all decision-making.

The findings from all three research projects (Lester, 2003; Wildy & Clarke &., 2004; Wilson & McPake, 1998) highlight issues that influence the managerial practice of teaching principals: context, available resources, tasks, time and choices. These studies pinpointed the multifaceted and often irresolvable consequences of the complexity of the teaching principal position. However, many teaching principals undertake additional miscellaneous tasks to those identified so far.
2.3.4 Management of miscellaneous tasks

In addition to the four clearly definable roles of teacher, school manager, curriculum leader and school administrator, the principal can often be the relief bus driver, gardener, cleaner and computer technician (Donaldson & Marnik, 1995; Hill, 1993). These multiple miscellaneous tasks of the role may seem quaint (McRobbie, 1990), but in today’s rural communities principals have to manage such tasks and meet the same requirements as their better equipped counterparts in the city. As a result of fitting these multiple tasks into a week, the teaching principal is often exhausted, stressed and anxious.

The state of exhaustion and stress can be further intensified if the teaching principal has children attending school. McRobbie (1990) refers to ‘role conflict’ that arises through such things as a lack of time to assist one’s own child after a day which typically begins at dawn and finishes well past the child’s bed time; and guilty feelings if the teaching principal’s child qualifies for a school award (McRobbie, 1990).

2.3.5 What do researchers say about this multi-faceted role?

A review of the role of the small rural school teaching principal suggests that education employing bodies seek persons who can ‘walk on water’ (U.S. Education, 1999). These perceptions convey an exaggerated view of contemporary school principals, who are expected to be well-educated, psychologically mature, proactive, creative and visionary (Bennis & Nanus, 1995; White-Hood, 1991). Such qualities are essential for one of the most important managerial positions in our contemporary society according to Edinger and Murphy (1995).

The Gittins Report (CACE [Wales] 1967 cited in Dunning, 1993) pays particular attention to small schools and an important feature of its consideration was the acknowledgment of the problem of the ‘doubly loaded’ teaching head. Yet, 25 years later, according to Dunning the bipartite role remains a characteristic phenomenon of small primary schools and little has been done to alleviate the demands of the job. In the 1990s in England and Wales, Dunning (1993) reports that the implications of educational reforms and the complexity of the accumulation of developments affecting the teaching and headship elements of the dual role greatly increased the
load for small school heads and he calls for an immediate investigation into this important role. Ireland (1998) and Mason (1999), both Australian researchers, add that with ever-increasing demands of a diversified society for accountability, more curriculum policy documentation, technological advances, and on-site management, it is time for employing bodies to consider altering staffing formula decisions to assist rural teaching principals with full-time managerial support.

**Summary**

The descriptive and interpretive research findings presented above that detail the tasks expected of teaching principals by employing bodies, parents, community members and staff, provide an insight into the complexity of the teaching principal role. That complexity, according to researchers, calls for an extraordinary person to fulfil the role successfully. Whether ‘extraordinary’ qualities are required or not, research consensus indicates that the position demands numerous capabilities to ensure a small school in a remote location operates efficiently and effectively. The tasks associated with management and teaching are unavoidable, and the neglect of any of these creates problems. Lessons must be planned and taught, reports must be written, budgets must be set, resources must be ordered, and buildings and equipment must be maintained. Tasks such as these are essential to the survival of the school as an organisation.

**2.4 Chapter conclusion**

The literature emphasises a number of issues that characterise remote rural teaching principals: the importance of context as a necessary precedent to understanding the remote rural communities are built upon close-knit relationships and the school in such a community contributes to, and benefits from, its community and relationships and a teaching principal's role is complex and many teaching principals are under-prepared, and all experience time pressure and the dominance of managerial tasks.

The last-mentioned point draws our attention to the question: Do teaching principals have time for reflection and strategic planning? If teaching principals can find time (and energy) for creative vision and planning, how do they convince the community that their visions and plans are worthy? Why do they need to? Why shouldn’t a commencing teaching principal arrive at a school and continue the status quo as
teacher and manager? I suspect that the answer is derived from the need to adapt the school to new circumstances whether they are ‘imposed’ by Education Queensland, desired by the teaching principal, or induced by changes in community needs and direction. If the commencing teaching principal is to be more than a status quo educator, the teaching principal has to lead. The meaning I have attached to teaching principal leadership involves processes described by Kotter (1989) who says leadership of an organisation includes creating an agenda for change, including vision development and development of strategies to achieve such a vision. Kotter also details the importance of a network of motivated people who are committed to make the vision a reality. I believe the leadership task to be the responsibility of the teaching principal. When undertaking the task of leadership, the teaching principal needs to determine what are the major influences upon leadership practice in a specific context, and how this will impact on all other tasks encompassed within the teaching principal role.

Further research into the interplay between the role of teaching principal and the pivotal influence the context has in the success of teaching principals may provide information that will highlight the necessary factors that affect the interpretation of the teaching principal role. If leadership is necessary then what form does teaching principal leadership take? I suspect that there are (a) crucial capabilities that allow the teaching principals to make the move from management to leadership and (b) factors within the local context that inform the framework that underpins their practice. This being the case, an investigation focusing upon teaching principal leadership is needed to highlight elements that facilitate leadership in schools where the local community plays a major role. This chapter has set the platform for such an investigation from which new theoretical propositions may arise.

The next chapter focuses upon school leadership research with a particular emphasis on currently accepted leadership models, 21st century influences upon leadership and effective leadership. Discussion of these theories and themes sets the present study in a broader context before examining key theoretical positions within the field.
CHAPTER 3

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed evidence indicating that the role of the teaching principal is complex and demanding, and heavily influenced by the expectations of the employing authority and the local community. The present research is concerned with how teaching principals gain acceptance for themselves, their ideas and for their approaches to leadership. Accordingly, this chapter reviews research and scholarly writing regarding the nature of school leadership, with a focus on expectations of leaders and leadership theories.

3.1 Structure of the chapter

The chapter is organised under five major headings: the difference between management and leadership; shifting notions of school leadership; expectations placed upon school leadership in the 21st century and school leadership theories. These categories were selected as they offered an understanding of trends within the school leadership field.

3.2 Difference between management and leadership

As noted in Chapter 1, Brown (2003) has claimed that teaching principals in one-teacher schools do not have leadership responsibilities because they have no one to lead. While I dispute this claim, I suspect that Brown would nevertheless accept that teaching principals must be good managers (as indicated in Chapter 2). This prompts the question: How do leadership and management differ?

Leadership in organisations, according to Kotter (1989, p. 20), appears as creating an agenda for change including vision and the development of strategies to achieve such a vision. Furthermore, Kotter includes the importance of a network of motivated people who are committed to make the vision a reality.

By contrast, ‘management’, while described in many different ways, typically comprises key processes (Kotter, 1989, p. 21) such as planning to achieve given ends,
budgeting, creating a formal structure that can accomplish the plans, and finally controlling—which involves constantly looking for deviations from the plan (‘problems’) and then using formal authority to ‘solve’ them. [It must be noted here, that many researchers, over the years, have used the term ‘administration’ in place of the word ‘management’. For this thesis, ‘management’ has been selected to represent those elements as described by Kotter.]

Comparison of these items leads quickly to two conclusions. First, management and leadership are not mutually exclusive. There is no logical reason why a person with appropriate background and skills could not do both well in some situations. One might even say that the two are complementary and sometimes overlap. Creating agendas that include sound strategies, for example, often requires some planning and budgeting. In a similar way, creating implementation networks that include strong organisations often requires cooperation from a variety of different sources (e.g., school staff, educational officers).

Yet, management and leadership can also be very different. Plans do not have to include a vision (or vice versa) and budgets do not necessarily have strategies (or vice versa). Similarly, the process of controlling people and the process of motivating them can be quite dissimilar. In a general sense, management is different from leadership in that it has more to do with the implementation of established systems and procedures than with developing a vision, gaining acceptance for it, and rapidly adapting to changed circumstances.

As this study focuses upon teaching principal leadership, the distinction between management and leadership must be clearly understood. The analyses of data rely upon an understanding of leadership elements so as to determine if teaching principals lead, how they lead, who they lead, and what the factors are that inhibit or facilitate leadership. This issue has clear implications on this study and will guide the interpretations made during the analytical analysis.

3.3 Shifting notions of school leadership

Although the importance of school leadership is widely accepted by researchers and policy makers, it is only since the 1960s that the study of school leadership as a social
phenomenon has developed into a body of research (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000; Fullan, 2000a; Simpson, 1998; Southworth, 1995, 1998). Attempts have been made to describe, analyse and interpret school leadership as distinct from leadership in other fields such as business, political science and anthropology, but, the use of conceptions from these perspectives has clouded the view of school leadership. Seminal work by Burns (1978) turned the focus to the unique characteristics of school leadership and there has subsequently been an increase in research and publication in this area. However, a concise description of the field has been a difficult matter as a clear definition of leadership has proven controversial and elusive (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Day et al., 2000; Jantze & Steinbeck, 1999; Leithwood et al., 1999; Sergiovanni, 2001; Southworth, 1995). Theories, models, and principles, several of which overlap, have confused the school leadership discourse. Bush (1995, p. 23) states ‘. . . similar models are given different names, or in certain cases, the same term is used to denote different approaches’.

Many early descriptions of leadership (before the 1970s) appeared to indicate that the community context of the school was not acknowledged as an important influencing factor on the practice of school leadership. While, recently, there is a growing literature on the need for school leaders to understand the school context. Each decade has witnessed different conceptual emphases being placed upon leadership such as bureaucratic, humanistic, instructional and transactional (Ball, 1987; Blasé & Anderson, 1995; Day et al., 2000; Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2003; Leithwood, Menzies, Zantzi & Leithwood, 1999; Lyman, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992, 2001; Smyth, 1989; Southworth, 1995).

More recent approaches have drawn attention to variations in leadership that are attributable to the social/organisational context in which the leadership occurs. Influences such as gender (Blackmore, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984), change theory (Fullan, 1998, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994), and school effectiveness and improvement (Harris & Chapman, 2002; Harris & Lambert, 2003; Hopkins, 2001; Stoll, Fink & Earl, 2003) have shifted the traditional approach to leadership from a focus upon the things individuals (alone) do, to a process that occurs within, and is heavily influenced by, the group (albeit at the instigation of the leader) (Crowther,
An investigation into leadership expectations for the 21st century further expands the understanding of these shifts in theoretical emphasis. To this end, the following section explores these expectations.

### 3.4 Leadership expectations in the 21st century

Globalisation with its attendant economic, cultural, political and social flows has resulted in increasing plurality and complexity in society (Appadurai, 1996; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Davis, Darling-Hammond, Lapointe & Meyerson, 2005; Fullan, 2000a; Genge, 1996; Halsey, Lauder, Brown & Stuart-Wells, 1997; Leithwood, Tomlinson, Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990; Turan & Sny, 1996). The literature indicates that there is a vastly different set of policies and discourses framing educational practice for the 21st century than was evident 35 years ago, and that these new policies and discourses directly challenge, if not change, the context in which school leaders must work.

Internationally, factors that have been identified as driving changes in education include: political, rather than educational concentrations; economic pressures such as concerns about effectiveness and efficiency; trends towards devolution and school-based management and the increasing multicultural flavour of many school communities. The key principle underpinning these theoretical shifts is that as social and cultural plurality accelerate, so presumptions about leadership have changed to place a greater emphasis on local responsibilities and the inclusion of local stakeholders in policy development and implementation. This principle is outlined in the Education Queensland Corporate Plan (Education Queensland, 2002, p. 11):

> Change in the dynamic environment of today causes challenges to be managed at all levels in the school organisation. . . . devolution increases anticipation and empowerment of teachers, parents, students and the local community in making and implementing educational decisions. It requires skilled, responsive managers and appropriate accountability mechanisms.

It is dangerous to list expectations of leadership, glossing over the differences that these expectations take in different contexts, but similarities in policy direction are
evident and it is useful to outline them broadly. Five policy directions are now discussed to illustrate major influences upon 21st century leadership: effectiveness and efficiency; state funding and marketing; devolution towards self-management; national and state frameworks; and identity politics.

**Effectiveness and efficiency**

Commencing in the 1980s and flowing through into the new millennium, a new discourse of school effectiveness and efficiency emerged. Influential research has been conducted on school effectiveness, especially in the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), New Zealand and Australia (Fullan, 2000c; McGraw et al., 2002; Mortimore & Mortimore, 1991; Stoll & Fink, 1996). Lists of characteristics of effective schools have gained wide appeal, as have the quality indicators that have emerged alongside them. Published test scores and other measures, such as retention rates, have highlighted performance indicators for schools. Although publishing test scores has met with strong criticism, there is no doubt that this culture of ‘performativity’ and the discourses of effectiveness and efficiency have set new terms for school performance. Virtually no aspect of the educational enterprise is untouched, and hence a redefinition of the leadership role to encompass effective leadership has been occurring (Ball, 2000; Fullan, 1991; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Leithwood, 2005; Louis & Miles, 1992; Murphy, 1991; Southwood, 1995). This will be further discussed later in this chapter (see section 3.6).

**State funding and marketing**

An associated international trend is one where educational reform is accompanied by capped, if not reduced, state funding, and by the introduction of the market as a competitive framework. In some places, this has meant that state schools are increasingly fee-paying, and/or there are drifts of funding from state to private schooling, further complicating public/private education systems. The shift in emphasis to the market in education reflects a profound change in ethical and social assumptions about schooling (Brown et al., 1997). Education is but part of the broader social/political trend away from command economics and top-down administration, towards markets and devolved administration. Notions of leadership have co-evolved with these changes.
Devolution towards self-management

Between the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, many western education systems introduced the concept of self-management or school-based management. The impact of this policy upon leadership has become evident over the past few years as education employers have expected principals to possess an ever-increasing array of skills to manage financial, human and capital resources. The decision to grant schools more freedom to allocate their resources to need, has been reassessed in recent times. Increasingly, accountability procedures have been added and these range from prudent use of consumable resources through to financial allocation based upon student outcomes. Public documents, such as the Annual School Report (Canada, 2004; Education Queensland, 2004) are expected and used to compare and judge schools. Many principals consider the requirement to produce public documentation is far removed from the core business of schools, namely teaching and learning, while others argue that a performance indicator approach ‘forces’ schools to attend to core business. In addition, the leader’s work is complicated by increased staff and community participation in decision-making.

These changes in school governance, which Fullan terms a ‘comprehensive realignment of parental/community/school relationships’ (1998, p. 102), create school boundaries that are more permeable, with greater potential for building more comprehensive learning systems centred upon schools and their communities (Louis & Marks, 1996). Both Clarke (2000) and Vincent (2001) discuss this changing school governance and highlight the associated skills expected of school leaders.

This new conceptualisation of parent and community relations gives rise to one particular leadership tension, according to Christie and Lingard (2001). When the educational values and beliefs of the principal, staff, parents and community members match, success stories abound; but when there is a collision of beliefs and values, the mismatch creates tensions and dilemmas for the school leader that are often irreconcilable.

National and state-wide frameworks

At the same time as devolution towards self-managed schools has gathered pace, there is a countervailing or contradictory trend, whereby the state is taking on new centralist
functions. The centralising tendencies of new managerialism include developing state-wide frameworks, including curriculum; formulating strategic objectives for the system as a whole; setting standards of practice; assessment and reporting frameworks; monitoring quality and establishing accountability measures for performance and outcomes. Thus, greater autonomy comes with more visible accountability pressures. As Fullan (1998, p. 102) states ‘school leaders must constantly negotiate this simultaneous centralisation–decentralisation terrain’.

Identity politics
Complex issues of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual politics have emerged in recent times. These pose challenges for school leaders, who need to engage in new ways with issues of identity. The new emotional economies that flow through and around educational systems and schools have often seen women take on the emotional labour and emotional management necessary to keep stressed schools and teachers going (Blackmore, 1999; Hargreaves, 1998). The result has often been educational systems committed to formal equality of opportunities for women, and leadership in schools has given recognition to its gendered character (Limerick & Lingard, 1995). These identity politics further engage the school leader in the need to develop interactions with staff in positive and productive ways.

Summary
Examples of some of the leadership expectations of the 21st century outlined in this section highlight their existence nationally, at state level, and at local community level. Not only are schools more accountable to external constituencies and market relationships, but they also need to network across their boundaries to access knowledge, financial and material resources.

To sum up the influences of these expectations, there has been a significant shift from hierarchical, bureaucratic organisational structures to more decentralised and professional control systems. Murphy (1992) points out there has been a change of metaphors from ‘principal as manager’ to ‘principal as facilitator’, from ‘teacher as worker’ to ‘teacher as leader’; as well as an overall transformation from command to empowerment but one that is subject to increasing ‘performance constraint’. Leadership practice in schools is now moving from the principal as sole leader to teachers and the principal who form teams to lead the school jointly.
Such expectations, which are typical of those from the business sector, have had a substantial influence in the educational setting with resultant changes to school structure. Significantly, it is the principals who have the potential to have the greatest impact on the future shape of schools (Dempster, 1993) and the educational quality they deliver, but it is no longer a job solely for the principal.

The expectations for principals have changed quickly to embrace the capacity to manage change (Newton & Tarrant, 1992; Walker, Farquhar & Hughes, 1991) as priorities change, often unpredictably in response to local, state and national needs. The principal now must consult, collaborate and empower. The principal now occupies a key link in the chain between head office and the school—teachers, staff, students and the community—as never before. This linking role and the centralised–decentralised tensions noted earlier, produce a complication within the principal’s work. On one hand, some principals have interpreted school-based management and devolution of responsibility to mean the right to ‘do their own thing’, while others see the response as one working more closely with the school staff in planning and decision-making to better address the needs of their particular school (Brown, 1990). Thus, principals bring to their positions various interpretations of their role and hence the influences upon their work vary according to each principal’s approach and school context.

The formation of ‘networks’ and the development of ‘collaborative learning organisations’ have been proposed in the organisational literature as ways to facilitate these many changes (Crowther, Hann, McMaster & Ferguson, 2001; Liebermann & McLaughlin, 1992; Limerick, 1992; Limerick & Cunnington, 1993; Senge, 1997). Such concepts are being promoted in educational environments for effecting change in schools (Fullan, 1991; Newton & Tarrant, 1992). While being potentially effective in assisting principals to undertake their new responsibilities and the changes to the work expected of them, collaborative processes themselves provide further challenges to the leadership capacities of many principals. The process of forming networks and collaborative learning organisations has been de-emphasised in educational research studies (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). Yet, as Burns noted in 1978, relationships require exploration by researchers because they influence the motives of leaders and followers. Further investigation is required into how leaders achieve the challenge of
positioning schools locally within the framework of state politics while also establishing collaborative relationships with local communities.

This section of the study has recorded a number of the expectations placed upon school leaders. These expectations directly challenge, not only the contexts in which school leaders work but also the approach used by the principal to lead his/her school. The literature indicates the vast set of policies and discourses that now frame educational practice and how this directly challenges the practice of school leaders. It is this range of challenges that can be used for descriptive and explanatory purposes within this study. But it must be remembered that the data which influenced the findings described in the above research papers were obtained from large urban schools. An analysis of the research data of this study which was obtained from a selection of small remote rural schools will be guided by the 21st century leadership expectation described but the setting may influence school leadership practice and the interpretations.

In the past, the principal alone was the figurehead, the person staff looked to and expected leadership from. But as expectations of the principal have changed, this ‘accepted’ view has altered. Advocates for group leadership have begun to dominate. This general individual-to-group shift has appeared within theories of school leadership and that shift is discussed in the following section.

### 3.5 School leadership theories

School leadership theories have been grouped within this section of the review with the aim of analysing the shift from the principal as sole leader, to the principal encouraging participation of others in the school leadership process.

#### 3.5.1 Theories focusing upon the individual

The review of literature revealed that in a majority of schools, up until the early 1970s, school organisation appeared to be managed by the principal/head master (a position rarely held by a woman) who acted as the sole person being responsible for all school organisational matters (Cole, 1997; Hothouse, 1995; Smith, 1991). Directions on how to run a school were from the central employing authority, and these directives were to be carried out to the letter by the school principal. The central
authority was the sole source of leadership, providing school direction, agenda for change and strategies for visionary development. The principal’s role was that of management—planning to achieve central authority directives and ensuring these directives were met.

The principal’s personal traits appeared to affect the nature and quality of the management and influenced the success of school organisation (Simpson, 1998). Theories described during this period included the Great Person Approach (or ‘Great Man’) the Trail Approach and Theory X. Researchers did not identify school context, resources, characteristics of students and local communities as factors of influence. Furthermore, directives from the central authority were universal, thought to fit all schools in all contexts.

In the early 1970s, researchers began to note a shift in inquiry from the principal’s personal traits, styles and behaviours to the nature of the school organisation and the ways in which it influences, and is influenced by, the principal’s work (Sarason, 1982; Simpkins, Ross & Barrington, 1987). Findings indicated that strategies effective in one school context would not necessarily work in another, so that school management would present differently from one situation to the next. It was increasingly recognised that situational variables were extremely important in understanding school organisational processes as well as for predicting possible success in principal practice. Three theories from organisational psychology, which were popular during this period, demonstrate this shift of approach: Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967; Hershey & Blanchard, 1972); the Leadership Decision-Making Model (Vroom & Yetton, 1973); the Path-Goal Model (House, 1971).

Research on the work of a principal revealed it to be characterised by involvement in a large number and variety of tasks of short duration, which were often complex in nature and where much time was spent in verbal interaction (Duignan, 1987; Sarason, 1982; Simpkins, Ross & Barrington, 1997). In addition, a principal’s work was characterised by the need to keep everyone happy—fulfilling central authority directives and supervising the teaching of students. The principal seemed to be kept busy ensuring smooth school functionality. Reflection, review and planning were not described as part of the work of the principal, nor the encouragement of teacher

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3 ‘Context’ in the main, referred to the within-school context.
professional development (Fullan, 1991; West-Burnham, 1990), and interactions with parents were limited to fundraising activities.

The 1970s witnessed a growth of interest in the cognitive processes demonstrated by the principal. Based on the assumption that principals’ behaviours are influenced by how and what they think, the focus of inquiry shifted to principals’ decision-making and problem solving processes (Leithwood et al., 1999). Research findings described the principal as the decision maker acting upon knowledge held by the self, not by other members of the school staff or the school community. School management was firmly in the hands of the principal, with evidence of some leadership activities applied as central authority directives were interpreted to fit the individual school context.

In 1978, Burns’ research findings set the scene for a changing view of school principal practice (Simpson, 1998) when he described two forms of leadership: transactional and instructional. He described transactional leadership as one which focuses upon ensuring that all members of the school organisation carry out tasks efficiently for the good of the whole. Control mechanisms, procedures and policies drive this form of leadership, with the principal as the sole leader. This hierarchical structure means that power rests in the person who holds position and title. The need for resource accountability, equity between schools, and ensuring school staff members are working towards improved outcomes for all students influenced this perspective.

Burns also described an instructional leadership. Research findings revealed that the source of influence and authority was expert knowledge and pedagogical skill (Ehrich, 1998). This was usually demonstrated by the principal, who was primarily concerned with developing a school mission, promoting the school culture and administering instructional programs (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The focus of instructional leadership upon the core business of schools, teaching and learning, makes this theory relevant today—even though Leithwood (1994, p. 502) has described instructional leadership as ‘a dying paradigm’. British researchers, Bush and Glover (2003) and Southworth (2002) recommend that instructional leadership be incorporated into leadership training and development programs because surveys
examining student achievement and school effectiveness have recorded significant improvements when leaders demonstrate instructional leadership characteristics.

Both transactional and instructional leadership approaches rely on and incorporate behavioural styles that accommodate the principal’s authority to make all decisions, which staff members follow. But student and teacher input, along with central authority directives, all contributed to the principal’s final decisions.

**Summary**

To summarise, five key findings have emerged from the literature review thus far. It was revealed that the employing authority dictated action and these directives were managed at school level by the principal. Organisational structures and processes are characterised by bureaucratic and hierarchical features and success is measured by goal attainment and prioritisation of instrumental and administrative concerns. The principal’s personality was often the variable that afforded success. Interactions are construed as being one-way, with defined roles and clear boundaries within which staff members carry out their tasks. The within school context as an influence upon leadership is recognised, but the school setting, local social and cultural contexts are perceived as minor influences upon leadership.

**3.5.2 Theories focusing upon the principal encouraging participation of others in the school leadership process**

The shift from sole management and leadership to group participation increased in momentum from the mid 1990s (Beck & Murphy, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992). Within western democracies, school community contexts were rapidly becoming more pluralist and complex, which created ever-increasing demands upon the principal (Bhindri & Duignan, 1997; Day et al., 2000). For instance, there was an explosion in the use of information and communication technology, the influences of multiculturalism, and the increasing influence of business practices on education. Power, responsibility and authority appeared to become the property of the group rather than the individual—the group being, staff, students, parents, and to a lesser extent the involvement of community businesses and individuals. However, the principal was still the one driving, maintaining and encouraging this perceived shift of authority. Personal and professional morals, values and ethics are considered at all times, leading to a valuing of the cultural context. Individual staff members must be
committed to shared visions and goals for shared leadership opportunities to be successful. In addition, human development became the focus by creating conditions for student and staff growth and success.

Research writers saw the principal as the leader no longer alone; other staff were involved in leadership decisions that were influenced not only by the needs of the central authority, but also by the needs of the individuals involved within the school itself. This emphasis was rooted in such theories as the Path–Goal and contingency theories that were applied to school organisational processes back in the 1970s and 1980s (Fielder, 1967; House, 1971). Leadership theories sought to move the bureaucratic and administrative focus from centre stage to balance it with a spotlight on values, moral authority and capacity for change. This modification in approach to leadership was a realisation of the inability of transactional and instructional theories to stimulate improvement within contemporary organisational contexts. Transactional and instructional practices have thus become supportive, not dominant strategies.

Concomitantly, leadership began to be expressed in a wide variety of forms and a number focused upon the distributive elements of sharing leadership tasks with members of the teaching staff. For this review, these theories are elaborated as they describe shared leadership and offer an opportunity to understand how school leadership may present in a group situation. Transformational, servant, moral, values-led contingency, participative and distributive forms have been selected for further discussion (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Beck & Murphy, 1993; Bhindi & Duignan, 1997; Day et al., 2000; Fullan, 2001; Greenfield, 1995; Leithwood, 1994; Lyman, 2000; Rolph, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1992). The investigations into descriptions of shared leadership theories have expanded the understanding of how principals facilitate and organise group leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Yukl (1994) comprehensively reviewed empirical research in leadership to develop guidelines for what he described as transformational leadership. Transformational leadership has been reported to be one of the most effective approaches to shift the leadership perspective from individual to group. Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinback (1999) suggest that transformational leadership is ‘a powerful stimulant to improvement’ (p. 37) and that it facilitated a shift in the school leadership process.
They describe eight aspects of this leadership form that have contributed to change within school processes: school vision, establishing school goals, provision of intellectual stimulation, individualised support, modelling best practice and organisational values, demonstration of high performance expectations, creation of a productive school culture and creation of structures to enable participation in decision-making.

Underpinning transformational leadership is the assumption that adaptation to a changing world is a central requirement of administration in any organisation. This is common to many theories of leadership, including ‘authoritarian’ variants. But it is argued by the exponents of transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Menzies, Jantzi, & Leithwood, 1999) that a leader should inspire and transform the thinking of other players in the organisation in response to the evolving and changing world—in other words the leader should increase the organisation’s capacity to adapt. The relationship between the leader and the follower is one that allows both to grow together through encouraging individualistic thinking and practice. This is in stark contrast to earlier leadership practice where the leader determined the actions of followers.

With the principal as a participant, preferring to lead from within rather than from the top, working teams and committees engage in problem-solving and decision-making. Leadership does not reside in any one fixed place or person for all time; rather, expertise and competence supersede any formal position. Leithwood et al. (1999, p. 9) state that ‘leaders change with the issue’. For all members within the organisation and to a lesser extent members outside the organisation to become involved in working teams and committees, as Leithwood et al. (1999) report, the individual’s stimulation is achieved through focused, inspired, intellectual engagement with the leaders and with others.

To inspire intellectual engagement, the exponents of transformational leadership argue for empowering others to make significant decisions. Leaders should implement strategies that help others participate effectively and provide opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making about issues that affect them (Leithwood & Riehl, 2004). Through these processes, school leaders promote equity and justice for all students and staff by establishing school climates in which all parties feel they can
contribute. There is devolution of responsibility and decision-making, even in very hierarchical organisations (the larger the organisation the greater the necessity for devolution). But transformational theorists argue that transformational leadership encourages and enables professional growth of the participants and, at times, the principal as leader steps aside to allow shared responsibility of school organisational processes.

**Servant leadership**

The servant leadership approach is often discussed as fundamentally at variance with transformational leadership (Hunt, 1999; Osborn, 2001) but an analysis of this theory uncovers a matter of a difference in emphasis. Described by Greenleaf (1977), servant leadership is a means by which leaders obtain the necessary authority to lead. Servant leadership provides authority partly because one of the responsibilities of leadership is to show direction and purpose to others. Within an organisation, members have ideas and hopes for the organisation and for their own role within that organisation, but without leadership members may have difficulty in achieving this for themselves. Servant leadership offers the means of achievement through providing a sense of direction and establishing the overall purpose of the organisation. Fundamentally, this is similar to the descriptions of transformational leadership.

But, according to Greenleaf, being successful in providing purpose requires the trust of members of the organisation. For trust to be forthcoming, members must be confident that the leader’s competency and values are not based upon self-interest alone. Greenleaf maintains it is best to let the members of the organisation define their own needs and, in that way, the leader understands that those whom he/she is serving are a most important element in the acceptance of the values and the ideals of the individuals. These ideals and values help shape the organisation and, in a sense, all members share the burden of leadership.

Servant leadership is practiced by serving others, but the ultimate purpose is to place all members of the organisation in the service of ideals. Taking this emphasis, servant leadership is closely allied with moral authority. Moral authority relies upon persuasion, which is rooted in ideals and values that together define the organisation’s purpose and core values.
Moral leadership

Beck (1994) suggested that practicing a moral or caring ethic in education involves receiving, responding to and remaining in a caring relationship with all those involved within the organisation. This idea underpinned Sergiovanni’s (1992) work on stewardship, where the leader acts responsively and authentically towards others. Sergiovanni (1992, p. 139; 2001) argues that moral authority is ‘the cornerstone of one’s overall leadership practice’. Sergiovanni devalues the traditional focus on sole-leadership and argues that the moral and ethical behaviour of the whole group are the most important elements.

The purposes of moral leadership are to increase sensitivity to the ‘right decision’, increase participation and create a more democratic organisation and community. Consequently, students and parents are joined in a coordinated effort to achieve common goals. Sergiovanni (1992) argues that such commitment to ‘ . . . the concept of stewardship, empowerment and collegiality means that leaders and followers are inextricably bound up; they allow one another to exist . . . without followership there can be no leadership’ (p. 85).

Increasing participation is further facilitated through building a learning community that includes the whole school community (staff, students, parents, local community members), in which caring and positive relationships are a necessity (Lyman, 2000). From a variety of disciplines, scholars are suggesting directly or by implication that the presence or absence of caring affects, and some say determines, the degree of learning in schools (Barth, 1990; Beck, 1994; Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Epstein, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1994). At the same time, and again from a variety of perspectives, persons serious about reforming education are advocating an emphasis on building a learning community for the transformation of schools (Marshall, Patterson, Rogers & Steele, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 1996). Marshall et al. (p. 291) suggest that ‘for students and teachers to be connected to their schools, indeed for learning to occur, educational administrators’ behaviour must be centred on caring’. Lyman (2000) states that ‘the significance of leadership grounded in caring and morals has its power to transform schools . . . schools would become welcoming learning environments for all’ (p. 13).
Moral leadership appears to provide an approach that a principal may take to connect the goals, values and ideals held by all school participants. To enable these to be expressed successfully within school processes, programs, events and future planning, it appears that the principal must work along with members of both the within- and without-school contexts to ensure everyone is included and valued.

Values-led contingency leadership

Yet another approach to group leadership is values-led contingency leadership. Values-led contingency leadership has its origin in research conducted by Day et al. (2000) in England in the 1990s. The focus of values-led contingency leadership is to create and facilitate conditions for the betterment of students, staff and the local community. Values-led contingency leadership practice in the late 1990s and early 2000s has been influenced by the beliefs that personal and professional ethics and values influence practice; a context of change must be realised; the group shares power, authority and responsibility; and that community involvement in the development and pursuit of visions and outcomes is valued. For these factors to have lasting reform in the leadership of schools, Fullan (2002) advocates a transforming of school culture, changing what people in the organisation value and how they work together to accomplish it. Fullan (2002, p. 19) is setting forward a ‘cultural change’ leadership approach that may foster the conditions necessary for sustained education reform in a complex, rapidly changing society. Fullan (2002) goes on to say ‘an organisation cannot flourish—at least for long—on the actions of the top leader alone. Schools need many leaders at many levels’ (p. 156).

This person-centred perspective appears to challenge the theories that propose solutions and recommend ‘one-way-to-lead’ approaches. But more importantly, this approach places the group as the important element of the school organisation, not the principal. Principals move on to another school, but the ‘group’—the school staff as a body—does not. Their visions for the school and commitment to the school sustain school success.

Participative leadership

Discussed frequently in current school leadership documents is ‘participative leadership’. The term ‘participative leadership’ was adapted from Yukl’s (1994)
description that encompassed ‘group’, ‘shared’ and ‘teacher’ leadership. Participative leadership, according to Leithwood and Duke (1999), stresses the decision-making processes of the group.

Participative leadership shares several key ideas with the work of other leadership theories. The emphases of participative leadership are similar to those of transformational leadership, namely: the needs of both leader and follower are met, stakeholders work together as peers, the whole person is engaged in issues he or she cares about, and participants strive towards a high level of motivation and morality (Goddard, 2002). The differences appear to be that the broader needs of the school community are met, stakeholders only respond to those leaders who have credibility and integrity to serve the process, and that leaders are servants of the group (similar to Servant Leadership, Greenleaf, 1977) helping everyone to do their work (American Leadership Forum Book, 2001). As a result, researchers report that a deeper sense of connectedness grows out of the interactions.

This approach to school leadership does not vary markedly from those preceding in this review. Elements of transformational, servant and moral leadership are all within the essences of this approach. What it does offer, is an emphasis upon how school community members can become part of the decision-making process.

Distributive leadership

Currently, the style of leadership referred to as ‘distributive leadership’, which actively encourages sustainable school improvement, is being proposed as a ‘new’ leadership style (Day et al., 2001; Gronn, 2000; Spillane et al., 2001). The key element of distributive leadership is the replication of leadership at various levels, and there appear to be several variants of this basic idea (Crowther et al., 2002; Harris, 2004a). This literature review identifies a recent proliferation of terms and concepts closely related to distributive leadership. Although some researchers (Bennett & Anderson, 2003; Harris 2004b; Oduro, 2004; Woods, Bennett, Harvey & Wise, 2004) are beginning to unravel these concepts, few have attempted to determine the distinctive characteristics and effects of distributive leadership. These researchers have shown that schools may flourish under dynamic leadership but, once the principal is transferred, school success declines. Where schools are struggling and rapid change is required, an authoritarian approach may be appropriate, but this must
evolve into shared leadership for change to be sustainable (Handy, 1996; Harris & Muijs, 2003). According to Harris (2004b) and Rolph (2004), the distribution of leadership tasks across the school increases the capacity of staff, which then generates and sustains school improvement. The exponents of this theory list the benefits as being: the personal and professional development of those involved, the ‘ownership’ that individual staff members feel, and the ability to draw on the strengths of each staff member (Harris & Lambert, 2003; Louis & Marks, 1996).

A distributive approach to leadership has the potential to reduce the impact of school change and increase the need for a high level of trust. When distributive leadership succeeds, everyone experiences and shares in the success; but when it fails the principal is ultimately responsible (Spillane et al., 2001). Relationships between staff and the leader are quite ‘special’; the leader must not mind who gets the credit for success, and individuals must be comfortable in an environment where one is expected to use one’s own professional judgment. As Fullan (2001) suggests, any attempt to create coherence will inevitably generate discord, and this is especially the case where there is distributive leadership. Discord may occur if staff lack experience in sharing responsibility and accepting credit. Whilst it is difficult to deny the moral appeal and practical advantages of distributive leadership in schools, there is limited empirical data to confirm its positive effects or to show how it can be successfully implemented.

The concept of distributive leadership presents a number of possibilities for schools with staff. But, is distributive leadership a possibility in the small remote rural school? As there are no full time staff, who will be led by the principal? Does the small rural remote setting alter the perspective of 'school'? Distributive leadership is a possibility if the school community and even members of the wider community are involved in making decisions about future school policies and vision development?

**Summary of the shift from sole to group leadership**

The examination of major school leadership theories over the past 35 years has produced a shifting picture of leadership theories. Several issues have influenced changes to leadership practice and these are summarised briefly here.
First, in post World War II Australia the driving force for sole management and leadership practice rested with the employing authority with no, or very limited, interface with staff, students, parents and the school's immediate community demanded of leaders. Group leadership practices reflect a shift in the employing authority’s thinking about the inclusion of students, staff, parents and to some degree community members.

Second, sole leadership theories do not focus upon school development or transformation of the organisation to improve school performance. Group theories emphasise the redesigning and transforming of the school organisation as a high priority.

Third, the concept of the principal as the sole leader has been replaced by ‘shared’ leadership. The ascendancy of the concept of shared and distributed leadership represents a significant shift in thinking about leaders, leadership and leadership development. It not only challenges the mythology of individualistic leadership, but also opens the way for research to investigate how shared leadership can improve student and school performance. With the addition of aspects of servant leadership to the process, ideals take the spotlight and moral authority becomes the cornerstone of leadership practice.

The shifts in theoretical emphasis that have occurred have focused upon the need to adapt, the need to build the capacity for change, to achieve successful partnerships, and to initiate collaboration and networking between leader and staff members. Further, there has been the inclusion of local business and community representation on school committees.

An analysis of individual and group leadership theories points to the following possibilities for this study. Having no full-time staff in a small school, it seems self-evident that there is no one to lead as Brown (2003) has claimed. When a principal is the sole full-time staff member, it might be expected that individualistic leadership is the only possibility. Or could we expect to find other persons involved in remote rural schools, thus opening the way for shared leadership? An analysis of the collaborative leadership theories reviewed in this chapter follows, summarising present emphases and areas where research evidence is sparse.
This is presented in Table 1 with a noting, by the use of a tick, of key features of the theories in which collaboration is included.
### 3.6 An analysis of collaborative leadership theories

Table 1 summaries some of the key features of the theories reviewed in Section 3.5 with responses to nine questions. A tick indicates that a feature (column) is fundamental to the theory (row) concerned. The comment 'at times' is used when the feature is accommodated by a theory, but is not assumed to be central to it. There are several contrasts worth noting.

Comparison of the first two columns of Table 3 (Q1 and Q2) reveals a difference in the degree to which the leadership theories reviewed in Section 3.5 encourage vision development by the principal (Transformational, Participative) or by the principal and teaching staff in collaboration (Servant, Moral, Values-led contingency, Distributive). This difference may be relevant to the teaching principal context to the extent that they act individually or include part-time staff in vision development and implementation.

Questions 3 and 4 reveal another contrast of potential relevance; namely the extent to which successful teaching principals establish connections and trust with members of the community as well as with their staff (Participative, Distributive), rather than focusing on their immediate within-school context (Transformational, Servant, Moral, Values-led Contingency). In either case, one issue will be the narrowness or breadth of the group involved: the teaching staff or all staff (if within-school connections are emphasised); the Parents and Citizens committee or a wider community group (if the community is involved). Both sub-issues may hinge on the persons who seem to be (and see themselves as being) central to the operation of the school. In an urban context, such 'persons of influence' are usually the professional staff and the Parents and Citizens committee (and sometimes the parents and the students). This may or may not apply in the remote rural context.

The devolution of leadership to teaching staff as revealed by Question 5 is accommodated, in varying degrees, by most theories surveyed earlier. Servant leadership (without a tick) places a different interpretation on relationships between leader and follower, because the staff define goals and the principal works alongside them to achieve those goals. It could be argued that devolution of leadership may not apply to the remote rural context because teaching principals have only part-time staff.
to contend with, but if the breadth of the group is widened, other possibilities may be revealed.

Power used ethically to empower others (Question 6) appears to be common to all collaborative leadership theories. All theories recognise the importance of understanding the ethical features of a situation and how they may (or may not) be addressed through existing laws and organisational rules. These are key components of the use of power, and it remains to be seen how prominent they are in the practices of teaching principals in the remote, rural context.

Questions 7 and 8 reveal that collaborative leadership theories are learner-centred approaches which emphasise the importance placed on capacity building and the pursuit of ideals and values. Collaborative leaders constantly monitor and manage competing tensions and dilemmas (because collaboration requires that differences be revealed and resolutions negotiated). Again, it remains to be seen how prominent (and effective) these aspects of practice are in the remote rural context.

The last column (Question 9) reveals a difference in the degree to which the leadership theories reviewed in Section 5.3 encourage school growth and success undertaken by the staff as a group. The difference may be relevant to the teaching principal context to the extent that such principals act on their own or include their part-time staff in forward-planning for growth and success.

One issue that is conspicuously under-developed in the theories reviewed in Section 3.5 is highlighted by Question 4 in Table 1, namely the extent to which connections are formed with community members. Although participative and distributive theories acknowledge some community role, their treatment of it is limited. Community engagement/involvement is not ascribed any serious role in the other theories. As noted earlier, inclusion of the community may be a key factor in the success of teaching principals practising in the remote rural context. However, as with all grounded research, further speculation should await the findings of the present research.

The key features of the collaborative theories discussed in this section will contribute to the analysis of the findings in Chapter 7. Through the process of pulling together the key features of the theories, the analysis will be employed to determine how
current theories assist in the understanding of teaching principal leadership and if addition understandings are necessary to explain leadership in remote rural settings.

### 3.7 Chapter conclusion

It is undeniable that modern western societies have become more pluralistic and the needs of communities are more diverse than in previous times of relative cultural homogeneity. This increasing complexity has had an impact upon governments, business organisations and the way we currently view the world and our future expectations.

Consequently, the work of leaders has become less predictable, less structured, and more conflict-laden. Leadership in businesses has had to progressively accept and plan for the fact that world trade and economic and human patterns are rapidly changing. Driving forces include developments in information and communication technology (ICT) and the increasing levels of diversity within western communities fuelled, at least in part, by changing immigration patterns. Some communities in the western world now cater for upwards of sixty different language and cultural groups (Ryan, 2003). Leaders of organisations in western countries are increasingly required to interact with clients who have a different heritage from their own.

These worldwide changes have necessitated a reassessment of ways to lead an organisation. Schools and schooling have not been untouched by these changes and have adapted to fulfil the demands of their evolving societies. For example, schools in Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and New Zealand have all undergone reforms in response to major changes enforced by governments, such as those towards self-managing schools; changing standards and accountability; and retaining central government control while paradoxically releasing more responsibility for decision-making to the local school level. These changes have occurred in response to the shifting sands of economic trends, multiculturalism and technology.

Schools of today are multi-million dollar enterprises, charged with many accountabilities ranging from student outcomes; the effective, efficient and prudent use of resources; to the future wellbeing of humanity (Limerick, Cunnington &
Crowther, 1998). Educational leadership is a complex phenomenon. Changes in society, workplaces, expectations, organisational design and ICT suggest that we need to continually rethink our views of school leadership. New structures that have emerged in schools create new and challenging dilemmas for principals (Dempster, 1997) necessitating new skills that can be applied beyond the immediate and traditional professional context of the school (Begley, 1995). There has been a shift from command and bureaucratic hierarchical organisational structures relating to the school to transformational and shared styles of leadership. This has occurred coincidentally with an increasing complexity in the principalship, rapid curricula changes, and the need for ongoing adaptation to continually changing school governance.

Having summarised examples of significant changes in contemporary society and their influences on education, including their impact on school leadership, it is important to signal how this study will contribute to the understanding and promotion of theoretical leadership concepts and frameworks. This chapter has shown how concepts from a range of contemporary leadership theories can be used for descriptive and explanatory purposes within the study. Theories have been outlined from the field of leadership that will assist in data analysis and interpretation and have shown how existing theoretical frameworks can be reconciled in a contemporary way to give cohesion and direction to the study.

The shift from individual to group leadership describes current trends in leadership approaches. Group leadership includes members of the within-school context (students, staff and parents) as well as the without-school context (local business and community representation). Knowing the parent body, their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and meeting the needs of their local context influences the way group leadership is expressed. Having representation of the 'contextual membership' complicates school leadership practice. However, it must be remembered that much of the leadership research reviewed was conducted in large urban schools, and yet findings seem to have been applied to all school contexts.

There are crucial components that allow leadership to occur as it does in large school contexts. This does not imply different leadership practice in every different context.
but it does mean that contextual sensitivity will determine how leadership practice is enacted.

This chapter has set the platform from which new theoretical propositions may arise from the analysis of data gathered from leaders with teaching tasks in isolated settings and which may contribute to a reconceptualisation of leadership. How this might be achieved methodologically is the focus of the next chapter.

But before moving on to the Methods Chapter, I focus the outcomes from the two literatures reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 upon the research at hand.

The two literatures I refer to were concerned with teaching principal and school leadership. It is now time to consider how these literatures together contribute to this research. The school leadership findings were gathered mainly from large urban contexts and have been superimposed upon numerous school contexts as a guide to the understanding of school leadership in complex organisations. The teaching principal context is an exception; it stands alone, and can be considered as a different environment, for discourse about school leadership. My analysis suggests it seems to have been viewed as being unable to contribute to mainstream literatures. In this study I reverse this apparent oversight and use data from research in remote rural teaching principal settings to pose questions about present theory and leadership concepts. It is hoped that by using this perspective, unexpected points of view will surface and in so doing, the findings will contribute to and further enrich school leadership theory.

The perspectives of teaching principals and how their leadership practice may be influenced by their contexts are considered important to understanding school leadership from this different viewpoint. These perspectives, being important for this study, require gathering and analysing. To achieve this end, an effective research method for recording, interpreting and analysing the effects of context upon meanings constructed by teaching principals was sought. Symbolic interactionism has been shown as a most effective method for exploring how people interpret their world and how the context shapes and alters their understanding of their position within their context. Understanding the meanings made by teaching principals and how these meanings influence and shape the interpretation of their role is an important step in understanding teaching principal leadership.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY, DESIGN AND METHODS

4.0 Introduction

The study aims to describe and analyse how remote rural teaching principals define and interpret school leadership in their work context. In addition, the study aims to examine the meanings given by the research participants to their social and professional circumstances and how these influence their leadership practice. Chapter 4 describes chosen methods of data gathering that acknowledge my subjectivity as researcher. It provides a description of symbolic interaction as the theoretical perspective informing the selection of methods. It goes on to describe a theoretical framework and a methodology that are consistent with the characteristics of qualitative case study adopting grounded theory methods of data analysis. Additionally, it presents a rationale for using case study, describes the sampling strategy and the composition of the sample, and details the data collection procedures and method of analysis. The chapter closes with a brief explanation of procedures adopted to address trustworthiness, authenticity, ethical issues and the strengths and limitations of the research method.

The notion of studying people in their natural environment rather than through abstract forms or in artificial experiments has driven the premise that inquiry must be grounded in the empirical world under study (Woods, 1992). The ‘empirical world’ means the day-to-day life of individuals as they interact together, as they develop understandings and meanings, as they engage in ‘joint action’ and respond to each other as they adapt to situations, and as they encounter and move to resolve problems that arise through their circumstances. This study investigates the factors that six teaching principals say influence their practice as they engage with others (such as students, staff, parents, community members and their employing authority). In an attempt to understand their points of view, to appreciate how they interpret the cues given to them by others, the meanings they assign to these cues and how they construct their own actions, the grounded approach of symbolic interactionism is warranted as an appropriate methodological base. Symbolic interactionism typically deals with small-scale, everyday life, seeking to understand processes, relationships,
group life, motivation and adaptations (Woods, 1992) and is one way to uncover influential factors and the consequences of action. This study fits within this realm as principals appear to construct their responses based on the meanings they make from interactions with other people on a day-to-day basis.

4.1 Symbolic interactionism

Blumer first coined the term ‘symbolic interaction’ in 1937 and later elaborated it (1969) setting forth three tenets:

Tenet 1: Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.

Tenet 2: The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.

Tenet 3: These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.

These three principles are useful for framing this research. The first principle implies that understanding people’s behaviour involves exploring how they define and interpret their world. The second principle emphasises that action results from social interaction, and the third principle states that individuals continue to define and redefine their position within their contexts over time.

The five research questions posed at the beginning of this thesis seek the meanings that principals attach to their actions in their particular contexts. They also seek an understanding and interpretation of how the participants have defined, and are defining, their interactions with a variety of persons within their contexts—students, teachers, parents, community members and officers of Education Queensland.

The study focuses on interpretation of the meanings made by the teaching principals within their social settings. As Woods (1992) notes, the concept of self is seen as a social object constructed by the individual after reflecting on knowledge through interaction with others. The self is ‘the lens through which the social world is refracted’ (Woods, 1992, p. 341). Woods states that interpretation is essential and that elements such as personality traits, needs, unconscious motives, socioeconomic status, culture or physical environment are factors that may influence behaviour.
Hargreaves (1987) has drawn attention to a number of strengths of symbolic interactionism. These include the following that relate to this study: its ability to enable the researcher to explore social action from the point of view of the actor; to articulate taken-for-granted knowledge; to provide members with the means to reflect on their own activity; to inform policy by providing knowledge and understanding of the everyday life of schools; and to illuminate the meanings that individuals make of their situation in range, depth, and richness of detail.

Symbolic interaction is an appropriate theoretical framework to determine what facilitates or inhibits school leadership in remote rural settings. Symbolic interaction offers the researcher an overarching approach to the investigation of how a particular group of persons—in this case, teaching principals—give meaning to their ‘realities’. The study design uses case study as the main vehicle providing each principal a means to tell his/her story of leadership. This allows analysis and interpretation of data so that a comprehensive picture of the participants’ leadership is articulated. The implications of these symbolic interactionist assumptions for the study methods, selected population, sample size and analysis and reporting procedures are discussed in the following sections.

4.2 Methodological framework

4.2.1 The qualitative framework

The research questions (listed below) directed me towards insiders explanations of their leadership experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences—this requires a qualitatively oriented study consistent with the recognition and understanding of symbolic interactionism. Taking some time to establish itself as a valid way of approaching research, the qualitative paradigm has come to be seen as having a recognisable set of principles, methods and strategies, as well as its own protocols for matters of ethics and rigour. Recognition of qualitative research as a credible paradigm was not quick, nor did it proceed smoothly, but it is now established (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Clandinnin & Connelly, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Eisner, 1991; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Lofland & Lofland, 1995; Maykutt & Morehouse, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Newman, 1997; Sarantakos, 1993; Tuckman, 1988).
The research questions addressed by this study focus upon the interpretations made by teaching principals. To be able to extract interpretations, the research framework must be appropriate for the aims of the study. The symbolic interactionist framework provides the study's base encouraging the researcher to seek methods enabling the voice of the teaching principals to be heard. The research questions from Chapter 1 below, seek an understanding of teaching principal leadership.

- Do teaching principals see leadership as an important aspect of their role? If so, how and why?
- What factors do teaching principals say influence their leadership practice?
- What do teaching principals say are the consequences of these factors on their leadership?
- Do some teaching principals see themselves as thriving in their positions while others see themselves as having difficulties?
- Do teaching principals ascribe their success or difficulty to their leadership and if so, what aspects do they think are important?

Having established that the grounded approach of symbolic interactionism provides a framework to enable teaching principals’ voices to be recorded, the following table positions the three symbolic interactionist tenets with method requirements. These requirements enable data collection to focus upon the individuals under examination. Sensitivity to individuals' construction of interpretation within their contexts over time is a high priority for this study. The meanings made become the focus. With the explicit desire to collect, analyse and report teaching principals' understandings and interpretation of their leadership, purposeful method selection deemed semi-structured interviews as a useful tool.
Table 2: Symbolic interactionist methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbolic Interactionism</th>
<th>Method requirement</th>
<th>Method chosen</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 1: Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.</td>
<td>Requires method(s) that will reveal the meanings that teaching principals ascribe to their practices and to influences thereupon.</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews focused on teaching principals’ experiences of their role and actions, with a particular focus on leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 2: The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.</td>
<td>Requires method(s) that allow teaching principals to express their interpretations of their experience and practice within the social contexts of community and school.</td>
<td>1. Guiding and probing questions that focus on teaching principals’ interpretations of their practice in the contexts they deem important.&lt;br&gt;2. The use of narrative to capture the unique character of, and interdependencies amongst, a teaching principal’s understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenet 3: These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.</td>
<td>Requires method(s) that (a) are sensitive to changes in teaching principals’ interpretations over time and (b) allow their understandings to be refined during the data gathering process.</td>
<td>1. Questions that allow teaching principals to express any changes in their perceptions and actions that occurred during their postings.&lt;br&gt;2. Use of multiple interviews which, amongst other things, allow teaching principals to refine their understandings (facilitated by the provision of transcripts and feedback between researcher and subject).&lt;br&gt;3. Collaborative narrative construction that allows refinements to be made so that the story faithfully reflects the teaching principal’s specific understandings and actions. The narratives formed the case studies.</td>
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The selection of a semi-structured interview tool provided me with not only the opportunity to use the literature to guide question development but the flexibility to probe for interpretations of the teaching principal’s practice within their contexts. Multiple interviews provided further opportunities for reflection and meaning refinement which facilitated connections and clarified interpretations.

A collaborative reporting narrative provided the opportunity for participants to review their 'stories'. This allowed refinement opportunities to ensure the story being told reflected specifically his/her interpretation of the meanings made while in the role of
teaching principal. The narratives presented in the form of case studies formed the basis of analyses, both within cases and across cases. The use of case is now discussed.

4.2.2 Case study

I describe this investigation as a case study and I have used Yin’s (1989, 1994) three pivotal questions to assist in determining the appropriate research design:

- the type of research questions to be answered;
- the extent of control the researcher wishes to have over the actual behavioural events; and
- the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events.

Case studies arise out of a desire to understand complex social phenomena and require a type of qualitative investigation that focuses on the particular, through examination of a specific phenomenon such as a program, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). Case study thus offers a means to fulfil the aims of the study.

A common concern about case studies is that they take too long, producing meaningless and useless information resulting in massive, unreadable documents (Sarantakos, 1993). But this is not inevitable. This study is guided by broadly-based interview questions which were discussed with current and past teaching principals, ensuring that interviews produce focused results within the desired time frame. The case studies produced are also guided by headings that focus upon the context of, influences on, consequences of, and the leadership of the participants, thus ensuring that descriptions are easily read and the information within these is accessible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988).

Case studies are special in that they focus on a bounded system, usually under natural conditions. For this research, the bounded system is the teaching principal working in an isolated rural setting that has, until now, received limited attention in published research. Anchored in this real-life environment, the case study method enables a rich and holistic account of leadership to be developed isolating the influences on it and their consequences.
Another common concern is that qualitative case studies can be limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher (Riley, 1963). The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis which, in this study, has advantages. For example, I have detailed knowledge of the teaching principal position and the educational systems within which the participants practice. I have also lived in a remote rural setting. I was fortunate to be accepted by the participants as a ‘comrade in arms’, one who listens sympathetically, and one who understands the unique circumstances of small rural community living that only one who has lived in a rural community for many years knows.

### 4.2.3 Interviews

Anderson (1990, p. 222) defines an interview as ‘a specialised form of communication between people for a specific purpose associated with some agreed subject matter’. Kvale (1996) outlines the characteristics of qualitative research interviews as focusing on the everyday lived world of the interviewee, seeking the meaning of central themes in the life-world of the subject, using normal language to obtain nuanced descriptions of specific situations.

The style of interview conducted is influenced by the overarching qualitative paradigm. Kvale (1996, p.2) states:

> When placed alongside the theoretical premises and research questions, interviewing appeared the most appropriate way to gather necessary data. The wish to have participants to tell their stories and be part of the analysis could be best done via a semi-structured qualitative interview.

Given the commitment to collecting new empirical data capturing the ‘authentic voices’ of the principals, semistructured interviewing allows access to an individual’s ideas and understandings directly, hence reducing researcher influence (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The semistructured interview is defined as a process by which the researcher explores a topic using a set of guiding and supplementary questions (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell & Alexander, 1990). Within this study, participants were enabled to reflect upon the influences they identified as having an impact on their leadership practice. Silverman (2004) says that interviewees are viewed as experienced subjects who actively construct their social worlds; the purpose of the
interview is to record the individual experiences and meanings made of their teaching principal practice to provide discrete data for analysis.

As Patton (1990) suggested, each guiding question was accompanied by prompts and supplementary questions or ‘probes’ that I used to obtain further details by inviting the participant to elaborate or to clarify. This data gathering approach was directed by the set of guiding questions which, in themselves, brought to the study restrictions and possible limitations, but ensured that various elements were discussed by all participants.

The four semistructured interviews were initially focused to establish rapport through the use of questions that gathered contextual information, including the physical properties of the school, its surrounds and the participants’ tasks as principal. I collected sufficient information to establish the contextual features of the school environment for each participant that contributed to the actions, experiences and the meanings he/she made of his/her work, including leadership actions. As the interviews progressed, leadership issues became more focal, culminating with the final interview which focused upon those factors that encouraged or inhibited leadership.

I analysed the interviews immediately after the transcripts were written; a process that enabled me to note any omissions and gaps that were then addressed in the subsequent interview. In addition, restructuring of subsequent interviews was possible to ensure all guiding questions were covered. Before the third interview was conducted, and using the interview data, I constructed a ‘concept map’ of what each participant said were influences upon their leadership. This was given to participants to review before I conducted the third interview. At the beginning of the third interview each participant discussed the map I had constructed, and any misunderstandings made by me were corrected (see section 4.8 for more details of this process).

4.2.4 Interview analysis

There are alternative approaches to categorising data for thematic analysis, either (a) possible themes are selected from an external source—perhaps previous theory or research—or (b) the themes are recorded from the data themselves (Polkinghorne, 1995; Silverman, 2004). This study adopted the second approach, just as that used by
Ribbins (1997) when analysing nine leaders from a variety of organisations. This approach was selected for this study to ensure that analysis was grounded in the principals’ data (Heritage, 1984).

However, while the process of inductive analysis enables case study narratives to be written, the ultimate objective of the study was a synthesis of the collected empirical evidence, and to develop theoretical constructs on school leadership. In other words, the aim was to go beyond a story (Day et al., 1999) and descriptive accounts (Patton, 1990) and to offer evidence related to and potentially qualifying existing school leadership literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

To facilitate this synthesis, a form of constant comparative analysis, after Le Compte and Priessele (1993), was used. Their modes of analysis comprise perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering, and establishing linkages and relationships, and speculation. This process enables concepts and themes to be established, and relationships and links to be altered as new information is gathered from subsequent interviews. Not only within case analysis, but also cross case analysis, further influenced the guiding questions for the later interviews. Accounts of the other teaching principals’ perspectives as well as those of the immediately-present interviewees, ensured that the follow-up questions covered potentially ‘shared’ issues arising from other interviewees.

### 4.2.5 Narrative development

One of the purposes of qualitative research is to provide insight into the perspectives or life-worlds of others. Narrative inquiry and portraiture are two contemporary approaches that use narratives and stories to achieve this objective. Such narratives might focus upon the participant’s or researcher’s experiences, or both. In this study, as the researcher I selected material from the participants’ interview transcripts to construct a narrative.

The purpose is to capture, in a more holistic way, the teaching principals’ personal leadership practice and to show the influences upon that practice. In spite of narratives being methodologically ‘messy’, Ah Nee-Benham and Cooper (1998, p. 6) argue that ‘to talk meaningfully about how life experiences shape one’s work as a school leader, requires a storied approach that is descriptive, personal and concrete’. Stories and
narratives structured in accordance with themes from the data analysis generated descriptive case studies, allowing for the process of moving ‘from the empirical trenches to a more conceptual overview of the landscape’ (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 228).

The narratives were returned to the participants for comment, negotiation and amendment, and appear in Chapter 5. The narrators’ ‘voices’ (their stories) provide an insight into, and illustrate, the themes of context, complexity and consequences of teaching principal leadership. In addition, the background information provided by the participants is located in Appendix D, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of each participant’s practice.

### 4.2.6 Multi-case approach

The study uses a multi-case approach, seeking ‘shared’ aspects of teaching principal experience, and thus it increases the potential for tentative generalisation beyond the particular case. Merriam (1988, p. 154) states that ‘an interpretation based on evidence from several cases can be more compelling than results based on a single instance’. A qualitative inductive multi-case approach seeks to build abstractions across cases and attempts to see ‘processes and outcomes that occur across many cases or sites’ (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 151). Further, multi-case studies have the potential to explore how processes are influenced by specific local contextual variables. This approach fits the purpose of this study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) highlighted the fact that combining a grounded theory approach with the collective case study design and data analyses increases the possibility of understanding multiple case findings, grounding them in reality and disclosing common features between cases.

Each teaching principal’s narrative is unique to the individual, but the cross-case analysis revealed that similarities were present. These similarities enabled the researcher is begin the construction of possible explanations of authentic teaching principal leadership practice.
4.3 The participants

The type of sampling used in this study was purposive (Anderson, 1990) whereby teaching principals in remote rural Queensland schools with a school population ranging from 4 to 26 students were interviewed. Patton (1990) states that ‘information-rich cases’ should be selected so that the best people for informing an understanding of a particular group of people are included.

Education Queensland Executive Directors were consulted to nominate possible candidates. The six candidates selected fulfilled the following criteria: their schools were in remote rural locations at least 100 km from the nearest township; the Executive Directors recommended these principals as articulate and clear thinkers; and they were the only full-time staff members of their schools with full responsibility for teaching their students and full responsibility for the organisation and management of their schools. All six principals included in the study were in their first appointment as teaching principal. This was not a deliberate decision, but as over 70% of teaching principals in one-teacher schools are beginning principals, this was always a possibility. Nevertheless, this offered a significant advantage by permitting close attention to the early phases of teaching principal leadership.

This purposive sample was not intended to reflect the stakeholder population demographically (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993; Morse, 1998). However, the final sample included a cross-section of participants from different rural settings, as well as different years of teaching experience, gender and the number of students enrolled at their schools. A profile of each participant is presented with his/her narrative in Chapter 5. Significantly, none of the principals who were approached to participate in the study declined. It appeared that they, too, were deeply interested in the research topic. All worked in remote small communities and, being new to their teaching principal role, were eager to share their experiences and to have the opportunity to reflect upon their practice.
4.4 Data collection

4.4.1 Phases of data collection

As already noted, data collection was qualitative in character and focussed upon teaching principals’ leadership experiences as viewed from their perspectives. Careful attention was given to confidentiality and anonymity because of the personal nature of the data. Each phase of the data collection is now discussed in turn.

Establishing an ideal environment in the field for this study

To create an ideal interview environment, the first contact, via telephone, was organised at a convenient time for the teaching principals. This introduction established communication and outlined the expected involvement of a participant in the study (see Research Ethics Protocol section 4.7). Documentation relating to the study, including guiding questions, was provided to all participants. At all times, language familiar to teaching principals was used to confirm my background and to demonstrate that they were to be the focus of the study.

To finalise this preliminary preparation for the interviews, visits to the participants’ schools were arranged.

Initial school visit

An initial school visit was arranged to each of the six schools. This familiarisation visit contributed to my acceptance into the school context and allowed the development of trust between the principal and myself. Once this acceptance was established, interview times were discussed. The meeting also provided opportunities to become familiar with each school context which, in turn, allowed me to contextualise the supplementary and probing questions used during the interviews.

A visitation checklist was developed before this initial school visit to ensure that the following elements were covered at all six sites:

- obtaining names, contact details and brief backgrounds of all part-time staff: length of time worked at the school; whether local person or transient;
- being introduced to all students;
• observation of the principal’s residence, determining age and background of the building;
• observation of the school grounds, main features, conditions of gardens (if any) and background to these features;
• observation of the condition of the main access road to the school, proximity of this road to the school and the school residence;
• detailing other features that I felt may be of importance while driving to the school or while at the school; and
• recording information that the teaching principal, adults or children happened to chat about.

This visitation checklist ensured that similar details were obtained in all six cases, but it also allowed each principal to tell his/her own school story. The ‘list’ enabled me to have confidence in my data collection therefore freeing my mind to note particular contextual elements that appeared to be unique to that context. This approach made the most efficient and effective use of time on site. Being well prepared in this manner (Merriam, 1988) demonstrated the researcher’s commitment to the study. The research ethics protocol was discussed once more to ensure the principal understood his/her commitment to the project and my commitment to her/him as researcher.

4.4.2 Interview properties

Interview format

The use of guiding questions (Appendix A) as a data gathering tool has been prominent in the work of many researchers of principals’ leadership (Leithwood, 1994; Morine-Dershimer, 1996; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). Through a series of increasingly explicit questions, attempts were made to elicit the source of the participants’ understanding of their leadership and the meanings they made. In response to participants’ answers, the order of the guiding questions altered and, at times, additional questions were included. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), new questions and insights may emerge or evolve during the data collection stage, and these direct the researcher towards a fuller understanding of the situation under investigation. During this study, both researcher and participant were able to probe
and elaborate issues that they deemed important for a fuller understanding of leadership practice.

In order to obtain a comprehensive account of each participant’s experiences, four types of questions were included in the interview schedule—throwaway, essential, extra, and probing (Berg, 2001). Each type of question is explained below.

The throwaway/background questions were used to commence the first interview and helped establish rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee. For example: ‘How many students are there at your school?’; ‘What are their year levels?’ Throwaway questions, as the term implies, are incidental to or unnecessary for gathering the important information being examined in a study. Nonetheless, throwaway questions proved to be invaluable in drawing out a complete story from the principals.

Essential questions exclusively concern the focus of the study. They were placed towards the end of the guiding question schedule because they were geared towards eliciting specific information about the participants' leadership approach.

Extra questions were worded slightly differently from the essential questions. These were included in order to check the creditability and consistency of responses.

Probing questions frequently invited interviewees to elaborate upon a particular response—for example, ‘You just mentioned working with the P and C to make decisions was a form of leadership. Could you explain that in detail?’ These probing questions became very important to the study because they encouraged the principals to talk in depth about their perceptions of teaching principal work and especially leadership.

The guiding questions were initially constructed by the researcher but were validated and reconstructed well before the interview process began. Teaching principals not involved in the study and school leadership literature guided the construction of the questions. Furthermore, these questions were offered to a number of additional experienced teaching principals and leadership researchers for review and reconstruction.
The second element of the interview format involved the use of the ‘researcher-constructed concept map’. This was developed using the data collected from interviews one and two and the process is detailed in the following section.

**Researcher-constructed concept maps**

Concept mapping is an approach used to explore personal constructs underlying individuals’ theories and beliefs (Cooke, 1999; McHugh, 2002; McLay & Brown, 2001; Novak, 2001; Novak & Gowin, 1984). In its simplest form, the concept map is a structured process on a topic of interest that can be used to help individuals articulate their ideas and describe how the ideas are interrelated in pictorial form. For this study, concept mapping using the traditional approach of participant construction was considered, but I made the choice that I would generate the maps. Constructing the maps using the participants’ information gathered during the first two interviews, made me ‘see’ the influences upon their leadership practice through their eyes. I had to step ‘out’ of my own teaching principal experiences and seek their meanings of their experiences. The approach reflects methods appropriate to the symbolic interactionist as the research is contextualised within situations thus ensuring research bias is limited as much as possible. Using this method, I took care that their stories were told, not my story. These maps were presented to the participants for comment and amendment.

Using the researcher-generated concept map approach, I ‘stepped into the participant’s life’ and endeavoured to reconstruct the data from the transcripts into an illustrative form. This exercise proved to be highly beneficial as it minimised researcher misinterpretation of the interview transcripts and explored more fully intended meanings, links and relationships. Relationships between influences, consequences, and the thinking behind the answers to the guiding questions during the interviews were ‘made visible’ to ensure the narratives that were generated from the transcripts were grounded in the participant’s experience. The participants had not encountered concept mapping from this perspective before this study. They expressed positive reactions with a particular focus upon the ability of this process to facilitate the construction of their stories. An example of these maps is located in Appendix C.
Length and number of interviews

The following factors were covered in the semi-structured interviews: the work commitment of each principal; the concentration time of participants at the end of a teaching day; the complexity of the questioning and the likely length of answers; and the range of topics to be investigated. Prior personal experience suggested to me that the participants were unlikely to reflect extensively upon their leadership practice prior to their involvement with the study. This assumption proved accurate for all six participants, so it was imperative that the selected format allowed the participants time to reflect during and between the interviews. This approach provided opportunities for the participants to reinterpret their initial understandings, and meanings made, and contemplate further issues not initially considered.

The resulting format prescribed four interviews, each 45 minutes in length, and the associated list of guiding questions was evaluated by peers and experienced teaching principals and considered appropriate, as explained later in the chapter.

4.4.3 Interview procedure

Semi-structured questioning

For each participant, four successive interviews, each of approximately 45 minutes duration were organised. The interval between the first and fourth interviews was kept to a maximum of six weeks. In the first interview, principals were encouraged to talk about their schools’ characteristics and context, which established a rapport between the interviewee and the interviewer (Kvale, 1996). The interview proceeded using guiding questions (Dana & Pitts, 1993), to extract views on specific facets of their work as teaching principal and the influences upon such. The second interview sought additional information (Bredeson, 1988) about these influences and the consequences that ensued with an increasing focus upon leadership tasks and experiences.

Between the second and third interviews, the principals received a copy of the ‘researcher-constructed concept map’ (See section 4.4.3). The third interview reviewed this diagram, and any identified gaps were clarified to ensure that a comprehensive story for each participant could be constructed. The fourth interview focused solely upon leadership issues and those factors that encouraged or inhibited leadership.
Feedback of interview transcripts

All interviews were audio-taped. Each interview was transcribed and copies forwarded to the participant for verification prior to subsequent interviews. All participants availed themselves of this option. The editorials requested were minimal: all being a missed word or phrase during the translation stage. This process ensured recorded information reflected the views of the principal accurately, thus maintaining the credibility of the study.

Feedback using researcher-constructed concept maps

Before the third interview, the data collected were synthesised into a diagrammatic representation. The main influences upon the teaching principal’s leadership, as detailed by individual principals, were placed near or in the centre of a sheet of A3 paper. Links between influences were shown with lines and often arrows were used to indicate the direction of the influence.

The process revealed whether principals had characterised their views adequately, and whether their views were understood by the researcher. If participants detected omissions or misconceptions in the ‘concept maps’, these were discussed and further clarified if necessary, during the following interviews.

Summary

The main research questions were addressed through the use of semi-structured interview questions. The issues of focus for the study included factors of influence upon leadership practice, consequences upon the leadership role, and how teaching principals construe their roles. Seeking answers to these questions was facilitated by the use of semi-structured interviews along with ‘concept’ mapping, which captured the ‘authentic voices’ of the principals. This particular interpretative approach focused upon understanding how principals defined and interpreted their school situations. In addition, the methods used enabled each principal to discuss their interactions with, and reaction to, events in their school setting and the meanings they made during and after interactions.

The use of four interviews and the provision of transcripts and ‘concept’ maps between interviews provided participants with opportunities to define and redefine
their actions. Trustworthiness and authenticity of the data were ensured by the ongoing correction and validation offered each participant.

In the following section, the processes used to analyse the primary data are explained.

4.5 Data analysis

The analysis started with the recording of detailed written transcripts, followed by thematic analysis using themes from the data and narrative construction. The result, categorising sources of influences across cases, led to the final stage of analysis: making inferences and developing tentative theoretical explanations.

Analysis began early and proceeded concurrently with data collection so that the two became closely integrated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Patton, 1990) to the extent that the analysis informed the choice of guiding questions for the following interviews. This approach enabled the collection of additional information where issues raised by the principals had not been fully explored in the previous interview.

4.5.1 Transcriptions

The interviews were audio-taped, and transcribed using the transcribing convention described by Silverman (1993, 2004). This convention included giving each interview a code (Chris Int1 = Chris interview one) and each interview line a number (Chris Int1:46 = line 46 of Chris’s first interview). The use of such detailed recording was the beginning of the audit trail enabling the researcher to track the analysis through to the narrative development stage.

The verification of interview transcripts enabled the principals to have ‘control over’ the data to be interpreted by the researcher. This was important, considering the high level of self-disclosure in the interviews and the need to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the material.
4.5.2 Thematic analysis

*Initial classification into influences and consequences*

To begin this stage of data review, a filing system was established. Naturally-occurring classes of influences and consequences of principals’ action were sought within each transcript. Several themes (files) arising from the transcripts were noted and within each of these files, subfiles were created. An example of this process is included in Table 3.

**Table 3: A thematic analysis file: Influence of staffing issues upon Chris’s practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subfiles</th>
<th>Influences upon Chris’s practice including his leadership perspectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Experienced Staff</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note:*
Chris Int2: 32 = Interview 2, line 32 of transcript
File—Staffing = thematic analysis produced numerous themes generated by the interview transcripts.
Subfiles = All thematic files were further subdivided into subfiles: in this example—new staff, experienced staff and influences upon practice

Words = extracted from interview transcripts

Naturally arising categories (the inductive approach described by Strauss, 1987) were used rather than those the researcher had anticipated, to ensure categories were truly grounded. This process provided a comprehensive means for accessing information.

Each transcript was coded several times—after initial production; after a first set of themes was compiled for comparison and verification; after other transcripts were
individually coded; and then in a major comparative exercise where categories were compiled and reclassified, omissions were noted and broader patterns and themes established. At each stage of analysis, the researcher discussed interpretations and emerging outcomes with colleagues and other fellow researchers so that the process ensured the credibility of a participant focus.

*Final classification of themes relevant to leadership development*

Initially, grouping quotes into factors of influence upon teaching principal practice appeared the most appropriate method to reveal each participant’s unique setting, practice and experiences (see Appendix D). For example Chris agreed upon the following influences:

- positive, supportive school context;
- local community;
- communication and relationships;
- personal beliefs of teaching and learning;
- mentorship and professional networks;
- demands of Education Queensland; and
- being able to change school procedures quickly.

Using this initial grouping approach, the case studies were constructed. (These studies are in Appendix C.) But the case studies thus organised did not appear to 'show' clearly how each participant did or did not develop, leadership characteristics. However, the case studies did provide a means to an end. They highlighted particular elements that could be drawn together to facilitate a clearer view of leadership practice.

It became clear that each school context had specific characteristics and influences upon teaching principal practice. Thus a theme titled ‘School context’ was adopted. Additionally, it become apparent that a theme encompassing educational beliefs, values and practices as understood by each participant was necessary. These influences were grouped under the new theme, ‘Educational influences’. A further five themes were generated in this manner. The final seven themes were: school
context, teaching principal background, educational influences, managerial influences, professional influences, relational influences and leadership practice.

**Participant confirmation of themes**

Before all seven themes were finalised, I presented them to each participant for consideration and sought their agreement. Agreement was obtained for all six participants.

As the same seven themes were agreed upon by all participants, they formed the analytic framework for a cross-case analysis.

### 4.5.3 Narrative construction

The first three interviews provided the initial layer of data and much of this information was used to construct the narratives located in Appendix D and the background contexts for each case in Chapter 5. The final interview provided the fullest articulation of influences upon and consequences of school leadership, and revealed a deeper understanding of the meanings given by the participants to their leadership practice. Six narratives were produced, one per participant. All interview transcripts contained the data that contributed to each of the narratives and the within-case discussions of Chapter 5.

### 4.5.4 Cross-case analysis

Once the six narratives were produced, a cross-case analysis was conducted. The specific themes used in the construction of the narratives informed the cross-case analysis and contributed to the development of general themes.

**Summary**

The data were analysed in a variety of ways to provide a more complete understanding of teaching principals’ leadership practice. The data analysis included detailed transcripts, thematic analysis to establish themes, narrative construction, and categorisation of influences on the principals’ practice. The cross-case analysis
provided the means to determine similarities which facilitated the opportunity to make inferences and construct accurate understandings of school leadership practice.

4.6 Appraisal of method and design

4.6.1 Research ethics protocol

The first step taken in the development of the research methodology was the creation of a set of ethical guidelines, the purpose of which was to clarify the research for the benefit of the case study principals (see appendix A). The guidelines specified what would be expected of the principals on the occasion of fieldwork visits. In return, the principals were given assurances about such matters as the storage and retrieval of research data, confidentiality and the preservation of anonymity. The ethics protocol also addressed the question of trustworthiness of the research by providing a framework of participant verification at each stage of the data collection process up to and including the case study documents. This protocol was strengthened by the use of the interview schedules and guiding questions that were common to all participating principals.

The Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee approved the study.

4.6.2 Trustworthiness and authenticity

The usual criteria for judging the inferences of data are ones such as internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), but in the case of qualitative data these matters are addressed differently. Guba and Lincoln (1994) use terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability for establishing trustworthiness and authenticity. Yin (1994), Patton (1990) and Stake (1995) identify a number of verification procedures that are present in this study and include: in-depth descriptions, detailed accurate records of data collection and analysis procedures and member- (participant-) checking. In this study, the research decisions have been outlined in the first chapter and further explained in this methods chapter. Ethical issues have been considered and approved by the ethics committee. The methods are grounded in the literature.
Member checking has been used to ensure that the researcher’s findings resonate with the understandings of the participants. Having the participants verify and modify at each stage (interview transcripts, diagrammatic representation and case study stories) gave them ownership of their narratives. By maintaining accurate, detailed and comprehensive records of both data and decisions taken during the progression of the study, the audit trail developed, thereby fostering dependability and confirmability in the findings. The findings are derived from the data and the process by which the findings are arrived at is clearly detailed. The data have been arranged in a way that allows the relationship between interview transcripts, data analysis and the final documents to be followed through an audit trail (Maykutt & Morehouse, 1994). This audit trail facilitates the opportunity to backtrack at any time and provides confidence that issues raised by the participants are treated with honesty and consistency.

4.6.3 Strengths and limitations of the research design

Qualitative studies have played a valuable role in the field of leadership. They have been responsible for paradigm shifts in our understanding, critical insights into poorly understood dimensions and the longitudinal perspectives that other methods have failed to capture (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Isabella, 1990; Roberts & Bradley, 1988). Yet despite this contribution, the role of qualitative research has remained limited (Parry & Meindl, 2002).

The weaknesses and strengths of the method (see page 58) are briefly summarised so that these can be considered in the design of this study. A major limitation of data generated by case studies is that they cannot be statistically generalised to a whole population. Nevertheless, although qualitative methods such as personal histories are by their nature subjective, they do generate valuable primary data. They provide deeper levels of insight into leadership than more traditional quantitative studies. While one cannot statistically generalise from case studies, one can learn from them (Shulman, 1996) and develop analytical generalisations (Yin, 1994) based on the theoretical principles that arise during the research process.

The fully transcribed interview data helped minimise inconsistencies deriving from the researcher’s personal perceptions and analytic biases. Further, the ‘member-checking’ of transcriptions and narratives ensured trustworthiness and authenticity of
the stories. To enhance the accuracy of data interpretation, analysis was discussed with colleagues and other researchers to verify the researcher’s findings. The diagrammatic representations were also examined by the participants to provide a further filter for the researcher’s interpretations.

The research design was conceived to acknowledge the principals’ experiences from their perspective. It is felt that this has been accomplished and in the process a more detailed, in-depth understanding of their leadership and the sources of influence on their practice has been achieved.

4.7 Chapter conclusion

A study design focused on case is consistent with both interpretivism and symbolic interactionism. Using case provided an appropriate vehicle through which the meanings of the practice of six teaching principals were ascertained. The trustworthiness of the research method was constantly monitored by participant verification and detailed audit tracking.

Now that a justified methodology, design and methods have been explained, a within-case analysis of each of the six cases referred to earlier is presented in Chapter 5. This acts as a precursor to Chapter 6, which explores the cross-case analyses undertaken to uncover school leadership similarities and common meanings, and any variations amongst individuals and contexts.
CHAPTER 5
PRINCIPALS TELL THEIR STORIES

5.0 Introduction

To reiterate—the study centres on the personal stories of six teaching principals of one-teacher schools in remote rural Queensland locations. These stories describe influences on their leadership that the participants perceive as important.

This chapter describes factors that influence the six teaching principals’ work and the consequences of these upon their leadership. This is presented as a within-case analysis. Each case provides a portrait of the principal’s understanding and practice of leadership organised around major categories of influence. These categories have arisen from constant comparative analysis which established linkages and relationships that contributed to patterns and themes in teaching principal leadership.

5.1 Analytical framework

A comprehensive reading of the interview transcripts suggested that all six teaching principals’ stories could be organised under seven subheadings. The seven subheadings, and relevant interview excerpts, were considered appropriate by all teaching principals—a fact substantiated by the participant-checking process incorporated within this study. The seven subheadings and the matters they address are as follows:

- school context: school location, physical structure and staffing;
- teaching principal background: classroom teaching and rural experience;
- educational influences: the educational beliefs, values and practices of the teaching principal;
- managerial influences: processes and procedures to facilitate teaching and the organisation at the school;
- professional influences: in-service training, mentoring, professional development, career planning and peer support through networking;
- relational influences: communication skills enabling the development of relationships with students, staff, parents and the local community; and
leadership practice as understood by each principal.

5.2 Structure of the chapter

The chapter has six stories, each beginning with a contextual overview that includes a description of the principal’s school, its locality, the school community, student numbers and staffing. The details of the principal’s teaching and rural experience follows, and finally the interview data are presented in the seven categories of the analytical framework. The case studies and a conceptual diagram, which are located in Appendices C and D are referred to within this section of the chapter.

In order to maintain anonymity, schools have been assigned a letter code and each principal is referred to by the use of an alias.

5.3 Within-case analysis

5.3.1 State School A and Chris, the teaching principal

Contextual overview

Local context: State Primary School A was built over 100 years ago for the purpose of educating the children of miners in a remote location in western Queensland, over 900 km west of the state capital, Brisbane. The area has changed dramatically since those times from a busy tent city to a lonely site where the school and the schoolhouse are the only surviving buildings. The nearest town with services such as a post office and medical expertise is 107 km away, and the nearest homestead is 15 km away. Mail is delivered twice a week.

Children travel as far as 52 km to the school. Long distances are an accepted element of this community, but most residents still feel the isolation and go to great lengths to support their local school by participating in all school functions, attending local drama programmes, making use of the photocopying facilities and using the school as a community meeting place.

School buildings: The school building is set in well-established grounds with a small area of green lawn and garden beds. The toilets, tennis court, play shed and the front gate are connected by concrete paths. Some of these ground features are many years old but have been maintained well over time. The school building is set on concrete
stumps with a concreted area underneath, providing a shaded area for the children to eat lunch and play, although the head height is insufficient for adults.

The classroom: The classroom is spacious and brightly painted. Numerous teacher’s displays and children’s works decorate the room and veranda. There are plenty of tables, chairs, eight classroom computers, and different work areas so all activities can be conducted in comfort. A new carpet has been laid in the classroom, and beanbags are provided for every child, the teacher and visiting adults, so activities often take place on the floor.

Principal’s residence: Accommodation for the current teaching principal is a government-built schoolhouse (built in the 1950s), which is poorly maintained.

School community: The community is made up entirely of Anglo-Australians, both landholders and workers on the properties. The residents have always been supportive of the staff and school activities. (This understanding was constructed from data published in the School Reports (Education Queensland, 2002b) and was made available to me as a consultant within a previous research project.)

Economic status: The main income in the area is from the beef and sheep industries with the average property size being 10,000 hectares. As the area is currently in drought and both the wool and beef industries have suffered downturns, community members have been ‘tightening their belts’ for many years. Nevertheless, all homes are well maintained. Every household has a computer and approximately three quarters of households are connected to the Internet (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

School population: The school population has decreased from over 50 in 1971 to 17 in 2002. The school was a two-teacher school for many years, but four years ago when student numbers dropped below 26 it was downsized to a one-teacher school.

Staffing: The current full-time teaching principal and sole teacher, Chris, arrived at the school two years ago. A part-time teacher’s aide, who has been in that position for over 13 years, works four days each week. A cleaner, who has worked at the school for two years, works six hours a week. The position of administrative assistant (15 hours a week) is shared between two people—one experienced and the other new to
the position. A grounds person is employed for six hours a week. A relief teacher can be employed one day a fortnight relieving the teaching principal from full-time classroom duties for that day. Once a week for one hour, the children learn Japanese via a conference telephone link-up with their Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher, who also visits the school one day each term. Chris teaches music and physical education in addition to English, maths, science, technology and study of society.

Chris—the teaching principal

Chris, single and in his mid-twenties, is an Anglo-Australian who had four years of classroom experience before accepting this, his first teaching principalship. Chris’s classroom experience consisted of two years in single classes and two in composite classes covering two year levels. Both schools were in regional coastal locations. Chris is currently in his second year of the teaching principalship and expects that he will apply for promotion to a larger school at the completion of his third year.

Preparation for the teaching principal position: Chris detailed five factors that prepared him for his teaching principal position. While teaching at his previous school, Chris was a member of the leadership committee that discussed and developed school policy. The principal of that school offered to be Chris’s mentor during his first year as teaching principal thus continuing the beneficial relationship already established. (Education Queensland offers mentor opportunities to beginning principals. This program supports beginning principal by pairing these principals with experienced principals). In addition, Chris attended an induction workshop before taking up the teaching principal position. Chris, along with four other beginning teaching principals who attended the workshop, established a professional, supportive network that has continued throughout this principalship.

These events gave me a solid start. I always had someone to call upon for assistance. (Interview 4: 123)

The final factor was Chris’s childhood experiences from within his family circle where Chris said he gained valuable insight into small rural schools. He recalls his father being instrumental in beginning a new school in an isolated location in rural

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4 Remote service for a teaching principal is normally a three-year term.
Victoria and the stimulating discussions about the purpose of education that took place around the kitchen table. His father saw the school as ‘belonging to everyone within the local community’ and Chris remembers his father’s success. Chris indicated this knowledge informed the choices and approaches he made as a beginning teaching principal:

Dad said people are important. They need to know you value them. (Interview 2: 265)

**Gaining local community knowledge:** Chris described how he compiled his understanding of local educational beliefs and values through his involvement in community organisations. Three associations served the local needs of the people: a playgroup for young mothers and their babies; a tennis club and a Community Progress Association. Chris said he is a member of the latter two. Up to 30 adults and almost all of the school children gather at the tennis club most Friday evenings. The Community Progress Association meets once a month and members include the parents of some of the school children along with many of the older generation. His active membership of the two organisations, Chris indicated, had lead to his invitation to assist with numerous farm activities during some weekends.

Chris said through the involvement in community organisations and working on the farms, he was able to glean information that enabled him to construct an understanding of how the community members viewed the school and how they preferred to be involved in school processes and events. Moreover, he was able to build a perceptive of the educational beliefs and values held by the community members. In addition, Chris said he generated an understanding of the roles and influences of various community members.

When reviewing the influences on Chris’s leadership with him, three groupings were initially used to sort the data—personal, professional and contextual. Within each of these groups, factors were defined as positive or negative, but these initial divisions did not give a sense of Chris’s teaching principalship. What characterised his leadership and how was he able to galvanise the school community? To better enable a definitive understanding, the following headings were considered and agreed upon by Chris—educational, managerial, relational, professional and leadership. These
categories provided anchor points for elaborations of, and evidence for, the analysis of
Chris’s leadership practice.

**Educational influences**

Chris indicated his belief that making connections with the students’ interests,
background and prior knowledge ensures student engagement and achievement. This
personal conviction and his professional reading about effective teaching led Chris to
develop relevant units of study that are challenging, but allowed for student success:

> I truly believe it is important to make links with the student’s prior
> knowledge and interests otherwise I don’t think learning will
> happen. Doing this allows students to learn about things they enjoy
> and this encourages more learning. (Interview 3: 61–63)

Chris discussed the importance of demonstrating to his students that he did not have
all the answers and that he was willing to learn from students, books and other
resources. He indicated this approach makes connections with his students and
demonstrates the value he places on their knowledge and ideas. Furthermore,
increased student motivation and inspiration for academic and sporting success
resulted as they all learnt together:

> Confidence and self-esteem of each student improves if I
> demonstrate I am a learner as well. (Interview 3: 223)

Moreover, Chris wanted to make clear his belief that as children mature they should
become more responsible for their learning. Making connections with their lives,
valuing their ideas and beliefs, and careful selection of teaching strategies allows for a
growing student independence and confidence. Chris said his motivation for this
educational belief was grounded in the need for children to be taught how to access
information for themselves, not simply be presented with the facts:

> I use a lot of open-ended activities and choice, so the children
> practise how they can achieve the finished task on time. They also
> have to make decisions for themselves about how to find out about
> their selected topic and form of presentation. My teaching strategies
> lead to skills of independence, curiosity and enjoyment.
> (Interview 3: 241–244)

In addition, having to be out of the classroom at times due to the requirements of the
teaching principal role, Chris said this position actually facilitates and demonstrates to
the children the importance of developing independence. Not only independence, but the advantages in accessing other adults and peers for help when necessary:

\[\ldots\] because sometimes I have to leave the children and they must know how to continue on with their own work. (Interview 4: 110–111)

I encourage the students to look to their classmates for help and to the other adults in their lives: parents, neighbours, part-time staff. (Interview 4: 115–116)

Originating from his childhood experiences, Chris said he holds a strong belief in the importance of understanding the educational values and beliefs that are held by the children’s parents. Further, Chris discussed his deep belief in the importance of others, respecting everyone’s achievement, and valuing the concept of working with others, to enrich the outcome:

I think I need to understand the educational beliefs of the parents and the plans they have for their children, otherwise I will be aiming for one thing at school and the parents will be aiming for another. A team effort gives success, a partnership with parents improves student learning, I think. Students, parents and myself have targets to reach together. (Interview 3: 54–56)

Chris demonstrated this approach to his teaching through the development of particular study units making connections with the children at State School A, and further through what appeared to be a genuine need to elicit from the parents, their understanding of education and their dreams for their children. Chris discussed questionnaires he had sent to all parents requesting information about their hopes for the school, the children, what has worked well in the past and why, and whether they had any suggestions for activities for the next 12 months:

I sent out just one or two questions to everyone attached to the school newsletter and asked for their opinions. More and more answers were returned once they saw I was genuinely interested in their ideas. We discussed these during the P and C meetings. (Interview 4: 240–245)

Now finishing his second year, Chris stated he has developed an understanding of the wishes of the parents and other community members, and they work together to achieve this for the children. When asked if there were any of the ‘wishes’ that clashed with his educational beliefs, Chris replied:
No, not in the big picture perspective. I do have topics I would like to teach such as underwater sea life but when I look to the outcomes I want to achieve, I can achieve these through the study of sustainable rural environments. I believe in developing independence, working together well and achieving at a high level. I love having visitors to my classroom. The parents and other members of the community have indicated they believe these are important as well.

(Interview 4: 240–245)

As a consequence of working together with staff, parents and community to achieve improved outcomes for the children, Chris indicated:

We [parents, staff and community members] are starting to plan curriculum changes for the next two years. We are looking at science links with the local context and improving reading and comprehension skills.

(Interview 4: 273–175)

Chris wanted to ensure he had recorded that the teaching principal position not only involved classroom teaching but many managerial tasks that needed to be fitted into each and every day.

Managerial influences

Chris was asked what he considers to be school management:

School management is fulfilling all procedures and processes expected by Education Queensland, and ensuring everyone [staff, students, and parents] knows what they are to do. (Interview 4: 317)

He indicated the importance of being prepared to listen, to learn, and to accept current school procedures:

I thought it best just to keep procedures going and to learn about the school and the people before I started to make changes.

(Interview 2: 314–315)

Dad always said this was best until you found out why processes and procedures were as they were. Then you can alter if you see a better way.

(Interview 2: 319–320)

Moreover, Chris reported his father always said it takes time to develop a working relationship with the school parents and, as a teaching principal with three years at the post, there is time to develop this. While there were some procedures (ordering resources, recording telephone messages) Chris thought he would like to alter, he
recognised the importance of continuing practices already established and accepted. This acceptance earned the respect of staff and parents and set the scene for the subtle introduction of change.

Keeping the managerial aspects in place and running smoothly allowed Chris time to concentrate on learning the managerial tasks. Chris said he was overwhelmed by the number of tasks that needed his attention:

There is so much to do as a teaching principal. I reacted all day and was so tired by the evening. So many lessons I started but never finished. I was called away to answer the telephone or meet a visitor. I was going around in circles. (Interview 1: 106–108)

. . . as soon as I settle down to work, the cleaner needs help or I see Book Club mailing must be done or the telephone rings. There is no end to it all. (Interview 3: 195–196)

Asked if this was still the case, Chris stated:

No I learnt, some things do need immediate attention, but most can wait. I finish one job before starting another. (Interview 3: 198–190)

Also I now concentrate upon whole school and curriculum programming issues, not just student issues that I did in the beginning. (Interview 4: 211–212)

When asked how he had altered his approach to school management Chris responded:

Time management is so important. In the beginning I started a number of things but nothing was finished. Now I plan my time and allow for conversations with the locals, and time for tennis, time to read and time to plan for the future. I have to be disciplined but I achieve so much more and I am not so tired anymore. (Interview 4: 152–155)

Relational influences

Chris said he was fortunate because the previous teaching principal had established positive relations with the staff and the parents and he said he was able to build upon these:

I came into an ideal environment because all was going so well here because of the approach adopted by the last principal. The staff, principal and parents appeared to have positive relations and were working together to make the most out of this school. (Interview 1: 292–294)
This pre-existing positive working partnership continued, according to Chris, because of his ‘laid back’ approach using humour, accepting things as they were, indicating that he trusted the staff to do their tasks, and valuing their contributions. Chris said he was not only able to maintain established partnerships but to continue their development. One example given was:

I invited the cleaner to work her three shifts each week during school hours. This single change in routine led to closer relationships between the students and the cleaner. These relationships lead to her being invited by students and staff to become involved in activities such as helping organise the school camp, covering books in the library and listening to the children read. I also requested the cleaner to work at the school every second Friday because on many Fridays I am absent. This practice addressed three issues: the relief teacher being the only adult at the school, and enabling these two staff members to develop a working relationship. They also began to trust me. They thought I cared for them, which I do. (Interview 4: 390–397)

This strengthened bond of collegiality within the school staff was possible, Chris said, because he respected their needs and trusted them. Additionally, Chris said he thought this action strengthened the trust between himself and the staff. Chris identified another event that strengthened his relationships not only with the staff but also with the members of the broader community:

I surprised my administrative assistant with a ‘home-made’ dish for lunch one day because she had completed a task beyond expectations. She was thrilled, a guy making a surprise lunch. Everyone [members of the community] knew by the end of the afternoon. Now we have a special lunch every Tuesday at school. I think it makes school special and the people important. (Interview 4: 399–402)

This recognition by the ‘locals’, Chris thought, was a turning point in his position as teaching principal:

Dad, my past principal and others at the induction workshop have referred to staff, students and parents as important players in a small school but I began to think there was more. The mere act of making lunch for Mrs . . . [administrative assistant] and how this fact was circulated so fast throughout the community was amazing. After this event, I was greeted by everyone, even community members who don’t have children at the school. (Interview 4: 421–425)

I have become someone of importance in the community. I think I am accepted by the locals as their principal now. (Interview 4: 431–432)
In an attempt to define ‘acceptance’, Chris finally decided it was:

. . . being looked upon as a member of the community. Not just the new principal of the school but as a valued member of the community. I was invited to be president of the local Progress Association, and invited to help write the wording for the historical signs around the district. (Interview 4: 451–453)

Chris made it clear that his ideas were only accepted once he became part of the community; once positive relationships were established. By attending and participating in community events, Chris said he also became known within the broader local community. This willingness to be involved led to the parents and the members of the community seeing Chris as ‘their principal’:

Valuing the locals is important and becoming involved in their events. (Interview 1: 280)

All down to positive relationships. Once I was part of their lives and they realised my educational aims were to improve the children’s learning, I had so many dinner invitations and an invitation to join the tennis club and I go out with locals to their properties at the weekend etc. (Interview 4: 165–167)

In an attempt to conceptualise exactly what the enabling instant or process was that moved Chris from ‘the principal’ to ‘their principal’ was very difficult for Chris to articulate. His responses included concepts of being able to communicate with everyone, joining local groups, staying in the district at weekends, accepting opinions and procedures of the past, valuing and caring for others, and incorporating the community’s educational ideas and beliefs into school programs. Through his action of joining local community groups, he was able to tap into the knowledge of the power brokers—influential parents within the community—and this, according to Chris, enabled him to use the existing relational network (Case Study A, Appendix D).

But he finally decided the pivotal point was becoming a valued member of the community through his action of valuing their ideas and sharing his educational knowledge to ensure the best learning opportunities are offered to the children:

I am valued. And I think it is this that has allowed me to lead this school over the part 12 months or so, and as well, lead the community through the activities of the Community Progress Association. I have contributed to community decisions such as the
upgrading of the telecommunications into this area. 
(Interview 4: 171–172)

Chris believes that demonstrating he valued the opinions and enjoyed the company of community/school members facilitated his acceptance as ‘their principal’ and enhanced the learning environment and the possibility of leadership.

**Leadership practice as understood by Chris**

Chris’s understanding of leadership is explained in the following:

> Leadership is about working with others, and inspiring them with a vision for our school. I get parents, other community members and part-time staff together so we can work together to achieve the vision for the school. Articulating these ideas is very difficult but once we started, things got easier. The way into this was listing what we [Chris, staff, parents and members of the community] valued. Once this process starts, there is more work. I have to maintain the interest, keep ideas generating and all the professional reading I feel I need to do, makes this visioning a very slow process when I am the only person. (Interview 4: 313–319)

The influence of his father’s belief that parents should be made welcome at the school at all times and their ideas valued appeared to underpin Chris’s approach to leadership. But Chris included not only the parents but members of the wider community:

> My leadership approach is influenced by my values. I value my human resources, I value the knowledge that the school community members [parents, staff and other community members] have and I value the thinking of my students. (Interview 4: 301–302)

Chris seemed to indicate that investing in the ‘people’ of the local community through accepting and sharing of ideas, values and beliefs was the best explanation for his success at State School A.

Chris detailed three different approaches to school leadership but emphasised they were all grounded in ensuring everyone was included and valued. First, ‘direct leadership’ is necessary to ensure Chris’s school meets Education Queensland’s requirements:

> I use a more direct approach when Education Queensland requires particular documents or processes to be fulfilled to the letter. I inform the staff and parents of what has to be done and why. This sounds like management but it isn’t. I have to show why these
processes are important to our school and how we can make them work to our advantage. (Interview 4:188–191)

If Education Queensland requirements are not fulfilled we would miss out on grant monies, additional resources and replacement of aging equipment. (Interview 4: 191–192)

Second, Chris used the words ‘collaborative leadership’ when he referred to his work with principals of the regional network. ‘Collaborative leadership’ is a result of the remoteness of the schools and involves local principals working together to discuss ideas they are considering that would improve their school:

... a collaborative leadership approach because, as all the teaching principals in this region work together, we share and help to write documents, to solve school issues, discuss future ideas for our school, and we help each other if a personal issue arises. (Interview 4: 179–181)

Third, Chris discussed ‘creative leadership’. Chris believes that the availability of resources can limit remote small school leadership unless creative means are implemented to find solutions. Creative leadership is essential, because without positive direction and resourcefulness the teaching and the attitudes of staff and students can become dominated by limitations. He defines the goals of this approach to leadership in the following terms:

... making the best out of the available resources [human, physical and financial] so that all members of the school community can grow ... valuing everyone for what they can offer ... working with what we have, to provide a school for everyone (Interview 4:651–653)

The lack of local resources and access to services really does influence and could hinder leadership if someone allowed this to get them down. (Interview 4: 199–201)

According to Chris, he uses these three different leadership approaches depending upon the circumstances, his desired outcomes, and the need to involve others in the decision-making process:

... what I want to achieve and the knowledge held by the person I am working with dictates my approach. (Interview 4: 163)

As a result of these approaches to leadership, Chris said he has been rewarded with many successes:
I have had many successes and enjoy my time in this small school setting because I have been able to work with the parents, the school staff, the local community members and the local principals to achieve improvements for the school. Working together leadership allows others to share and develop ideas and changes for the school. Change works best if there is shared ownership of the change. (Interview 4: 210–213)

Chris was questioned about the role of the community members who did not have children currently enrolled at the school. Upon reflection, Chris indicated his father had not included, within his advice, the importance of these persons, neither had his past principal. Chris discussed how his understanding had altered—he thought staff and parents were the key to school leadership but, within this community, he felt the whole community body influenced his practice. ‘Working together’ in a sharing and trusting environment includes staff, students, parents and other community members. Chris was questioned for his reasons for including the community members:

This school is an important element of the community, not just because it has a photocopier and a meeting place for local organisations, but because this school is embedded in the community—they work together—they are a part of each other. (Interview 4: 714–716)

You can not have one without the other. (Interview 4: 720)

Having a broader membership at meetings often increases the number of interpretations of an issue and Chris was questioned about how this has influenced his leadership:

At first, I found this an increasing difficulty but as I was willing to let other ideas be selected over mine, this was not a problem. Now, I value everyone’s ideas and the more different the understanding of a school issue, the better the final decision. (Interview 4: 451–453)

Actually, we all seem to view an idea from the same perspective—if the change improves student learning, everyone agrees. (Interview 4: 457–458)

Finally, Chris was able to detail four negative issues influencing his leadership.

First, rapport:

A misunderstanding or a person feeling devalued definitely prevented the “collaborative” and “working together” leadership from working. Everyone gets on with me so much better now and we all seem to understand each other’s thinking than we did during my first few months; so maybe there has to be some sort of rapport
established first before we can all work together and for me to lead.
(Interview 4: 36–365)

Second, acceptance:

As a new principal and new in the rural location, Chris indicated his lack of acceptance restricted his effectiveness. First, he had to prove himself as a good teacher and be capable of administrating and organising the school effectively. Chris indicated establishing his credibility with Education Queensland officers through these means enabled him to achieve, over time, a credibility rating that facilitated action upon request. Asked what he was implying, he stated:

Education Queensland seemed to be very interested in my classroom performance as a teacher and if all their forms and procedures were completed on time. As I was able to achieve both, the officers were more than willing to help me with any of my requests. (Interview 3: 310–312)

Second, Chris stated he needed to establish his credibility with the local community. In this case, being looked upon as a valued community member made all the difference:

I often need help with the water supply, work around the school grounds etc. Now I just telephone someone and the response is instant.
(Interview 3: 320–321)

Asked wasn’t this the case at the beginning of his teaching principalship, he said:

No, the locals held back. I had a blocked toilet and I had no idea what to do—it took two days and a number of telephone calls to find a local who knew the toilet system underground layout to help me. (Interview 3: 331–332)

Third; being the one:

Chris recognises a limiting factor upon his leadership as being the person who everyone ‘needs to see’. Interruptions throughout the day and into the evenings at home exhausted Chris, which led to a ‘reactive’ environment. Chris indicated that if he had failed to implement procedures (such as part-time staff recording all messages during class time, installing an answering machine, and keeping to a routine for tackling different tasks) to reduce repeated interruptions, reflective thinking and future planning would not have been possible.
Fourth, multi-age teaching.

Chris thought a lack of curriculum knowledge, and especially a lack of knowledge about multi-age teaching, would place a beginning teaching principal at a disadvantage. A beginning teaching principal has much to learn, but if the classroom organisational knowledge is lacking, leadership would be very difficult.

Chris summarised his understanding of leadership:

> I think, looking back over my time here, my leadership really began once I was accepted by the whole community and I was able to introduce ideas, and have them accepted, that the staff, parents and others had not thought of themselves. (Interview 4: 731–733)

> An example was the maths program—I linked our maths program for the older children with three other schools and we compared results, shared resources and the overall result was an incredible increase in maths throughout this community and the students’ results showed improvement. (Interview 4: 739–742)

> Also I think leadership here involves sharing ideas, respecting each other, and working towards the same outcome for the children. (Interview 4: 749–750)

**Professional influences**

Workplace learning, such as membership of the leadership committee while at his previous school, provided valuable awareness of the type of thinking required of a school leader. The leadership approach modelled by the principal of that school provided Chris with a style of leadership he felt he would like to adopt at his new school. The principal encouraged capacity-building of his school members by inviting them onto the Leadership Committee. This committee was involved in meeting the immediate and long-term challenge of strategic vision development. Staff members learnt from and supported each other during the committee decision-making processes. Chris said he valued his principal’s goal to help other teachers to strive for success. Chris recognises the significance of this experience, more so now as a beginning teaching principal than while on the committee as a teacher in a larger school:

> During my early months at the school, there was a policy change. I had no idea what to do but, as my mentor, my last principal helped me and I turned the exercise into a positive for me and the school. (Interview 2: 71–73)
The induction workshop proved to be valuable, but Chris acknowledges that until he was actually ‘doing the job’ he did not have an understanding of the position. Numerous task types overwhelmed him, as there seemed to be no end to the requirements both Education Queensland and the school community expected him to fulfil.

Through the process of ‘collaborative leadership’, Chris discussed the importance of the principal network established while attending the induction workshop\(^2\). Due to the isolation of schools, the enormity of some tasks was reduced by working together to share and solve school issues. This network of colleagues has widened from the beginning teaching principals who met during the induction workshop to include experienced principals of larger primary schools:

> There are about eleven of us now—we email documents, questions for help and more importantly we can debrief our problems, stories, school incidents. (Interview 4: 137–138)

> I find this so important. I know a fair bit about the teaching principalship now but the debriefing opportunities are the most beneficial aspect of this network to me. (Interview 4: 139–141)

As asked why other principals had joined the network, Chris stated:

> We are such a positive group and others find our positive approach so beneficial to their practice. We always find a solution to school problems one way or another. Honestly, I think we are valued and looked upon as a valuable source of information. (Interview 2: 144–145)

Chris said he would be sad to leave, but he would apply for promotion:

> Education Queensland said if I stayed for three years, I could apply for a promotion. I would like to try leading a larger school, but I will miss everyone here. (Interview 4: 410–411)

### 5.3.2 State School B and Margaret, the teaching principal

**Contextual overview**

*Local context:* State Primary School B was built during the late 1970s. It began operation to service the educational needs of a small but growing beef cattle community, over 850 km south-west of the state capital, Brisbane. The closest town

2 Induction workshop organised by Education Queensland to orient new principals and detail expected roles.
with services such as a post office and a small corner store is 103 km away, and the nearest homestead is 11 km away. Gravel roads connect all the properties in the immediate area of the school to the closest town. During wet weather, these roads can become impassable for periods of up to three days. Medical, dental and pharmaceutical services are 213 km away. Mail is delivered twice a week.

School facilities: The three-room school building is set high on concrete stumps and is concreted underneath, with a toilet block nearby. The school grounds are attractive with a small lawn area surrounded by garden beds featuring native flowering plants. Concrete paths lead to a covered play area, tennis court and a playing field. Water is obtained from a bore pump, which often requires repairs.

The classroom: The open-plan classroom is brightly painted and has a welcoming atmosphere. Teacher's displays and children’s works decorate the veranda and classroom. There are numerous tables and chairs offering a very flexible classroom arrangement. Six computers are arranged so that all children and adults can access them with ease.

Principal's residence: The schoolhouse, which was built as the same time as the school, is situated very close to the gravel road. The house has three bedrooms, with the laundry and car accommodation underneath. There are no plants or other forms of screening between the road and the house, so passers-by have an unimpeded view of the house. The teaching principal has indicated that this lack of privacy causes her much concern.

School community: The school community is entirely Anglo-Australian. The parents of two school families are workers on local beef properties, while the remaining six families are property owners. The school families seem to have strong Christian convictions. Religious services are held every fortnight at local homesteads around the district and are reported to be well attended.

The land for the school was donated by the local owner of a large property. The community values the school, as it is the only public building in the community. The school offers community members facilities such as computer access, photocopying, a meeting venue and community tennis (Education Queensland, 2002b).
**Economic status:** All property owners and workers in the district have suffered financially from the current drought and downturn in cattle prices. Historically, their incomes have allowed the families to send their children away to boarding school after the completion of Year 7 and to take one family vacation at the beach or with relatives in another part of Australia. Their homes are well kept, with a number of families having recently installed air-conditioning and a second telephone line for Internet access (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

**Student population:** Student numbers have fluctuated over the years but at all times have remained below 26, a fact that has meant the school has always been a one-teacher school. The school population is currently 22, with all seven year levels represented.

**Staffing:** A full-time teaching principal, Margaret—who arrived at the school at the beginning of last year, is the sole teacher at State Primary School B. There is one teacher’s aide who has been at the school for six years, and who works four days a week. The cleaner works eleven hours a week and the administrative assistant works fifteen hours a week. A relief teacher is employed once a week relieving the teaching principal from full-time classroom duties for that day. Music and physical education specialists visit the school once a fortnight for one and a half hours per visit. Once a week for one hour, the children learn Japanese via a conference telephone link-up with their Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher stationed 150 km away at a much larger state school. Once a term, this teacher visits the school for the day so the Year 5, 6 and 7 students meet with their LOTE teacher and work face-to-face with her.

**Education Queensland’s records of community support:** State School B was supported by the school community until two years prior to Margaret’s appointment. Due to the circulation of confidential information throughout the community, conflict occurred between the district’s residents and the staff and principal. The Parents and Citizens’ Association detailed their concerns to Education Queensland and, at the end of the following year, Education Queensland transferred the principal.

Margaret, the current principal, on her first trip west to visit her new school, met with Education Queensland regional officers and was informed of the Parents and Citizens’
Association’s concerns. This related to unprofessional conduct by staff and principal, such as the disclosure of private details to the broader community. Margaret was directed by Education Queensland officers to inform the staff and the school community of her intentions to prevent such happenings reoccurring.

**Margaret—the teaching principal**

Margaret, single and in her late twenties, is an Anglo-Australian who had five years of classroom experience before accepting this, her first teaching principalship. Margaret taught at an inner-London school for one year before spending four years in regional Queensland schools. Queensland classroom experience included three years in single grade classes and one year in a composite class. Margaret has had no professional or personal experience of remote rural teaching or lifestyle.

*Preparation for the teaching principal position: *Margaret did not attend an induction workshop. Her previous principal, who suggested she apply for a teaching principalship, offered to be her mentor through the Education Queensland mentor system:

> He [Margaret’s previous principal] is such a wonderful person, so knowledgeable and so willing to share and help me. He has been my guiding light and through his support I have been able to not only successfully manage but to lead this school. (Interview 1: 280–282)

Heeding her mentor’s advice and using the approach he had modelled in his own school gave Margaret skills and processes that guided her role on a positive path. Margaret believes first impressions are important, and deliberately and strategically designed choices about organisational procedures and values set the tone for her future success:

> I think if I had just arrived at the school and knew nothing about the immediate past of the school and staff, things would have started differently for me. But I did know what was happening so I was able to consult with my mentor for a means to begin the healing process and for me to start off on the right foot. (Interview 4: 78–80)

*Gaining local community knowledge:* Developing her understandings of the locally held values and beliefs of education was high priority for Margaret. These understandings, Margaret said, influenced her approach to this teaching principal position. It was through community membership that meanings were made.
The organisations in this small community are the tennis club and the under fives children's playgroup. Listening to conversations held between community members at tennis functions, Margaret said she became aware of the educational beliefs and the traditional educational values held by the community. These included the importance of the three R's and low value placed upon technology.

Margaret said she was rather surprised by how much local residents seemed to know about everyone, and soon realised her own actions were observed and noted. This 'visibility' afforded Margaret opportunities to not only learn as much as possible about community members but also how they interacted and influenced community action.

**Educational influences**

Margaret’s educational beliefs are focused upon social responsibility—equal treatment for all, a sense of belonging, and integrity of the individual. Providing a strong influence on the values underpinning her teaching, Margaret acknowledges these personal beliefs that originate from her family:

> My family values, I know I carry them with me—a fair go for everyone, work hard to achieve a worthwhile goal, self-determination to make every opportunity turn into reality and care for each person. (Interview 4: 110–111)

Margaret grouped the educational factors of influence under four headings: personal beliefs; understanding the beliefs held by parents; being a learner; and connecting with the local context.

Margaret believes everyone, both children and school staff, should be given every opportunity and that the integrity of the individual should be valued:

> I believe everyone should be treated equally. I demonstrate I trust the children and the staff, and I believe in them. This modelling has allowed the students and the staff to work together with me. I think my approach creates a positive learning atmosphere where the students and staff can do their best and they are valued for their work achieved. (Interview 4: 151–154)

Through offering children opportunities to be leaders within the classroom setting, Margaret believes responsibility and independence are nurtured:

> I believe every child should have the opportunity to be a classroom leader at times and share responsibility and to develop
independence—no matter what age or ability—so I select teaching strategies that allow this to happen. These skills will be essential for secondary school success. (Interview 3: 262–264)

Margaret also discussed the importance of understanding the educational beliefs held by the parents and community members which strengthen educational partnerships, Margaret believes:

The school community members’ values and beliefs about education and child care have a great influence upon my teaching. I need to understand and show I understand where they are coming from because this knowledge will help me develop partnerships with community members. (Interview 2: 35–37)

Margaret was asked what she meant by the phrase ‘partnerships with community members’:

I believe knowing what they value helps me to focus my planning so the students’ learning will be supported at home. (Interview 4: 93–94)

When asked if she had determined the beliefs of the school community members and if they were aligned with her own, Margaret replied:

Some I am sure of. They value traditional solid English and maths, and high standards because they want their children to do well, especially at secondary school. (Interview 4: 99–100)

These beliefs are in accord to some degree with mine but I also believe and would prefer to use many of the modern approaches to teaching and learning such as constructivism and technology. (Interview 4: 105–106)

Finally, Margaret said she believes that educational leadership is the process of working together with staff and students towards an understanding of the importance of lifelong learning:

I am a learner so I model this to both students and staff. We learn together. This is educational leadership, I think—for the students: we investigate new topics together and topics with local content which I know little about; for the staff: we work together to understand Education Queensland policy and we decide upon a united interpretation that best suits us. (Interview 4: 189–192)

I believe this approach encourages lifelong learners. (Interview 4: 198)
Margaret especially emphasised the value of connecting study topics with the local context:

Valuing the local life style is important. (Interview 2: 91)

Educationally, Margaret’s beliefs are centred upon the person. She believes it is her social responsibility to ensure opportunities are offered for individual development and achievement and by creating links with the beliefs of the community, Margaret said she has set the groundwork for future curriculum planning:

Parents, staff and community members have started to work with me in developing a design for future curriculum activities. We are considering literacy, numeracy and music programs at present.
(Interview 3: 311–312)

Managerial influences

Margaret indicated she had some understanding of the managerial expectations of the position because she had worked cooperatively with her previous principal. However, as the context of State School B was different, she had to determine for herself how best to handle the management of the school:

I had some idea of the job because my last school was a three-teacher school and the principal and I worked on some activities together and now he is my mentor. But otherwise I would have had no idea as I was not offered a place in an induction workshop.
(Interview 3: 357–359)

By showing the staff that she trusted and respected their existing practices, and assuring them that changes would only occur after consultation, Margaret said she gained their confidence. The immediate outcome was a sharing of school information, including the procedures and processes that enabled Margaret to function effectively during the first months:

I was able to establish myself during the first few weeks because I had planned my strategies and had considered how I was going to support the staff and accept procedures as they were.
(Interview 4: 31–32)

With positives on all sides, Margaret stated she was able, in time, to begin sharing instructional ideas with the staff and school community members. She had found that the conservative nature of this rural community was responsible for the limited use of technology in everyday instruction. After confirming her suspicions with her mentor,
Margaret selected a strategy. By carefully distributing other schools’ newsletters and educational documents that detailed the positives of technology, especially aiming towards secondary school requirements, Margaret was able to influence the thinking of her school community. Margaret said that . . .

. . . they must first see the benefits for them and even after this stage is reached, time is needed before change is fully accepted. (Interview 2: 85–86)

The locals think basic education, as they were taught, is the best way so trying to introduce more computer and technology work was almost impossible at first. But as I became more understanding of their beliefs, I saw an avenue—they believe secondary education is very important, so I shared many documents indicating the importance of technology in secondary schools and after that my suggestions were accepted and we have a great program running now with new computers, digital camera, design software etc. (Interview 4: 213–217)

Through the experience of coming to a school with confidentiality issues, and having solved those quite quickly, Margaret discussed her heightened awareness about the need to ensure everyone felt part of the school:

I got a strong sense that not only the parents and staff wanted to know about everything happening at the school, but also the others in the community. They don’t have children here, but some attended here as children and others just see the school as part of their community. (Interview 4: 123–125)

I kept being asked what is happening at the school, what are you planning? (Interview 1:191)

In response to these questions and valuing the input of all community members, she described the instigation of a newsletter that catalogued school events:

The community wanted to know everything that was happening at “their school”. I started a weekly newsletter that was posted or emailed to every community member. They loved the idea and it has now grown into fortnightly community news with school and community events and happenings. I started this and it has been a winner. (Interview 1: 203–206)

The popularity and growth of the newsletter increasingly consumed more and more time until she was able to find someone to assume editorship. The danger, Margaret highlighted, was the overwhelming volume of managerial tasks, and the newsletter further burdened her daily life:
Always something to do so need to prioritise tasks, otherwise I am overwhelmed by the day to day happenings and there is no time for vision development. It’s hard enough to find time for planning my teaching for the next day sometimes. (Interview 2: 224–226)

As teaching principal, I am the only full-time person here to answer all queries. I spend a lot of time on the telephone and in person talking and answering questions from parents, students, visitors etc. (Interview 2: 231–233)

The school environment forged by Margaret’s all-inclusive approach created a sense of unity and valuing of all individuals. This is discussed under the relational heading.

**Relational influences**

Relationships are built upon self-respect as well as respect and care for others, according to Margaret. After living in this community for over a year, Margaret believes she is beginning to understand the depth of the relationships within this particular remote rural community (Case study B, Appendix D). But she stressed stepping ‘cold’ into this situation could have led to disaster:

> If I had not known the background of the school, I could have easily made similar mistakes [not being aware of the importance of confidentiality] and had problems with my credibility for quite a while. I didn’t know how closely linked every person is to all others in this small isolated community and once you make a mistake here, it is very hard, if not impossible to correct the impression left. (Interview 4: 234–237)

A critical influence upon relations, Margaret says, is the context. Within the small school context, influence is embedded not only in practice but also in daily living. Margaret’s context appears to have many unwritten rules by which the teaching principal must abide. Margaret detailed these:

> . . . staying in the community over the weekend instead of heading east to the large cities; joining local organisations; keeping my dating with a local property owner’s son discrete; and demonstrating that I respected the lifestyle and values of the community. (Interview 4: 239–241)

Her determination to understand this remote rural context and ‘to be part’ of the community inspired her approach:

> They expect the teaching principal to become a member of all the local organisations—tennis, arts council, progress committee. I am most willing to attend as many as I can. I also stay here on
Margaret emphasised that determining the expectations of the local community is essential if a teaching principal wishes to make a success of the position. When asked to elaborate she added:

As teaching principal you need to find out the unwritten rules as soon as possible and because I asked so many questions during my first months in this position, I found out many things that guided me towards a beginning of this understanding. Also they became aware that I did value their beliefs, and the history of school procedures etc and I was willing to listen to them. (Interview 4: 252–255)

But I didn’t do this because I knew this was important, I did this because I believe everyone is important. I do this wherever I go. (Interview 4: 260–261)

I was lucky—that was all. Now, I understand how important this is to this community. (Interview 4: 263)

Becoming part of the community is vitally important, according to Margaret, because the community views the local school as ‘their school’ and the principal as ‘their principal’.

The community members will go to great lengths to assist the school if the principal establishes a willingness to become part of, and to understand and accept, the way of life of this remote rural community. (Interview 4: 291–293)

When asked to explain this further, Margaret commented:

The school is an essential part of the community. As you can see, there is no other public building around and we have a library and computers, photocopier and sporting facilitates, so everyone and everything is linked like a web. I step in as the principal, and they are anxious about how I will interact with them: will I include them in the decision making? Will I understand the role of the school within the community? (Interview 4:61–65)

When you come to think of it, my presence has a huge impact on all the lives of everyone here [the local community]. The community has an equal impact upon my practice. (Interview 4: 71)
Margaret said she had been invited to be a member of the local ‘Community Progress Committee’. She explained:

Water is a problem in this district and the local council wanted to increase the dam that supplies this school and a couple of stock reserves. I accepted nomination onto this committee because community members said they valued my input. This is a major community issue—I was surprised because I am not a permanent resident, but they said they wanted my help and involvement.

(Interview 4: 341–344)

To sum up her relational perspective, Margaret highlighted the difference between her previous teaching positions and this current posting:

This school is different: it is an integral part of this whole local community. What happens here affects everyone. This is so different from the other schools where the school was just another building, another service in a busy and diverse town or city.

(Interview 4: 72–74)

**Leadership practice as understood by Margaret**

Education Queensland had informed Margaret that poor leadership practice had destroyed the relationship between the school and its community. Margaret was determined to regain the support of the community and to enhance the students’ educational and social learning outcomes by clearly defining her role and her expectations as the new teaching principal. She indicated that her actions as leader were critical and the interview data revealed Margaret’s understanding of leadership as a process of developing social responsibility:

Everyone was very reluctant to participate in developing a vision for the school because of their past experiences with the last principal, but once I offered professional development opportunities, and I offered numerous times for everyone to share ideas, they began to realise they were welcome and valued.

(Interview 3: 91–93)

My actions affect everyone in this community as I soon began to understand that the school is part of this community—they work together almost like threads in a piece of material.

(Interview 4: 321–322)

Margaret said she leads in at least three different ways depending upon the outcomes she desires and the experience of the person/persons involved.
‘Guiding leadership’: Using a guiding approach through sharing information, Margaret leads the school community towards decisions that are likely to result in improved student outcomes:

I am a guiding leader when I guide them [the school community] towards decisions that will improve school performance. (Interview 3: 136–137)

Margaret indicated that she has to ‘guide’ and ‘work together’ with the school community. It appeared to Margaret that the community, of which the school is a part, needs not only to accept change but also expect to be involved in decision-making. This understanding has influenced this working together leadership approach:

I share and discuss suggestions for change and together we work out the best way to achieve the change. (Interview 4: 305)

‘Direct leadership’: Margaret said she uses ‘direct leadership’ with concise, clear instructions when informing children and new staff about their work. This is best, she said, because everyone knows what to do and satisfactory results are achieved:

I am a direct leader when I work with the children and a new staff member. (Interview 4: 137)

... in confidentiality issues I am very direct. (Interview 4: 186)

‘Negotiating leadership’: To achieve the necessary funding for part-time staff, Margaret said she used a negotiating approach with Education Queensland officers:

I am a negotiating leader when I need resources for my school from Education Queensland. Over time my skills of negotiating have improved. The community members understand where I am coming from and where I would like to take the school as a whole. As well, Education Queensland staff now understand where I would like to lead my school and as a result I am achieving more and more funding for the school. (Interview 3: 192–194)

Once funding was assured, Margaret said, the way was clear for her to work along with the school community towards the desired future for their school. With guidance from Education Queensland officers and her professional support network, she said she was able to propose new ideas for the school’s future and to begin strategic planning. Margaret indicated she thought the future was very promising for the school.
As we [staff, local community members, myself] are all working together, the possibilities for improved learning experiences are endless. We are determining targets for the future and how these can be achieved. (Interview 4: 730-732)

Upon reflection, Margaret indicated two factors that continue to reduce her effectiveness as leader: multi-age teaching and being the only full time staff member.

First, multi-age teaching:

Having all year levels, knowing multi-age organisational strategies is a must. I had much to learn quickly but I still feel I am winging it at times. I just wish I knew more about how to manage so many ability levels all at the same time. (Interview 4: 271–273)

Second, Being ‘the one’:

A teaching principal is always needed by someone. I have set times that were just for me to work alone, otherwise I would be unable to consider how things are going and plan staff development, new resources etc. But this does not always work, Education Queensland want an answer now, or a visitor arrives in my classroom—I have to attend to these matters immediately. (Interview 4: 281–284)

When asked what would help to eliminate these issues, Margaret stated:

More time basically. I work almost around the clock (thank goodness I have a few friends out here to provide interruptions). Also I would like to visit multi-age schools and see how I should be organising all these children. (Interview 4: 304–306)

Actually what I should do is discuss this with the principal network we have in this region and plan multi-age teaching professional development. (Interview 4: 310)

To sum up, Margaret thought teaching principal leadership was:

Working with everyone [students, staff, parents and all other members of the community] to achieve an improved future for the children which, in the long run, improves the community as a whole. I have to be able to introduce new ideas and values and have them accepted. (Interview 4: 411–413)

Professional influences

Initially, the support offered by her mentor, the principal of her last school, was invaluable providing advice to guide Margaret’s handling of the confidentiality issue
Information detailing the current school climate, prior to taking up the teaching principal position, gave Margaret the opportunity to plan her first weeks strategically.

After six months in the job, Margaret began the process of developing trust with fellow teaching principals of the region and with a small number of principals of larger schools further afield. Margaret said that, over time, this professional network provided a strong knowledge base from which she could elicit help and advice. The tasks required of a beginning teaching principal are numerous and diverse. Margaret said that without collegial teamwork and positive relationships in the school and the community, work as a teaching principal would never be completed even though it is rewarding:

I didn’t attend an Induction Workshop so I made my own contacts. There is a network of teaching principals now in this region and I consult and chat to the members often. Also I don’t restrict my professional contact to only teaching principals—I have made contact with principals of larger schools who have more and wider experiences. These contacts have proved to be most useful in facilitating my leadership. (Interview 4: 408–412)

Margaret was asked about her career planning:

I don’t know if I am going to apply for a promotion after three years, I quite like a local fellow out here so maybe I will stay on for a while.

(Interview 4: 371–372)

In just 20 months in the position, Margaret said she has been able to demonstrate her developing leadership qualities and her ability for working together with others in both a supportive and collegial manner that has continued the restoration of State Primary School B’s morale. She indicated she was able to establish the first stages of trusting relationships and productive partnerships through positive personal and interpersonal skills because of her acceptance of the school community’s values and attitudes and, as a result, has become part of the local community.

5.3.3 State School C and Janet, the teaching principal

Contextual overview

Local context: State Primary School C is a fairly new school, built during the late 1980s. It began operation to service the educational needs of a small but growing beef
farming community, over 1,100 km north-west of the state capital, Brisbane. The local community purchased the two-roomed school building and offered it to the Queensland State Government so that a school could be established in their local district. Previously, school-age children had to study via the Distance Education Scheme or leave home to attend boarding schools in larger centres. The closest town with services such as post office, grocery store and petrol station is 114 km away, and the closest homestead is 10 km away. Gravel roads connect all the properties in the immediate area of the school to the closest town. The roads are classified as all-weather but, during heavy rainfall, the roads wash badly and access is only by four-wheel drive vehicle until the local shire maintenance crews can carry out repairs. A doctor visits the local town once a week but for care on the other days, medical services are 210 km away. Mail is delivered twice a week.

**School facilities:** The school is set in natural bushland with dirt road access. There are no green lawns, but the natural grasses are mowed. The school building is surrounded by a number of sheds that have been built over the past two decades. These include a sports shed, a cleaning shed, a hydroponics shed, a community rural fire shed and a very large play shed. The play shed was built from funds donated by the Variety Club (a charitable organisation that raises money for non-profit organisations, rural schools and remote medical services), and provides a large undercover area housing climbing play equipment, and sand pit. Many community members contributed time and skills towards the construction of this shed so that the best facility could be built with the available funds.

**The classroom:** The classroom is open-plan and is brightly painted, spacious and alive with the teacher’s displays, children’s work and learning centres. There are numerous tables for both children and adults to work at, offering a very flexible environment for all. There are six computers. The school has a very welcoming feel.

**Principal’s residence:** The teaching principal was originally accommodated in a caravan in the school grounds, or was billeted with a local family. In the mid-1990s a small school residence was constructed on the school grounds.

**School community:** The community has always demonstrated strong support for their school (Education Queensland, 2002b). The parents exhibit a strong commitment to
the education of their children and participate in all school activities. The community is made up entirely of Anglo-Australians, both landholders and employees on the properties. The main income is from the beef industry with the average property size being 8,000 ha (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Distances are an accepted element of this community, but many people go to great lengths to alleviate the sense of isolation—by holding birthday parties where every community member is invited, by taking their children to the coast (more than an eight hour drive away), or by travelling overseas when economic conditions allow.

Economic status: Even though the district has suffered a number of years with very low rainfall, the property owners appear to be financially comfortable. Many families own new four-wheel drive vehicles and all families went away for vacations during the Christmas break. All families at the school report having Internet access at home, and half live in air-conditioned homes.

Student population: State Primary School C has always been a one-teacher school and there are 21 students currently enrolled.

Staffing: State Primary School C is staffed by a full-time teaching principal who arrived at the school last year. There is one part-time teacher’s aide who started at the school during first term in 2002 and who had not worked in a school before. The part-time cleaner and part-time administrative assistant have both worked at the school for a number of years. A relief teacher can be employed one day a fortnight relieving the teaching principal from full-time classroom duties. Once a week for one hour, the children learn Japanese via a conference telephone link-up with their Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher stationed over 200 km away at a much larger state school. Once a term this teacher visits for the day so the Year 6 and Year 7 students meet their teacher and work face-to-face with her. As there are no music and physical education specialists visiting the school, the teaching principal has these curriculum areas to teach as well as English, maths, science, study of society and technology.

Janet—the teaching principal

Janet, single and in her mid-twenties, is an Anglo-Australian who had two years of classroom experience before accepting this, her first teaching principalship. Janet’s
classroom experience was in a two-teacher school in rural Queensland. Janet indicated she was not happy at that school because the principal and the local community were very unfriendly. Prior to these two years in the country, Janet had not had any professional or personal rural experiences. Janet is currently in her second year of the principalship and, at the time of interview, expected to remain at State Primary School C for at least another year.

**Preparation for the teaching principal position:** Janet did not attend an induction workshop for new principals, and there was no network of local principals in place when she first arrived at State Primary School C. An experienced principal was not available to pair with Janet in the mentorship program. Janet has not studied any postgraduate leadership courses and is not a member of any professional leadership organisations.

**Gaining local community knowledge:** The local organisations include a playgroup of three mothers and their children, and a clay pigeon club. There are numerous social functions held throughout the community at property homesteads and to these Janet indicated she is often invited. As well, on many occasions she is invited to informal dinners by individual community members. At least once a week there is a dinner or a party to attend, Janet said. It is during these functions, Janet came to her understand of the educational beliefs of the community and much of what was expected of her as the teaching principal. The meanings made from these understandings have influenced Janet’s approach to the teaching principal role and how her leadership style has evolved.

**Educational influences**

Janet acknowledged personal educational beliefs, values and practices as being significant influences on her current educational practice. Janet indicated how these factors have influenced the changes she has made to the curriculum that have strengthened community links. Three such changes are detailed: broadening educational opportunities to increase life chances; school studies endorsing local activities; and involving parents in the students’ education.

First, valuing the importance of a broad education as a means of increasing a student’s life opportunities influences Janet’s choice of units of study. Janet also indicated that
she plans learning experiences that encourage students to step outside their comfort zones as a means to develop their confidence and self-reliance:

I have always thought the wider the experiences a child has at school, more opportunities become available as they grow up. This belief has influenced my selection of units of work I plan for the students and the wide variety of teaching strategies I use.

(Interview 1: 210–212)

Being aware of the influence of isolation upon the children’s upbringing, Janet has altered the curriculum with many study opportunities focusing upon world events:

The children here are so safe in their isolated community. Everyone [community members and parents] looks out for the children; I think I need to guide the children towards their development of their own thoughts and to experience some risk-taking so they can begin to develop self-direction and independence. It is so isolated here but one day the children will have to go away to secondary school and maybe further for tertiary studies and work. (Interview 1: 233–237)

Janet believes social interaction in a variety of school settings provides opportunities to broaden the children’s educational experiences. Visits to larger schools so that students can participate in school activities such as tuck shop, oral presentations to 100 plus audience members, inter-school camps, and combined school sporting events all contribute to extend the students’ experiences and prepare them for their future:

Joining with other children from larger schools, I think, greatly helps my students learn more about life and what happens in the larger schools. Combined school camps especially provide the children time for social interaction. (Interview 1: 241–243)

Second, Janet believes the school should be a valued and a contributing component of the local community. To facilitate this she made a number of curriculum changes that connected study with the local economy. A unit of study investigating the effectiveness of different dung beetle species is just one example. Local landholders and an agricultural scientist stationed over 100 km away worked with the children and Janet. This type of study included teaching practices based upon hands-on activities which motivated, engaged and fascinated her students:

I believe the children must value the work of their parents so I changed the curriculum to include links between the classroom and the real world. (Interview 2: 231–232)

Most of the students would prefer to be out in the paddock with their parents doing something, so using hands-on strategies
encourages my students to learn. They enjoy the mysteries of new
discoveries. (Interview 2: 247–249)

Further, Janet believes that encouraging the community members to use the school as ‘theirs’, cements her place as an important member in the community. She says she has achieved this by encouraging the local community members to use library books, and by allowing computer use by adults after school hours:

I believe all resources should be made available to everyone so I am happy to share with everyone. This brings more community members to our school. (Interview 4: 10–11)

Third, her belief that involving parents in the students’ education will increase student achievement materialised in the development and introduction of a school newsletter. This newsletter features the educational efforts of parents’ work around the school, their study support at home, and sporting practice at school and at home. School newsletters often feature school events and happenings. Janet’s focus varied to reflect and endorse her belief that parents’ interest and help with education do make a difference to their children’s success.

Janet elaborated this belief with an incident that occurred during her seventh month at the school:

One day while two parents were helping with maths, I overheard them chatting about what they thought was good primary teaching. They were saying they wanted their children to be able to fit in at high school and to achieve high primary grades so this was possible. They went on and agreed that was why they were helping at school. (Interview 4: 81–84)

Janet said she felt more confidence as a result of knowing the community’s beliefs because she was beginning to realise how important it was to know they influenced the community’s educational convictions (Case study C, Appendix D). She felt more relaxed about her programs and sharing plans for improvement. Asked what she was implying, Janet discussed the importance of knowing what the parents and community members believe:

If we all have similar educational beliefs we can all work together successfully for today and for the future. (Interview 4: 123–124)

In response to a question about other beliefs she held and similarities to those held by the school community, she said:
I believe so. We believe high expectations of the children encourage high outcomes. Also we all believe that high standards in primary school will assist with success at secondary schools. (Interview 4: 207–209)

But we disagree on a broad education that accepts other religions. They say they are all Christians and they object to me even mentioning other religions such as Buddhism and the Jewish faith. I had parents waiting for me at the school gate the next morning after a classroom discussion focused upon other cultures and religions. (Interview 3: 257–260)

Janet outlined how she handled this occurrence:

By chance there was a P and C meeting that very afternoon, so I placed on the agenda, religious studies for discussion. The staff, parents and community members, informed by the curriculum information I presented, came to the agreement that informing the children was not such a bad idea. The lessons were to take on an informative focus and were to include many religious 'types' including Christianity. All present requested copies of the materials I was going to use in the future. I was pleased to do this. (Interview 3: 262-268)

Janet said her curriculum leadership is strongly driven by her personal beliefs and educational values, but at times she adjusts to accommodate the local context such as limiting discussion on religion. She claimed to have held these beliefs for a number of years, but the experience of being principal of a remote rural school has consolidated her understandings of how the context influences the way beliefs and values are enacted.

I had no idea how important the community context of a school is. I just thought you came into a new school and taught the material that is required for that year level. But there is so much more: the school setting; the people; the history of the community. These things must be considered first. (Interview 4:691–694)

**Managerial influences**

Janet indicated she was unable to make curriculum changes until she implemented particular managerial approaches. Janet had so much to learn about her new teaching principal position that she was fully occupied with managerial matters during the first six months in the position (Case study C, Appendix D). Janet had not attended an induction workshop nor was there a network of local teaching principals that could assist her:
I had to learn everything from scratch. This meant I was working virtually all weekends and most nights trying to fit in my lesson planning around the management expected of me. Leadership was not ever thought of in those first 6 months or so. I was too busy surviving. There was not time or energy for leadership. (Interview 1: 310–313)

Attending an induction workshop, or at least meeting with others in the job, would have helped me a lot. (Interview 1: 320–321)

**Relational influences**

Having to rely on herself, Janet said, led to many occasions when the position almost became too much for her. In the beginning she was fortunate enough to have a friend teaching in another region, and they often telephoned each other and used these opportunities to debrief and to discuss possible options. However, this friend left teaching and went overseas so Janet was alone and left to handle the ‘bad’ days by herself. In time, Janet said, the ‘good’ days dominated and she felt she was doing a good job.

Janet indicated that initially her relations with staff, parents and community members were limited by the community’s expectations of the role, but gradually opportunities were presented to expand the role. These opportunities are discussed under three headings: gaining students’ respect; forming local friendships; understanding the influence community members have upon the school.

First, Janet found gaining the children’s respect aided her acceptance by the school community:

> Once the children accepted me as their teacher and principal, I found the community members began to listen and look upon me in a different way—a way that they appeared to take notice of what I was proposing. (Interview 3: 416–418)

Second, Janet believed that developing local friendships provided her with insight and understanding of the school community, which she said enabled her to begin the transition from management to leadership:

> I started to understand the beliefs and values of the community members. Also I came to understand the dreams they had for their children. (Interview 3: 33–314)

When asked what she was implying, Janet stated:
Well, leadership could not happen here until a shift is made from keeping processes the same as before to being able to have my ideas accepted and I think this acceptance has occurred. (Interview 3: 319–320)

Third, establishing positive relations with community members enhanced her understanding of their influence upon the school. Janet said she was beginning to realise that the school is embedded within this local context. Everyone, even families without children currently attending the school, is interested in this school. Not only are they interested but they expect to have their input into discussions on school policies and events:

I had no idea that this school is run by the community. I am learning about the importance of the school to the community. (Interview 4: 21–22)

I am establishing relations with these community members and through this process I feel I am becoming accepted by the community. (Interview 4: 37–38)

Janet added:

I have just been asked to chair a community meeting about new telephone changes in this district. I think that shows my acceptance as part of this community. (Interview 4: 327–328)

Janet had mentioned the concept of acceptance a number of times and she was asked to describe this in greater detail:

Remember I first said I was told to keep things as they were and I would enjoy my stay here. Well, I did that, but through the use of existing relationships I began to demonstrate my commitment to this community and to the children. Well, that and being part of the community by joining local organisations and making local friends, I am now accepted as part of the community: I am one of them for the time I stay here as their principal. (Interview 4: 190–194)

They look to me for ideas, not only for the school but for the community as well. I think that is acceptance and that is why I am now able to lead. (Interview 4: 201–202)

**Leadership practice as understood by Janet**

Over the two years of Janet’s practice, there was a shift from maintaining the status quo to the initial stages of introducing change. The steps that facilitated change illustrate Janet’s personal growth as a beginning school leader.
Upon arrival at State School C, Janet was greeted with a directive from parents to keep the status quo:

I did as I was told for the first seven months or so. I gained this feeling from the first day I arrived when parents met me and welcomed me to ‘their school’. I was told if I continued what was already in place, I would enjoy my stay here. (Interview 4: 157–159)

When asked how this influenced her work she stated:

First few months I felt I was just being another person, the immediate past teaching principal, but I had so much to understand about being a teaching principal, I didn’t put much time into thinking about this. (Interview 4: 180–182)

When questioned if she was still encouraging past practices, Janet replied:

Yes, all the basic school procedures such as ground care, school hours, hours for part time staff etc. (Interview 3: 217)

But I soon realised the students were above the expected for their ages in maths but below in English. Maths was timetabled in the morning and English after morning tea. I thought I should change the timetable to work on English when the students are fresh. But when I suggested this to the part-time staff they immediately thought English was best second each day and maths was always first so why change. After considering this ‘block’ to such a small change, I asked the students and they thought it would be fun to do their reading and writing first. So I decided to ask the children to present the idea to the parents at the next P and C meeting. I thought if the children made the suggestion, the parents might be happy to make the change. It worked. (Interview 3: 219–227)

By using the children as a vehicle for achieving change, Janet began the process of changing her practice from management to leadership. I asked if there were consequences of this action:

The children were thrilled, they had ‘spoken’ at a P and C meeting and the parents agreed to their ideas, so the children started to think of other ideas and the children and I began working closer together almost like a team. This was the beginning of the very strong relationship the students and I enjoy. This was the start of me becoming my own school leader. (Interview 2: 121–125)

In seeking clarification about what she was implying, Janet said:

I had found a way to influence the decision-making of the parents. (Interview 2: 127)
Subsequently:

The children showed their respect for me at home. Over time this influenced the change of thinking from the parents. I think this contributed to the parents being willing to consider my suggestions for school changes. So into my second year here I am able to introduce change myself. (Interview 2: 132–134)

The local community members now come and help me at any time. (Interview 2: 153)

Additionally, Janet believes that knowing the status of each community member enabled her to test possible school changes before taking the idea to the staff and to P and C meetings:

Certain community members are taken notice of by most of the parents. These I target first. I suppose it is all artificial—I am using the local community status network. Ah, I see what you are asking, it’s not me, just I know how to use the relations already in place as I did with the children re the maths and English timetable swap. (Interview 2: 158–160)

In many ways the approach used by Janet (using something highly valued by the community, the school children and certain community members) as the vehicle for the message and change is manipulative or subversive but in a community/school friendly way. Janet’s changing approach to her practice enabled her to influence the parents’ thinking, paving the way for what Janet refers to as her major curriculum leadership initiative:

I think my biggest win in the area of curriculum has been the introduction of ‘Philosophy of Education’ studies. My beliefs are mirrored in this course of study and I felt that the children and the adults of this community would benefit. (Interview 4: 210–212)

Incorporating this changing climate with her knowledge of parents’ beliefs and values, Janet indicated she was able to gain support for the inclusion of ‘Philosophy of Education’ within the curriculum:

Without hesitation my recommendations were accepted. (Interview 4: 215)

The parents have a deep-seated need to do the best for their children, so my suggestion to consider ‘Philosophy of Education’

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6 ‘Philosophy of Education’ is a course of study that assists children to think about their thinking processes and how they make decisions while learning.
fitted their needs once they understood the advantages.
(Interview 4: 217–218)

The acceptance of ‘Philosophy of Education’ changed the whole curriculum and I asked Janet why she thought this had become possible:

I have used the children and certain community members to support my ideas, but there is more to it than just that. I am certain it is the respect and relationships that have developed over time between the parents, children and other community members and me that allowed me to completely alter the curriculum presentation and focus. (Interview 4: 91–94)

Janet explained that through making connections with the school community’s beliefs and demonstrating respect for past procedures, she felt these elements facilitated her move from management to leadership.

Janet indicated that there were other factors that influenced her leadership: being ‘the one’; resistance to change; here pre-determined role; and lack of acceptance.

‘Being the one’: Because she was the only full-time staff member, everyone needed to connect with Janet, which interrupted her daily work at the school. But more importantly Janet said she found herself ‘on guard’ on all occasions:

Being the only teacher makes you the target for the skilled community member to glean what information they can from you if you let your guard down. It is wonderful to go home [home is 800km east of the current school posting] where I can put my feet up and relax. (Interview 1: 122–124)

But, she says there is a positive side as well:

I have numerous opportunities to learn about the ideas and values of this community and at the same time share with everyone my suggestions to make improvements. (Interview 1: 126–128)

‘Resistance to change during my first months’:

When I did have time to think of a change, I presented this to the staff and the P and C members and their response was—‘no way, why change we never did it that way before’. (Interview 2: 177–178)

Janet said that she learnt to deal with this reluctance by using pre-existing relationships ‘but that is not leadership’, she said. Having to explain ideas to community members provided Janet with opportunities to improve her negotiating
and debating skills. Janet appeared to be describing a kind of vicarious leadership achieved through the (established) influence of others.

‘A predetermined role’: The community had developed a role for ‘their’ teaching principal—Janet believed it was difficult for her to develop a sense of role until she knew what was expected, and fulfilled those expectations. But developing a sense of the role was not the whole story, Janet indicated:

> Joining local community groups, including local topics of study and inviting community members to the school was not enough to allow leadership. I think it is being ‘accepted’. (Interview 3: 210–241)

‘Lack of acceptance’: Janet believes the final element of acceptance is the key to her leadership. Once ‘accepted as their principal’ she said, the support offered by community members seems unconditional. When asked how had she become ‘accepted’, Janet said:

> The children first demonstrated their willingness to work with me in a type of partnership of respect. The adults followed over time when they realised I was there to help their children and to work with them [parents and other community members] for the improved standing of the school as a whole. (Interview 3: 251–253)

> A type of working partnership that involved the sharing of ideas, values and beliefs. (Interview 4: 389)

I asked Janet how does being ‘accepted’ and having a working partnership facilitate leadership.

> Having my ideas judged on their merits; not being disregarded because I said them, or having them accepted because one of the community members supported me. This was a major step for my leadership. (Interview 4: 236–238)

In describing ‘acceptance’ Janet said:

> I think someone can’t lead this school until there are positive relations with student and school community members. Ideas and suggestions are discussed openly and the worth of the idea is judged on its merits to improve student and community outcomes. (Interview 4: 241–243)

Janet listed a number of ‘leadership actions’ she was able to implement once she had achieved ‘acceptance’. These included partnership with parents and community members to write the vision documents for the next 5 and 10 years; initiating links
with target secondary schools to ensure the transition from primary to secondary is seamless, both academically and socially; organising a school principal conference at her school during which community members were involved as members of discussion panels allowing them to present their school’s vision of the future.

Janet discussed the additional workload involved in planning strategically:

> Developing a vision for the school really does require you to lead the community towards their preferred future for their school. Having the interpersonal skills and the practical knowledge of being able to do this was daunting at first but once the process was started and agreed upon, leadership elements of offering options and possibilities, and keeping the process moving forward came to the forefront of my practice . . . management and leadership become confusing, but as I am the only full-time staff member and the principal, both tasks of running the school [management] and inspiring others fall upon my shoulders [leadership]. (Interview 2: 262–268)

Janet foreshadowed other policy adjustments:

> Yes, I would like to link my older children with children in other schools. I think we could teleconference the children to discuss their learning experiences and their plans for secondary school. The older children miss out a lot in the small school, I think. They need to chat with others of the same age. (Interview 4: 259–262)

> I have not heard of this happening before but I know I could make it work. We could study across campuses and develop partnerships with other students and teachers. (Interview 4: 263–264)

Janet has no formal experience in leadership studies but she is able to describe what she thought was teaching principal leadership:

> It is a partnership. We work together with two aims—to improve children and community outcomes. I think the parents and community members look for my educational ideas because I do have current educational knowledge and know the current trends, but together we decide which trend fits our vision and adapt to suit our children. (Interview 4: 137–141)

Two issues still influence Janet’s leadership practice: professional isolation and multi-age organisation linked with outcomes-based education and constant curriculum changes (Case study C, Appendix D). Janet indicated she constantly feels isolated professionally, as opportunities to discuss leadership face-to-face with other principals are rare.
Professional isolation—even with the email stream, I miss face to face discussions—the coffee and the chatting. (Interview 4: 27–29)

Knowledge of the new outcomes based education in a multi-age classroom—how to effectively combine these two was a challenge for me. This takes time and reduces opportunities to sit back and consider ideas for the school’s future. (Interview 4: 67–68)

Finally, Janet indicated an unexpected role that was ‘forced’ upon her: that of community leader:

People seem to get the impression that as everything at the school was going so well, I could contribute more and be part of community decision-making. (Interview 3: 191–192)

This role involves working with the community to discuss local and state government issues such as telephone changes for the whole district. Since accepting this role Janet said:

It has improved the support offered to me as principal and to the school as a whole. (Interview 3: 198)

**Professional influences**

Being in her second year of teaching, and her first year as principal, Janet had limited experience upon which to draw. The principal at her first school did not inspire her, she stated, and Janet was not informed of the Education Queensland induction workshops for principals until after being in the position for six months. At the induction, Janet said that she proved to be a valuable resource for the other beginning principals, all of whom had only been in the job for weeks. She said she did not learn anything new herself, as much of the time was focused on the duties of the larger school principals (Case study C, Appendix D). None of the new beginning principals were from remote rural locations so Janet felt there was not the opportunity to establish a support network.

But, having developed confidence with school managerial procedures and the expectations of the school community by her tenth month in the position, Janet stated she did form links with local teaching principals:

I met a few of the local principals at an Education Queensland regional meeting and so I encouraged discussion through email streaming. I ask for assistance at times with Education Queensland documents, and also I run my new ideas for the school by them. (Interview 3: 108–110)
When asked to give an example of one of these ideas, Janet stated:

"Yes, when I was planning the conference, I asked for suggestions and support: a confirmation of my ideas I suppose you could say. I needed someone to run my ideas by and the network we have going at present is very useful. All principals have different background and experiences and I have learnt much." (Interview 3: 129–132)

Education Queensland officers were very helpful, Janet stated, and she did not feel that asking for help when needed indicated to Education Queensland in any way that she was incapable of handling the promotion. This inner confidence gave Janet the edge. She was able to access information when needed so that managerial tasks could be completed correctly. Janet indicated she was quick to learn, but even so she spent every weekday and night completing managerial tasks, and discussing possible solutions with colleagues.

I asked Janet about her future career plans, if she had any and Janet replied:

"I would like to move to a larger school after my three years here. I understand how a school works, how to employ staff and how to develop future improvements and lead a school. I would like to have more teachers around me. I feel very isolated here being alone. That is my dream at present." (Interview 4: 335–338)

5.3.4 State School D and Alice, the teaching principal

**Contextual overview**

*Local context:* State Primary School D was built during the late 1950s. The school setting is very picturesque, being on the top of a small hill overlooking a fertile valley with ranges in the far distance. When the area is not in its current state of drought, incoming storms can be viewed rolling in from many kilometres away. Grazing properties surround the school complex, with the closest homestead 11 km away, and the closest town 110 km away. The closest regional centre with medical and banking facilities is 255 km away, over 950 km north-west of the state’s capital, Brisbane. Mail is delivered twice a week. The access road is unsealed and, in spite of a recent upgrade, sharp stones can ruin tyres.

*School facilities:* The school building is small, with one classroom and a very small staff space. It is set on concrete stumps and is concreted underneath, giving the children a shaded play space. However, the headroom is not sufficient to
accommodate adults comfortably. The toilet block is many metres away from this main building linked by a recently constructed paved path. The paving has been widened in one section to allow for the construction of a barbecue when funds are available. The school grounds include an oval, a large area of lawn, many well-established shade trees, small garden beds, two tennis courts and storage shed for gardening equipment. A satellite dish for all telephone, television and Internet communications dominates one section of the grounds.

*The classroom:* The classroom is cramped with poor access to the three classroom computers. Chairs and desks take up all the available space, and the students have limited room for their bags. Storage space is also limited, so many items are stored in the classroom and this reduces comfort levels. Classroom displays consist mainly of work hung from fishing lines across the room. Tall visitors have to continually duck between the hanging works if they wish to move around the room.

*Principal’s residence:* The schoolhouse, in one front corner of the schoolyard, was built at the same time as the school. It is highset, with the laundry and car accommodation underneath.

*School community:* The school community consists solely of Anglo-Australians. Current parents of the school are all owners of properties stocked with beef cattle (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

*Economic status:* The average size of the surrounding properties is 6,000 ha. Owing to the fertile soil throughout the district, the property owners are considered to be well-off and most have modern homes, new family cars, at least one computer per household and Internet access. Biannual family vacations include Australian and international destinations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

*Student population:* The school population has been fairly constant since the 1950s with a current enrolment of 23. All seven year levels are represented.

*Staffing:* State Primary School D is staffed by a full-time teaching principal, Alice. There is one teacher’s aide who works 20 hours a week who started at the school during 2002. The cleaner works 8.5 hours a week and the administrative assistant works 12 hours a week. The school grounds are cared for by the grounds care person
who carries out his duties 6 hours every week. A relief teacher can be employed once a week relieving the teaching principal from full-time classroom duties for that day. Once a week for one hour, the children learn Japanese via a conference telephone link-up with their Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher stationed over 200 km away at a much larger state school. Once a term this teacher visits the school for the day so the Year 5, 6 and 7 students meet their teacher and work face-to-face with her. The teaching principal teaches music and physical education as well as English, maths, science, technology and study of society.

*Background to State School D as recorded by Education Queensland:* Education Queensland has recorded positive community support. The Parents and Citizens Committee has held many successful fund-raising events, which funded the construction of the tennis courts in 1995 (Education Queensland, 2002b).

**Alice—the teaching principal**

Alice, single and in her mid-thirties, is an Anglo-Australian who had ten years of classroom experience before accepting this, her first teaching principalship. Alice’s classroom experience consisted of a variety of different sized schools, ranging from a four-teacher school to schools with over thirty teachers situated within the southern coastal region of Queensland. Five of these years were in multi-age classrooms, which at various times included all year levels from Year 1 to Year 7. Alice had no professional or personal experience in rural or remote teaching locations before being posted to State Primary School D. Unlike other teaching principals interviewed, Alice had waited four years from her initial application to achieving principalship. Alice is currently in her third year of the teaching principalship.

*Preparation for the teaching principal position:* Alice did not attend an induction workshop before taking up her first teaching principal position. She said she was not offered an opportunity to be part of the principal mentor system.

*Gaining local community knowledge:* When Alice arrived there were three local community organisations: children’s weekly playgroup; local dramatic society and tennis club. Being interested in sport, Alice said she started and continues to organise the touch football matches every second Sunday. The tennis matches are held each Friday night. All organisations conduct their events at the school so Alice said she
often sits in, listens and watches. Alice said these opportunities enable her to 'get to
know the locals' and she indicated her understandings of the local community were
mainly generated by the knowledge she gleamed during these episodes.

**Educational influences**

An analysis of Alice’s educational beliefs and values highlights how they strongly
influence her teaching, learning and assessment practice:

> For primary students, I think the three Rs [reading, writing and
> arithmetic] are essentials. All the new curriculum subjects such as
> technology and health make it very difficult to find enough time to
give the students a solid education. (Interview 2: 91–93)

Repeatedly Alice discussed the importance of foundation knowledge especially
during the early years of schooling. Probing, Alice articulated the source of this
belief:

> We moved a lot when I was young and I missed so many basic
facts. I was lost by Year 7. So I want all my students to have a solid
beginning and be excited about learning. (Interview 2: 126–127)

Moreover, with the expectations for high achievement through the use of a variety of
teaching strategies and creativity, Alice claimed the students are motivated and
engaged. Approaching teaching and learning in this manner, Alice added that the
children love learning and are willing to accept responsibility for their own learning.

Another traditional belief of Alice’s focuses upon parental involvement in education.
Alice stated firmly that parents are best helping at home, not in the classroom:

> . . . parents should help with homework, but they are not welcome
in my classroom. I believe the local school should be part of the
community—meeting place, join children to celebrate their learning
successes, place of community sport, but I don’t want parents
involved in educational processes. (Interview 2: 136–138)

Alice provided two reasons: parents interfere with school time, and their educational
knowledge is limited. Alice believes primary students work better at school with the
teacher as the only source of direction (Case study D, Appendix D). Other adults in
the classroom provide interruptions and distractions:

> In the past, my classes run smoother if I keep parents away from my
classroom. (Interview 2:140)
Moreover, parents lack educational knowledge and as a result would confuse the children through the use of incorrect processes and language use:

They [parents] are busy with their own lives on the properties. They don’t know about the current trends of education or what education today aims to achieve. They cause confusion in the minds of the children. (Interview 2: 143–144)

Alice referred to many educational changes that have occurred over the past few years which the parents would not understand:

Outcomes-based education is all new to me. If I involved the parents, I’d have to spend time teaching them to understand outcomes. I don’t have that time. I am having trouble understanding it myself. (Interview 2: 210–211)

Alice believes it is her responsibility to prepare the older children for their secondary school education:

I do this by setting assignments that the children must organise for themselves, to develop a time management plan and to organise resources so assignments are completed on time. (Interview 2: 219–220)

Asked why she believes this is important, Alice stated:

Rural kids have to go away to high school, so I think I should provide them with study skills and time management skills so they are able to work well away from their home environment. (Interview 2: 231–232)

Questioned further, Alice added:

Rural kids come from small schools where they receive individual assistance and support. We nurture them. But at the larger secondary schools, they are just one of a mob. There is not time for individual help or individual care. (Interview 3: 162–164)

Also I experienced this myself. I was sent to a large private boarding school in Brisbane for my secondary years. I hated it. So many children, there was no space for me, no time for anyone to really listen to my needs. I felt lost almost all of the time there. (Interview 3: 162–164)

Alice indicated that her childhood experiences of a lack of basic skills and being sent to boarding schooling, had a strong impact upon her teaching, especially now as she has a small remote rural school. She said:
I feel for these kids. (Interview 3: 166)

It is so isolated here. There are no local secondary schools so all children have to board away from home. I know the parents are anxious about this and so they want the children to learn as much as possible here at this school. (Interview 3: 241–243)

Also, I know they value homework. They like to see the children taking work home especially reading, tables and spelling. (Interview 3:252–253)

Upon reflection, Alice stated that the parents’ beliefs were very similar to hers. She uses a wide variety of reading matter to make connections with the media and the lives of the children.

**Managerial influences**

Alice reflected in detail upon her managerial role at State School D. She recalls her misunderstandings during the first 18 months in the position and how her perceptions of the role have since changed dramatically. Initially, she thought the job was simply a managerial one, but after 18 months the administrative assistant left the school and Alice had to learn how to do all the required tasks—she said she suddenly realised how complex the position was:

I misunderstood the teaching principal role. Initially, I learnt everything from the administrative assistant. For example, filling in forms on time for Education Queensland; assessing and ordering resources, organising pay for staff etc. Basic organisation, ensuring the school runs smoothly. (Interview 1: 30–32)

During the first 18 months I had time to plan my lessons and to enjoy myself. I even cleaned the school for 6 months when the cleaner left. I filled in until I could employ another cleaner. (Interview 1: 39–40)

But after the administrative assistant left, I read all the school correspondence and realised policy development and direction for the school was actually part of my job. I was surprised. (Interview 1: 41–42)

Alice said she had maintained all school procedures as expected of her. In hindsight, Alice said that was actually a good approach to the management of her school. Questioned why she believes this, Alice replied:

Keeping things going as they were with the old principal is good because people liked things the way they were. I don’t think a new
The principal should make lots of changes suddenly. People don’t like that. (Interview 4: 69–71)

Furthermore, Alice said she was averse to change:

I don’t like change and I have to see a reason for change so why would anyone else like change. Also if a new person makes changes it makes you feel your ideas were not good enough. I believe you must tread carefully and just by accident I did that because I thought that was all this job was: keeping things going. (Interview 4: 26–28)

Because she had accepted past procedures, Alice stated, the community was comfortable sharing their knowledge of established maintenance procedures:

I was told about who to ask to help if the toilets block and who to ask if the pump out on the dam stopped. (Interview 4: 83–84)

Alice listed the numerous tasks expected of her by Education Queensland and those imposed by the local community:

I have to get my head around budgeting, ordering resources, paying staff, recording and inspecting necessary maintenance, organising meetings and chairing them. Plus there is so much to know about who can repair computers, how to obtain new water piping, who was the tradesman approved of by the local community etc. (Interview 4: 126–128)

At the other schools where I have been a teacher, I could go down to the local hardware store after school and buy what I needed, but here it can take weeks to obtain a washer for a tap. (Interview 4: 132–133)

**Relational influences**

Alice discussed a number of issues relating to personal and public relationships that included: isolation and its consequences; community involvement; and being accepted as ‘their principal’.

Isolation has had a major effect upon Alice’s practice. Alice recalls how lonely she felt being a single female in such a remote setting (Case study D, Appendix D). The inability to communicate frequently with family and friends caused Alice to make friends with the teacher’s aide, who was the only other single female in the community. Alice said she needed emotional support and someone to talk to and that was the reason for taking the teacher’s aide into her confidence.
Yet Alice said this was a mistake because, as teaching principal, you are privy to private details and confidential information and during their social discussions Alice repeated much of the information she gleaned during the school day:

I just can’t bottle it all up. (Interview 1: 171)

At the end of the day if you have someone you can go home to chat things over with all would be well, but being single there is no one. I can’t meet a friend at the local coffee shop and debrief. This place is so isolated. There is no one. (Interview 1: 182–184)

Unfortunately, confidentiality was broken by the aide and Alice had to terminate her employment:

The community members were very distressed and upset and soon told me what they thought of my disregard for their private information. (Interview 1: 194–195)

Being single you go home to an empty house. There is no one to tell and share the day’s happenings with. (Interview 1: 197)

I got to the stage where I needed to tell somebody something, but I shouldn’t have used my aide as a sounding board because she knows too many people in the community. She told others and before I knew it, everyone knew. (Interview 1: 201–203)

Depression set in, Alice said, after she dismissed the teacher’s aide because she was again alone:

I felt so lonely. I have no one to talk to. Sometimes, I just want to stay home and not go to school to face another day. (Interview 1: 210–211)

Alice believes that the lesson learnt reinforced her resolve to establish and keep the trust of all community members in the future. The outcome of this resolve, Alice said, was that after many months, she regained her self-confidence, and communication and interchanges with the community members returned to the previous positive nature:

But the mistake was made and I had to work hard to regain confidence. (Interview 1: 213)

I thought if I had the kids’ respect, the parents would follow, but it is more. I had to prove myself—as a good teacher and supporting the children to achieve their best. (Interview 1: 216–217)
Alice explained the meaning of ‘principal of their school’. She stressed the importance of becoming part of the community. Not content with joining the local tennis club, Alice instigated touch football games. Alice indicated she thinks these happenings contributed to her acceptance as ‘principal of their school’:

I had to become part of the community and their acceptance of my idea of the touch football games was an indication to me I was accepted. I can build on this now. If I had not been able to do this I think I would be at odds with the community and my principalship would be difficult. (Interview 3: 172–174)

**Leadership practice as understood by Alice**

The first 18 months in the position involved teaching and, for a while, school cleaning as school management was left to the administrative assistant (Case Study D, Appendix D). Since that time, accepting responsibility for all facets of the school, Alice said she is developing an understanding of school leadership:

At first I didn’t even think about leadership. I just did as the administrative assistant said was needed to be done. Now I see this position [teaching principal] differently. A teaching principal manages the school by keeping it operating, teaches the children but also the school needs a future. And leadership gives this. (Interview 3: 341–343)

When asked to clarify what ‘the school needs a future’ meant, Alice said:

Just this year I have been developing school policies, discussing the future with everyone [staff, parents and other community members]. For example thinking about how to link this primary school with the nearest secondary school. (Interview 4: 249–250)

Alice expanded upon how this change had occurred:

The confidentiality issue really shocked me. The new Executive Director of Schools helped me through that situation. Now she spends time with me chatting about school leadership and she sends me articles to read. I know more about what is expected of me as a principal. (Interview 4: 371–374)

The consequence for Alice has been abandoning a self-reliant approach and accepting that others can contribute to improving her practice. According to Alice, this has become the major influential factor upon her changing approach to the teaching principal position. Alice said her practice involves the inclusion of others—staff, parents and other local community members and nearby teaching principals:
I asked Alice about her belief that parents should not be involved in the school:

Yes, but my educational belief of keeping parents at arm’s length has altered. The inclusion of the parents’ ideas and suggestions has actually improved my practice. (Interview 4: 96–97)

I am developing positive connections with the whole school community. (Interview 4: 106)

Questioned for her interpretation of ‘developing positive connections with the school community’, Alice gave meaning to her expression by the following:

At first I invited parents for their ideas and from those I wrote policies, documents and simply presented these at the next P and C meeting for endorsement. But now we [all community members] discuss the ideas and we are beginning to work on school policies for the future together. (Interview 4: 114–116)

When asked why Alice called this change of approach ‘leadership’ she replied:

Leadership is making changes, improvement, but management is keeping things going—like I did for the first 18 months. I am thinking about how we can link with other schools and even maybe ask the nearest secondary school manual arts students to travel here and make a barbecue for the school. My ideas have been discussed and accepted by the school community and we are working together to make these changes. (Interview 4: 451–454)

Alice said these attitudinal changes, small as they may seem, are a major shift in practice:

I am learning so much: how to re-focus my thinking about this position and how I can make it work. (Interview 4: 461)

Alice claimed the professional readings that the Executive Director of Schools had shared led to a conceptual change in practice:

I am learning about leadership, but I have to work out how to make the ideas the Executive Director of Schools is talking about, work in this local community. As I said earlier, there is more to just doing what books say, it is about links with the individual community members—connections with their lives. The school is deep-rooted within this local community. (Interview 4: 239: 242)

Connections with their lives means to me firstly, the locals need to see that I have the best for the students at heart, and then I have to understand how I can do the best for the children, and then I have to be looked upon as ‘their principal’. This is so hard to describe—it is something unseen, something that I have not read about so far, something about emotions, feelings, being respected and sharing
ideas and values. No, not respect, more than that—maybe an understanding of each other [Alice, locals]. That is what I think is teaching principal leadership. (Interview 4: 246–250)

Professional influences

There was a network of local teaching principals that holds meetings once a month at the local large school, which is 110 km away over gravel roads. Alice attended twice during her first months, but made the decision not to attend again for the following reasons:

I am just not prepared to travel such distances alone.
(Interview 1: 142)

By the time I travel to meet with another principal, I could have written half the document. I have to get in my car and travel 110 kms one way all on gravel roads. I went two weeks in a row and got two flat tyres. Where do I get a flat tyre mended? It takes at least a week to send it into town on the mail car, have it mended and to be returned via the mail car. (Interview 1: 156–158)

Late interviews indicate that Alice's use of professional colleagues had altered:

I decided I could do everything myself especially after the flat tyres, I stayed home. Now, I travel sometimes, but mostly I use the telephone and emails to discuss and work with other principals and the Executive Director of Schools. Actually, it does save time, and my documents and practice are so much better.
(Interview 4: 156–159)

Alice has enjoyed her professional reading and is considering post-graduate studies:

I don’t want to study but I am enjoying my reading. Maybe one day I might. (Interview 4: 465)

I asked Alice about the focus of the articles she was reading and the discussions she was having with the new Executive Director of Schools;

Taking risks by asking questions of Education Queensland officers so my practice does improve. Also how to work collaboratively with other principals so I am not reinventing the wheel all the time.
(Interview 4: 376–377)

Thus Alice had turned away from a self-reliant approach to the principalship to an understanding that others can contribute to improving her practice. Asked about career plans, Alice said:
I have applied for a promotion. I would like to be closer to my family so I will apply for a larger school nearer the coast. Also the school must be on a bitumen road—I have had enough of gravel roads and flat tyres. (Interview 4: 471–473)

But I also have this feeling inside I would like to be a school principal at another school to start differently from how I started at State School D. (Interview 4: 476–477)

5.3.5 State School E and Suzanne, the teaching principal

Contextual overview

Local context: State Primary School E was relocated from another region to the current site during the late 1980s. It began operation to service the educational needs of a small but growing beef cattle community. Set in the middle of a small government reserve of naturally occurring ironbark trees and wattles, the school cannot be seen from the road until entering the school driveway. The school and school house stand alone. There are no other buildings.

The school is 623 km from Brisbane and is 108 km away from the closest town. This town offers a good range of services and retail stores. The closest homestead is 10 km away from the school. The school is accessible by unsealed roads, which become impassable during heavy rain. This has not been a concern during 2004 as the area is in drought and very little rain has fallen during the past 18 months. Mail is delivered twice a week.

School facilities: The school building consists of one room with a small office and a smaller storage room partitioned off at one end. The school site was cleared of all trees, resulting in a lack of shade in the play areas. There are two tennis courts in the grounds. There are no lawns or gardens because dam water is limited and must be kept for toilet use. During the summer days, the play areas are far too hot so the children play in the classroom.

The classroom: The classroom is open-plan with windows along three sides, so there is little space to display children’s work. As there are 24 students, space is limited but the classroom arrangement does allow for 10 computers, desks, learning centres, bookshelves and the children’s bags. Part of the room has vinyl on the floor with a sink and cupboard space beside; so most activities can be conducted within the walls of the classroom.
Principal’s residence: The accommodation for the teacher was built at the time of relocation: a small, lowset building with two bedrooms and a carport.

School community: All school community members are Anglo-Australian. All parents at the school are owners or workers on nearby cattle properties (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

Economic status: This area has suffered economically over the past decade. All school parents are supplementing their incomes with pig and kangaroo sales. None of the homes are connected to the Internet, and vacations away have been irregular according to Suzanne.

Student population: The school population has always been small, with 24 students currently attending. The projected student population for the next four years is: 2006 to 2008—24 students, 2009—22 students.

Staffing: The only full-time staff member at State Primary School E is the teaching principal, who has been at the school for three years. There are five part-time staff: a grounds care person three hours a week, a cleaner three hours a week, a teacher’s aide twelve hours a week, an administrative assistant six hours a week and a relief teacher five hours a week. Once a week for one hour, the children learn Japanese via a conference telephone link-up with their Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher stationed over 200 km away at a much larger state school. Once a term this teacher visits the school for the day so the Years 5, 6 and 7 students meet their teacher and work face-to-face with her. There are no other visiting specialists so the teaching principal teaches music and physical education as well as English, maths, science, technology and study of society.

School background according to Education Queensland: The school has had many teaching principals during its short history. Some principals have stayed as long as two years; others as short as eight months. The employing body has recorded a number of instances where the local community members have made the teaching principal’s time very uncomfortable, resulting in the principal requesting an early transfer (Education Queensland, 2002b).
Suzanne—the teaching principal

Suzanne, married and in her late thirties, is an Anglo-Australian who had eight years of classroom experience before accepting this, her first teaching principalship. Suzanne’s classroom experience was in composite and single grade classes in large urban coastal Queensland schools. Suzanne had not had any professional or personal rural experience, but she has always held the view that teaching in a rural school and experiencing rural life would be ideal. Suzanne had taught music for ten years before training and moving into primary school education with Education Queensland.

Preparation for the teaching principal position: Suzanne has not attended an induction workshop and she said she was not invited to join the principal mentor system. There is no local network of teaching principals and she has not become a member of any other networks that exist further afield.

Gaining local community knowledge: Local community knowledge was initially devalued by Suzanne. She valued her educational beliefs over those held by the parents and other community members.

Suzanne said there is a tennis club and all activities are held at the school. Suzanne did not become a member nor supported their fund raising events until after her second year in the position. She saw no value in being involved. Over the past year, Suzanne has accepted the importance of community beliefs upon her practice and her understandings of these has been gained through three areas: tennis club membership and involvement; participation in the local agricultural show and driving the school bus.

It was during the informal conversation with parents and community members on these occasions that Suzanne thought she is gaining an understanding of their educational beliefs in traditional schooling processes. Meanings generated by this knowledge, Suzanne said, have informed the guidelines to her school leadership approach formulated over the recent 12 months.
Educational influences

At the beginning of Suzanne’s teaching principalship, she said she valued a teacher-dominated approach for the transmission of the knowledge set out in the curriculum documents:

After 8 years of teaching and having my own children, I know what strategies work. I must ensure content knowledge is taught so many of my lessons are taught using teacher-directed strategies.

(Interview 1: 105–106)

Three years into the position at State School E, Suzanne said her approach has moved from a teacher-dominated to a caring, shared control approach that demonstrated her consideration of others and the importance of involving others in all decision-making processes. Suzanne described several student-focused strategies that allow her students to accept some responsibility for when and how they study:

I now allow the students to make decisions and to have some choices with how they will present their work. I scaffold more now and guide them along to success.

(Interview 4: 33–34)

Students must learn to use computers. In today’s world it is essential.

(Interview 4: 38–40)

Suzanne believes technology is vitally important and, as State School E had only one computer, she said she decided to adjust the budget planning allowing for the purchase of additional computers:

My own children are very knowledgeable about computers so I know I can teach the children here as well. I turned the school on its head in those first few months, but now the benefits are starting to show.

(Interview 3: 155–157)

Using technology, Suzanne said she encourages the younger generation to research widely thus improving learning opportunities:

Being able to find information when you need it is a key to help children find the best future possible.

(Interview 1: 286)

But, I found resource books dating back to the 1950s in the small—you have no idea how small the library here is! Everything needs throwing out.

(Interview 1: 287–288)

When asked what she was implying, Suzanne said:
If I am to teach successfully here and for the children to learn, we need a new library—it is as simple as that. I believe in up-to-date books, the use of the Internet, the web, asking for help from other adults, are all important for learning. (Interview 1: 290–292)

I asked how the parents reacted to her suggestions of needing a new library:

Looking back now I am sure I upset them. Some of the books were donated by them over the years. (Interview 4: 10)

Suzanne was queried about what the parents believe about the use of the web and buying new books: ‘basically what is their belief about research and learning?’

At first I didn’t know, I didn’t ask but more recently I am finding they also think a broad education is important and having current computer skills etc. But mind you, they all seem to want their children to work on the property, but in today’s world these skills are necessary for land and stock management. So we believe in the same but for different reasons. (Interview 4: 87–90)

Suzanne finally described her belief in developing a supportive family environment and after three years she feels she has achieved this aim:

When I first came here the children exhibited thoughtless, careless behaviour towards others and their possessions. Now they work together (most of the time) and help each other especially learning computer skills and doing art work on presentation pieces etc. (Interview 4: 111–114)

There is a new kid, been here only three weeks, and yesterday I heard one of the children say: ‘You must not laugh when Amy can’t do that maths, we all help her’. (Interview 4: 307–308)

Suzanne summed up her last three years’ educational experience:

I described my educational beliefs as being centred on caring and constructing a family supportive classroom, but upon reflection, in the beginning I almost created the opposite. (Interview 4: 126–127)

But now I have been able to implement my beliefs that I think important as a basis for a solid education and I have let go of some of the control. (Interview 4: 132–133)

I have found the parents’ beliefs are similar, so all works well but the reasons for our beliefs are quite different. They are focused upon the children’s future on the property, while mine is upon opening opportunities and increasing life chances. (Interview 4: 96–98)

**Managerial influences**

Suzanne recalls her need to change management procedures from day one:
I arrived and implemented changes—I implemented organisational changes I knew would work—I have had much experience and I ‘knew’ what was best for this school and for the children. (Interview 4: 155–156)

I ordered new computers. I ordered new furniture so I could install the computers. I decided to pay school accounts monthly instead of fortnightly—saves work and money. I asked for a full stock of the library—I told the staff it was a disgrace. (Interview 4: 160–161)

I even rearranged how the part-time staff recorded their hours—I instigated new forms and new procedures. (Interview 4: 165–166)

When asked how she would describe her actions, Suzanne replied:

At the time, I thought they [the actions] were for the best. But in hindsight—most unsatisfactory. (Interview 4: 289)

Asked what she was implying, Suzanne said:

Staff did as I said and, as I was new, I didn’t notice or recognise negative body language. But I have come to understand the staff members need to be included in decision-making and as a team we should decide upon procedures and processes. (Interview 4: 291–293)

Suzanne recorded that her domineering approach created friction with not only the staff, but also with a number of the parents, resulting in the transfer of children to other schools. Moreover, Suzanne said she was having difficulty obtaining information about the school irrigation system etc:

I think the parents were withholding information. (Interview 1:241)

Suzanne said as school numbers began to dwindle the Executive Director of Schools visited State School E offering guidance:

Education Queensland sent the Executive Director of Schools to visit and discuss with me what was happening and to find out what I was doing to create the loss of student enrolments. We discussed the changes I was making and it was agreed all changes were ‘good organisational changes’. We also discussed the timing of the changes and maybe it would have been better to wait a while before making changes. (Interview 3: 165–169)

I started to consider these discussions with the Executive Director of Schools and I thought about how I made changes almost on the very first day of taking up my position. I thought about how I told staff what was going to happen. (Interview 3: 181–183)

Suzanne said she slowly learnt to alter her approach from:
Suzanne became cognisant of the inadequacy of her practice as she attempted to implement those aspects of management that were consistent with the beliefs of the Education Queensland officers. Her efforts to move from a domineering approach to one of collaboration began to work:

I am beginning to understand the staff better and this community. We discuss changes now and decide together.
(Interview 2: 322–323)

Relational influences

The relational aspect of Suzanne’s teaching principalship had a bearing upon her approach to ‘handling’/‘working alongside of’ the members of her school community: students, staff, parents and members of the wider community (Case study E, Appendix D).

In the beginning Suzanne did not encourage, or seek out, relations with any of the school community members. Suzanne said she was naturally a good listener, but having at last been given a principalship, she initially was too enthusiastic and domineering, telling the students what was going to change:

I didn’t consider their feelings re the changes. I simply made changes, demanded improvements, demanded changes in their writing etc. I suppose basically I turned their school days upside down. (Interview 4: 326–327)

In a similar manner Suzanne told the staff what was to be:

I didn’t have time to discuss. I had all my changes and I had all the paperwork that Education Queensland expected. I just told them what changes I expected them to make and said that was how things were to be. Communication was one-way. (Interview 2: 189–191)

The parents attempted to establish a connection with Suzanne but she rejected these attempts:

Parents dropped in and offered help, but I needed to establish myself and the changes I was making, so I gave the parents little ‘time’. (Interview 1: 120–121)
I was not invited to parties, dinner, social events but I didn’t ‘know’—didn’t recognise this situation as being important in this rural setting. (Interview 1: 134–135)

Most parents came to the first P and C meetings where I informed members of changes but after that few attended meetings and so the meeting became quick short reports of what was done and what was to be done. No discussion. (Interview 1: 165–167)

Lacking the knowledge that the community members expected to be included as a part of this small school community, Suzanne said she did not consider the importance of this group as part of the school organisation:

I smiled if I saw any [community members] about, but I saw no need to involve them in anything at the school. (Interview 4: 189)

When asked why she didn’t involve the community members, Suzanne stated:

Why? They didn’t have children at school so why would they be interested in what happens here? At all the schools I have taught in only staff and some parents were interested in the school. (Interview 4:191–192)

This is how I thought when I first started here. (Interview 4: 193)

Now, Suzanne thinks:

They [community members] are important. They want to be involved and they do offer lots of support. (Interview 3: 287–289)

Suzanne said the community were beginning to accept her:

I think I am being accepted because I changed from doing most of the talking to becoming a listener; I consult before changing; I lent positive support for a major annual social tennis function; and I implemented school open days, which offered opportunities for me to communicate my beliefs, and provided opportunities for parents to discuss their educational beliefs. (Interview 4:65–69)

The school open days proved to be well received and started positive communications between the parents and myself. (Interview 4: 21–22)

Suzanne indicated she started to join local organisations by becoming an active member of the tennis club (community members play one evening a week), which provided opportunities to discover the community’s expectations for her as the teaching principal. Suzanne learnt that the wider community expected a great deal from ‘their principal’ and, by her action of ‘storming in’ with all her ideas and not
including everyone in the process of change, she had misunderstood her role as a teaching principal. The community had expectations of her as ‘their principal’:

I had no idea that the whole community saw the school as ‘theirs’ and I had to ‘fit in’ as the principal. By not joining any of the sporting or cultural groups when I first arrived and by not including them in my decision-making I had ‘broken’ unwritten laws so to speak. I didn’t know this school was so embedded in the community. I just saw it as the school for the local children just as it is everywhere else. (Interview 4: 339–344)

Asked what she was implying, Suzanne said:

This may sound odd but the school and the community is as one. What happens here affects the community and vice versa. (Interview 4: 347–348)

At the other schools I have taught in, the staff and to some degree the parents were involved in the school, not everyone else. They have their own lives to lead and the school is of no interest to them. But here the school is an important part of the community—I see that now. (Interview 4: 351–352)

I asked Suzanne what else she had done to become part of this community:

When the school bus driver is not available, I volunteer to drive—this gives me a chance to chat casually with parents and community members along the route. I also have a better understanding of where they live, and who lives on the properties, and they see me out and about. (Interview 4: 540)

Also the show committee in the nearby town invited me to judge show work. I met many of the residents at the show and they liked my judging, so that has contributed to my growing respect and becoming a valued member of the community. (Interview 4: 561–562)

It appeared that Suzanne’s change of approach was appreciated by everyone in the community because Suzanne said:

I think all this has started the process of my understanding the position that the school holds within the community—not a separate identity but a part of the community. The staff, the parents and others stop and chat to me about their community now and the hopes they have to improve the services here. (Interview 4: 571–573)

I asked Suzanne that, if she had changed her relational approach, what else has happened as a result.
My leadership of the school. I can now suggest changes and I can see that the community members are agreeing with my suggestion because they are good ideas, not because I am the principal.

(Interview 4: 357–358)

Now I hear community members refer to me as “our principal” but this was not until well into this year. I didn’t understand all this at first. (Interview 4: 360–361)

**Leadership practice as understood by Suzanne**

Suzanne described the factor influencing her leadership was her approach to the task. Following alteration to her approach, Suzanne indicates that the relational factor, that is, relationships between herself and the community, is an influential factor upon teaching principal leadership.

At first, her commitment and zest for the job was overpowering. Suzanne describes her leadership during her first months as:

> Domineering, I was a bully. I decided and told everyone else to follow. (Interview 4: 201)

Staff and parents expressed dissatisfaction with the school by the end of Suzanne’s first year (Case study E, Appendix D). The reason, Suzanne admitted:

> I had many ideas that had been bottled up for years about how I would run a school of my own, so in the first year of my principalship, I began planning and implementing all my ideas without considering the values, ideas and attitudes held by the staff and parents, and the context of the school. (Interview 1: 189–191)

A consequence of this approach was that four families became unhappy with the changed emphasis at the school and chose to leave:

> Children started to be removed from the school—two families enrolled in Distance Education and two families who lived almost equal distance between this school and another enrolled at the other school. (Interview 1: 206–208)

> Proposed Year Ones for next year were withdrawn from the books so no new students were expected at the beginning of the coming year. (Interview 1: 209–210)

Suzanne said that, as she started her third year at the school, relationships with parents and members of the community were well on the mend. The school population had increased, and P and C meetings were attended by all school families, by the part-time staff and by many community members. Suzanne said she had improved her ability to
articulate her beliefs and her visions for the school. The consequence of these improved relationships was improved learning and teaching practice, increased involvement in decision-making and the beginnings of a shared school vision that allowed for collaboration between all interested parties.

Suzanne wanted to make it clear that:

> The understanding of how my school actions affect the whole community. The school is such an important element of the whole community. How I lead the school affects everyone. The school is just one part of the whole picture, interwoven with all the other parts of this community. (Interview 4: 223–225)

> The consequences of my change of action resulted in my leadership, which was domineering at the beginning, to become personalised, valuing and working along with others—students, staff and all community members not just the parents. I wonder if I was even leading in the beginning. (Interview 4: 372–374)

Suzanne added:

> Relationships facilitate leadership because there was nothing ‘wrong’ with my educational changes, but it was the ‘way’ I approached the task—everyone felt left out and not valued. Also the community members expected to be involved and I didn’t include them. (Interview 4: 370–373)

> I saw teaching principal leadership in the beginning as making educational decisions that would improve student learning. Now I see teaching principal leadership as putting the understanding of others and the understanding of past happenings of the school first. I see myself as a facilitator with educational knowledge that the staff and community members do not possess. But this knowledge needs to be fashioned to ‘fit’ the needs of the school and the expectation of the community. (Interview 4: 401–406)

Suzanne said her school has defined and promoted an image of close familial style relations among all school community members, while offering a mixture of educationally traditional and progressive teaching methods that was consistent with the predominately conservative attitudes articulated by members of the school community. Interestingly:

> Staff and community members are just now starting to come to me for ideas and with questions that will improve student learning. That is school leadership I think. It is a sharing of ideas. I have changed so much. (Interview 4: 412–414)
Professional

Suzanne had no prior experience as a school leader, and had not made any attempts to join any professional leadership organisations or networks. Suzanne has benefited from the professional guidance offered by the Executive Director of Schools. Suzanne has no immediate plans to leave State School E.

5.3.6 State School F and Bill, the teaching principal

Contextual overview

Local context: State Primary School F was built during the late 1960s to educate the children living on sheep properties in a very isolated rural area of Queensland, over 670 km west of the state capital, Brisbane. The school is 117 km from the closest town, which has a population of 19, a corner store, a post office, a church and a hotel. The closest regional centre with medical services, petrol station and general shopping facilities is a further 90 km beyond the town. The closest homestead to the school is 11 km away. Unsealed roads, which often become impassable after heavy rains, connect all properties and the small local town. Mail is delivered to the school twice a week.

School buildings: In recent years the school building has been extended to three rooms. These rooms are the classroom, a combined library and staffroom, and a storage room for art supplies, stationery and cleaning chemicals. The storage room is kept locked at all times. The building is concreted underneath and a path leads to the front gate and to the two small toilet buildings. Other school structures include an excellent multipurpose tennis court with lights, and a clay-pigeon shooting shed. Both the tennis court and the clay-target shed were built with community and local government monies. Garden beds have been developed and native trees planted along the fence facing the road. A small area of lawn is maintained while the remaining land is covered in native grasses.

The classroom: The classroom appears quite cluttered with tables, chairs, bookshelves and eight computers. The 16 students appear cramped and the principal has difficulty moving about the room to assist individual students. The teacher’s aide often works with the Year 1 and 2 children and she takes them out on to the veranda or into the
office so that they have a little more room. Few educational displays or pieces of children’s work are exhibited.

Principal’s residence: Up until the mid 1970s, the principal was accommodated by property owners in their homes. Then the employing body built a two-roomed house with a curtain as a room partition around the bed. Teaching staff voiced dissatisfaction but the building was not upgraded until the late 1980s when the present small two-bedroom house was constructed. This house is lowset with a carport, and is located right beside the main unsealed road with no screening for privacy.

School community: The school community consists solely of Anglo-Australians. During the past fifteen years, Education Queensland has recorded a number of disturbing events relating to State Primary School F. Several teaching principals posted to the school were unable to cope with the isolation, suffered mental breakdowns and were removed from the school. On six other occasions, the community created an untenable environment for the principals, who requested transfers to other schools as classroom teachers (This position was constructed from data I obtained during a previous consultancy with Education Queensland (Education Queensland, 2002b)). Education Queensland officers did not inform the new teaching principal of these situations.

The school community consists of seven families who have sent their children to State Primary School F for two generations and think of the school as ‘their’ school. They have exerted much pressure upon the teaching principals, even when they do not have children attending the school at the time (Education Queensland, 2002b).

Economic status: Due to the downturn in the wool industry during the 1980s, many of the property owners turned to beef production, but this industry also suffered downturns. In the past, all properties could offer full-time employment to at least one worker family, but in recent times this has not been possible. At busy times, casual workers are now employed from the surrounding townships (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004). For this reason the population of the district has greatly reduced over the past two decades. Incomes have declined and although homes are well maintained, no new homes have been built in the district for over 20 years. According to Bill, only the property owners have Internet access and few enjoy annual Christmas vacations.
Student population: During the first two decades of the life of this school, student numbers were in the 20s and 30s. More recently the numbers have dropped to as low as three, and on at least three occasions the school has been threatened with closure. During 2002 there was an increase in enrolment to 16, with all year levels represented. The reason for this increase was the presence of the next generation of the original families—sons or daughters raising their young families on their parents’ properties. Over the past five years there has been a very active playgroup operating from the school, but the numbers in the playgroup were expected to dwindle to nil by 2007.

Staffing: State Primary School F is staffed by a full-time teaching principal who is in his first year in this position. There is one teacher’s aide who works one day a week and has been at the school for five years. The administrative assistant works one day a week and has worked at the school for many years. The cleaner (three hours a week) and the grounds person (four hours a week) have been with the school for four years. A relief teacher can be employed once a week relieving the teaching principal from full-time classroom duties for that day. Once a week for one hour, the children learn Japanese via a conference telephone link-up with their Languages Other Than English (LOTE) teacher stationed 150 km away at a much larger state school. Once a term this teacher visits the school for a day so the Year 5, 6 and 7 students can work face-to-face with her. There is a music specialist who visits for ¾ hr each week. She is a local property owner. There are no other visiting teachers.

Background of case Study School F: The school’s records held by Education Queensland detail the requested transfer of all the appointed principals over the past ten years (Education Queensland, 2002b). (These documents are not public documents, but were made accessible to me as was I employed by Education Queensland as a consultant within the research area of leadership sustainability.) Six teachers had been appointed to State Primary School F over this period. Of these six, four had requested a return to classroom duties in larger schools, one had sought a teaching exchange in England and one had resigned. All six did not complete their expected time (three years) as teaching principal at the school. Education Queensland encourage their staff to spend three years at their first teaching principal post before seeking a promotion as principal of a larger school.
Education Queensland records showed that all six teaching principals had stated that their main reasons for leaving State Primary School F was the school community and the isolation. The members of the school community, according to the previous principals, had appeared welcoming at the start but soon demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the principal’s performance by failing to cooperate, interfering with the process of teaching and on three occasions removing goods from the school. Interference included: ‘wanting their own way’ regarding classroom instruction; unwillingness to agree or even enter into discussions about spending P and C funds on new resources such as Arts programs, a music specialist or technology; and directing employment decisions. Goods removed included library books, a school printer and paper supplies. Two principals also reported interference at their school residence including removal of the rainwater from the residential tank; leaving the yard gate open allowing beef cattle into the house yard; and the presence of strange lights at night flashing into the residence (Education Queensland, 2002b).

**Bill—the teaching principal**

Bill, single and in his late twenties, is an Anglo-Australian who had four years of classroom experience before accepting this, his first teaching principalship. Bill’s teaching experience was in a large regional semi-rural school 95 km south-west of Brisbane, hence he has had no professional experience of remote rural settings. One visit to a rural property during his high school years was his only personal experience of rural life. Classroom experience involved two years with composite classes and two years with single grade classes. Bill enjoys teaching and his previous principal suggested he apply for a teaching principal position. Bill is currently completing his first year as teaching principal and intends to apply for a transfer to a larger school as principal at the completion of his third year.

*Preparation for the teaching principal position:* Bill has not attended an induction workshop, is not a member of a network of principals, and is not part of the mentor system Education Queensland developed to pair beginning principals with experienced principals.

*Gaining local community knowledge:* All public social functions (cricket, tennis, barbecues) are held at the school and Bill's present is required to unlock and secure the premises. These functions Bill said, provides him with opportunities to gather an
understanding of the beliefs and values held by the community members. Their value of sport and a traditional schooling approach appeared to Bill to be their preferred schooling for their children and he said he gathered this impression during conversations held at the community functions. He was able to observe the roles and influences of various community members and hence increase his understanding of how decisions were arrived at in this community. Bill said he come to an understanding that the community members had a strong need for their children to succeed at the local exhibitions (local agricultural shows and Queensland Country Women's Association) and would go to all lengths to ensure this success.

**Educational influences**

Bill indicated that his educational practice is influenced by a number of personally held beliefs and values characterised by acceptance of individual differences:

> Every child should have equal opportunities to reach his/her potential, every child should be guided towards high technology skills, every child should be given opportunities to develop independence, as individuals and creative thinking skills.  

(Interview 1: 156–158)

These beliefs, Bill said, had driven his planning and choice of study topics during his past four years as classroom teacher. He said he had hoped to provide learning experiences for the children at State School F that would reflect these beliefs. Asked to expand upon these beliefs, Bill added:

> Technology is the future. I believe that primary aged students should be exposed to computers, digital aids such as cameras etc and should spend a lot of time creating, designing and planning. The process is so important, not the product. Teaching thinking and how they learn. Each child learns differently and I believe if we learn together, the child learns to accept each other and what they can do.  

(Interview 1: 163–167)

Bill also said his belief that a child-centred curriculum would facilitate the development of social and cooperative skills. A child-centred multi-age classroom allows everyone to learn at their own pace and . . .

> . . . there is much to do in a multi-age classroom so if the children can become involved in their own learning, I believe the processes of thinking, working together in a team and developing independence increases. I want to give choices and encourage students to try things they haven’t tried before—to develop as
individuals. Open-ended tasks challenge everyone. This creates a child-centred class. (Interview 1: 265–270)

Bill said he had looked forward to his teaching principalship:

When I found out I had a teaching principal position, I became all excited because here was an opportunity for me to put all my beliefs into practice. I started planning immediately, especially in the technology areas. (Interview 1: 56–58)

Bill indicated that this posting seemed to be ideal; an environment where children enjoy themselves while they work and learn together. But Bill stated that the parents of State School F had other educational beliefs and purposes for schooling:

I found that the educational beliefs held by the school community did not agree with mine. At my third P and C meeting, I was informed how the school always wins all the ‘schoolwork’ sections at the local show. How they expected the school to continue to win. Last year they clean-swept some sections. (Interview 1: 286–289)

I hate public displays of schoolwork. It takes so much effort and this community wants their children to win. I find this very stressful because it is against my teaching philosophy. So great, I have to pretend to the students, they are doing the right thing. So wrong! The parents did a lot of the children’s work. No wonder they win. (Interview 1: 293–296)

Regardless of learning styles and individual preferences for study topics, Bill said this approach to show work was against his teaching philosophy: teaching students that product is more important than process. But he said he agreed with the wishes of the school community because:

I had heard from one of the other principals in another one-teacher school that you must do as the community says in nearly everything otherwise they will push you out. The principal here before me was very ill and was up against the wall and at loggerheads with the parents. He could not cope and asked to be transferred. (Interview 2: 59–63)

Bill detailed other areas where his and the parents’ beliefs differed. These included parenting patterns, and curriculum innovations such as technology and the use of computers:

I sent a message home to parents asking them to ensure their children all have a good night’s sleep during the week. Some of the children go out roo [kangaroo] shooting each night and go to bed at all hours. They are so tired at school. Some sleep at school. (Interview 1: 71–73)
I value technology, but the parents are so negative towards any changes to the curriculum to include technology. (Interview 1: 96)

The differences between the community’s beliefs and Bill’s proved to be insurmountable: either Bill or the parents had to capitulate. Bill said he did agree to do the show work, and he did not pursue any new changes.

When asked why he acted in this fashion, Bill said:

I wanted to keep this position. I didn’t want to rock the boat.  
(Interview 3: 10)

I asked what he was implying and Bill stated:

As I said before, I heard this community pressures teaching principals to leave if the principal doesn’t fulfil the desires of the parents. I didn’t want this to happen. (Interview 3: 15–16)

**Managerial influences**

To facilitate school management, Bill said he obtained many of the school documents and policies before taking up the post. He said he was particularly interested in the staff procedural documents:

I asked the part-time staff for their work programs, hours, preferred work days etc. (Interview 3: 35)

In seeking clarification of why Bill requested work details from the staff, he said:

I had reviewed the part-time staff hours and indicated to the teacher’s aide she should come to school on a different day to the administrative assistant, but she said she did not wish to alter her day. They gossip most of the day. If they came on separate days more work would be achieved. But they said they could not change their day. (Interview 3: 51–54)

As the staff’s response was negative, Bill said he decided not to proceed with his changes. In explaining why he indicated:

I thought at first I could make the suggestion again in a few weeks, but after the technology incident with the parents I chose not to follow through with any staff changes. (Interview 3: 61–62)

I asked what was the technology incident.

At the first P and C meeting, I suggested funds be made available for the employment of a local technology person to visit the school and work with students on a weekly basis. From previous parent
feedback documents, technology was recorded low on their [parents] preferred study topics. The P and C members voted against the suggestion and indicated to me that they had no interest in considering the idea again. Again, the body language was so negative. I didn’t understand. I had never experienced this before. (Interview 3: 134–140)

The attitude of the part-time staff and parents made him feel uneasy, Bill said, which prompted him to obtain background information about the school and the community from Education Queensland. Bill learnt that all six teaching principals prior to his appointment had sought transfer before the completion of their three-year appointments. The school community had a history of pressuring teaching principals until they requested a transfer. Education Queensland officers had not disclosed the school’s history until requested. This meant Bill arrived at the school unaware and unprepared. Bill said his previous school experiences involved teachers, parents and the principal working together. He said he assumed the same conditions would exist at State Primary School F, hence he presumed he could implement many procedures that were successful at past schools:

I really liked the way my past principals handled staff. Some of the parents, not many, but some were involved in the school decision-making process so I planned to involve them. I thought I could include the parents in the planning at my new school. Being such a small school, I thought I might be able to include all parents. (Interview 4: 31–35)

But it is different here; the staff and parents do not want to work with me. (Interview 4: 36)

Bill said he was determined to last the expected three years. He elected to ‘hang in there’ and survive as best he could in the hope of a more favourable principalship position in the future:

Let sleeping dogs lie and I backed off from making any more suggestions to the staff and the parents. (Interview 4: 100–101)

Bill said he was unwilling to negotiate with the parents on matters such as new curriculum ideas and beliefs about teaching and learning. When asked why he had taken this approach, Bill said:

I want a promotion and I heard that the school community had influenced the promotion chances of past teaching principals at that school. I am happy to accept things as they are and to patiently wait until my three years are completed. (Interview 1: 24–26)
I had hoped to guide the parents to assist with improved educational outcomes of their children but if I tried to do this, I would risk offending members of the school community, who might then complain to Education Queensland. (Interview 1: 39–41)

The parents tell me what they want me to do and I have decided to fulfil these. (Interview 2: 361-361).

Bill was asked ‘How do you run your school?’

All I do is organise and run this school, all forms are completed, reports are written and I teach the required curriculum. I just do as I am told by the parents and fulfil all the expectations of Education Queensland. (Interview 4: 291–293)

I asked Bill if he had known of the school community’s approach before he started here, would he have approached things differently.

Yes, I think so . . . . I would have tried to find out what they wanted first but I didn’t expect that the school community would be against me from the start. This was a total surprise. I just thought good ideas from other schools would work here. (Interview 4: 302–304)

Relational influences

As a result of the perceived lack of cooperation, Bill was asked if he had requested assistance from Education Queensland officers or fellow colleagues:

I can’t risk other people finding out what is happening in the school in case they think I am not suitable for promotion. I am lying low in the hope that the three years would pass without incident and Education Queensland records will show a successful completion of my term at this posting. (Interview 4: 354–356)

Bill was asked if he had joined any of the local sporting and social groups:

All sporting events are held here at school. I have to be present to unlock and lock up. So yes, I do join in with tennis and cricket. I am quite good at sport. (Interview 2: 139–140)

Socially, most of the young fellows in this district meet on the road and make a fire and drink around for hours. I don’t join in. (Interview 2: 146–147)

When asked if he had made friends at the sporting events, Bill replied:

No, the parents use it as opportunities to tell me what they want from the school. It is horrible, I dread the days. I play the sport and often I go home for lunch if I can, so I am not around for them to bail me up. (Interview 2: 175–177)
Certain parents take every opportunity to try to push their agenda and this puts me under a lot of pressure. (Interview 2: 180–181)

Over the past 12 months I have been keeping a list of what the parents want by my bed so that I can survive my time here. It is as simple as that. (Interview 2: 185–186)

Bill discussed the lost opportunities because he thought, by having all the community activities based at the school, he would be in a position to work along with the parents and create a learning partnership but:

I tried to copy his [Bill’s immediate past principal] positive approaches to sharing ideas and asking parents and staff for ideas, but this school is so different. The parents here just want to tell me what I should be doing. (Interview 2: 241–243)

I asked Bill about friends—did he have any friends out here?

No. Whenever I can, I head east and meet up with my girlfriend. I get away on weekends as often as possible. I am out of here as soon as Friday school finishes. (Interview 3: 171–172)

Bill has not indicated, in any way, that he wishes to alter the overall resultant negative situation. When asked if he had tried forming a working partnership with the parents and staff Bill said:

I don’t want to work closely with these parents. I am sure I will come out for the worse. And the staff, they just use this place for gossip. Honestly, on the day they are here, I have my lunch downstairs with the children. The children are good to be with. (Interview 3: 196–198)

I asked what he was implying:

There is a negative feeling towards me. I just feel uncomfortable all the time and I have in the back of my mind what happened to the past principals. (Interview 3: 204–205)

Leadership practice as understood by Bill

Bill discussed his preferred approach to leadership which, according to him, was the approach used by the principal at his previous school:

I would prefer to develop a ‘working together’ partnership with staff and parents. I have visualised sitting down and discussing the future aims of the school and how we can improve the student’s results. And then when all is in place, maybe even review school policies with staff and parents. But, this has not happened. (Interview 4: 86–89)
Asked why he made no attempt to develop these collaborative partnerships, Bill replied:

I have done all the things the parents said they wanted—entered school work in the local shows and we did well. I haven’t asked for budget changes re the technology and so on. I have done all that. But their body language and general approach to me was still negative. (Interview 4: 25–127)

I am beginning to think they dislike me. I know I prefer the school days when I am alone with the children. I just hope I can last here long enough [complete his three years]. (Interview 4: 131–132)

The consequence of Bill’s ‘let sleeping dogs lie’ approach for his principalship has been the relative absence of examples of leadership (Case study E, Appendix D). He says he has made no attempt to provide opportunities for capacity building in this small remote rural setting.

**Professional influences**

Bill appeared to be relaxed discussing these matters. I put the question ‘You seem very open telling me about your practice, but you said you were unable to discuss this with colleagues. Why?’ Bill said quickly:

You have no influence on my future promotion so I feel I can answer your questions freely. Actually I am finding this a valuable debriefing experience. (Interview 4: 426–427)

You know, there is no-one to talk to who does not have an influence upon my career. (Interview 4: 439)

As previously stated in the section titled ‘Preparation for the teaching principal position’, Bill indicated he had no leadership training before making the move from classroom teacher to teaching principal. Bill was asked if he had recently engaged in any professional training or accepted professional support:

I am now surviving my second year here. No, I have not joined any principal networks, cluster groups, or enrolled in any university leadership studies. My aim is to survive. At the end of this year I am going to apply for a promotion and cross fingers one comes available by the end of my third year. That is all I am considering at present. (Interview 4: 456–459)
5.4 Chapter conclusion

The stories of six teaching principals have been presented in this chapter. The influences on leadership were captured using interview excerpts assembled under the seven subheadings agreed by all study participants. Teaching principals’ perceptions about themselves as leaders related to their confidence and the difficulties experienced within their school context. They described how important it was for them to understand the expectations of the employing body (Education Queensland) and the expectations of the local community. Their lack of prior knowledge of the teaching principal position, and a lack of guidance as to where to source this knowledge, contributed to the difficulties they experienced in assuming a leadership role.

All teaching principals recognised that their actions were influenced by the context in which they work. Several did not recognise the need to address these contextual particularities until some months after starting at their post. Some expressed frustration with the teaching principal role as defined by the local community when it did not correspond with their own perception of the role. The teaching principals recalled what they perceived had helped them to assume a leadership role, where they felt they had achieved, and where their expectations were not realised.

They identified four major factors they believed contributed to their development as leaders. First, there was the ‘official’ role explication gained formally from the employing body’s directives. Second, there was the ‘unofficial’ clarification gathered from professional support networks such as teaching principals located in similar contextual settings. Third, there was the ‘contextual’ role informally gained from community expectations. At times these expectations were withheld from the beginning teaching principal, while in other cases the community made clear demands upon the principal which, if not accepted, inhibited his/her acceptance by the community. Finally, teaching principals identified relational aspects as a factor in helping them connect with community members and colleagues. Their acceptance and ability to develop positive relationships with not only the students, staff and parents but also with the members of the broader community enabled or restricted their leadership. A number of the participants indicated that their knowledge of the importance of relationship building as an influence upon leadership was limited, but
after time in the position, they began to realise how important this factor was to success.

The leadership of the teaching principals was in evidence in most stories. A number of features of leadership can be extracted as a means of establishing what leadership by a teaching principal encompasses. There appears to be evidence suggesting leadership starts when the teaching principal convinces parents, staff and community members to adopt programs that are unfamiliar to them. These new ideas and at times, values, must be accepted by the school community and it is the actions of the principal that ensure acceptance. But new ideas and values must focus upon matters that are important to the local community, of which the school is a part. The participants of the study have recognised that a school, embedded within its community, embraces the importance of the care and understanding of all individuals. The leadership of teaching principals provides a sense of importance, vision and purpose for the dreams held by all community members. Teaching principal leadership appears to bond together students, staff, parents and the local community as participants, all assisting to enhance the work of the school.

Although all participants were beginning teaching principals at their first post, the stories illustrated similarities in perceived outcomes. It is these commonalities and differences between the stories that are explored in the next chapter. Their individual stories are revisited using a cross case analysis to determine factors influencing leadership success.
CHAPTER 6
CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

6.0 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to rework the stories recounted in Chapter 5 in an analysis of commonalities and differences, in particular, the way in which the stories illuminate factors and consequences that contribute to teaching principal leadership. As Glesne (1999, p. 69) explains:

The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry. To this opportunity, add the serendipitous learnings that emerge from the unexpected turns in discourse that your questions evoke.

Chapter 5 presented individual stories utilising five thematic categories to capture teaching principal leadership as perceived by this group of principals—educational, managerial, professional, relational and leadership practice. This chapter draws together case study data to address the research questions central to the study:

- Do teaching principals see leadership as an important aspect of their role? If so, how and why?
- What factors do teaching principals say influence their leadership practice?
- What do teaching principals say are the consequences of these factors on their leadership?
- Do some teaching principals see themselves as thriving in their positions while others see themselves as having difficulties?
- Do teaching principals ascribe their success or difficulty to their leadership and if so, what aspects do they think are important?

The cross case analysis presented in this chapter examines the similarities and differences between the six teaching principals, focusing on what they perceive about teaching principal leadership. The research questions are discussed in turn, citing evidence from the interviews. The discussion and findings from this chapter are used in the final chapter to address the focus of the research: Why do some teaching principals thrive while others falter?
6.1 Do teaching principals see leadership as an important aspect of their role? If so, how and why?

Alice initially did not consider leadership as an important element of her role. 'I just did what the Administrative Assistant told me to do. I was busy teaching and cleaning' (Interview 4: 491-492). It was not until after discussions with the Executive Director of Schools did she begin to consider the possibilities of leadership. Alice stated, 'I am learning about leadership, but I have to work out how to make the ideas the Executive Director of Schools is talking about, work in this local community. As I said, there is more to just doing what books say, it is about links with the individual community members—connections with their lives. The school is deep-rooted within this local community' (Interview 4: 239-242). ‘... sharing of new ideas and plans for future changes, and having them accepted by everyone [staff and the P and C members] for improved outcomes for all the children’ (Interview 4: 621–622).

Margaret however, demonstrated leadership practice through her approach to the confidentiality issue. Margaret began strategic planning before starting in the position. 'I needed to act, put a plan into place so I could begin to direct students and staff towards the best action. I had to lead' (Interview 4: 217-218). Margaret said, 'Working with everyone [students, staff, parents and all other members of the community] to achieve an improved future for the children which in the long run improves the community as a whole. I have to be able to introduce new ideas and values and have them accepted' (Interview 4: 411–413). 'Leadership is definitely parts of a teaching principalship' (Interview 4: 416).

Chris maintained the status quo until he felt he understood the history of school procedures and he had begun to establish rapport with the staff, students and parents. 'I assured staff everything was to remain the same' (Interview 4: 523-524). 'After listening and learning, I began to understand this "school" and began to formulate ideas for future changes and directions. I belief this is what a teaching principal should do as a leader—learn first about the context, the people' (Interview 4: 531-533). 'Leadership is important because there are so many changes being directed to school, the principal has to sort these out and link possible steps with the needs of the people, everyone in the community' (Interview 4: 401-403). He added, 'I think, looking back over my time here, my leadership really began once I was accepted by the whole
community and I was able to introduce ideas, and have them accepted, that the staff, parents and others had not thought of themselves’ (Interview 4: 731–733).

Janet, placed into a school as teaching principal after one year in the classroom, indicated she was still coming to terms with the requirements of a teacher. She was more than happy to maintain the status quo until she began to feel comfortable as an effective teacher. ‘I was so excited about this new position because I wanted to be a good teacher’ (Interview 4: 688-689) ‘But I soon discovered to be a good teacher was not enough, a teaching principal needs to assess educational policy changes and the implications in accord with local beliefs and values. There is no-one else to do this, the teacher principal has to lead, that is my role’ (Interview 4: 693-696). Janet described a partnership between herself and the community. ‘We work together with two aims—to improve children and community outcomes. I think the parents and community members look for my educational ideas because I do have current educational knowledge and know the current trends, but together we decide which trend fits our vision and adapt to suit our children’ (Interview 4: 137–141).

Bill and Suzanne said they both thought leadership was important and their initial approach was to impose their ideas upon the school community. Bill: ‘At my past school the principal had such good ideas; I wanted to put those in practice at "my" school. That was leadership I thought’ (Interview 4: 510-511). Suzanne: ‘I had to lead this school and I have all the right ideas. But I soon learnt having ideas was not enough. As a teaching principal who leads, you must link community needs with good educational policy’ (Interview 4: 678-672).

Participants described teaching principal leadership as moving the school beyond its present position, however satisfactory it might appear to be to the community. The participants described the process of teaching principal leadership as sharing visions with the aim of deciding upon future directions for the school. Everyone in the community is included. It appears that the outcomes reached reflect the context and decisions are made collectively, not by a committee or by a single person, yet under the guidance of the teaching principal. How it is achieved and why different methods were taken will be analysed in the following sections of this chapter.
6.2 What factors do teaching principals say influence their leadership practice? What are the consequences of these factors upon leadership?

During the interviews, the principals referred to factors influencing their school leadership. All participants indicated that school leadership does not come automatically with the position, but is facilitated through the interrelationship of the following factors:

- understanding the ‘place’ of the school within the local context (‘place’ refers to the niche the school fills within the local community structure);
- being sensitive to the expectations and needs of the local community;
- building relationships amongst students, staff, parents and the broader community members;
- developing trust through the demonstration of competent teaching skills and knowledge;
- articulating their pre-conceived image of teaching principal leadership at the beginning of their appointment; and
- accessing professional knowledge that enhances practice.

Inhibiting factors included: managerial tasks dominating time; a mismatch between the pre-conceived understanding of the teaching principal leadership task held by the beginning teaching principal and the local community; lack of multi-age teaching knowledge; and the teaching principal’s understanding of his/her community role being different from the community’s expectations.

6.2.1 Understanding the school's ‘place’ in the community and acting accordingly

All participants articulated the importance of understanding the ‘place’ of their school within the local community. The school is one part of the community within which it is embedded.

Suzanne, for example, used the word ‘interwoven’ to describe her perception of the structural composition of her community. ‘The school is just one part of the whole picture, interwoven with all the other parts of this community’ (Interview 4: 223–225). ‘The school is not the centre of this community. All parts—the school, the rural
properties with owner and worker homes—are all parts’ (Interview 4: 408–409). Suzanne said ‘I know this now, but I didn’t when I first started here and began making changes without consultation or consideration of the context’ (Interview 4: 410–411).

There was consensus between all principals regarding the ‘place’ of the school within the community and the subsequent influence upon their leadership. Margaret, for example, said, ‘I think the sense of place is very important. Everyone here sees the school as just a facet of their community—it is important—but so is Murphy’s property for example because it has a swimming pool and so on’ (Interview 4: 679–680). Chris used the words, ‘The school is embedded within the local community—understanding this is essential’ (Interview 4: 590–591). Janet said ‘. . . [the school] is just one of the many parts that contribute to the unique character of my community. The ideas and values held by the community members for the school, all contribute to the place this school holds within the community’ (Interview 4: 528–530).

The participants indicated that a teaching principal must understand the ‘place’ of his/her school in the remote rural setting before he/she can begin to understand his/her role as a possible school leader. Chris stated, ‘I had much to learn about this community, their worries, their dreams, their values and how the school fits into this community, before I was able to begin any type of leadership role’. (Interview 4: 560–562). Bill said, ‘This school is just a part of this community, everyone is involved ensuring the school fulfils the directions they have determined for it' (Interview 4: 390-391).

It appears that the understanding and acceptance of the ‘place’ that a school holds within its community influences the likelihood of a principal assuming a leadership role. The school appears to be one part of the whole in contrast to the converse where it may be seen either as having little to do with the community at large, or as the centre of the community. A misunderstanding of the ‘place’ of the school as conceived by the community appears to impede the leadership role sought by the principal.
6.2.2 Sensitivity to the expectations and needs of local community members

Linked with understanding the ‘place’ of the school is an understanding of the expectations held by the local community for the school and hence of the teaching principal. The participants described a number of factors: encompassing the awareness of, and incorporation of the dreams, ideas and aspirations held by the community for ‘their children’; understanding the role expected of the teaching principal, as teacher, school leader and/or community leader; and relating and being sensitive to the educational beliefs and values held by the community. It appears, on the surface, that connecting with the educational beliefs and values of the community and linking these with the educational knowledge of the principal, demonstrates a genuine affiliation with the locals. Chris said, ‘A team effort enables success, a partnership with parents and community improves student learning’ (Interview 3: 55). Margaret agreed, ‘This does not mean only utilising local values and beliefs but looking for ways to incorporate these into my understanding of current best teaching practice and enhancing student learning outcomes’ (Interview 4: 569–571). If a teaching principal demonstrates an understanding and acceptance of ‘. . . local ways, desires, ideas and values’ (Janet, Interview 4: 560), then ‘The community is behind you and you can begin to suggest and make things happen to improve schooling and the community’ (Janet, Interview 4: 599). Both Bill and Suzanne described their conflict with community expectations, which resulted in community support being withdrawn from their schools for a period of time.

A community with pre-determined expectations for the school and the principal appears to place pressure upon a beginning principal, and a disregard of this phenomenon creates conflict between community and principal. Sensitivity to the expectations, values and ideas of local community members appears to be rather complex for a beginning teaching principal to grasp, but it nevertheless appears to be a strong factor influencing leadership possibilities. If this matter is not understood and addressed promptly, it seems to preclude a leadership role.

Margaret used the term ‘contextual sensitivity’ (Interview 4: 691) which seems to clearly encapsulate this factor: respect for the expectations of the local community.
6.2.3 Relationship building between students, staff, parents and community members

By building positive relationships, the incoming teaching principal appears enabled to move from the status of an ‘outsider’ to becoming accepted as a member of the community, which in turn seems to facilitate leadership possibilities. Chris and Margaret revealed the importance of creating personal networks within the community so as to learn more about it and gain acceptance within it. Chris said ‘knowing as much as possible about this community and the people who live here, allowed me to get to know them and to form friendships and become accepted as “their” principal’ (Interview 2: 456–457). Margaret indicated that these friendships enabled her to ‘. . . build relationships which allowed me to work together with community members in a positive way so as to improve school outcomes’ (Interview 4: 671–672). Positive relationship building between the community and the principal appears to create community acceptance and pave the way for leadership possibilities.

In addition, these relationships made it possible to ‘spread the news as the teaching principal sees a situation’ (Chris, Interview 3: 490). This acted as a buffer against gossip and misconceptions. ‘My new local friends were most handy—they told me lots about community members and I could chat to them about local events, happenings and beliefs. I could also explain my actions and beliefs as well’ (Janet, Interview 2: 490–492).

Bill’s educational beliefs were in conflict with those of the community and, according to him, ‘. . . this situation did not make it easy to make friends or develop positive relations with any locals’ (Interview 4: 501–502). When he attempted to alter existing school procedures, he encountered resistance and he said ‘I did not know anyone here well and could not explain my ideas or have them accepted’ (Interview 4: 523–524). Rather than attempting to reconcile differences through relationship building, he withdrew and accepted the status quo: ‘Let sleeping dogs lie’ (Bill, Interview 2: 487).

To sum up, the knowledge gained from the six cases examined, appears to indicate that a principal who understands, accepts, develops and nurtures relationships with all members of the school community, and additionally those of the general community, can create an environment in which leadership practice is possible. This factor of
developing, initiating and nurturing relationships appears to be a crucial prerequisite to leadership.

6.2.4 Trust development through the demonstration of competent teaching skills and knowledge

It appears that the rural communities included in the study placed high value upon learning. Having the skills and ability to manage and organise multi-age lessons was expected of the teaching principal by both the community and Education Queensland. Chris said, 'If parents see each child achieving, they begin to see the new principal as "their principal"' (Interview 2: 40-41). Participants indicated that being a competent teacher formed the basic groundwork for respect. It appears that this factor is a precursor to the acceptance of a new principal and, as such, becomes critical to the development of teaching principal leadership. Alice: 'Curriculum knowledge is very important. If you do not know all levels of the curriculum, I think staff and parents would not respect you as the teacher' (Interview 1: 140-143). As student numbers are small in these schools, multi-age teaching is a necessity. If the beginning teaching principal is struggling with numerous curriculum levels, the time available for reflective thinking, vision development and strategies is limited, hence inhibiting leadership possibilities. 'When you are able to prepare lessons well and quickly, you have time to work on the leadership of the school' (Chris Interview 2: 430-432). Margaret said, 'Time is the essence, if you can manage the multi-age classroom, you can set aside time to consider future plans' (Interview 2: 396-398).

It would appear that successful management of multi-age classrooms has two beneficial effects, one direct, and the other indirect. Being accepted as a competent teacher (by the community and Education Queensland) is the direct consequence; without such acceptance of the teaching principal's professional competence, leadership is precluded. The indirect consequence is that a well organised teaching principal who is in command of all the year-based curriculum, has more time and energy available for reflection, for developing the school vision, and for contemplating ways to have the community accept and implement that vision.
6.2.5 Preconceived understanding of teaching principal leadership held by the beginning teaching principal

The preconceived understanding of teaching principal leadership appears to influence how incumbents construe their role. Suzanne and Bill ‘saw’ themselves as the school leader with followers who would automatically comply because each was ‘the principal’. They appeared to think that, if they motivated the ‘followers’ (students, staff and parents), leadership was assured. Suzanne said: ‘I was the principal. I told the staff, students and the parents what was to be done. I took no notice of the broader community members. I just thought if I showed the way with lots of energy and enthusiasm, they would be motivated and follow along’ (Interview 3: 526–528).

Chris, Margaret and Janet, on the other hand, construed their role as a facilitator who encourages participation and cooperation between the many parties that constitute the small rural community.

At the start of their principalship, it appears that none of the participants understood the influence of the members of the community because they initially described the school community as consisting of students, staff and parents. It was not until they entered their school setting that they understood the ramifications of the involvement of all community members. The preconceived understanding of teaching principal leadership appears to be an influence upon subsequent leadership in action, because if the expectation does not align with the community’s expectation, acceptance of the new principal and hence the possibility of leadership may be hindered. If a teaching principal’s expectation changes early to accommodate the context, there appears to be the possibility of leadership. Suzanne said, ‘Now I know my initial image of a teaching principal’s role was quite different from the one this community expected. Everyone expects to be included and everyone wants to be involved in decision making. Now through positive relationship building I work along with all community members and together we decide upon the best action for the future of their children’ (Interview 3: 529–333).

Some participants (Suzanne and Bill) initially construed their role as involving a ‘command’ style of leadership, whereas the others understood that they needed to be participative. Even so, all teaching principals appear to have overlooked the importance of the wider community in school affairs.
'The wider community', for this study, as defined by the participants includes all members—school staff, parents and all other relations to the current school children, all community members—hence when participants have used words such as 'the community', 'local community', 'everyone in the community', 'the wider community', 'all community members' they are referring to all persons who participants in the local organisations, visit the school and form the social networks within the district within which the school is set.

6.2.6 Confidence in accessing professional knowledge that enhances practice

Teaching principal leadership appears to rely upon specialised knowledge and competencies that beginning principals may not possess. These can be acquired through collaborative partnerships with fellow principals and the employing body’s officers. Conversely, if a principal rejects professional contact, it appears that the cycle of events that follows does not encourage skill modification and improvement.

All participants reported their lack of knowledge of the role before taking up their post. Three participants (Chris, Margaret, Janet) reported their confidence in sourcing knowledge and assistance where they thought they were deficient. They said they were able to improve their leadership performance and their professionalism. The ability to work, removed from established personal and professional networks, requires a high degree of confidence in one’s ability. Chris and Margaret appeared to operate within the new territory comfortably through forging new professional networks. The confidence to seek these support mechanisms—asking for help and confirmation of practice—demonstrated a high degree of self-confidence. Accordingly, Margaret experienced success from the outset because she was able to discuss with her past principal (who acted as a mentor) the most appropriate approach to facilitate her leadership.

Bill, and initially Alice and Suzanne, described how they limited their interaction with teaching colleagues and attempted to work in isolation. Suzanne and Bill avoided contact with fellow professionals and Bill admitted ‘I didn’t want others to know what was happening here’ (Interview 3: 634). Furthermore, ‘I don’t want them [Education Queensland] to think I am unsuitable for the job’ (Interview 3: 478). Having sufficient confidence in one’s practice to offer it to others for review or modification appears to
help develop the skills necessary for leadership. Bill confessed that upon reflection he thought ‘I am learning very little here; just how to work from day to day without upsetting the community. My professional development is at a stand still’ (Interview 4: 792-793).

6.2.7 Managerial tasks dominating time to the detriment of leadership

All principals reported that managerial duties tended to consume all available time outside that required for teaching. Many hours during the nights and weekends could be absorbed fulfilling the management requirements of Education Queensland, and ensuring the school organisation ran smoothly ‘I could spend every waking moment making sure the school is organised’ (Chris, Interview 1: 560). ‘Simply filling in forms and organising buses, rubbish, ordering resources and so on, the list is long. I spend all my spare time making sure all these things are done for this school’ (Margaret, Interview 1: 402).

The principals clearly indicated that without effective time management and the prioritising of managerial demands, their practice would have remained centred on management, with little time for reflection and self-improvement. Janet said, ‘I am so pleased I am organised, I read the mail and do what is required. Otherwise I would waste time going back over things, I would have no time to sit back and think about improvements I could be making’ (Interview 3: 46-48). ‘I have a list of the most important things that need doing each day and next week—this helps me manage my time. Before I did this, I was using valuable time re-doing and correcting missed work’ (Alice, Interview 2: 341-343).

A focus upon management is essential to ensure all school processes and procedures are conducted correctly, but if management consumes the time available to a teaching principal, leadership possibilities are reduced. Chris said, ‘I put aside time just to future plan now, otherwise I find I am spending all my time managing this school’ (Interview 4: 691-692).
6.2.8 Community’s attitude towards the role and duties of the new teaching principal as a community member

Chris indicated he was posted to a positive community environment that provided a supportive atmosphere for his practice. ‘I am invited to attend community functions, as well as to many homes for dinner. I felt welcome right from the start’ (Chris, Interview 2: 526-527). Margaret, Suzanne, Alice and Janet also indicated their attendance was welcome at all community functions. Chris, Margaret, Alice and Janet all accepted these invitations, became active participants and consequently became valued community members. ‘I involve myself in the local tennis club activities through helping plan functions, and I think the community values me as a community member’ (Margaret, Interview 3: 491-492). Janet and Chris said their communities encouraged their involvement in local organisations and elected them to executive positions. ‘I am now the secretary of a local community group. The community encouraged me to get involved’ (Janet, Interview 3: 671-672). Alice, because of her interest in sports, initiated the formation of a touch football team which reportedly was a successful pathway to establishing connections and relations with community members. ‘This was the best thing I could have done, joined with the community in their sporting activities. We just talk and talk about many things and I feel I am making sense of this position now and am establishing a positive rapport with many of the community members’ (Interview 4: 591-593).

Suzanne, on the other hand, initially rejected her community’s offers of community involvement. This rejection led to Suzanne being held ‘at arm’s length’ by the community, which limited possibilities to establish relations with community members. It was not until Suzanne understood the importance of accepting the community’s role and duties expected of her, that opportunities arose that enabled her to understand her community and begin building relationships. ‘Things are so much better now since I have become involved in the community. Community members talk to me and listen to me’ (Interview 4: 474-476).

Both Bill and Janet said that involvement in community events was paved with ‘danger’ as some community members took the opportunity to try and extract information about school activities. Bill added that many of the community members used these occasions to put forward opinions of his actions at the school. Janet said
she handled this situation by saying ‘. . . I am wearing my community hat now, not my school hat’ (Interview 3: 687). But Bill indicated he was troubled by these confrontations and appeared to be unable to find a suitable approach to ease this pressure.

The approach the community adopts towards a teaching principal influences the ease with which a new principal settles into his/her school. All participants of the study had no or little prior experience of remote rural living. Moving into an environment where community members are small in number, and in which a neighbour could also be a parent and a part time staff member, was initially disturbing. The findings appear to suggest that community members in remote rural settings should be encouraged to accept responsibility for the task of helping the new teaching principal settle into the local community.

6.3 Do some teaching principals thrive in their positions, while others falter? If so, how and why does their approach differ?

In addressing this question, it is of relevance that three of the teaching principals described their practice as thriving, while two did not, and that particular factors gave rise to their perceptions and actions. Some of these factors have already been referred to above, but they are reconsidered (along with others) in the following paragraphs.

6.3.1 Sensitivity to the expectations and needs of the community members—contextual sensitivity

I firstly address Margaret’s term ‘contextual sensitivity’. This factor refers to the process of recognising, connecting with and accommodating community expectations. In this cross case analysis, I have isolated two major elements of contextual sensitivity: the community’s educational expectations, and the community’s preconceived view of the role of the teaching principal. It is argued that an understanding and an appreciation of these elements of contextual sensitivity contribute to a successful approach to teaching principal leadership.

Community’s educational expectations

Three of the interviewees (Margaret, Janet and Chris) sought the opinions of parents and community members, and blended locally-held educational beliefs into their school programs. The ensuing trust generated by this approach apparently allowed
these teaching principals to gradually modify past educational emphases. Margaret, Janet and Chris demonstrated a belief that educational outcomes were best achieved through consultation with all community members and, in addition, by understanding the beliefs that influenced the educational choices made by community members. Furthermore, Chris circulated surveys on a regular basis to ascertain whether the educational programs he devised were obtaining the results both he and the community expected, whereas Janet and Margaret used an informal approach of casual ‘talk’ whenever parents and community members visited their schools.

Through community support, mutual respect develops between principal and community and this appears to offer a pathway to leadership. Chris said, ‘I am valued. And I think it is the respect that has allowed me to lead this school over the past 12 months or so, and as well, lead the community through the activities of the Community Progress Association’ (Interview 4: 171–172).

The principals who did not seek community involvement reportedly encountered a negative response to their educational approaches from parents, staff and community members. Suzanne and Bill, for example, sought to impose their preferred educational programs by utilising a curriculum that had proved to be successful elsewhere, and the consequence was a mismatch between practice and the expectations of the community. After meeting resistance, Bill elected to let the local community dictate the framework for their children’s learning. The data appear to confirm that a mutual respect gained through sensitivity to educational expectations facilitates acceptance of a principal in remote rural settings. Conversely, a lack of contextual sensitivity appears to engender a lack of respect for the teaching principal that limits leadership.

The relationship between community’s and teaching principal’s expectation

Understanding the predetermined role assigned by the community to the new teaching principal proved to be another element of contextual sensitivity. Janet, in particular, described this factor noting it was not until she had determined what the community expected of her, that she was able to begin to thrive in her position. Initially, having been informed that the community expected ‘things to run as they were’ (Interview 1: 591), Janet said she acted accordingly and as a result trust developed between the community and herself. Once trust was established, Janet found she was not only able
to introduce a new curriculum approach, but more surprisingly the community expected her to undertake extramural community leadership: ‘I felt very uneasy at first, the community wanted me to run their community meetings and to act as the liaison person with outside bodies such as the telephone company and the electricity board’ (Interview 4: 517–518). Chris’s experience appears to be similar in that the community’s predetermined role for him was initially to be a good teacher, and when he proved to be a successful teacher, the community pressed him to become actively involved in community leadership roles.

Conversely, Suzanne said that her initial understanding of the teaching principal role conflicted with the role prescribed by the community. The community wished to be involved in all school decision making, but Suzanne excluded them. ‘I did not think the community had anything to do with the school so I didn’t involve them in any school communications’ (Interview 4: 551–552). Having altered her approach through an understanding of her community’s expectations of her as teaching principal, Suzanne appeared to be able to change a faltering principalship to one that afforded leadership opportunities.

Determining the expectations of the community, and being sensitive to them appears to facilitate leadership possibilities. Furthermore, it appears that for the teaching principal to thrive there needs to be a match between the role expectations of the community and the actions of the teaching principal. The role expectations include: involving community members in school decision making processes; meeting educational standards held by the local community; and becoming involved in community organisations and events.

6.3.2 Involvement in the local community

The principal’s involvement in the community indicates respect for rural lifestyles, a desire to participate in local organisations and events, and is closely linked with contextual sensitivity. I argue that the principal’s community participation can offer opportunities for relationship building with community members, though the risk of becoming too open about personal and interpersonal matters must be understood. I present an explanation of what constitutes community involvement using three
Isolation and its ramifications

Study participants had little or no experience of living in a remote rural setting and the dislocation from family, friends and their established network of colleagues in familiar territory appeared to create a number of difficult issues. These issues included making friends with local community members, being the sole occupant of a dwelling in an isolated location and adopting an appropriate code of conduct (the latter is treated separately later in this chapter).

Chris said it was important to make local friends and participate in local events. Asked if the situation was different for single males and single females entering isolated locations, he said, ‘I don’t know, maybe. As a single guy everyone was impressed with my cooking and I am asked out a lot to dinners and I feel I can go anywhere—maybe’ (Interview 4:129). While Margaret replying to the same question said: ‘Most definitely yes, I am now engaged to a local fellow but before that I had to be careful of whom I was with at community events, and how I conducted myself, and visitors’ cars had to be gone by the accepted hour. Yes, isolation and making friends for a single female has to be different from being a male—they [males] are more easily accepted and can do more things’ (Interview 4:117–118). Margaret indicated how she coped: ‘I joined community groups and attended local functions right from the start. I found friends, married couples, easily’ (Interview 2: 365).

Janet indicated that, without the company of her dog, she may have found the first year difficult. Suzanne, said, ‘I think the matter of loneliness and isolation is a big worry for single women being placed so far away from family and friends. At night, it is so quiet out here—it can be quite scary. Education Queensland Officers need to be aware of this and offer support to new teachers coming out this far’ (Interview 2: 491–492). Alice said, ‘There were no single females in the district except for my teacher aide. We became friends’ (Interview 1: 405–406). But as Alice added, ‘This was a disaster’ because the aide broke the code of conduct, Alice had to terminate the friendship, leaving Alice alone and depressed. It appears from this small sample, that some individuals are able to deal with isolation while others have difficulty managing the remoteness of the setting and may even become fearful for their safety.
Code of conduct

Alice’s solution to the isolation was to make friends with the teacher’s aide. Alice used the teacher’s aide as a sounding board and disclosed private information she had heard as principal. Some of these indiscreet comments were retold by the teacher’s aide to community members, breaching confidentiality, and resulting in a withdrawal of community support. Alice said she experienced depression and the inability to attend school some mornings once this friendship was terminated, and said she knew of other single female teaching principals in remote locations who suffered from similar mental distress.

Janet acknowledged that maintaining confidentiality was a major concern and said she handled the issue of being questioned about school, while attending a social function, by saying ‘. . . I am wearing my social hat now, not my school hat’. Bill, on the other hand, did not appear to be able to find a solution to this situation and said, ‘I don’t look forward to the social days because the community members use the occasions to ask me about how the different children were progressing and what I thought of my students. I even go home for lunch on cricket days so I am not around for the people to ask me such personal questions’ (Interview 4: 691–693).

The data appeared to suggest that all parties need to observe a strict code of practice to prevent confidentiality problems arising in isolated communities. Furthermore, there seems to be a place for the community to be sensitive to the living situation of the principal, and to respect and support him or her during social occasions.

Social interaction with the community

Participation in social events is closely linked with contextual sensitivity, according to Chris, Janet and Margaret. An understanding of the values held by community members, they said, enabled them to appreciate the structure of their community and how they might participate within this structure. Chris, Margaret and Janet became members of local sporting/social clubs, and as their involvement became known to the community they were ‘. . . looked upon as a member of the community’ (Chris, Interview 4: 451). On the other hand, Bill, Alice (until she formed the touch football teams) and initially Suzanne, elected to spend their recreational time in private
pursuits. The former group was adopted by the community as ‘their principal’, whilst
the latter remained outsiders, only recognised for their association with the school.

Suzanne and Alice described the change of their status once they became involved in
a number of community activities. Alice said, ‘My idea of initiating touch football
games really started my acceptance by this community and I was suddenly invited to
join the tennis club again and be part of the advisory committee on roads’ (Interview
4: 590–591).

The data suggest that involvement in local community events contributes to the
opportunity for the development of relationships and personal networks between
teaching principals and community members, which in turn appear to contribute to
leadership development. However, participation in local events and organisations has
inherent risks so a strict code of conduct must be observed.

6.3.3 Perception of leadership

Contextual sensitivity and involvement in the local community appear to facilitate
leadership possibilities and job satisfaction in remote rural schools. In addition, a third
factor was gleaned during the analysis: how individual teaching principals perceive
their role as leaders. Their perception of their role appears to influence how they
approached the teaching principalship. What is perceived by principals to be
appropriate/inappropriate, desirable/necessary/ideal behaviour influences how they
participate in the community, and whether they accept and accommodate the
community context. The cross-case analysis extracted three themes under this
heading: participants’ preconceived assumptions about leadership; acceptance of the
‘place’ of the school within the community structure; and the importance of
relationship building with community members. These are discussed individually.

Preconceived assumptions about leadership

Chris arrived with a mental picture of the role that had been influenced by his father’s
perspective, whereas Suzanne’s understanding of teaching principalship—‘to impose
her best practice’—was derived from information gleaned from staff room chatter in a
large urban school. Janet, on the other hand, said she had no preconceived
understanding of the role. Education Queensland invited her to apply for the position
and she said ‘. . . I was still learning how to teach. I had no idea what a teaching principal did or what was expected of me. I arrived here and was told by the parents what I was to do so I did it’ (Interview 1: 272–274). These understandings that principals carry appear to explain their initial approach to the position. It appears from the data, that teaching principals arrive with preconceived assumptions about how a small school works, what changes will improve school effectiveness and how changes are best implemented.

The approach to leadership as part of teaching principalship is noteworthy. Three (Chris, Margaret and Janet) appeared to orientate their practice to involve a ‘cooperative all-inclusive’ approach. These principals claimed success. While Suzanne initially considered the leader/follower perspective as appropriate for small school leadership, she soon realised this approach was unacceptable to her community. She described how her new approach towards community involvement in school decision making and her own involvement in community affairs enabled her to begin the leadership process. Alice indicated her initial job orientation was focused upon teaching, and learning managerial tasks. Alice said ‘I had no idea what a teaching principal did so I just did what the administrative assistant said to do. It was only after reading some leadership articles I realised what other principals did in their schools’ (Interview 4: 593–595). Bill’s view of his role led him to attempt to implement procedures from his past school, but after these were rebuffed by community members, Bill concentrated on his personal survival in the role by maintaining the status quo in school organisation and teaching.

Even though this is a small sample, the data suggest that beginning teaching principals possess varying understandings of the teaching principal role, and that their experiences appear to influence how they initially enact that role.

**Acceptance of the ‘place’ of the school within the local community**

From his father, Chris understood the importance of involving the students, staff and parents in the decision making process, but despite this, Chris also noted that, ‘I didn’t realise until starting here how important the whole community is in relation to the school’ (Interview 4: 399). Janet indicated she had entered an environment that defined her role, and until she became accepted by the community, she had to fit that ‘mould’. She said that she felt the community was rather invasive and powerful. ‘I
feel uncomfortable as they [community] seemed to have control over this teaching principal position’ (Interview 1: 163). ‘But after being here for several months and understanding how the local community “sees” their school as part of their community, I started to understand how they perceived my role and why’ (Interview 4: 420–424). Accordingly, realising that the remote rural school is embedded within the community seems to be central to success: ‘... I must work together with every community member if I am going to make my leadership work’ (Margaret, Interview 4: 451–452).

By contrast, Suzanne initially described her understanding of the school as an independent structure lacking dependence upon the community, except for the attendance of the children. She detailed her lack of sense of setting and the interplay between the community and the school. ‘I excluded them [community members] to my detriment’ (Interview 4: 390). Bill described how he had previously experienced successful teaching methods and school management approaches, so ‘I wanted to implement these into my new school but this did not work... the community runs this school, and I found I was just looked upon as a visitor who would soon leave and move on, so I was expected to fit into their mould’ (Interview 4: 225–227). The findings suggest that attempts to impose processes without consulting with the community are likely to result in conflict.

It appears from the data that the schools are woven into the fabric of their communities. The teaching principal's acceptance of the place of the school appears to facilitate their later leadership. Those understanding the embeddedness of the school within its community and who acted accordingly reported success, whereas those who described their lack of this conception reported a lack of job satisfaction and failed to blend their teaching values and those of the community.

**Importance of relationship building with community members**

Relationship building with community members was considered by Chris, Margaret and Janet as an important step towards ‘acceptance’ and becoming ‘the community’s principal’. Chris, Margaret and Janet regarded relationship building as a prerequisite for successful leadership. It appears that for a teaching principal to be accepted by the community as ‘their principal’, rather than remain as ‘the new principal’, positive relationships must be forged with all community members. Being able to plan and
work together with community members towards improved student outcomes—according to Chris, Margaret and Janet—enabled their leadership to develop. Margaret said ‘... linking my teaching with contextual issues and involving the local landholders in the unit planning created such a buzz throughout the community that relationships with everyone became noticeably more relaxed and positive’ (Interview 4: 410–411). ‘I was becoming accepted and I feel I was able to now introduce some changes to school procedures’ (Interview 4: 501–502).

Janet added an additional facet when she described her relationship building process. She indicated that during the early stages of developing positive relationships that led to her acceptance as ‘their principal’, her use of existing community relational networks was beneficial: ‘I used the local community status network to further my ideas towards the end of my first year here—this really worked’ (Interview 4: 764–765). The choices made by a principal to aide the relationship building process seem to vary, but it appears from the data that positive relationship building contributes to the success of principals who have apparently been accepted by the community and work in unison toward improved student outcomes.

Conversely, Bill, Alice and Suzanne (initially) appeared to devalue community involvement and relationship building with community members, and consequently they were ‘held at arm’s length’ by their communities. The task of teaching principal leadership appears to be complex, but a clear prerequisite to, and accompaniment of, success in the establishment of positive relationships not only with parents, staff and students, but also with community members.

This analysis leads to the view that if ‘collaborative partnerships’ are important, leaders need to maximise their effectiveness by forming a team that includes all community members who are interested. This means establishing broad-reaching relations so that information is easily shared, people feel valued, and coordination is effective. This, I argue, is when leadership becomes evident.

6.3.4 Complexity of the teaching principal role

The complexity of the role described by all participants appeared to dominate their thinking, especially during the first 12 months in the position. All principals were
appointed from a classroom teaching position in which almost 100% of their time was devoted to teaching. In their new positions, they were responsible for all teaching and additionally were expected to manage the school efficiently. Managerial tasks included budgeting, resource acquisition, employing and supervising staff, and completing numerous forms (such as student attendance returns, accident reports, building maintenance assessment and annual reports, to name but a few). The job description included leadership activities such as writing strategic plans and vision documents. The teaching principal position was described as overwhelming by the participants and they were concerned that they did not possess the capability to fulfil all employer expectations.

I present the complexity of the teaching principal role using the following headings: full time teaching and multi-age teaching; management and teaching principal leadership; effective time allocation and management; and complexity arising from staff appointment processes. These factors were extracted from the data as facilitating and inhibiting leadership. These findings replicate what other researchers have already reported. They found ‘benchmark findings' and confirm the bona fides of this research.

**Full time teaching and multi-age teaching**

Teachers are expected to plan effectively and teach for improved student outcomes, and beginning teaching principals are no exception. The expectation is that teaching principals have the added competence to teach students across many ages and many levels of ability, often across seven year levels. Prior single-age and year level teaching experience in larger schools does not prepare teaching principals for the broad range of student learning ability across all year levels in their new schools. Chris, Suzanne, Janet and Margaret particularly, pinpointed the impact of multi-age teaching upon their planning and teaching. Moreover, a less than thorough knowledge of the curriculum and current trends, such as outcomes-based education, resulted in the participating teaching principals highlighting their lack of confidence when attempting to adapt the curriculum to suit the local context. Janet and Margaret, who possessed practical knowledge of multi-age teaching and organisation, said they adjusted to the demands of the small school situation quickly and demonstrated to the community members their efficient teaching methods. Margaret said, ‘I don’t know
Bill and Suzanne had no prior multi-age teaching experience and said they struggled to plan for and teach all the children at their school. On the other hand, four of the principals (Alice, Chris, Janet and Margaret) reported that initial parental respect developed once they demonstrated competence in teaching. This, they said, set the groundwork for rapport with the school community but, as Chris stated, ‘The children must be learning something’ (Interview 1: 375). Alice said, ‘They [parents] all checked me out and how I was teaching. Once they were satisfied that I was a good teacher, they left me alone to get on with my job’ (Interview 1: 123–124). As teaching principals are usually appointed to their position for three years, and as they are the only full-time teachers, the consequence for student learning can be significant if their teaching ability is below par. Furthermore, the parents were particularly cognisant of the multi-age teaching situation and all participants recorded the importance that staff and parents placed upon the new principal being able to competently teach all ability levels.

Highly skilled, above average teachers, preferably with experience in upper and lower primary levels, seem to be the most suitable teachers for this principalship, as the major task of teaching a wide variety of ability levels is the norm. All but one interviewee had four or fewer years of classroom experience before taking up the teaching principalship position, and only two indicated they had any previous multi-age teaching experience. This analysis points to the importance of new teaching principals having prior multi-age teaching experience across many primary levels, otherwise their time and planning is focused upon teaching, leaving little or no time for developing leadership competencies.

**School management**

All six participants described the demands of teaching principal management as complying with all procedures and processes expected of them by Education Queensland, and ensuring that staff, students and parents know what they should do to ensure the school runs efficiently. This means completing all the forms requested by the central authority and returning them on time. Margaret added, ‘I had some idea of the managerial jobs because my last school was a three teacher school and the
principal and I worked on some together. All the forms required, the reports, organising pay for the staff, checking up on building repairs and the safety of the play equipment. All these things I call management’ (Interview 3: 557–560).

Whereas, Janet said, ‘I had to learn everything from scratch. This meant I was working virtually all weekends and most nights trying to fit in my lesson planning around the management expected of me. I now know what forms are required and when and how to complete all the reports. I started a timetable so I have all back to Education Queensland on time. Otherwise, I find I worry and wake up in the middle of the night thinking I had forgotten to do something’ (Interview 1: 426–431).

Chris described the management of the school as. ‘... essential, time consuming, must be on time, so much to learn ...’ (Interview 2: 457-458).

The participants confirmed the importance of school management.

**Effective time allocation and management**

Although three of the six teaching principals had experienced short-term exposure to the role they were undertaking, all six said they did not understand the complexity of the position and the demands this placed upon both their knowledge and time. All interviewees in the study were overwhelmed by the excessive managerial work initiated by the employing authority and indicated that their survival depended upon prioritising tasks and taking shortcuts. If management is allowed to dominate all available time over and above teaching commitments, there is no time for reflection and critical evaluation of their practice.

Chris, Margaret and Janet indicated they were able to prioritise tasks, and manage time effectively, thus setting time aside for reflection and to improve planning, implementation and vision development. This management of time enabled the three principals to allot time to enhance their leadership skills. Alice and Suzanne were guided towards this outcome by the Executive Director of Schools as their attempts during their first year in the position were not effective.

Prioritising actions and a stringent time management regime proved to be essential, not only for acceptable outcomes to be achieved but for any personal satisfaction to be experienced. Common to all was a feeling of frustration that many forms (such as the
completion of the curriculum framework and the framework for the school budget for the following year) were returned from Education Queensland for modification. This resulted from a lack of managerial experience and the rush to meet submission deadlines. Not only did this consume further valuable time, but it resulted in loss of morale and self-confidence. It appears that the participating teaching principals became adept at juggling their time. Fitting the multiplicity of tasks into a teaching principal’s day, being able to comply with Education Queensland’s agenda, and having time to consider and plan leadership strategies, pointed to a thriving teaching principal.

In addition, the participants indicated they had underestimated the effect that frequent interruptions to their work (teaching, management and leadership) would have upon school outcomes. All participating principals felt that interruptions were not only common and an undesirable part of their day, but they also injected additional stress. As Janet put it, ‘The frustrating thing is that I often begin a task knowing full well there’s a better than average chance that I won’t be able to finish it all in one go’ (Interview 1: 426–427). The participants said they were ‘the one’ that everyone needed to see because they were the only full-time staff members. Chris said ‘Because everyone wants me, I was becoming very reactive in my thinking because I felt I was expected to give answers all the time. This took up so much of my time’ (Interview 2:534–535).

Effective time management practices appear to help most teaching principals to survive, but survival should certainly not be the goal. It is generally agreed that the principal’s role is a major determinant of the school’s organisational climate, because principals need to be involved in a dynamic way in all aspects of the school’s operation, not struggling to meet community expectations and current requirements of the employing authority. Further, the implementation of procedures to avoid unnecessary interruptions appears to be vital to ensure task completion, to maintain high student learning outcomes and to increase job satisfaction.

**Complexity arising from staff appointment processes**

Time availability is further eroded by additional and unexpected tasks that new teaching principals may encounter during the first months at the post. Janet is a case in point. Upon arrival, Janet found it necessary to employ a new teacher’s aide, and
was confronted with unfamiliar tasks such as interviewing, employing and training staff for a role that she was not competent in herself. These additional tasks exemplify the complexity of the teaching principal position, especially without preparation or support. Janet described her experience: ‘I had never employed anyone before. I had no idea what to do. The person who did apply was unsuitable, but the parents informed me I was expected to employ that person. This put me in a very difficult position’ (Interview 4: 537–538). The problem posed by the restricted pool of talent, and the local community often anointing members for school positions before they officially become vacant, appears to further complicate a particularly difficult situation for new teaching principals.

In schools where competent teacher’s aides were in place (Chris, Margaret, Alice, Bill and Suzanne), the teaching principals’ work load and stress levels seemed much lower. It appears from the data that an experience such as Janet’s complicates an already complex and unfamiliar role and hence reduces time to consider leadership issues.

6.3.5 Professional support for the teaching principal

From the data collected, I argue that the complex role of the teaching principalship can be managed more effectively if beginning teaching principals possess prior knowledge of the role, and if professional support is available during practice. This factor is elaborated under two headings: preparation for the position and support during practice. The principals participating in the study made a clear distinction between their lack of preparation for the role and how support during the role facilitated their leadership possibilities.

Preparation for the position

Chris indicated that it was not until he was actually in the position that he began to understand the work of a teaching principal; there were four events prior to commencement that assisted him during his first year—an induction workshop, a network of beginning principals, his past experience as a member of a leadership committee, and his childhood memories of his father as a teaching principal. He indicated, ‘Teaching principal’s work is multifaceted and complex and without prior introductions, I don’t think I would have survived my first year’ (Interview 1: 409).
Margaret had taught in a three-teacher school for a year, but she said, ‘Even though my principal shared much with me, I did not really understand what a teaching principal did until I started here’ (Interview 4: 402–403).

All three remaining teaching principals did not have prior knowledge of a teaching principal’s work. ‘I had no understanding what a teaching principal does. I just thought I was a teacher and made sure resources were ordered, the school was clean and the ground looked reasonable’ (Alice, Interview 1: 567–568). Suzanne had no prior introduction to the position, and her knowledge of teaching principal’s work was restricted: ‘I imagined what was expected of a teaching principal. I had heard teachers chatting in staffrooms about what teaching principals did and I understood from this [that] I was expected to go in there and show them I was the principal and this is the way to do things’ (Interview 1: 510–511).

To avoid appointees being initially overwhelmed with tasks, and misunderstanding the position, there appears to be a critical need for knowledge of the position before commencing their principalship.

**Support during practice**

Almost every day in a large school, principals and teachers have the opportunity for professional interchange, whereas teaching principals of one-teacher schools experience very restricted opportunities for such conversations. Occasions for interchange are restricted to professional development days, which are rare. Those (Chris and Margaret) who took the initiative to join or to develop a professional teaching network were able to alleviate this problem, and they reported that their skills and knowledge improved.

Chris and Margaret became members of a professional network of teaching principals, which they described as essential to their survival in the position—especially during the early months. This network doubled as professional enrichment and as a debriefing opportunity that Chris described as being most valuable. Janet, Alice and Suzanne indicated that, initially, they worked alone. After several months, Janet said she joined a network of teaching principals and found the professional interchange rewarding for all aspects of her work—teaching, management and leadership. Alice
and Suzanne suggested that over time, and with the guidance of others, networking offered a means of professional confirmation and reduced professional isolation.

Receiving ongoing support such as Chris and Margaret experienced (through their mentor relationship with their past principals) appears to be critical for early success. Both Alice and Suzanne described support offered by the Executive Director of Schools as the turning point of their teaching principalship, whereas Bill elected to remain alone and his practice appeared to be faltering. Data suggest that professional support during practice, whether it be through membership of a network and/or a mentor relationship, may provide opportunities for improved practice.

6.3.6 Limitation of resources

The six remote rural locations are similar in that there are no local stores to obtain school resources, and the distance from the nearest supplier is too great for the teaching principal to travel after school. Resource acquisition, being a new task for all teaching principals, further complicated the principalship during the first months.

Margaret and Janet indicated that their solution to limited resources was to make the most of what was available locally. ‘I am enjoying linking my teaching with local content and using what is available here, especially the people and their knowledge. I am learning so much’ (Janet, Interview 2: 221–222). Conversely, Bill and initially Alice, allowed the isolation to dominate thinking. Bill said, ‘There is so much I need, but nowhere to get it. I have to keep changing my teaching program because the resources are not here at this school. I wish I had the resources I had at the last school’ (Interview 1: 421–422). Alice stated, ‘I have all these units of work from my other schools I would like to teach but I can’t do any of them; the resources are not here’ (Interview 1: 390–391).

Suzanne described an additional issue that may face teaching principals ‘... the library resources were so old. Almost all the books needed to be thrown out’ (Interview 1: 460), ‘... only one computer ... ’ (Interview 1: 460). It appears that the resources available in some schools are more restricted than in others.
Chris and Janet, by contrast, described how local human resources dictated the boundaries of their work and thus became a determining factor in how they defined the tasks they personally had to undertake to successfully manage the role.

How the principals handled limited resources resulting from isolation influenced their teaching principalship success. Solutions varied, but the solutions presented each principal with opportunities to make the most of their setting and advance their practice.

6.3.7 Background of the school

The two factors analysed in this section imply that community engagement with previous teaching principals influences the welcome afforded the new teaching principal. How each individual teaching principal manages the situation he/she encounters influences whether the principal thrives or falters. This section is divided into two themes: understanding the background of the community and accommodation of current procedures.

Understanding the former principal’s relationship with the community

The relationship of the former teaching principal with his/her community has an influence on the reception a subsequent principal receives, which impacts on the first months of the new principalship.

Forewarned, Margaret was able to prepare herself for the first week of her principalship, and she felt she had successfully handled the situation. Margaret implied that this provided her with a positive base upon which to build her position. ‘I developed a sense of what was happening before I started, and setting firm guidelines of conduct for all staff to follow, I could address other issues from a similar firm but positive base’ (Interview 1: 149–150). None of the other participants in this study was briefed on past events at their individual schools.

Upon arrival, Chris found that the previous teaching principal had established positive relations with the staff and the parents, thus the environment he entered facilitated working partnerships. But for Bill, the situation was different. Bill indicated it was not until he inquired of Education Queensland, that he learned about the domineering
approach his community took to new teaching principals. The community had created an environment that had forced six previous teaching principals to apply for transfer. According to Bill, had he known this information before taking up the post, it would have influenced his initial approach and may have improved his situation. It appears that teaching principals have a greater chance of success in their new position if they are fully briefed on prevailing community attitudes.

Continuing with existing procedures

Upon arrival, all principals found the part-time administrative staff had at least two years of experience and wished to continue in their present positions. Chris and Janet found it practical to rely on, and learn from, these existing school members. They reported that the likelihood of stress from excessive work load was greatly reduced. Chris, particularly, emphasised the importance of accepting current procedures and processes and implementing change only if change was necessary, and then only after detailed discussion with staff and community members. It appears that at a small school embedded within a remote community the incoming teaching principal should trial existing procedures before attempting change. Margaret’s and Alice’s approach appeared to be similar to Chris’s. Margaret said, ‘...start my first week by letting everyone know that I was willing to listen and to gather their ideas and suggestions before I made any changes’ (Interview 2: 192–193). I could almost see the part-time staff relax physically and all moved ahead from that moment’ (Interview 2: 195–196).

Conversely, during her first weeks, Suzanne implemented many managerial changes without consultation with staff, and the changes were only honoured because she was the principal. Bill attempted to impose change but the staff did not alter their practice. The data appear to indicate that teaching principals need to be aware that forcing changes to managerial procedures risks alienating staff and community. Therefore, it seems preferable to continue existing procedures until their efficiency can be assessed.

6.4 Chapter conclusion

The cross-case analysis has focused upon the leadership experiences of six teaching principals. It found their leadership practices were influenced by several factors: the principals’ personal and professional knowledge and experiences prior to taking up
the post; the expectations of the community and whether the principal accepted or rejected these expectations; professional knowledge attained while at the post; and the expectations of the employer. The principals reported encountering positive and negative experiences as they attempted to acquire knowledge necessary for fulfilling a leadership role. The outcome for each principal varied with his/her ability to identify the particularities of his/her school context and accommodate features of that context.

One influential similarity that appears in all six cases is the remote rural community’s perception of the ‘place’ of the school. The place—the embeddedness of the school within a pre-existing social infrastructure—appeared to influence the relationship between principal and community. The significance of the ‘place’ of the school became apparent to the principals when they began to appreciate that even though the school was the only public building in the community, the school was not the centre of the community.

The people within the teaching principals’ context and those of the principals’ past seem to be influential in directing and driving the complex process of teaching principal leadership. Those people include parents of the teaching principal, past principals who acted as mentors, the employer, community members and professional colleagues. The combination of prior experience and conceptions, moulded with contextual influences, shape teaching principal leadership practice in small remote rural schools.

The community factor appeared to be a major influence. This influence seems to encompass a number of areas: the preconceived role for the teaching principal; high expectations of the principal’s competence to handle multi-age teaching; an expectation of involvement in the community; and the expectation that the community should be involved in the decision-making process of the school. Developing a partnership between principal and community appeared to facilitate the possibility of leadership. The willingness of the principal to recognise, connect and accommodate these expectations appears to influence success.

In four of the cases, community support appeared to enable the teaching principal to operate successfully and become accepted as ‘their community principal’. This acceptance apparently led to the principals’ ideas for learning programs and strategic
planning for improved school outcomes receiving approval. In two cases, where the principals’ approach lacked prior community approval, the principal remained apart from the community. This appeared to impede success.

Leadership theory, although dominated by findings from research conducted in large urban schools, has offered a number of possibilities to guide the understanding of teaching principal leadership in remote rural schools. Within schools, issues such as working with and developing the professional skills of the teachers and including representatives of the parent body on school committees feature strongly in large school leadership theories. Relationship building has been noted as important (Fullan, 2002; Hargreave, 2003).

The fundamental issues for this study are centred on: a) the persons who see themselves as stakeholders in the running of the school, and on b) the approaches used by the principal to incorporate them into that process. What types of relationships does a teaching principal need to establish? Are they similar or different from those reported in large urban schools? Do the relationships enabling leadership in remote rural schools mirror those of the large urban schools? Furthermore, community relationships appear to be an important precursor to teaching principal leadership—because the community appears to be able to withdraw support and the teaching principal’s leadership will falter if establishing and nurturing relationships is not recognised.

Although Brown (2003) reported that teaching principal leadership was impossible in one-teacher schools because ‘there is no one to lead’, the findings of this cross-case analysis highlight the complex and context-specific nature of the teaching principal setting—demonstrating that, far from being absent, leadership is heightened in the one-teacher situation. It appears that any change (other than the trivial) requires community approval and involvement, which in turn requires teaching principal initiative and leadership. In other words, even the everyday basics of teaching improvement require the exercise of leadership. Teaching principal leadership appears to rely upon the development of relationships through mutual respect and trust, because the remote rural school virtually mandates collaborative leadership. The sharing of ideas resulting from this respect and trust appears to enable the principal to introduce unfamiliar concepts and have them accepted. Some form of relationship
building is necessary for collaborative leadership in any context. What differs between contexts are the persons involved. In the remote rural school setting the most important relationships appear to be with community members.

In conclusion, analysis of the qualitative data reported in this chapter indicates that good multi-age teaching, developing positive relationships with community members and becoming accepted as ‘their community principal’ appeared to create the trust and respect that made it possible for some principals to have their ideas and values for improved school processes accepted.

The final chapter draws together the findings to discuss a theoretical explanation, putting forward tentative conclusions and explaining how the leadership role of the teaching principal is shaped.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

7.0 Introduction

This study was prompted by my interest in determining why some teaching principals were successful in leading their small schools while others were not. It became evident to me, as a previous teaching principal and resident of a remote rural environment, that the context either enhanced or hindered the way teaching principals practiced. The study investigated, from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969; Woods, 1992), how six teaching principals made meaning of their role, and why influences upon their practice resulted in different leadership outcomes.

This chapter presents a theoretical explanation putting forward tentative conclusions as theory, explaining how the leadership role of the teaching principal is shaped. The explanation emerged from the questions of the study:

- Do teaching principals see leadership as an important aspect of their role? If so, how and why?
- What factors do teaching principals say influence their leadership practice?
- What do teaching principals say are the consequences of these factors on their leadership?
- Do some teaching principals see themselves as thriving in their positions while others see themselves as having difficulties?
- Do teaching principals ascribe their success or difficulty to their leadership and if so, what aspects do they think are important?

The evidence reported in Chapters 5 and 6 permits me to address the research questions, albeit in a manner limited by the size of the sample and the methods used to elicit the evidence. The following is a summary of my findings with the research questions tacitly in mind, moving from those that corroborate findings reported by others, and culminating with those that challenge some existing assumptions and interpretations.
Before presenting my case, the significance of the study and the structure of the overall thesis are briefly revisited.

7.1 Significance of the study

Insight into the influences upon teaching principal leadership was considered significant for three major reasons. First, until recently there has been a significant reliance on leadership perspectives derived from large urban schools as the primary source of school leadership data (Day et al., 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Southworth, 2002). This reliance is due to the greater number of larger schools in modern urbanised society and their ease of accessibility. I argue that the application of leadership theory generated from data collected from large urban schools may not apply to school leadership in different contexts. In this study, empirical data were gathered from teaching principals of remote, rural schools, whose leadership perceptions have seldom been considered in leadership research. The study offered an opportunity to examine the themes generated from the findings with an aim to identify key concepts of teaching principal leadership. These concepts offer the possibility for the development of tentative teaching principal leadership theory that is likely to augment current theories of school leadership.

Second, numerous theories have been developed to describe and explain the leadership behaviours of successful school leaders in an effort to determine what constitutes effective school leadership. These theories have been generated from data gathered in large urban schools, which have again been applied to leaders of schools in all contexts. In addition, Brown (2003) reports that a teaching principal has a complex role but as there is no one to lead in schools where the teaching principal is the only full-time staff member, leadership is not part of the role. I propose that leadership is possible when there is seemingly ‘no one’ to lead and I argue that an examination of remote rural teaching principal leadership may reveal evidence of effective leader characteristics applicable in a different context. Hence, the findings from the study are likely to produce information that best explains effective teaching principal leadership to add to existing literature on effective school leadership.

Being mindful of the fact that a number of countries including Canada, New Zealand, Scotland, Finland, Ireland, the United States and Australia have schools with teaching
principals, and in some countries up to 30% of all primary aged children attend rural schools, this third point is of importance. Teaching principal literature has revealed reports of work-related stress that reduces the quality of performance and hence the quality of education. It has described situations that led to teaching principals resigning from the profession or transferring back to urban classrooms. However, these reports appear to lack information explaining the impact that the role and the school context have upon the teaching principals’ ability to develop and sustain leadership in remote rural schools. I argue that the study will provide information to afford a clearer understanding of teaching principal leadership—what teaching principals are likely to experience as they seek leadership opportunities. The emerging theory generated will extend current leadership theory as well as providing a rationale to enable employers to improve support offered to principals. This has the potential to improve the retention rate of school leaders in rural environments and the quality of education provided to rural children.

Fourth, from personal experiences living in a remote rural setting, I observed a number of teaching principals succeed at their posts, while others faltered. I suspected that there is crucial knowledge that enables teaching principals to succeed and that the local context is likely to be influential in forming a framework that underpins this success. This being the case, an investigation focusing upon teaching principal leadership was needed to pinpoint elements that facilitate leadership in schools where the local community plays a major role. I propose that the approach or style associated with effective teaching principal leadership will ‘fit’ the specific situation in which it is grounded.

7.2 Structure of the thesis

The purpose and place of the study was outlined in Chapter 1. Personal elements appeared in the statement of the researcher’s position, experiences and in the discussions on topic, methodology and format. Contextual elements were recorded in the place of the study within the leadership literature, especially in relation to the small school context, and in the introductory remarks around theory and methods. The intention of the study was to develop an understanding of leadership through the eyes of rural school principals because it is argued that leading in this environment differs from leading in urban environments.
With this in mind, Chapter 2 considered the findings of teaching principal research reported in the literature. The literature described teaching and managerial tasks as dominating the daily lives of teaching principals. The review highlighted a gap in the current understanding of the teaching principal role. If teaching and managerial tasks dominated time, are some teaching principals able to fulfil the task of school leadership? This prompts the question, ‘Why do teaching principals have to lead when, ostensibly, they are their own bosses and have no professional colleagues to lead?

Chapter 3 described a range of contemporary leadership approaches. In addition, the importance of context and its influence upon leadership was a specific focus of the review, with a lack of conceptualisation of leadership within different contexts noted by contemporary researchers. Additionally, the current emphases upon teacher and distributive leadership focus upon large school settings and overlook situations where the school principal is the only teacher. The shift from individual to group leadership described in current trends in leadership approaches relies on larger school settings than those found in remote rural settings.

There are crucial components that allow leadership to occur in large school contexts but these are different for schools where the community is a strong influence upon school leadership. My argument is that there appear to be other components encompassing the broader setting of the school context not previously acknowledged in the general literature on school leadership.

Chapter 4 recognised that the research methods chosen began from the researcher’s subjectivity, but the focus was extended to the nature of the research problem, the theoretical context that framed that problem and the methods that would be helpful for gathering the most relevant data. This chapter detailed the methodological choices, including the data gathering and analytic strategies employed. Framed by symbolic interactionist ontology and epistemology (Blumer, 1969; Woods, 1992), which suggests that meaning is found in the interactions of individuals with others and their environment, the study methods sought to gather an understanding of school leadership from the teaching principal’s perspective.
Chapter 5 presented six individual stories linked with the case studies in the Appendices. Key categories and sub-categories of influences on leadership emerged during case analyses. The principals identified four major factors they believed contributed to their development as leaders. First, there was ‘official’ role explication gained formally from the employing body’s directives. Second, there was ‘unofficial’ clarification gathered from professional support networks, such as teaching principals located in similar settings. Third, there was ‘contextual’ role explication gained from community expectations. Finally, teaching principals identified ‘relational’ aspects as a factor in helping them connect with community members and colleagues. Their acceptance and ability to develop positive relationships with not only the students, staff and parents but also with the members of the broader community enabled or restricted their leadership. There appears to be evidence that suggests leadership starts when the teaching principal convinces parents, staff and community members to adopt programs that are unfamiliar to them. But new ideas and values must focus upon matters that are important to the local community of which the school is a part.

Using the factors detailed in Chapter 5 and through constant comparison, concepts emerged and contributed to the development of a number of theoretical propositions that were presented in Chapter 6. It was proposed that good multi-age teaching enables the process of parent and community acceptance to begin. In addition, it was suggested that developing positive relationships with community members and involvement in community activities enables trust and respect between principal and community members to be established. The acceptance and sharing of ideas resulting from this respect and trust enabled the principal to introduce unfamiliar concepts and have them accepted. It was proposed that in consideration of the previous assumptions, a teaching principal who wished to become a leader of his/her school needed to develop an understanding and accommodation of the contextual characteristics of their local community before leadership practice can begin to flourish.

These propositions are now integrated into the synthesis of findings, highlighting implications for leadership researchers and policy makers, and outlining the lessons that can be learned with the ultimate aim of developing an awareness of the complexity of the leadership practice of teaching principals. The culmination of the
study is a discussion of the author’s contribution to educational leadership. Directions for future research conclude this chapter.

7.3 What factors influence the leadership of teaching principals?

Chapters 2 and 3 reviewed teaching principal and leadership literature respectively. Much of the literature concerned with teaching principals in small schools concentrates upon how the many tasks involved influence their daily lives. A number of studies (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Dunning, 1993; Lester, 2003; Mason, 1999; Nolan, 1998; Wilson & McPake, 1998) influenced the way the present research proceeded and, in turn, now contribute to the analysis of the themes drawn from the data. The leadership research, mostly based in large urban schools, describes the changing patterns of leadership from leader/follower to a more distributive approach encouraging school members to be involved in decision making and to grow professionally through the experience. Some of this research (Day et al., 2000; Fullan, 2000; Glatter et al., 1996; Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Lyman, 2000; Rolph, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2001; Walker & Quong, 2004) contributed to the present research design and consequently adds to its data analysis.

7.3.1 Corroboration of the literature

The factors and consequences outlined in the following section list those that not only were findings from this study but have also been reported in previous studies, both international and Australian. Corroboration of the literature is an appropriate point to begin this summary of the findings of this study and its implications.

Demands of employing authorities

The findings from research projects conducted by Fullan et al. (2000) and Glatter et al. (1996) indicate that the requirements of employing authorities, which are many in number, alter on a regular basis, require specialist knowledge to fulfil, and impose serious demands upon principals. Additionally, the demands of school administration are increasing and effective school leadership can be, and is, dampened if administrative matters dominate the principal’s daily activities. The findings from teaching principal research projects conducted by Clarke and Wildy (2004), Lester (2003) and Wilson and McPake (1998) highlight the multifaceted and often
irresolvable consequences of the complex school position that teaching principals are required to fulfil. Fitting the multiplicity of tasks into a teaching principal’s day and being able to comply with the ever increasing employing body’s demands, were highlighted by Dunning (1993) and Mason (1999), who also noted the resulting adverse effect upon teaching principal job satisfaction. Loss of job satisfaction, disillusionment and finally, transfer from the position, are themes noted in many of the studies.

The findings from the study reported here reflect precisely these effects. The ever increasing demands of the employer for policies, action plans, and annual reports can, and do dominate the busy lives of a teaching principal with a full-time teaching load. Not only the demands of the employer were recorded, but additionally, the findings uncovered the community’s expectations of the teaching principal. Demands from the employer and the community must be addressed by the principal and this imposes burdens that constrain leadership possibilities.

Complexity of multi-age teaching
Anderson and Pavan, (1993), Bingham (1992), Dean (1988), Gaustad, (1992) and Lester (2003) have all reported the complexity of multi-age teaching, which the findings of this study support. The present study revealed that community members had high expectations for the academic outcomes of their multi-age school. Principals with prior practical knowledge of multi-age teaching and organisation adjusted to the demands of the small school classroom rapidly, whereas those without these capabilities, struggled to fulfil both community and their employing authority's demands. It seems that a priority requirement of the position should be competency in multiple ability multi-age teaching.

Meeting the community’s educational expectations
As Christie and Lingard (2001) report, tensions can occur between leaders and the school community if educational expectations are not met. The data from this study support their findings. Additionally, the present findings indicate that the teaching principal should work alongside the community to meet the educational needs of the community and to offer the best possible educational experiences to the children. The findings appeared to indicate that, through the process of working together for
improved educational outcomes, mutual trust and respect develop between the principal and community members. This facilitates acceptance of the principal as ‘the community’s principal’, which in turn enables the principal to introduce strategic planning options that could increase school outcomes. Mutual trust and respect appear to be factors that enhance teaching principalship. Without the development of trust and respect, it appears that the principal remains as ‘the new principal’, and hence his/her innovations will not be endorsed by the community. The consequence is that they will not be implemented. This is the same in a large urban school, the teaching staff (and Council/P and C members, less so) are the 'influential' persons. If the new principal ignores these persons and/or adopts a clearly different process the 'new' ideas either will not be implemented, or will be subverted in some way. However, it appears that within remote and rural settings, the 'influential' persons are the community—staff, parents and everyone else as noted in Chapter 6 (p. 162). Without endorsement by the 'community', strategic planning possibilities are limited as the teaching principal's actions are curtailed.

**Sensitivity to within-school context**

Within-school contextual sensitivity is recognised by a number of researchers (Day et al., 2000; Fullan, 2002; Greenleaf, 1977; Goddard, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2006) particularly within the values-led contingency, participative, distributive and servant leadership models. The needs of both leaders and followers are met with the purpose of helping everyone improve their work, resulting in a deep sense of connectedness within the school context. Applying contextual sensitivity, as Leithwood and his colleagues (2006) imply, appears to contribute to the success of school leadership. The findings of this study concur, in that the part-time staff in small rural schools have a deep-seated need to be involved in decision making, and to be kept fully informed of any employer directives. More importantly, it appears that the members of the community—with or without children at the school—expect to be involved in the decision-making process. Teaching principals who recognised this community expectation and responded accordingly appeared to be able to offer strategic planning ideas, to build vision and have these accepted, but those who did not recognise or rejected community expectations experienced limited or no acceptance of their ideas.
Gaining access to and managing resources

Wilson and McPake (1998) outline the importance of understanding the contextual resource availability, both human and physical, which they note as the defining determinant of how a teaching principal works. They refer to this as ‘situational management’ that controls how a teaching principal defines the tasks she/he must undertake to manage the role. This study concurs with Wilson and McPake in that resource limitations due to isolation, play a vital part in the enactment of the teaching principalship. Physical resource limitation can influence the performance of the principal, but of more importance is the limited pool of human resources available in most remote communities. Employing inadequately skilled staff placed increased pressures upon the principal and, as a result, further reduced the time available to develop strategic school planning. The findings reported in this study therefore support Wilson and McPake’s findings regarding resource restrictions and their influence upon principalship. However, an additional factor, that of obligation to employ a person tacitly endorsed by the community, was encountered in this study. This finding was only recorded in two cases, and thus could be a rare occurrence, but it is an indication of the potential extent of the influence of the community, and should not be overlooked.

Building personal networks

Personal network building has been recognised as an important step in ensuring that the principal’s perspective of the school is conveyed directly to community members (Fullan et al., 2002; Gammage, 1998; Lester, 2003). This networking also provides a valuable source of information about community members, their status within the community, and their influence upon community affairs. This study would tend to agree with Fullan and the other researchers above, regarding the importance of developing personal networks through participation in social and sporting clubs and attendance at local events. Furthermore, this study found that networking facilitated the establishment of positive relationships with members of the community and subsequently brought rewards in the form of enhanced community support for the principal. These rewards include mutual respect and trust that appears to optimise possibilities for teaching principal leadership. Closing out links with a community proved to stall interaction, and teaching principalship faltered.
The ability to develop relationships with a wide variety of people appears to require skills of a beginning teaching principal not identified in job descriptions published by Education Queensland (Education Queensland, 2002). Education Queensland detailed necessary criteria for the position to include ‘. . . working with staff and parents . . .’ (p. 3). A high level of confidence referred to as ‘emotional intelligence’ by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) also appears to be necessary, especially considering the dislocation of these principals from family, friends and their established networks of colleagues. It appears the job description may require review.

Relevance of collaborative leadership theories to the teaching principal context

Throughout this section, past research findings and current leadership theories have been linked with the findings of this study. But to define how current collaborative theories can contribute to the understanding of successful teaching principal leadership, the following offers a summary of the main contributing features. Section 3.6 of Chapter 3, (p. 51) 'An analysis of collaborative leadership theories' has guided this summary.

The teaching principal undertakes vision development which is put into practice with part-time staff. Collaboration with the part-time staff during the developmental process greatly increases leadership success.

Relationship building with staff is enhanced through trust and connectedness and appears to provide a pathway towards success. This complex process is integral to collaborative theories.

The importance placed on capacity building and the pursuit of ideals and values is revealed as a high priority for teaching principals. Building capacity is a precursor for and intrinsic to collaborative action. It is a hallmark of collaborative leadership theories. The findings of this study indicate the importance of sensitivity to local expectations. Understanding the importance of this factor enables the teaching principal to manage competing tensions and dilemmas originating from within the community or instigated by the employing authority in a co-operative manner.
In addition, to the three factors above, an overriding feature that collaborative theories offer to the understanding of teaching principal leadership seems to be the importance of 'power used ethically'. There is a strong emphasis placed upon the importance of confidentiality of information and a professional code of conduct within the teaching principal context. In an isolated location where most of the teaching principal's actions are visible, the ethical use of power and information is a key component of success. Collaborative theories give this feature prominence, and go a long way towards explaining the significance of staff and community partnership in remote rural schools.

Having linked some of the study’s findings to existing literature on leadership, it is departures from that literature which are addressed in the next section.

### 7.3.2 Departures from the literature

The following section presents particular findings from the study which may contribute new insights into leadership theory development.

#### The school’s place in the community

The findings of Gammage (1998) and Clarke (2003) characterise the remote rural school as the hub or centre of the local community. Having a school within a remote rural environment brings increased resources that otherwise would not be normally present, such as office equipment, meeting space, sporting equipment and facilities and the like. Being thus positioned, the school can encourage the broader community to become involved in all school events and to take an interest in the children’s learning. In this sense, at least, the teaching principal seems to be placed in a 'central' position in the community. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study highlight a different perception of the school and its principal inasmuch as the school is seen as part of, but not the centre of, the community, and the teaching principal is 'judged' by how well s/he also becomes part of the community. Members of rural communities hold power within the community and in all its organisations, including the school. However, no matter how well established (and accepted) the teaching principal becomes, s/he does not assume the central role implied by Gammage and Clarke. On the contrary, even after the teaching principal has been invited to lead community functions—a strong marker of community acceptance—s/he remains just a member of
the community, not a central or pivotal person. Moreover, it is still the community that holds the power over school affairs: community members can remove support for the school at any time.

**Increased involvement in educational program design**

Wallace (1998) reported that small schools experience a minimum of bureaucratic interference, allowing for more flexibility in school decision making and also permitting changes in curriculum and reorganisation in instructional material with ease. The result, Wallace claims, is that teaching principals have a sense of control over what and how they teach because they are responsible for designing the educational programs for their schools. But the present findings imply a different perspective: the community within which the school is located has considerable power over changes to educational programs initiated by the teaching principal, and expects some control over how educational programs are to be run. Even when the community retreats a little, allowing the teaching principal more latitude to introduce new aims and practices, the findings indicate that if these new processes are 'at odds' with the ideals and values of the local community, pressure is exerted upon the teaching principal to conform.

**The need for leadership in remote schools**

Although Brown (2003) has claimed that leadership in one-teacher schools is impossible because ‘there is no one to lead’, the findings of the present research highlight the complex and context-specific nature of the teaching principal setting, demonstrating that, far from being absent, leadership is heightened in the one-teacher situation. This arises because any initiative by the teaching principal, however modest, requires leadership to ensure its acceptance. However, the teaching principal is unlikely to lead effectively unless s/he has developed relationships with community members through mutual respect and trust. The acceptance and sharing of ideas resulting from this respect and trust appears to enable the principal to introduce unfamiliar concepts and have them accepted.

**The focus of school leadership**

A review of the studies of large urban schools conducted by researchers such as Leithwood et al. (1999), Leithwood and Riehl (2004) and Lyman (2000) has indicated
that the principal leads within the school and delegates only within the school. The principal, whether acting according to the leader/follower role or the distributive leadership role, still has jurisdiction within the school as long as the employer’s requirements are fulfilled. This is clearly contrary to the findings of this study, because a community has the power to withdraw or endorse support for the principal. If the principal is endorsed, support appears to be unlimited for his/her ideas, programs and policies. In cases where community support is not forthcoming, enrolments fall and the principal may be excluded socially. Though the study sample is small, the abovementioned factors have such broad implications that they should not be discounted.

**Relationship building**

Leadership theory, dominated by findings from research conducted in large urban schools, has offered a number of possibilities to guide the understanding of teaching principal leadership in remote rural schools. Within schools, issues such as working with and developing the professional skills of the teachers (including representatives of the parent body on school committees) appear to dominate large school leadership theories. Relationship building has been noted as important by some researchers (Fullan, 2002; Hargreave, 2003), but their analyses have focused mainly upon relationships between students, staff and parents within the school context. Relationships are significant in both leadership theory and effective leadership research and this was a finding of this study. The difference appears to be that the within-school context dominates the focus of relationship building in larger urban schools whereas the whole context—within and outside schools—is of importance for leadership in small rural schools. Furthermore, relationship building may be an important precursor to effective principalship, because key stakeholders can withdraw their support and thereby block innovation.

**7.3.3 Relevance of finding to leadership theory**

When re-examining Section 3.6 (p. 51) in the light of the present findings, the following can be inferred. There are three factors that provide additional understandings necessary to explain leadership in remote, rural communities: sharing vision development and leadership tasks with a wide range of stakeholders; how these
stakeholders differ from those of large urban schools; the range of leadership skills expected of a beginning leader.

If a teaching principal applies a collaborative approach not only to part-time staff but to community members, success as a leader is possible. In addition, the present findings imply that the establishment of connections and trust with members of the community as well as with staff is the basis upon which this collaborative approach is built. The community members see themselves as 'persons of influence' and appear to expect to work along with the teaching principal. A collaborative approach involving principal, part-time staff and community members appears to be pivotal to the success of a teaching principal in a remote, rural setting.

Further to the above point, one interpretation of the present findings suggests extended devolution of leadership, not only to teaching staff as assumed by most leadership theories but also to community members. A teaching principal who develops trust and connectedness with community members can share parts of the leadership role with those members. This role sharing appears to be 'fluid'. Depending upon the focus of school planning, the membership of specific committees is dependent upon member skills and degree of interest. The membership of the teaching principal is a constant on all planning committees. This finding reveals the significance of community engagement and involvement. It may be said that it is 'just' the stakeholders who differ: in an urban context it is the principal, full-time staff and community members; in a remote rural context it is the principal, part-time staff and community members. Seemingly there is no difference but my findings suggest that there is a qualitative difference.

The stakeholders of remote, rural settings 'see' the community as 'their' community, and the school as 'their' school. They take ownership of its success. Their interest, loyalty and commitment to 'their' school is high: they take the principal into their homes and their lives. This is a critical factor in remote, rural settings and may also be found to be critical in other settings where the stakeholders have strong links with each other outside of the school and where the school is viewed as an integral part of 'their' community. An understanding and acceptance that the community exerts a
major influence on school affairs is essential. The recognition of this factor by the teaching principal appears to be an attribute that is necessary for his/her success.

The remote, rural setting demands of the teaching principal, the inclusion of this wider group of participants. Successful leadership attributes do differ as a consequence. The teaching principal in a remote, rural context is conspicuous, visible and vulnerable. And to be 'seen' as a school and a community leader, the teaching principal has to have or has to develop the capacity to handle this visibility. Visibility is handled through the development of relationships. The ability to develop relationships in this setting calls for skills of a high degree. The principal as the school leader has to open the school to all, link with community expectations, engage all interested community members, and tap into existing community networks. The life of a teaching principal is not his/her own. They become the 'talk' of the community. The need to develop relationships, both public and personal, is significant.

Most teaching principals are beginning leaders. There are few other staff members with a range of experiences, to share tasks. The teaching principal is required to lead, to be multi-skilled in curriculum, pedagogy and multi-age teaching, and to be able and willing to share tasks with community members. There is no pool of community members who hold current education knowledge [as exists in an urban setting] due to sparse population. It may be that the expectations of the leadership capabilities of teachers beginning in the role of teaching principal are too high. For teaching principals to become community members and collaborate with the community in the governance of their schools, they need attributes different from principals in large urban settings.

These findings expand the knowledge of small remote rural school leadership and offer directions for further research into school leadership generally. When considered in conjunction with previously recorded findings, a clearer picture of leadership practice in this context emerges. With this in mind, the following section details two pathways that appear to be possible in teaching principal leadership.
7.4 Do some teaching principals thrive in their positions, while others falter?

The teaching principals’ stories recorded operational conflict, rapid knowledge acquisition, despair, acceptance and collaboration as important influences on their integration into community culture. It is clear that some teaching principals can learn from conflict while others are intimidated and avoid further confrontation. At the risk of over-simplification, it seems that success as a school leader in a remote school is dependent on the teaching principal’s initial orientation to the role and the community context in which the position is embedded. This is diagrammatically represented in Figures 1 and 2. The figures present pathways towards or away from school and community leadership. The ability to negotiate the pathway is influenced by the knowledge acquired before accepting the position and early in the principalship. An acceptance or lack of acceptance of the principal by the community ultimately enhances or limits leadership.

Both figures begin with assumptions about the knowledge a beginning teaching principal may acquire before starting at the post. It is the action of the teaching principal and the following interaction between principal and community that shape further understandings and subsequent leadership possibilities. Figure 1 suggests the pathway for a successful teaching principal in a remote, rural context. Figure 2 illustrates the pathway of an unsuccessful teaching principal.

**Figure 1: Successful teaching principal leadership**

- If the new teaching principal:
  - Understands that the community ‘owns’ the school
  - Has prior knowledge about teaching principalship
  - Has prior experience with multi-age teaching
  - and is able to build and foster relationships readily
  - Active involvement in the community
  - Principal is accepted as a member of the community
  - and uses a collaborative/cooperative leadership style
  - Principal's school and curriculum leadership and classroom teaching are accepted/endorsed by the community
  - Principal is invited to undertake leadership roles in other community activities
Although the evidence from my study is not sufficient to generalise strongly, nevertheless I propose that the centrality of community acceptance and the importance of relationship building are key factors in teaching principal leadership success. Commencing principals who assume that they can work in isolation from the community—perhaps because they are the (sole) educational professional present—are very unlikely to succeed with anything more than a placeholder role, perhaps not even that. An individualistic approach tends to produce direct action towards management and maintenance of the status quo. By contrast, principals who presuppose that they need to integrate into their community and carefully nurture relationships are much more likely to succeed, not only in their everyday teaching and learning activities, but also in their role as leader of school development. A collaborative approach tends to direct action towards the future—to improvement and therefore change.

This finding accommodates existing theory, but draws attention to the under-researched processes of relationship building that allow a principal to become a bona fide member of the school community. In explaining these two possible consequences, individualism in leadership results in professional isolation, working
alone, maintaining the status quo, inability to link with community, little recognition of the community’s role, lack of acceptance as ‘the community’s principal’. A collaborative approach makes the possibility of community membership a reality. Relationship development, acceptance, leadership possibilities are all elements of this approach when relationship building is seen as the central focus.

Relationship building must be taken seriously by theorists intent on improving understandings of school leadership. An understanding of relationship building processes linked with the type and expectations of particular stakeholders in different contexts is essential. This study has uncovered processes that appear to be present in remote, rural settings that appear to be absent in large urban settings— that of intense community ownership of school success.

7.5 Significance of the findings

7.5.1 Theoretical significance

Small remote rural schools are unique: they cater for a small number of children within a wide age range; the principal doubles as the only full-time teacher; there are few part-time staff, who often see themselves as part of the local community first and as school staff members second; and there is physical isolation from professional and personal support and limited access to resources. The local community perceives the school as a significant part of their community and consequently expects involvement in all school decision-making processes. Indeed, it is difficult if not impossible, for a teaching principal to make any worthwhile changes without community support. The key point is that any change (other than trivial) requires community approval and involvement, and that in turn requires teaching principal initiative and leadership. In other words, even the everyday basic of teaching improvement requires the exercise of leadership, quite unlike the self-contained classroom of an urban school. This is different from large urban schools where the community has little influence on school activities, other than through the Parents and Citizens’ Committee or School Council.

At one level, this difference is stark and of immense practical significance, as will be reiterated later. At another theoretical level, a central issue is the nature of the process of relationship building needed to achieve effective leadership in remote as opposed
to urban schools. In remote rural settings, much depends on the teaching principal’s acceptance as a member of the community, which in turn means that relationship building has to be personal in focus and embedded in a wide range of community activities beyond the school. In the urban setting, conversely, the focus of a collaborative/transformative principal is mostly on the staff (and to a lesser extent the students and parents) of the school. Such relationships are mostly ‘professional’ in character, that is, school focused and more reliant on the principal’s professional standing within (and beyond) the school than on the principal’s personal relationships with members of the wider community. Arguably, therefore, not only the focus of relationship building, but also its nature, differ between the remote rural and urban settings. At the very least, this implies that staff development for shared/transformational leadership has to be adjusted for the context within which the leadership is to occur. Furthermore, it is possible that theories of group/distributive/collaborative leadership will have to be amended to accommodate the findings reported here.

I argue that appropriate relationship building is more central to the development of shared/group leadership than has been previously acknowledged. It is accepted that relationship building is present in urban as well as rural contexts, but the focus and character of the relationships vary. Within both urban and rural settings, relationship building is professional, school-based, personal and community-wide. But the focus differs between the two settings: the urban setting tends to be dominated by professional and school-based relationships, while the rural setting is dominated by personal and community-wide relationships. It is through these relationships that leadership becomes possible. How leaders in urban schools gain acceptance for themselves, their ideas and for their approaches to leadership and organisational development have been recorded by researchers as chiefly centred on pedagogy, knowledge of current educational trends and encouragement of staff professional development (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves, 2003). These are firmly centred upon professional and school-based elements. The present study’s data indicate that at the heart of a teaching principal’s leadership is the critical ‘organisation’—the local community. Personal and community-wide relationships are central to gaining the acceptance that allows the possibility of leadership. It is only through these relationships that the teaching principal becomes accepted as the community’s
principal—‘their principal’—thereby creating the circumstances necessary before altering established practices and updating the school's vision.

However, there are numerous issues in large schools, so the degree of importance attached to developing positive relationships with all community members is masked or attenuated, and thus has not been recorded as important as in the remote rural setting. It is possible that the ‘hermetically sealed’ environment of the urban school may potentiate (but not mandate) ‘command’ styles of leadership, whereas the remote rural school virtually mandates collaborative leadership. Through successful relationship building and acceptance of a community-influenced role, teaching principals connect with their communities and have the potential to position their communities for change—in both curriculum (within-school) and community development (outside-school) through collaborative leadership.

The differences in relationship building between rural and urban contexts are not as important as their role of precursor to, or catalyst of, collaborative leadership. Collaborative leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collaboratively. It involves opportunities to bring to the surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to reflect upon and make sense of work in light of shared beliefs and new information. This approach creates actions that emerge from these new understandings—such is the core of leadership.

Accepting this as the core of collaborative leadership, the study’s findings prompted further investigation of the approaches to leadership ‘used’ by the participants and subsequently uncovered a recognition of the significance of ‘relational leadership’. I use this term to describe the meaning made by the participants of how they connected with their communities. Participants reacted to community pressures and, after positive relational conditions were in place, by a process involving sifting and sorting via critical reflection they framed their knowledge of teaching principal leadership. For some teaching principals these events were learning opportunities to develop relational knowledge—for others, events created barriers to community collaboration. Participants who reported that they learnt how to lead through relationships were more successful at motivating, inspiring and aligning people to facilitate change (Kotter, 1989), than those who said that they did not. Further theoretical development
of the precursor/catalyst role will be important, not only for a more complete understanding of leadership development, but also for the construction of viable staff development methods. At the heart of teaching principals’ success or failure appears to be how they gain acceptance for themselves, for their ideas and for their approaches to leadership and organisational development.

How should such theoretical development proceed? Armed with the knowledge that relationship building acts as a precursor to, or catalyst for, collaborative leadership, further detailed research is required into how principals encourage, develop and maintain professional and personal relationships. How do these relationships grow over time? Do professional and school-based relationships differ from personal and community-based relationships? Research investigating these elements may contribute additional information to the understanding of school leadership today.

Furthermore, the research reported in this study indicated that the teaching principal position holds the potential for community leadership. Half of the participants reported that their community expected them, not only to become involved in community organisations, but also to hold executive positions that led to decision making on behalf of the local community. These teaching principals were pressured to participate on committees empowered to improve community utility services. There is no reference to this additional task, from school leader to community leader, in the school leadership literature. This community leadership potential for school leaders extends leadership theory beyond the front gate of the school into a broader sphere. It is speculated that this is possible through the development of relational leadership that facilitates acceptance of the teaching principal as a community leader. Further research into this extension of the school leadership role will contribute to leadership theory generally as the expectations of the 21st century extend beyond the school gate into business and the wider community. This leads to a question regarding how this leadership is facilitated and maintained.

7.5.2 Significance for practice

Knowledge that principals bring with them to the position

A principal’s sense of self and of what he/she can do, influenced by the knowledge gained from family, mentors and school hearsay, gives meaning to the enactment of
the position. Typically in symbolic interactionism, experiences are the basis of understanding and beliefs; understanding and hence beliefs informs knowledge; knowledge shapes action; and in turn, action creates new or different experiences always through interaction. This cycle of knowledge construction results in differentiated outcomes for principals as they react differently to experiences that inform and reform understandings and knowledge of how to lead. The study evidenced the importance of preconceived perceptions of the role, and how this influences teaching principal action in a new context. Believing that the students, staff and parents are waiting for direction, induces principals to adopt a leader/follower approach to leadership; whereas believing they expect involvement in decision making induces a collaborative approach to leadership. This may explain the conflict that teaching principals experience when actions are grounded in knowledge gained from contexts such as staff room chatter, or the presumption that successful processes in one context will transpose successfully to another. Reliance upon faulty knowledge appears to act as a barrier to success and it is asserted that addressing the preconceived beliefs of future teaching principals is of importance.

**Employer expectation of the role**

Employing authorities define how teaching principals should enact their role; for example, official role documents such as job descriptions and educational policies characterise some aspects of the role. Additionally, tasks such as completing managerial forms, reports and specific procedural directives form a major part of the role. Such documents are artefacts of knowledge, representing a version of a preferred way of acting for teaching principals. Beginning teaching principals engage in considerable effort to explicate this knowledge. As the study shows, they were buffeted by expectations that they found difficult to identify and understand. Lack of knowledge often resulted in tasks requiring further attention, which burdened an already busy principal. The challenge induced by lack of managerial knowledge and time constraints demands resolution if an individual is to progress as a school leader. Leadership appears possible if a principal is able to manage the overwhelming number of managerial tasks, thus allowing time for reflective thinking. Reflective thinking offers principals opportunities to consider strategic planning possibilities and a vision for their schools.
Expectations about multi-age teaching

It is clear from my evidence that the employer and members of the teaching principal’s local community expect high teaching standards. The teaching task is complex because many ages and hence abilities are present in the class, resources are often limited due to isolation, and managerial tasks can interrupt teaching routine. Successful teaching brings approval from both employer and community. Without prior experience of multi-age teaching and organisation, teaching principals find it difficult to achieve expected standards. Acquiring multi-age knowledge during the early phases of the position occupies time that could otherwise have been allocated for leadership possibilities. Furthermore, if the community observes limited abilities in handling multi-age groupings, their acceptance and trust of the principal is not forthcoming. The education of children is a high priority; hence prior multi-age knowledge is regarded as essential.

Community expectations about the place of the school

A number of the factors that influence the leadership practice of teaching principals originate in the community in which a school is located. It has been shown that respect for the expectations of the local community—contextual sensitivity—is a major influence upon the possibility of leadership. The first element of contextual sensitivity analysed is the local community’s perception that the school is part of the social infrastructure of the community. This places a particular emphasis upon the ‘place’ of the school within the community and upon the role of the principal. The study pinpointed this influence as impacting powerfully upon principal action. A teaching principal must accept the community’s belief that the school is part of the social infrastructure of the community—that it is embedded within the community—and any action must accommodate this preconception. The second factor of influence is connected with the first. The community desires and expects to be part of school decision-making processes and accepting these two influences upon teaching principal practice places teaching principals in the role of collaborative team member. As collaborative team member, the principal’s educational knowledge and the community’s aspirations for their children are melded into a vision for the school. The adoption of the principal’s ideas as accepted school policy acknowledges the acceptance of the principal as ‘the community’s principal’. Acceptance indicates trust
and mutual respect for the principal, and vice versa; it further confirms the willingness of students, staff, parents and community members to work with the principal on leadership matters.

Conversely, if the place of the school in the community is rejected or not conceived as important by a principal, the position as teaching principal leader appears to suffer. If the community is excluded from the decision-making process, the community is likely to reject the new principal. The principal remains as ‘the new principal’ and cooperation and acceptance is withheld, resulting in a faltering leadership situation. I claim that knowledge of the ‘place’ of the school and community expectations for involvement in decision-making processes must be acquired and understood by the teaching principal if leadership processes are to succeed.

**Professional support offered by colleagues and employer**

Being mindful of these requirements and expectations, teaching principals should endeavour to attain the required knowledge and skills. One approach to improved practice involves working with colleagues through networking and mentorship. Without collaboration, interaction and relationships with colleagues, managerial work often needs to be repeated due to knowledge limitations. Once teaching principals understand the requirements of school management, they are able to advance, discuss and confirm their thoughts concerning leadership issues. These discussions are advantageous, with evidence in the study indicating that building such competencies and confidence facilitated leadership opportunities. Furthermore, support from the employer guides and sustains beginning teaching principals’ knowledge acquisition. This is perceived as an essential responsibility for the employer because such support facilitates success in the teaching principal role.

**Educational expectations and values of the community**

Trust and mutual respect between the principal and the community were engendered by a willingness to understand the thinking that influenced locally-held educational beliefs and values, before blending these into school programs. This demonstration of educational contextual sensitivity was manifest in the acceptance of the new principal. A lack of sensitivity through imposing educational processes originating only from
the principal, or from his/her past school experiences, limited the possibility of acceptance.

Finally, the key factor influencing the interpretation of the teaching principal role was the expectation that s/he would be involved in the broader community. This involvement extended beyond just a participatory level; the community exerted pressure on the teaching principal to accept executive positions. Yet undertaking these community leadership responsibilities appeared to enhance leadership success. When community members offer positions of responsibility to a teaching principal in community organisations, this indicates an acceptance of the leadership capabilities of the principal and acknowledgement of the principal’s involvement for the betterment of the community. A homogenous group of people results who share common goals for the school and the community. Being influential in the local community is a symbol of the importance of the teaching principal role in remote rural settings.

**Relational leadership as a precursor to school leadership**

The building of a working relationship with community members was described as an essential precursor to leadership practices. Relationship building was the enabling social circumstance that facilitated teaching principal acceptance, enabling school leadership. Teaching principals taking the initiative in establishing and nurturing relationships by acknowledging current school procedures, encouraging and providing professional development for school staff and community members, welcoming all to the school, and accommodating community beliefs and aspirations, report success in developing links with community expectations. Relational leadership is the bonding process a teaching principal undertakes to initiate, establish and cultivate with students, staff, parents and community members in an endeavour to create collaborative mechanisms that advance learning and improve student life chances. Where relational leadership is present, links can be established to community expectations enabling the sharing of ideas and values. Where limited or negative relationships with community members exist, acceptance of the principal and the exchange of ideas are hindered. Thus relationship building is of critical importance to enhance the likelihood of leadership success. Further, it appears from the sample that relational acuity (awareness of the importance of and the ability to maintain positive
and productive relationships) facilitates leadership, and is a precursor to the leadership process.

7.6 Implications for future research

7.6.1 Issues concerned with the remote rural context

Role of community leadership

The community leadership roles assumed by some of the participants in this study appeared to be significant for their acceptance as members of their communities and as leaders. This deserves further research, in particular to determine whether community leadership is necessary for successful teaching principalship, or simply an additional facet of the teaching principal role in remote rural schools.

Community perspective

Although the perspectives of teaching principals are central to an understanding of their practice, the perceptions and actions of key stakeholders in the school community may provide additional insights into the nature of successful teaching principalship. This second issue warrants further study. There is a need for further research into the expectations of community members and their preconceived understanding of the role of the incoming principal. Their perspective would add to an understanding of why the community is such a strong force in small rural locations, and why community members desire such strong involvement in the school organisation. Further research would help determine the relational understanding of these stakeholders, remembering that part-time staff, as found by this study, have a stronger affiliation with the community as residents, than as staff members of their schools.

Do remote communities have similar expectations?

Previous researchers have inferred from their evidence that the remote rural school is the centre of its community (Clarke, 2003; Gammage, 1998), whereas my evidence indicates that the school, while integral to the community, is not its centre. Are these differences due to the nature of the evidence obtained in the different studies, the interpretations placed on that evidence, or to differences between various remote communities? If different community configurations can be confirmed, do they have
different consequences for the community integration and leadership practices of teaching principals? For example, if there are remote communities in which the school is perceived as the hub, is there the same pressure on the teaching principal to become a member of the community before she or he can lead the school community effectively? My evidence—and previous experience—clearly indicate otherwise, but the issue cannot be resolved until a more systematic examination of types of remote communities is undertaken.

In addition to a more systematic examination of types of remote communities, we need to know whether some community members are essential to a principal's acceptance and if so what role(s) they play in the structure and processes of the community.

7.6.2 Issues centred on the nature and role of relationship building

Is relationship building a precursor to collaborative leadership?

If my theoretical interpretation is a reasonable starting point, it should be possible to obtain more evidence of the importance of relational knowledge and how this facilitates ‘leadership through relationships’ in the development of all school leaders. It should also be possible to extend my findings by showing that ‘leadership through relationships’ is a precursor to, and a critical element of, collaborative leadership. For example, does leadership in a remote school community facilitate leadership in urban schools (as sheer experience might imply), and if so how much of that benefit can be attributed to the relational knowledge and dispositions acquired in the rural context? Might there be some disadvantages of this kind of prior experience? For example, in a different context, relying on community support may be detrimental for leadership.

Are there leadership approaches/processes that facilitate success in a remote rural context? If so, do these processes facilitate success in other contexts?

Using current collaborative theories as a starting point, it may be possible to examine the them from a process perspective. Which processes appear to be common to successful principals? Propose why. Using this as a guide, investigate leadership in other contexts. Resultant findings may impact upon extant theory.

How does the teaching principal’s professional orientation affect his/her practice?
Additional research is needed to establish whether commencing principals have distinctive orientations to teaching principalship and, if so, whether those orientations are consistent with the proposal summarised in Figure 1. My presumption is that such orientations can be unpacked into constituent beliefs and practices, at least some of which may relate to other educational beliefs and practices. For example, commencing principals who favour a collaborative style of classroom may be more likely to express collaborative beliefs about their role in the rural community. Whether or not such connections can be established, it will be valuable to examine the extent to which initial orientations to teaching principalship can be influenced (for the better) during staff development and/or with peer support. There was evidence in my study that such changes can occur, but it is possible that they might be restricted to principals who are already favourably oriented to community involvement.

7.7 Chapter conclusion

When considering a research process to adequately investigate the complex role of teaching principal leadership in remote rural schools, I decided to select symbolic interactionism as a methodological framework. Empirical knowledge gained through living in a remote rural area and leading rural schools and communities influenced this decision. This methodological framework provided the background to analyses of the stories principals told, shedding light on how teaching principals make meaning of their leadership practice, through the investigation of influences on that practice.

Prevailing theories of leadership need to be used to further explore the relational aspects on school leadership. Have we underestimated the importance of relational knowledge and how to develop relationships as a precursor to leadership? Employing bodies, in identifying candidates for principalship, may benefit from the information within this thesis. Similarly, if communities set predetermined roles and expectations for incoming principals explicitly or implicitly, then there are understandings that need to be in place to help scaffold principal success.

This study has offered one set of answers to the research questions. Teaching principal practice and school leadership have been documented and influential factors that contribute to success have been examined. The study's information highlights differences in practice. I have theorised leadership practice shaped by contextual
experiences that are underpinned by people, conditions and events. These contribute to success, based on if and how teaching principals make meaning and sense of experiences in the light of shared beliefs and new information. This knowledge enables actions to come from these new understandings. Remote rural teaching principal leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collaboratively with community members. Conflicts and collaborations with community members produce consequences for teaching principals. In essence, the ability of individuals to build relationships is a definitive factor in determining the success or failure of school leaders in remote rural schools.
Leadership theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership theories</th>
<th>Key features of leadership approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1: Does the principal undertake vision development which is put into practice by the principal and teachers?</td>
<td>at times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: Is collaborative vision development by the principal and teachers deemed important?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: Are trust and connectedness between staff and principal given prominence?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: Are trust and connectedness between staff, principal and community members given prominence?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: Is leadership devolved to teachers?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: Is power used ethically to empower others?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7: Is capacity building of teachers essential?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8: Are particular ideals and values pursued?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9: Is school growth and success sustained by staff as a group?</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A    ETHICAL PROTOCOL

Ethical protocol and consent form

Dear ..................................

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this before you agree to participate in this research. I would like you to read and tick the appropriate statements below before signing. If at any stage you feel uncomfortable about proceedings you are free to renegotiate any of the terms below. My research depends upon your time and goodwill, and your concerns will always be taken seriously.

Tick or cross out the statements below as you wish them to apply to you:

- I have read the research proposal and understand the purpose of the research
- I understand my part in this research
- I agree to participate in this research
- I understand my participation is voluntary
- I understand I can renegotiate my participation at any time
- I understand I can withdraw at any time
- I understand my anonymity will be preserved at all times
- I agree to participate in at least four ¾ hour face-to-face interviews and other communications by negotiation
- I am happy for the interviews to be audio-taped and transcribed
- I wish to view the transcribed interviews and negotiate amendments
- I wish to be able to be involved in the interpretation phase
- I wish to view the draft of the section in which my input occurs
- I understand that parts of this research could be submitted to academic journals or presented at educational conferences

My availability over the next few months is:

___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Signed: ............................................................            Date: ........................................

With thanks,

Nita C. Lester

Please keep a copy of this for your records and return the original to me.
APPENDIX B: INFORMATION PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS

Institution: Griffith University
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy
Candidate's name: Nita C. Lester
Supervisors: Professor Neil Dempster, Professor John Bain

Working title.
Why do some teaching principals in remote rural settings appear to lack leadership qualities while others demonstrate leadership qualities and appear to lead their schools?

Background.
Teaching principal is a term used for a person who has the organisational responsibilities for a school with low pupil population and who has the responsibility for teaching all the pupils enrolled. From personal observation, I have noticed that some teaching principals fail to lead their schools while others lead their schools successfully and develop the required vision procedures for further school improvement.

Statement of problem to be explored.
The purpose of this study is to critically examine the leadership of some teaching principals in remote rural settings. The study will begin by reviewing the literature in the areas of teaching principalship and school leadership. Particular emphasis will be given to describing the forces that appear to facilitate school leadership effectiveness.

During my work as a teaching principal in remote rural school communities, I witnessed many highly skilled and well informed teachers fail as teaching principals. Was it possible that being a ‘good’ teacher was not enough for success? Successful teaching principals seemed to possess additional knowledge and skills that needed exploration.

The research questions attached will guide the collection of descriptive data as well as facilitate opportunities for theorising how and why leadership may have developed in a particular way.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Main questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Subsidiary questions if required as prompts</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is a teaching principal?</td>
<td>What words would you use to describe your position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching principal is like . . .</td>
<td>Compare this position with something else you know about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why become a teaching principal?</td>
<td>Did someone suggest this promotion? How did you find out about the availability of this position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you do?</td>
<td>Tell me about your work. What are the main features of your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What elements of your work are important to you?</td>
<td>Why are these elements important? Are there any outside influences that make any of these elements important and give your reasons? Are there part/s of your personal philosophy that make/s any of these elements important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any elements of your work that are less important to you?</td>
<td>Why are these elements less important? Are there any inside/outside school influences that make any of these elements less important and give your reasons? Are there part/s of your personal philosophy that make/s any of these elements less important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you perceive your current teaching principal context?</td>
<td>Why do you perceive your current teaching principal context as you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the context of your current teaching principalship influence the way you do your work?</td>
<td>Explain why any aspect/s of your teaching principal context influence/s your work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the cultural and/or social context of your school influenced your work?</td>
<td>What are the factors of the community setting that have influenced your work? What are the factors of the community itself that have influenced your work? How has your work been influenced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have there been any influences from the past that have impacted upon your work?</td>
<td>How have these influenced your work? Has there been any critical incident or who has influenced your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is/are there any element/s of your current lifestyle that have/had an effect on your work?</td>
<td>How have these elements affected your work? Has you chosen lifestyle influenced your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main questions</td>
<td>Subsidiary questions if required as prompts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any thing unique about being a teaching principal in this rural setting?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As school leader, what factors influence your leadership?</td>
<td>Why, and what are the consequences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there factors of more of less importance? Describe these?</td>
<td>Why have you grouped or selected these factors as influences upon your leadership?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there particular outcomes of these factors of influence and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do these define how you lead the school? And why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you tried different approaches to your leadership?</td>
<td>What have these been?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
<td>What have been the outcomes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What have been the particular strengths and weaknesses of these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of teaching principal are you?</td>
<td>Describe your style of teaching principalship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What have been the influences upon your style of principalship and give reasons for these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there factors of influence that impact upon your approach to this principalship?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have we left out of your story?</td>
<td>Do you have plans for your career? What are these and can you discuss if the present teaching principalship has had an influence upon your career planning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: RESEARCHER-CONSTRUCTED 'CONCEPT MAP'
## APPENDIX D  EXAMPLE OF CODING

This table provides typical examples of the final coding used for the within-case and cross-case analyses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Exemplifying Quotations</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School context</td>
<td>School location characteristics</td>
<td><em>Out here you have to get on with everyone for they are your community and your neighbours. Any time you get someone off-side you have to live with it. It is so complex. They see the school as their school.</em></td>
<td>Alice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School location</td>
<td><em>This school is a long way from anywhere— isolation on an immediate basis—sometimes I do not speak to another teacher for over a week. The nearest school is in the local town 117 km away and it is another one-teacher school.</em></td>
<td>Bill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teaching principal's background| Classroom teaching experience           | *I taught dance for 10 years and loved it but it didn’t give me control over the curriculum or the whole education of the students. I thought I could offer more.*  
*I was only in my second year of teaching so I had not thought of a promotion. I was still learning how to teach.* | Suzanne     |
| Educational influences         | Educational beliefs                     | *I have always thought the wider the experiences a child has at school, more opportunities become available as they grow up. This belief has influenced my selection of units of work I plan for the students and the wide variety of teaching strategies I use.* | Janet       |
|                                | Values and practices of the teaching principal | *After 8 years of teaching and having my own children, I know what strategies work. I must ensure content knowledge is taught so many of my lessons are taught using teacher-directed strategies* | Suzanne     |
| Managerial influences          | Processes and procedures to organise the school | *I even rearranged how the part-time staff recorded their hours—I instigated new forms and new procedures.*                                         | Suzanne     |
|                                | Facilitating school organisation and teaching | *I was able to establish myself during the first few weeks because I had planned my strategies and had considered how I was going to support the staff and accept procedures as they were* | Margaret    |
APPENDIX E: CASE STUDIES OF TEACHING PRINCIPALS
**Case Study School A: Chris, the teaching principal**

The first part of Chris’s case study presents his replies to the introductory questions ‘What is a teaching principal?’ and ‘Why become a teaching principal?’ The second section details Chris’s replies to numerous questions focusing upon factors influencing his practice.

*What is a teaching principal?*

You are doing three roles—you are a teacher, an administrator and a leader—with an emphasis on being a teacher. (Interview 1: 22–23)

Teaching principal is like . . .

. . . making the best out of the resources and making sure you have a focus on the children. (Interview 1: 54)

*Why become a teaching principal?*

Chris says being a teaching principal allows him to be involved in every aspect of schooling. He derives a sense of satisfaction from this and feels comfortable in knowing that the success or failures of the school with its many facets fall upon his shoulders:

I liked the idea of being in charge of things. I was on the leadership committee at the first school I was teaching at. We [the leadership committee] would be left in charge of things when the principal went away. I like having to handle situations there and help make decisions. (Interview 1: 61–64)

In a small school you are directly involved in everything, so therefore I thought it would be great. I love the idea of the holistic approach to schooling—where you are involved in every aspect of the children’s life. Also, how the school runs is directly related to what I am going to be doing. I have so much control over what I want to do. I get a kick out of knowing I am responsible for the learning of the children or if a school functions well. (Interview 1: 79–83)

Chris said he was totally unfamiliar with one-teacher schools before starting his current principalship two years ago and was surprised by the number of tasks necessary to run such a small school. The tasks are almost the same as those of his principal at his previous school:

I have to do almost the same as Mr . . . [Chris’s previous principal at the school with 20 teachers]. The only difference is the quantity of an issue, for example fewer library books to order or smaller
quantities of consumable items for the office or toilets etc.  
(Interview 1: 111–113)

As asked how he was finding the position after two years, Chris answered:

I enjoy it. The management has to be done but once you know the correct procedures it is fine. I would like to always have some time teaching even if I am a principal in a large school. I like getting out there with the kids and seeing what they are doing and I like playground duty—being involved in their mucking about. I also enjoy the leadership aspects and being so involved in the local community. (Interview 4: 281–284)

Factors of influence upon teaching principal practice

From Chris’s data, the following headings, verified by Chris, were selected influences upon his leadership:

- positive, supportive school context;
- local community;
- communication and relationships;
- personal beliefs of teaching and learning;
- mentorship and professional networks;
- demands of Education Queensland; and
- being able to change school procedures quickly.

Positive, supportive school context

The relationships and working partnerships established by the immediate past principal of Chris’s new school with part-time staff, parents and members of the Parents and Citizens Association (P and C) facilitated a positive school context. Chris indicated that this context provided an ideal setting for starting his first teaching principalship:

I came into an ideal environment because all was going so well here because of the approach adopted by the last principal. The part time staff, principal and parents appeared to have positive relations and working together to make the most out of this school.  
(Interview 1: 292–294)

Local community

For Chris, the following aspects of the local community influence his leadership:

- valuing the local community;
- making friends;
- becoming involved in the rural lifestyle;
- shortage of part time staff; and
- community expectations of teaching.

Valuing the local community: According to Chris, it is the local people and the available resources that set the context for a small remote rural school. Local people and resources influence the effective functioning of a small school and the outcomes of leadership:

The local community has a major influence on what I do and how I do it. The available resources and the people turned out to be vital elements of my teaching principal position and how I lead to achieve the visions of the school. (Interview 1: 71–72)

Further, becoming aware of residents who have influence within the local community was important knowledge for Chris to gain during his first year as teaching principal. With this knowledge he was able to tap into the community power brokers:

The policies and the people behind the policies have such an influence on my work. (Interview 2:12)

How well you know your community and the people within makes all the difference. In the beginning, once I realised the importance of the various groups and people within the community, I began to target each group so my ideas and the visions for the school would be considered at P and C meetings. This began my transition from being ‘new’, to being considered as someone who valued the children and their future. (Interview 2: 13–17)

An understanding of the community is essential according to Chris. He gained this understanding by becoming an active community member. Rather than travelling to a larger centre and socialising with other teachers on weekends, Chris preferred to remain in the local area and participate in sport (tennis) and other social activities (Community Progress Association). He indicated this facilitated the gathering of information about the local community and its residents:

I am a big believer in participating in the community—making the most of where I am—I get out and do things. If you did not like being part of the community, you could not do this job. It is a way of getting to know your community. (Interview 1: 269–271)
Making friends: Becoming part of the community helped Chris to make friends, which provided him with additional opportunities to learn about the community dynamics:

I have come to see the local community in another light.
(Interview 3: 81–82)

In addition, making friends provided Chris numerous opportunities to take leave of school issues for a few hours each week. This, reports Chris, is a very important aspect of being able to handle the teaching principalship in his small remote setting:

You’ve got to make friends in the local area. After you leave school each day, you have to find something else to do even if it is just for a break so your head clears and you can refocus again on school matters. I think it is really important. (Interview 1: 255–260)

Being involved in the rural lifestyle: Chris grasped the opportunities provided by parents to participate in farm activities. Learning to ride a horse, as did learning the procedures of stock work, enabled him to assist property owners during the weekends. His preparedness to become involved in rural tasks indicated to the community members his acceptance of their lifestyle:

The members of the community really enjoy my help on weekends. They will teach me anything if I am willing. (Interview 1: 261–262)

Reportedly the community has accepted Chris. His willingness to live and learn in the community has enabled him to initiate many school innovations such as visioning workshops and strategic planning sessions with the parents:

I think the community accepts me for I am always invited to all the community social functions and when I call for assistance with maintenance tasks at the school at least two or three fathers come in and help. Also when I offered workshops to help with the tasks of writing strategic documents for Education Queensland a number of the parents have attended every session. (Interview 1: 264–267)

Shortage of part-time staff: A small community such as Chris’s has a limited number of persons who possess the necessary qualifications to apply for part-time school positions. This shortage of potential staff with secretarial skills exacerbates the concerns of an already busy teaching principal:

This [staff training] has created quite an issue for me. My role is to be a teaching principal with a focus on teaching so if support services are not being delivered—for example how to fill out a BAS
[Business Activity Statement], I cannot be teaching because I am focusing on answering the telephone to assist someone who is writing the BAS. (Interview 1:220–223)

New staff—you do not have time to train them appropriately and get them up to the desired level. (Interview 1: 224–225)

Chris said he had established a network of contacts from which new staff could seek assistance. These were experienced administrative assistants at schools within the region. However, due mainly to lack of confidence, he said his staff was reluctant to seek this assistance.

*Community expectations of teaching:* Chris believes that the parents expected him to have curriculum knowledge of each subject area and for each year level. He feels an understanding of multi-age teaching was expected by the parents:

> During the first few months, the parents would drop-in during school time and ‘look’ at what was happening in the classroom. (Interview 2: 240–241)

Chris indicated that the parents expected to see all the students busy. He felt if this was observed he was accepted as the new principal:

> If the parents see solid work in the classroom, and each child achieving at his/her level, they began to see me as ‘their’ principal. (Interview 2: 33–34)

**Communication and relationships**

Chris stated that he found it imperative that lesson preparation was comprehensive so that when his tasks as a principal interrupted the presentation of the lesson, the desired outcome was still achieved:

> You are doing both roles—you are a teacher and a principal—with an emphasis on being a teacher. You must make sure you have the focus on the children. (Interview 3: 8–9)

> Make sure you are well prepared in the classroom, so you have time to do other things. Don’t look if you are rushed. Have the classroom in place so you can get up and talk to visitors. This is important. (Interview 2: 28–32)

To be successful in the demanding and diverse position of teaching principal, Chris sees the need to value, to create and to maintain positive communication and relationships with staff, students, parents, community members and colleagues. As previously noted, Chris said he was fortunate that the previous teaching principal had
maintained positive relationships with all staff and community members and they looked forward to furthering their positive relationships with Chris as their new principal:

Positive communication and relationships are vital. I try to take a positive approach to what is going on in our school. The relationships you have with the parents and the relationships you have with the community are yours to build. How you handle these and how you deal with problems are what I like about being a teaching principal. (Interview 1: 121–124)

Trusting relationships and productive partnerships are built on and maintained through effective personal and interpersonal skills:

I value the human resources at my school. They are most important and without them I could not operate as principal, so trusting relationships are so important to me. I have worked hard improving my personal and interpersonal communication skills. (Interview 1: 130–132)

Chris detailed communication and relationships using the following headings:

- staff;
- students;
- parents and the wider community; and
- colleagues.

**Staff:** Chris has found that maintaining positive two-way communication is the best way to develop trust and understanding between himself, the existing staff and newly appointed staff. Through approval of their work initially, changes can be suggested as trust develops between principal and staff members:

I think you must be open and always find the positive elements in everyone’s work. Once there is trust, we can work together and improve practice. (Interview 1: 138–139)

Trust can be further engendered by keeping all staff and community members informed. Chris indicated this is difficult when staff members are only at school once a fortnight and community members are popping in and out at all times. By using a white board to communicate school happenings, everyone now felt included and as a consequence, relationships grow:
Keeping the staff and community informed is one way to develop this trust. The white board allows me to let everyone know what is happening in the school. They really do want to know every aspect of what is going on—the slightest little thing.
(Interview 1: 152–153)

That was something I needed to learn to do for I was initially unaware what degree of importance the staff and especially community members gave to knowing and being involved. This has helped to build trust and positive relationships.
(Interview 1: 141–147)

Chris also changed the hours of the cleaner from out-of-school time to in-school time. This allowed the students and part-time staff an opportunity to meet the cleaner and to work together towards common goals:

The cleaner now comes during school time. The students can see what she does and they are more careful putting rubbish in bins etc. Also she likes to stay on and help with the students’ reading or sometimes I see her in the library helping covering books and putting books away. She even helped us pack for camp. She loves being involved, feeling needed and she told me a while ago she was learning a lot about what we hoped to achieve for the children.
(Interview 2: 177–182)

A relief teacher is available to Chris every second Friday so that he can attend meetings, process managerial tasks and arrange parent interviews during school hours. Chris has made use of these days, not only for his own benefit but to further enhance links between staff members. Chris explained the effects of often being away on Fridays:

I do not like having the relief teacher here alone so I have arranged for the cleaner to work during the school hours. I also found out, after being here for three weeks that the cleaner and the relief teacher had never met. So that was an opportunity for these two to work together and to get to know each other. Also the cleaner felt important being asked to come in on a day when I was not around, just in case the relief teacher needed something.
(Interview 2: 183–188)

Finally, Chris discussed the skills of ‘knowing when to intervene’ and ‘when not to intervene’ as new skills he needed to learn when dealing with staff members. Upon reflection, Chris indicated that ‘silence’ and ‘listening’ are among the best skills a leader can develop and refine.

Students: Keeping the fine line between control and enjoyment is an everyday issue for the teaching principal. The principal is the disciplinarian of a school but, as
teaching principal, the relationship between student and teacher and student and principal becomes blurred:

Managing the student–principal relationship is difficult. We do have a lot of fun together in the classroom but I have to keep my distance as the school behaviour policy must be in place at all times.

(Interview 2: 197–199)

*Parents and the wider community:* Two-way communication creates a positive working relationship not only with the staff, but also with the broader school community. By demonstrating his preparedness to listen and accept the ideas and values of parents and community members, Chris created the beginnings of a positive working relationship. Chris stated:

I try to be responsive to other people’s ideas. I listen, for others may think of another way to achieve an outcome. I have learnt to stop and try the suggestion. The suggested idea probably has as good a chance of working as my idea. (Interview 1: 168–171)

Through positive two-way associations, working relationship with staff, parents and community, according to Chris, paves the way for the development of ideas that lead to change and improved educational processes. Chris believes his chosen approach of showing interest in and care for the parents as individuals cemented positive relationships:

At the P and C meetings everyone turns up. (Interview 1: 134)

People respond according to the way they are treated, Chris believes. Showing genuine interest builds strong relationships, which lead to increasing support for him as principal.

*Colleagues:* Owing to the remote rural setting where the nearest colleague is over 100 km away, Chris indicated how important it is to establish professional communication networks. This involves taking the initiative and contacting other principals and seeking their involvement in sharing management processes:

We set up leadership practices to overcome remoteness. I needed to set up systems so I can access information and that makes communication and people so important. I value all support and offer support in return, but I had to go out there and set them all up.

(Interview 2: 3–5)
Chris, along with four other beginning teaching principals in the region, set up a professional support network. Chris said they share all documents, help each other with policy interpretations and act as a sounding board at the end of the day. Other principals in the region have since become involved.

To summarise, Chris declares:

The importance of open communication and positive relations with everyone [staff, students, parents and community members] in a small school setting can’t be over-emphasised. (Interview 2: 7)

**Personal beliefs of teaching and learning**

Chris indicated his beliefs about teaching and learning influenced his leadership in a number of ways.

Firstly he recalls his father being instrumental in beginning a new small school in an isolated location in rural Victoria and the stimulating discussions about the purpose of education that took place around the kitchen table:

Dad always said he had to open the school. I did not fully understand this as a child, but after being offered this position, I asked him what he meant. “The school in a small community is for the parents so they must feel welcome”, was his answer. I will always remember this. (Interview 2: 256–260)

Secondly, Chris emphasised his belief that his teaching should relate to the values, attitudes and the local culture of the small rural community. In doing so, he feels he is valuing the local community’s needs and, as a result, over time trust and respect develop. Without trust and respect, Chris thought he would not be able to lead the school:

Not only the children but also I needed to connect with the parents’ values and what they think is good education. (Interview 3: 50–51)

To further this development of trust and respect, he said a thorough knowledge of the curriculum was imperative as parents and staff members expect a high level of curriculum knowledge and have high expectations for their children:

Professional reading is an important aspect of keeping informed of curriculum expectations. I let the parents know of some of the articles I have been reading—just to show them I am keeping up-to-date. (Interview 2: 268–270)
Chris also believes that in a small school setting, the principal can allow the students more independence in tasks such as using the photocopier, looking for resources in the library and using the microwave in the staffroom to heat their lunches. This approach engenders independence and responsibility in the children:

We are not strict about kids in the office or in the staffroom. We trust our kids a lot more than in the bigger school. It works both ways—they really respond to that as well. If the office door is shut—they work it out—they are smart kids. (Interview 1: 97–99)

Chris also indicated he believed he was a lifetime learner, and this influenced his approach to teaching, school management and leadership:

I am a learner. I enjoy learning new things and do not mind sharing my shortcomings with the children and the staff. We work together on projects and learn as a team. (Interview 3: 220–221)

Finally, Chris indicated his use of humour and his casual approach to his position has allowed him to overcome his lack of knowledge of the tasks expected of him. His belief that ‘over-stressing’ about difficult tasks will achieve little has put the staff and other teaching principals at ease:

My ‘laid back’ approach and my use of humour have got me through a few sticky patches. I think if I was serious about everything, I would not be enjoying the respect I do now have from the staff and the other principals (Interview 3: 269–271)

**Mentorship and professional support network**

Chris was a member of the Leadership Committee at his previous school, which provided him with opportunities to gain an understanding of some of the tasks required of a school principal. This experience of working with the principal and other teachers with varied experience gave him valuable insights into leadership. This made the transition from classroom teacher to teaching principal a little easier even though, Chris stated, he found the number of tasks that needed to be completed to keep a one-teacher school operating quite overwhelming:

I had not ever set foot in a one-teacher school. The whole management thing blew me out of the water—how much there was! As soon as I started I developed more and more a respect for the people who were doing it [in a teaching principal position]. I did not expect all that management. (Interview 2: 156–159)
Further, Chris has gained valuable managerial assistance during his first year as teaching principal from two sources. First, having a mentor—the principal at his previous school—whose approach to valuing all staff members through sharing and building an individual’s skills was a strong influence upon Chris’s leadership:

I was really lucky I had a mentor who was really good—before I came here my principal suggested I become a teaching principal. He included me on his leadership committee so I could become involved in the leadership process of his school. He was so sharing and understanding to us all. (Interview 2: 129–132)

Without him I am not sure how I would have survived. (Interview 2: 133)

Second, Chris’s induction arranged by Education Queensland two weeks after taking up the teaching principal position:

There were five of us who started in our district at the same time and I really got on with them. We have set up a network of support. At the beginning I made a lot of telephone calls—sometimes just hello but other times how are you doing this. The number I make now has tapered off and the number I receive from principals in their first year of their principalship career is increasing. (Interview 1: 207–210)

Chatting and working with others [principals] lightened my workload . . . as well as colleagues often confirmed my actions and that gave me confidence. (Interview 3: 210–211)

Chris said:

[At the induction] we were told we have to share and to take our document writings to our staff—but I am the staff and I share with myself. With a lot of the documents I may only write one third of it—due to the fact it is someone else’s document from another school and I will say it is very similar to our circumstances so right, I can change it over and make it work for our school—that is where the sharing comes in. Also while we are writing, we are ringing each other [the teaching principals Chris met at the induction] for guidance and help. (Interview 1: 196–205)

The established network also had added bonuses:

A network of colleagues proved to be the best outlet for me to unload feelings and to discuss issues linked with confidential information. There was no-one here to safely chat to but it is not the same; you do not say everything on the telephone that you would person to person. (Interview 2: 225–227)
Chris believes that without his mentor, the induction workshop and the professional support network, the quality of his teaching, school management and leadership would be deficient.

**Demands of Education Queensland**

The position demands 100% + of my day and well into the night. (Interview 1: 100)

As the name indicates, a teaching principal is expected to teach, manage and lead. In the beginning, being a full-time teacher took up most of Chris’s time, so finding time to complete managerial tasks is a constant challenge. Chris indicated thinking about being a leader during those first months was out of the question. Being able to cope is a key issue and Chris indicated two ways he manages: time management and prioritising tasks:

Three jobs—teacher component, school management and leadership—there is not enough hours in the day to do all effectively. Just have to walk away. Time management is the go. I just make myself do one thing at a time. I work in the office to do all my planning and office work. I have a comfortable chair there. But as soon as I settle down to work, the cleaner needs help or I see Book Club mailing must be done or the telephone rings. There is no end to it all. (Interview 3: 190–196)

Each morning I attend to emails first, around 7am, but if Education Queensland says they need something urgently I am chasing my tail from then on. I never catch up. (Interview 3: 46–47)

I am learning to be selective and that has helped a lot over the past six months. (Interview 3: 201)

Many of the leadership tasks were unfamiliar to Chris, with the development of visionary documents the most demanding. Being completely unfamiliar with the procedure of writing such documents, Chris records this as by far the most challenging task of the position and one that influenced his leadership practice:

Leadership is about working with others and inspiring them to develop a vision for our school. I get parents, community members and part-time staff together to order their priorities for their school. Articulating these is very difficult but once we started, things got easier. The way into this was listing what we valued. (Interview 2: 80–84)

Starting slowly, as no one had any idea of how to accomplish Education Queensland’s visioning directive, but in time we did decide upon issues that mattered to the parents and the community.
The ways to achieve these, led to our vision for the school.  
(Interview 2: 90–95)

This articulation of the shared purpose and educational vision fostered a collective responsibility for school practice and outcomes:

Staff members started to come up with ideas and possible future activities for the school after we started the process of writing down our vision. They even offered to investigate the details and to let everyone know their findings. A change seems to be coming over the staff. I am looking forward to next year. (Interview 3: 171–173)

All the interest from the staff has made me search out new ways to achieve the community’s ideas for the school. (Interview 3: 175)

Everyone comes to P and C meetings now, even some of the part-time staff. They have never been before. (Interview 3: 176–177)

Keeping the vision alive is a task that Chris seems to be accepting with enthusiasm:

You know what, I think next year I might have a section in the newsletter informing the wider community of our vision and how everyone is contributing to the achievement of these goals.  
(Interview 3: 185–186)

**Being able to change school procedures quickly**

Being the only teaching staff member at the school every day, Chris is able to implement changes to classroom routine and procedures quite quickly. An example given was timetable alteration. In a larger school, many need to be consulted and a change may not be possible until the following term or year, but in a one-teacher school, change can be immediate:

If I can think of a better way to do something, I can make changes almost instantly. This does influence my work as principal. I can try more things and grow on [develop professionally] from the changes.  
(Interview 1: 148–150)

Chris said the teaching principal position allows him to be involved in all aspects of the children’s education as well as the organisation of the school. This unique opportunity offers the principal endless experiences to refine skills and to try new processes:

In a small school you are directly involved in everything. How the school runs is directly related to what you are going to be doing. I have so much control over what I want to do. (Interview 2: 150–15)

I would not give it up for a million dollars. (Interview 3: 280)
Leadership

The interview process culminated in a discussion focused upon leadership of the small, one-teacher school. Chris had, at times, during the previous interviews touched upon leadership but the final interview concentrated upon his leadership practice.

Chris indicated that his beliefs and values of teaching and learning influence his approach to leadership:

> My leadership is influenced by my values. I value my human resources, I value the knowledge that the school community members have and I value the thinking of my students. Also my leadership is influenced by the ideas, beliefs, and aspirations of the local community for their school.

(Interview 4: 160–161)

Chris said he did not know what his leadership practice was called as he had not studied leadership at university, but the following is his description:

> Working together leadership allows others to share and develop ideas and changes for the school. Change works best if there is shared ownership of the change.

(Interview 4: 181–182)

‘Working together’ in a sharing and trusting environment allowed Chris to work harmoniously with staff, parents and community members but also enabled him to introduce change to existing school procedures.

When questioned if he used this approach on all occasions, upon reflection Chris answered ‘no’:

> I use a more direct approach when Education Queensland requires particular documents or processed to be fulfilled to the letter. I inform the staff and parents of what has to be done and why.

(Interview 4: 188–189)

‘Direct leadership’ is necessary to ensure Chris’s school meets Education Queensland’s requirement.

Chris also used the words ‘collaborative leadership’ when he referred to his work with principals of the regional network. ‘Collaborative leadership’ is a result of the remoteness of the schools. Local principals working together to solve and share the numerous tasks that face each teaching principal:
a collaborative leadership approach because as all the teaching principals in this region work together, we share and help each to write documents, to solve school issues, share resources and we help each other if a personal issue arises. (Interview 4: 177–179)

According to Chris, he uses these different approaches depending upon the circumstances, his desired outcomes and the need to involve others in the decision making process:

... what I want to achieve and the knowledge held by the person I am working with dictates my approach. (Interview 4: 163)

As a result of these approaches to leadership, Chris said he has been rewarded with many successes:

I have had many successes and enjoy my time in this small school setting because I have been able to work along with the parents, the school staff, community members and the local principals to achieve improvements for the school. (Interview 4: 43–45)

The final section of the interview endeavoured to elicit from Chris if there were any circumstances that allowed him to lead, or circumstances that prevented leadership:

A misunderstanding or a person feeling devalued definitely prevented the ‘collaborative’ and ‘working together’ leaderships from working. The staff, parents and community members get on with me so much better now and they seem to understand my thinking better than they did during my first few months so I think it was the relationships we established over time enabled us to work together and for me to lead. (Interview 4: 361–365)
**Case Study School B: Margaret, the teaching principal**

The first part of this case study presents Margaret’s replies to the introductory questions; ‘What is a teaching principal?’ and ‘Why become a teaching principal?’ The second section details Margaret’s replies to the questions focusing upon the factors of influence upon her leadership.

**What is a teaching principal?**

You are a leader, a friend and I think someone who inspires, and someone to be inspired. (Interview 1: 22–23)

Teaching principal is like . . .

. . . a roller coaster. It is to me a job with lots of ups and downs. (Interview 1: 49)

Margaret explained:

An up is when I am able to lead the school community towards the vision the community and I decided upon. But a down is when my leadership approach was wrong and I have made another mistake. (Interview 1: 51–53)

**Why become a teaching principal?**

My past principal suggested it to me, I hadn’t thought about it at all but he said I could do it and enjoy myself. Before I knew it my application was accepted and I was on my way to a new school as teaching principal. (Interview 1: 91–93)

Asked how she was finding the position after 18 months, Margaret answered:

I am enjoying it. But, there is so much to do. I am constantly planning and trying to foresee the next stages of events so I am on top of them. If I fall into the trap of only working for today, the days are not so enjoyable—I enjoy planning and working ahead to achieve school and community goals—that is the fun part of this job. I love it here. I may stay. I am engaged to a local landholder’s son, so I may be here for a while. I will wait and see. (Interview 4: 431–435)

**Factors of influence upon teaching principal practice**

Margaret discussed the factors that have influenced her practice:

. . . communication and positive relationships because I was aware that positive communications had dropped to a low ebb. Secondly, administration [management] requirements, there is so much to do
and to keep up with. Thirdly, the teaching, knowing what to teach and what to expect from each child. The location, it has a strong influence on my day-to-day practice. (Interview 1: 36–40)

The community wanted change with reference to confidentiality but they first appeared to resist change in most other areas when I first started, so trying to win the parents and community members over to making change has greatly influenced my leadership approach. (Interview 3: 151–153)

My personal belief that every child should have equal opportunities drives me to improve facilitates at this school especially the computers. (Interview 3: 158–159)

My past teaching experiences and my past principal at the three-teacher school have been influences. He was a great model and has been a mentor to me over the past year. (Interview 1: 156–157)

From Margaret’s data, the following factors have been drawn. Margaret verified these as the major influencing factors:

- communication and relationships;
- community expectations;
- professional beliefs;
- past teaching experiences, colleagues and mentorship; and
- Education Queensland’s expectations.

**Communication and relationships**

For Margaret, the following aspects of communication and relationships have influenced her practice:

- staff and school community morale;
- confidentiality; and
- students.

*Staff and school community morale:* Immediately after accepting the position of teaching principal, Margaret was informed by officers of Education Queensland that the staff morale was very low and her brief was to rectify the situation. During the time of the immediate past principal, the school community had become disillusioned with poor communication and disclosure of confidential material by the principal, and trust in the teaching principal by the community had declined. Margaret said she was immediately concerned because she had no previous knowledge of how to handle
such a situation, but having just left a school where all staff and the school community members were very happy, she immediately approached her past principal for advice:

I was so lucky for we [Margaret’s past principal and herself] had a number of discussions and I also visited my new school twice before the year finished so I could develop a sense of what could be happening before I started there at the beginning of the next year. (Interview 1: 146–148)

I followed one of his [Margaret’s past principal] suggestions: he had a very open policy with his school community. He would say what he thought and ask people what they thought. There were no hidden agendas, always a very happy honest approach. (Interview 1: 265–267)

Margaret indicated that her aim was to:

... start my first week by letting everyone know that I was willing to listen and to gather their ideas and suggestions before I made any changes. (Interview 2: 192–193)

I could almost see the part-time staff relax physically and all moved ahead from that moment. I did not need to tell the Parents and Citizens’ members [P and C], they already knew by the time we had our first meeting a week later. (Interview 2: 195–197)

She noted that communication with the wider community needed to be positive at all times, for the community members judged the school by school documents distributed and ‘the stories’ they heard about the school. This knowledge has influenced her careful selection of content for all newsletters and all circulars sent to parents and community members:

I learnt how important positive communication was and I now use every avenue available to me to communicate the happenings of the school as well as foreshadowing ideas that I think would be best for the school’s future. (Interview 3: 10–12)

According to Margaret, she has been able to turn the negative school environment around. The main contributing factor has been her use of positive two-way communication, which has lead to productive relationships with staff and parents. Within a year of Margaret starting as teaching principal, she said the negative environment had been reversed and that she and the school community were moving forward towards a very positive working partnership:
I have found being positive and consistent is the best way to foster meaningful relationships with parents and community members. (Interview 2: 187–188)

**Confidentiality:** The issue of confidentiality had to be addressed frequently with the staff, as personal information is exchanged each day and the correct and sensitive handling of this information is vital to maintaining integrity. Margaret indicated that taking responsibility for other people’s confidential details can become overwhelming:

In a small community it becomes a very important issue because everyone knows everyone and is connected to the school in some way, so often there is no one you can have a chat to. I told the staff I am the best one to unload their worries on but whom do I unload to? (Interview 2: 123–126)

**Students:** An honest and consistent approach to communication with students builds respect and fruitful relationships, according to Margaret. By modelling her own values of caring for others, through the approach to teaching, Margaret says this has greatly assisted the development of a ‘caring for others’ attitude in the children. As Margaret indicated:

We have lots of fun together but they [the students] always know where the line is drawn. We work, play and help each other in the classroom and in the playground. We have achieved so much over the past 18 months and I think this is due to my modelling of accepted behaviour and values. (Interview 2: 79–81)

People are important especially the students. I respect their views, feelings and opinions. (Interview 3:123–124)

At community functions away from the school, Margaret indicated that she was quite informal with her students, for she was almost like a parent or an aunt. The multi-age arrangement of her class and the positive relationships, facilitate this approach and adds further to the respect the students and Margaret share:

At school we are like one big family, all working together and supporting each other. (Interview 2: 198)

In the community setting, I don’t mind them asking for a dance because it is a family atmosphere. I have actually had small kids at tennis crawl up on my lap and fall asleep while their Mums and Dads are playing. They still call me Miss. . . . out in the community but they know what I am doing is for their best interest because I care about them as individuals. (Interview 2: 199–202)
Community expectations

Margaret indicated there were three aspects of the local community context that influenced her work and leadership as teaching principal:

- code of conduct;
- traditional values; and
- visibility.

Code of Conduct: Expectations based upon past experiences created a dilemma for Margaret, which she needed to address as soon as possible. An incident arose when a parent at a Parents and Citizens meeting indicated that Margaret was not keeping the parents informed of school events. Previous principals had shown more openness than she was demonstrating. Margaret had been informed of this concern and said:

I write a letter home every week, I report at every Parents and Citizens meeting, most parents talk to me every day when they deliver or collect their children. I didn’t know how much more communication was required. (Interview 2: 144–145)

Later that week, the parent came up and said the issue was that when I came to dinner I did not discuss the school. She said parents found out lots of things about the school when the [previous] principal came to dinner. (Interview 2: 146–148)

This was an example of different expectations by some of the members of the school community and may be why, in the past, there had been a loss of trust between school community members and the principal:

No, that is unethical I told her. Dinner out for me is a social event but I must conduct myself in the correct manner and keep my school hat off. (Interview 2: 149–150)

Margaret said she addressed this issue at the following Parents and Citizens meeting and placed on record her understanding of the Code of Conduct expected of principals.

Traditional values: Margaret characterised her school community members as typical of many in small rural communities:

... hard working property dwellers with traditional beliefs about religion, race, marriage and what makes an educated person. (Interview 1: 270–271)
All members of the school community are Anglo-Australian and not very tolerant to other races or religions. They are very religious, believe in their Christianity, and you have to be very careful if you discuss other religions with them. Last year I had a discussion about another religion with the children and I had a few parents on my doorstep the next morning. (Interview 2: 25–30)

The community members believe in the old schooling approach of the three R’s and could see no need for technology in the classroom. When Margaret started at the school she said she noted that student use of computers was not encouraged. Resistance to change was strong, Margaret indicated, but over the past twelve months, she has purchased six new computers and turned parental opinion around by explaining to them how disadvantaged their children would be when they go on to larger schools to undertake their secondary education. Margaret stated her method of explanation consisted of making newsletters from other schools and educational documents available that detailed the advantages of technology, especially for remote rural children. In addition, Margaret gradually introduced computer design elements into the curriculum, which the children totally enjoyed and asked for more. These careful steps, Margaret indicated, allowed the school community time to consider and eventually accept the idea of change:

In this small school I am finding that the parents and the community members have no concept of what is happening elsewhere, so you have to make them aware of changes and what the benefits are of these changes. (Interview 1: 212–213)

It was hard work finding short articles for everyone to read to help them understand the recent changes in education. But it worked. (Interview 2: 256–257)

Change is an issue in this small community. Margaret has found she has had to prove why change is necessary before the school community is receptive:

I find if I wish to make changes at the school, the best way is to introduce the ideas at a P and C meeting, and the members and I talk through the advantages that a change would make to the children’s education. This is the only way I can make change. (Interview 2: 60–65)

When I chat to other small school principals, I hear different ways of handling a similar situation—every community seems to be very different. This community is very supportive as long as I keep to what has happened in the past or if I want to change something, the parents, the community members and staff need to see how the change will benefit the children. (Interview 3: 253–257)
Visibility: Margaret has found teaching in an isolated rural context poses different challenges to those experienced in inner London and northern regional Queensland:

There is nowhere to go to have a coffee, to shop, and to be amongst people who do not know you. You live within the small community and are always visible as the school principal and as the new person in the community. The roles of resident and school principal are inevitably closely linked and there is close scrutiny by community members. (Interview 3: 60–64)

The school is an important part of the community and the community members make it their business to know what the principal is doing. I have to be very careful when my fiancée’s car is parked outside the schoolhouse. Everyone knows our movements. (Interview 2: 107–110)

My [washing] machine broke down on Saturday. On Monday morning before 8:00am, I was asked by a community member what was wrong with my washing machine. (Interview 2: 115–117)

Acceptance of both the professional and personal side of being principal is part of success in a small community. At first, Margaret said she was uncomfortable being so visible, but now she said she accepts the ‘role’ and takes the opportunity to listen, to understand the locals, and to sow her vision for the school into conversations with community members:

I actually love where I am. Since coming here I have been away only on three weekends. So I actually stay in the community and chat to everyone who drops by. I had learnt so much by just chatting and listening. (Interview 1: 74–76)

I joined the tennis club and made friends that way. I am invited to all local functions and I am accepted as a community member not just as the teaching principal. (Interview 1: 83–84)

Sensitivity to the context and to the place of the school within the local community is an essential aspect of making leadership work, Margaret said:

Here you need to be part of the community and be accepted by the community members, or you soon apply for a transfer out. (Interview 2: 99–100)

In such a small community Margaret said that some of her friends are parents. This created dilemmas Margaret stated, which were, at times, very difficult to manage:

Out here you get on such a personal level with the parents and the children, you are friends with them. So you need to find ways to balance the friend and the principal roles. This was very difficult to
balance at times especially during my first year as teaching principal.
(Interview 3: 115–120)

**Professional beliefs**
Margaret discussed three professional beliefs that influence her leadership:

- being involved in community events;
- equal opportunities for students; and
- must make connections with local context.

*Being involved in community events*: Margaret believes involvement on the local community is essential for the actions of a teaching principal to be accepted:

> The community is a big part in a small school like this. You have to become a part of the community. If you do not become part of the community they generally do not accept you or the things you wish to implement. So I believe I have to make the effort to become part of the community. (Interview 1: 55–57)

One way to become involved is to remain in the district and join local groups, Margaret indicated. Another is to circulate the school weekly newsletter to all community members so that everyone feels part of the school:

> Basically if the principal is here for the school only and goes away on the weekends, then the community thinks that principal is not really interested and the community keeps the principal at arm’s length. 
(Interview 1:165–166)

> Newsletters are the best way to keep everyone informed. By being informed, the locals feel they are part of the school. Over the past 12 months, the support for my ideas has greatly increased and I feel one of the reasons is that I make everything open to everyone. 
(Interview 1: 60–63)

*Equal opportunities for students*: Margaret’s experiences in London and other Queensland schools have given her an understanding of the learning opportunities available to students. She said she believes that whether rural or urban, all students should have equal educational opportunities:

> You don’t know where the student will end up in their adult life, so school must offer the best educational chances. I know what other schools have, especially in the area of computers, so I want that for my students out here as well. (Interview 2: 41–43)
Must make connections with local context: Margaret believes that teaching is different in each different context. Making connections with the local community’s educational beliefs and values, and understanding their aspirations for their children is very important if learning is to happen, so schoolwork must be contextualised:

The children’s needs here are quite different from the needs of the urban students I have taught, so using units of work from the past do not work. I find I have to make connections with the children’s family life, their beliefs and hopes, and with the context before I can expect the children to learn new things. (Interview 1: 259–261)

Past teaching experiences, colleagues and mentorship
Margaret discussed three additional factors that she describes as influences upon her leadership practice:

- past teaching experiences;
- colleagues; and
- mentorship.

Past teaching experiences: Margaret’s experience in an inner London school, where students were very rowdy and rude, greatly influenced her teaching approach when she first started at the three-teacher school in northern Queensland, she stated:

I was always very, very strict. (Interview 1: 255)

Under the guidance of the principal at the northern Queensland school, Margaret said she learnt how to maintain discipline by setting parameters of behaviour without the need for verbal intervention:

He [Margaret’s past principal] showed me how to have fun with the children in a different way. They know the boundaries and you don’t have to yell and jump up and down and carry on. I really changed during my time at that school from a very strict teacher to joking around with the kids. But it only takes a look from me and they know they have gone too far. (Interview 1: 255–261)

As a consequence of her past principal’s guidance, Margaret indicated that her principalship has been made significantly easier. As the principal, Margaret said there are circumstances when she needs to demonstrate a firmer control over the behaviour of the students compared with the teacher role. There is a fine line between when she steps out of the teacher’s role into the principal’s role when a firmer degree of control over student behaviour is necessary:
Being able to show the children you have another side if they choose to step out of line has proved most useful. If I had not learnt to control my class through developing rules and parameters, I would not have been able to handle consequences when that little extra was needed to discipline inappropriate behaviour. (Interview 1: 266–270)

Margaret indicated that this approach has not only influenced her behaviour management strategies, but she has been able to differentiate between issues of importance, such as minor misdemeanours, and major behaviour concerns, such as bullying. (Interview 1: 290–293)

I am more relaxed and willing to let small things go, so I can concentrate on the important issues. There are so many issues, I found it difficult to sort out which ones I allow to run their natural course and which ones need attention when I first started. Now, as a result of the guidance offered by my mentor, I can sort issues quickly and effectively. (Interview 1: 272–273)

Margaret had had multi-age teaching experience, and she said that this:

. . . helped me so much. I don’t know how I could have coped with all the planning, if I didn’t know how to manage a multi-age class. (Interview 4: 244–245)

Colleagues: Relationships with principals in other small schools have become very positive experiences for Margaret. The confidence gained and the knowledge shared has allowed her to grow as a principal. Without these relationships with colleagues, her principalship in such an isolated region would have been very insular:

Positive relationships with distant colleagues are vital to the success of this position. (Interview 1: 180–181)

There are many documents to write and we share our first drafts between the group of teaching principals. This saves a lot of work. (Interview 1:125–126)

We have also created a cluster of teaching principals in this area and we met once a term. (Interview 1: 135–136)

We also have principal conferences twice a year when all principals from the district meet for 2 days. We talk about the needs of Education Queensland, all the new policies and discuss curriculum demands. It is not until the second afternoon that we join together with all the other small school principals and talk about the issues which especially concern us. I wish we had more time with small school principals. (Interview 1: 150–155)
Mentorship: As previously noted in this case study, support given by Margaret’s past principal has contributed to her style of principalship. Through sharing experiences, knowledge, modelling and listening, the mentorship has given Margaret further confidence, she said, to tackle the new tasks expected of a principal:

Without him [past principal] I would have not handled the communication and relationship situation very well. Without him I would have had no one to debrief to and without him I would not have had the confidence to encourage community members to develop a vision for their school. (Interview 1: 295–298)

Education Queensland’s expectations

Four elements of Education Queensland’s expectations have influenced Margaret’s principalship:

- teaching demands;
- ‘You are it’;
- vision development;
- being the lone representative of Education Queensland; and
- professional pre-training.

Teaching demands: Having to organise the school as well as teaching, places a considerable drain upon her time and energy Margaret stated. She commented that having all grades to teach each day, has proved to be a challenge:

I have all year levels at the school so planning takes a very long time for me. I find the multi-age approach best—thank goodness the principal in my last school practised multi-age teaching otherwise I would not be able to handle all these year levels. (Interview 1: 247–249)

‘You are it’: Margaret summed up her position with the words ‘you are it’:

You have to learn about everything: from knowing who to call to repair the bore water pump, to handling staffing issues, to developing a future vision for the school. This has a great influence upon my work every day of the week. (Interview 2: 10–12)

The most important development in Margaret’s approach has been the process of learning how to handle the unexpected in a clear logical manner. This allows her, she said to clearly assess the problem, decide who to contact for assistance, and how best to manage the problem until it is rectified:
I think the thing I have learnt the most is not to panic—if something unexpected happens—panicking does not help, so thinking with a clear head is the answer. At the beginning of last year, being here in the middle of nowhere and not knowing anyone, I panicked, whereas now I tend to be more at ease and know how to access help when I need to.

(Interview 2: 15–20)

A deeper aspect of this issue for Margaret was the realisation that she had no time to herself because she has to do everything. There are no full-time staff members to share the workload, to discuss alternatives, or to share the essential survival duties such as ordering resources, checking that bins are emptied and all windows and doors are locked:

I have to do everything. Even if part-time staff help out, I still have to check all essential duties have been conducted correctly. I am accountable for everything. (Interview 3: 41–42)

When you first take up such a position, there is so much to think about and to do. You get into a position like this and you get so inundated with everything that you don’t have time to think.

(Interview 3: 132–134)

‘You are it’ has led Margaret to establish professional networks with fellow colleagues and her past principal, because the position of teaching principal is too broad and too varied for just one person to handle alone. Margaret indicated:

There is so much to know in this job especially when you are starting. I use fellow principals and my past principal as sounding boards to run ideas by and to help me obtain knowledge I don’t have.

(Interview 3: 154–155)

Vision development: With the support of her past principal, Margaret has been able to handle the policy and visionary elements of her leadership role. Margaret indicated that if vision development were not a directive of Education Queensland, she would not have stepped into this role:

This [vision development] has influenced my leadership and broadened my skills. (Interview 3: 43)

As a result of the skills she has learnt while researching and participating in leadership discussions with her mentor and Education Queensland staff, Margaret’s whole perception of what makes a principal has changed:
Even though I have only been in this position for just over 18 months, I know my approach has changed. I can see where a school could go, and where I could lead the community. (Interview 3: 37–38)

Using these newly found and developing skills, a vision for the school has been written. According to Margaret, she is able to work with the community members towards goals that will improve student learning and community outcomes:

You need to lead through a vision that you and the community members create. Same with values—we come together and decide what values are best for our school and then I direct the final decisions so that these values are achieved. (Interview 3: 32–35)

_Lone representative of Education Queensland:_ Margaret found that being the lone representative of Education Queensland was a daunting task, especially when her personal philosophy of education did not concur with Education Queensland policy. Current educational expectations require the principal to convey changes in policy to his/her school community and Margaret had to find the positives in Education Queensland documents. She said she was aided through the membership of the professional network she had developed with other colleagues and her mentor:

The community relies on my knowledge to interpret new educational policies. At the P and C meetings there are often requests for me to interpret the current trends in education for everyone. (Interview 1: 165–168)

When the recent White Paper was to be circulated to all parents, Margaret did not distribute it until she had read and discussed with colleagues how it would impact upon her small school. Margaret stated her knowledge and understanding of this new policy conveyed professionalism to her community and further built upon her developing respect and acceptance as a community member:

I was told to give the copies of the White Paper to the parents immediately, but I hung on to them for a few days until I knew more about the contents of the paper. (Interview 1: 171–173)

_Professional pre-training:_ Margaret reflected upon not having attended an induction workshop at the beginning of her principalship. Over time, she indicated she had learnt much, but attending and meeting others would have saved her much time and energy:
Leadership approaches as discussed by Margaret

I am a different type of leader at different times. (Interview 3: 143)

Margaret indicated she has a clear understanding of her leadership and that she leads in different ways depending upon the outcomes she desires.

‘Guiding leadership’: Using a guiding approach in partnership with community members through sharing information, Margaret said she leads the school community towards decisions that have improved student outcomes:

I am a guiding leader when I guide them [the school community] towards the correct decision for the school. (Interview 3: 136–137)

Margaret indicated that she has to ‘guide’ and allow the community members time to understand the new information before they are able to comprehend how improved student learning is possible:

I made the mistake at first telling the parents and community members of my changes at a P and C meeting. My feedback was very negative. Now I share information about an idea first, and work with everyone to process the changes necessary. (Interview 4: 205–207)

‘Direct leadership’: Margaret stated she uses concise, clear instructions when informing children and new staff in their work. This works best, she said, because everyone knows what to do and satisfactory results are achieved.

Margaret started her leadership practice on a strong note because she had prior knowledge of issues that needed to be resolved. Using the suggestions of her past principal, she was able to create clear directives for the school community’s members to understand and follow:

I am a direct leader when I work with the children and a new staff member. (Interview 4: 137)

In confidentiality issues I am very direct. (Interview 4: 186)

‘Negotiating leadership’: When seeking Education Queensland funding for the school, Margaret found the best way to achieve her goals was to use a negotiating approach with Education Queensland staff:
I am a negotiating leader when I need resources for my school from Education Queensland (Interview 4: 185)

Over time my skills in negotiating have improved. The community members and I work together achieving school goals. As well, I am much better at writing documents for Education Queensland and these are bringing more funds into the school. (Interview 3: 192–195)
**Case Study School C: Janet, the teaching principal**

The first part of Janet’s case study presents her replies to the introductory questions ‘What is a teaching principal?’ and ‘Why become a teaching principal?’, while the second section details Janet’s replies to the numerous questions focusing upon the factors of influence upon her practice.

**What is a teaching principal?**

Someone who spends almost all her time preparing and working for the school and the community. (Interview 1: 335–336)

Teaching principal is like . . .

. . . a juggling act—it is trying to keep on top of the teaching, the staffing, the management of the school so there is time to think and prepare for the future of the school and the community.

(Interview 1: 340–342)

**Why become a teaching principal?**

Janet indicated she had not thought about becoming a teaching principal until the Executive Director of Schools asked her to apply:

I was only in my second year of teaching so I had not thought of a promotion. I was still learning how to teach. (Interview 1: 271–272)

I didn’t really like the school I was in so why not give it a go. Education Queensland asked me, it was not as if I was asking.

(Interview 1: 279–280)

Asked how she was finding the position after two years, Janet answered:

I am really enjoying the work and the leadership. Once I got over the isolation aspects of the position and found some local friends and a network of colleagues; it is all o.k. I have learnt so much, and one day I am going to apply for a larger school. I think I could handle more staff now. (Interview 4: 341–344)

**Factors of influence upon practice**

Janet described the influences upon her teaching principalship:

The local community, the school is part of this community; finding time to do everything; staffing issues, Education Queensland’s expectations; being alone. Also I suppose it comes down to my educational beliefs and those of the community, plus community expectations, and knowing the curriculum and how to teach using multi-age strategies. (Interview 3: 10–13)
From Janet’s data, the following factors have been identified. Janet has verified these as the influencing factors:

- community expectations;
- professional beliefs;
- small local context;
- Education Queensland expectations;
- professional isolation; and
- leadership opportunities and expectations.

**Community expectations**

Janet detailed seven different areas of community expectations:

- community involvement;
- keeping the community informed;
- change;
- curriculum;
- social; and
- employment.

*Community involvement:* Janet indicated she was met by all the parents on her day of arrival and they all informed her they expected to be involved in all school events:

> The community wanted to be involved in all the school events. I was told this when I arrived. (Interview 1: 31–32)

*Keeping the community informed:* Janet said she soon came to realise how vital it was to keep all community members fully informed when everyone kept asking for details of school happenings. By keeping everyone informed, she said she was also able to solicit help with resources and manpower:

> Communication with the wider community is a feature of being a teaching principal. I have found this community very, very supportive. They will do anything for you, but I soon understood I needed to keep them informed of everything that was happening at the school. A lack of communication in this area can cause lots of issues and worries. I never knew it was so important. (Interview 3: 2–6)
Janet indicated that a weekly newsletter that was sent to all community members, assisted her in the process of maintaining a high level of communication.

Janet also indicated that the community expected her to keep them fully informed of any changes of policy from Education Queensland:

> I have to be up-to-date with policy changes and new educational trends. (Interview 2: 20)

**Change:** Janet reported that the welcoming committee had another mission. They informed her that they did not wish for any changes to be made to school procedures that they thought were important. Janet was not sure what these were but she found out over the next few months:

> When I arrived they met me and made it very clear that I was not to change anything that was important to them. Keep things as they are, they told me. (Interview 1: 140–141)

Janet recognised and accepted the importance the locals placed on past procedures and maintaining them. Janet thought it would be a way of ‘fitting in’/ ‘being accepted’ if she complied:

> Everyone seemed happy after the first few weeks. I had kept everything the same. (Interview 1: 37–39)

Janet indicated she had entered an environment that had her role defined and, until she was accepted, she had to fit the ‘mould’. She felt the community was rather invasive and powerful:

> When I first arrived, I was told, ‘This is ‘our school’. I feel uncomfortable as they seemed to have a control over this teaching principal position. (Interview 1: 162–163)

**Curriculum:** Janet indicated that the parents’ educational beliefs and values influence their approach to schooling:

> I am expected to endorse the beliefs held by the parents. (Interview 1: 101)

> The parents value literacy, technology and numeracy but don’t care for art, science and dance. “As long as my child can read and write and use computers”. All families have computers at home with Internet connections. The children have excellent computer skills. (Interview 1: 73–74)
There are ten computers; all in good working conditions and good software for the children to use. (Interview 1: 76–77)

Janet reports that the school community is very progressive in some areas of the curriculum such as technology, but within traditional in areas such as religion and cultures:

I introduced different religions in one of the lessons one afternoon—you know the very next morning there were two parents on the school door steps wishing to indicate they didn’t approve of the lesson. (Interview 1: 104–106)

Social: The expectations of this community were reported to be high. They want her to attend all social functions, join in all local celebrations, and yet to be able to teach and organise the school efficiently:

I am so busy. I am included in all community’s social events. This brings with it the problem of social drinking—selecting a code of conduct I feel appropriate is difficult for my beliefs do not fit the community’s beliefs. I prefer not to drink but the community expects me to. (Interview 2: 148–150)

Janet says she is invited out to dinner at least once a week to which she said:

Dinner invitations—I actually keep a list of where I go so I can balance the number of times I go to for dinner at each family’s home. It is a real balancing act. (Interview 2: 198–200)

Employment: Staffing has caused continued problems for Janet. Being in such a small community, there are few persons available to work as part-time staff. The position of teacher’s aide is a case example:

I needed a teacher’s aide and only one person applied. (Interview 1: 158–160)

I suggested to the P and C [Parents and Citizens Committee] we could advertise again but they discouraged this. She had not been a teacher’s aide before and she was pregnant. I was told the ‘right’ thing to do was to employ her. (Interview 1: 170–172)

Janet found the person unsuitable for the position but community pressure was exerted upon Janet to keep the person employed. Without prior knowledge, Janet had no yardstick to guide her in the area of staffing. After one month, the newly appointed teacher’s aide began to arrive late to work and was unable to complete her set tasks. Janet said she decided to let things slide in the expectation that the issue would
resolve itself. The issue only worsened and Janet said she handled the staff member inappropriately, which led to repercussions throughout the school community:

She was often late and when I had words with her, she went off in a huff. Next morning I heard she had telephoned community members and bitched about me. The whole community knew.
(IInterview 1: 186–188)

The parents indicated to Janet the next morning that the said employee was ill sometimes and Janet had to be more understanding:

As a long-standing member of the community, she [the teacher’s aide] had a place in the community. I was new so my action must be in accordance with community’s expectations
(IInterview 1:189–190).

Janet indicated one of the most difficult challenges she faces as teaching principal is the management of staff:

I need assistance with leadership of staff. Maybe it should be included in the Induction workshop. (Interview 4: 41)

Professional beliefs
Janet listed two professional beliefs that were influential to her approach to school affairs:

- valuing the individual; and
- a supportive friendly educational environment.

Valuing the individual: Janet’s belief in valuing the individual influenced her approach to communication and relationships at her school:

This remote school setting has strengthened my belief in the individual, the importance to respect and to accept their [students and staff] achievements.(Interview 1: 35–36)Janet celebrates student success within the school and the wider community and believes this builds student self-esteem and adds meaning to their everyday school achievements:

The children need to know they are achieving but I think we need to celebrate that within the wider community—so the school maintains a positive image in the community and so that the children know that their achievements are valued beyond me; by Mum, Dad and others. (Interview 2: 107–109)
But with only 21 students, Janet indicated she needs to limit the one-to-one attention offered to the students, as she suspected familiarity could breed contempt:

You have to try to distance yourself so the kids do not feel too comfortable with you. You must not let the line blur. I definitely insist that they call me Miss... even when at their houses. I do not let them lean all over me or sit on me. (Interview 3: 27–29)

They ask me for constant help with their lessons but I now arrange times for them to work independently. I work at my desk and they work at theirs. (Interview 3: 38–39)

A supportive friendly educational environment: Having always believed in providing a supportive, friendly educational environment for students, Janet stated this small context intensified this belief. She said she has always firmly believed in the importance of assisting children to develop skills and confidence to handle change envisaged in the future, but this tightly knit isolated community strengthened this belief. She furthered this support by arranging for the students to visit a local primary school 114 km away at least four times a year for social and sporting activities:

I think it is very important to develop their social skills. These children have all grown up together. They have this comfort zone with each other. I am so conscious of the fact that it is important to extend this supportive learning environment. (Interview 1: 124–126)

Small local context
The isolation of State School C worried Janet at the start of her principalship. She indicated that her dog helped her through that period until she felt more at ease and began to understand how an isolated community functions:

I got used to the silence after a few months, but if I did not have my dog I don’t know how I would have coped (Interview 1: 250–251)

New friends enabled her to cope with the dislocation of family and friends:

Old friends and family were far away, and trips to see them every weekend were impossible. I made friends here quite quickly so I am lucky. (Interview 1: 262–263)

The school and school house is right beside the main road so visibility was a concern for Janet:

I thought, at first, being by the main road was good for at least I saw a car or a truck at least once a day. But I soon realised everyone was looking in and everyone knew what I was doing. This information
became part of the community gossip, so now I would prefer having my house away from the road. (Interview 4: 56–59)

**Education Queensland expectations**

Janet detailed three expectations that her employing body pressured her to accept:

- being as Education Queensland representative;
- time availability; and
- curriculum knowledge and multi-age teaching.

*Education Queensland representative:* A factor that has influenced Janet’s work has been the need to be the representative for Education Queensland. As principal and the only full-time Education Queensland staff member, Janet became the interpreter of all educational policies, and the communication of these has become an important aspect of her practice. Keeping in touch with educational policies is a daunting task for all educators, but being the lone person to whom everyone turns became an influential factor:

A recent example of being a representative of Education Queensland was the release of the White Paper [A document that indicated an extension of compulsory school years].

> It hit the community hard and they are coming to me for answers—what does this mean for my child? Which is rather interesting because the parents got the information booklet the same afternoon as I did and so I had to say I would get back to you on that. I feel I am out here representing Education Queensland and yet I am not kept as well informed as the parents and the other stakeholders. (Interview 2: 9–15)

This was near the beginning of Janet’s term as teaching principal. A change of approach was needed to prevent a recurrence of this situation. Janet indicated that in future she would first contact colleagues and develop an understanding of educational documents before distributing to parents and community members:

> Communication must always be positive and informed. (Interview 3: 72)

*Time availability:* Janet indicated she is quick to learn, but even so she spends every weekday and night completing managerial tasks and planning her teaching. Most Sundays she set aside to continue her school and principal work:
There always seemed to be something that needed doing. As a classroom teacher I used to arrive early but leave around 4:00pm, but now as a teaching principal, I work here until dinner time and most nights I return to my office and work on for another two or three hours. (Interview 1: 81–83)

Janet said it is important to finish at night remembering what tasks have been completed, not thinking of the seemingly endless number yet to be addressed:

If you don’t get things finished you go home thinking you have not accomplished anything. A few time management skills are needed—prioritise, writing lists, being able to check things off as you do them and at the end of the day be able to say—right I did that and I have accomplished something today. I can go home before midnight and sleep tonight. (Interview 3: 111–114)

Sometimes Education Queensland forms are returned to be re-done—so much time wasted. (Interview 3: 471–472)

The consequence of this situation for Janet has been:

I keep a list of jobs that need doing. The jobs are so different. There are no links. I keep a note book by my bed—I often turn the light on three or four times a night when I am stressed and then I could go for two or three weeks and not write a thing down. If I can’t manage my time I find I can’t sleep. (Interview 3: 154–157)

Time was further taken up with the writing of numerous documents required by Education Queensland such as Literacy Strategies, Information Communication Policy and a Curriculum Framework. Janet said she encouraged all community members to assist with the writing that was involved:

It required me to lead the community and discuss options with them so they can work out their preferred future for the school and their community. (Interview 2: 84–85)

The consequence of this development, Janet said, allowed her to encourage the community to develop a Strategic Plan for their school and to develop a vision for the future role of the school within the community:

It gave the school community an opportunity to create and sustain its own culture and their preferred future. (Interview 2: 92–93)

The vision development process has awakened within Janet an understanding of how values affect passion and action:
Knowing how I felt about something allowed me to appreciate how passionate someone else was about another aspect of the same school issue. (Interview 3: 189–190)

I was challenged by the whole process and it drove me on to bigger things. (Interview 3: 210)

Curriculum knowledge and multi-age teaching:

Starting out as a teaching principal you need an understanding of the curriculum and all the new syllabi and outcomes. I think you really need to be on top of that stuff so you can hit the ground running—you have to handle all the admin. Stuff [managerial tasks] and if you are unaware of the curriculum stuff or how to organise all the different ability groups, it would be too much. (Interview 2: 290–293)

I know the curriculum; I am on top of all their learning. (Interview 2: 295)

Janet indicated that having to do everything at the school requires a firm grasp of multi-age teaching, although:

The big issue is keeping up with all the new developments. There is no one to share ideas or understanding with. I find it impossible unless I read every night and most of the weekends. (Interview 2: 401–402)

The fact that Education Queensland continues to introduce new syllabi and new approaches to teaching, learning, assessment and reporting creates an issue for the lone practitioner, Janet stated:

With all the new changes in the arts and technology you need lots of in-service. I have to attend all in-service workshops as there is no one else to share this task. (Interview 3: 91–93)

Professional isolation

Being the only full-time teacher and with the closest school 114 km away, Janet says that the professional isolation she experiences has influenced her practice. Having only graduated as a teacher two years ago, Janet has a feeling of loss associated with being the only teacher. There is no one with whom to share, discuss or debate possible teaching, school management and leadership practice:

I am alone. This has led me to use the network of colleagues not only for managerial help but also for help with teaching. It is just
good to hear what someone else is doing and to be able to chat about my teaching strategies. (Interview 2: 112–114)

The professional isolation of not only being physically a long way away from other teachers but also the feeling that Education Queensland does not fully consider the needs of the one teacher school setting when they organise meetings and develop professional workshop formats. (Interview 1: 64–70)

Due to the feeling of professional isolation and Education Queensland not appreciating the one-teacher school concept, Janet discussed:

- professional networks; and
- principal meetings.

**Professional networks:** When Janet first began as teaching principal, there was no organised network of teaching principals, but now one is operating. Forming a network of local teaching principals to share teaching, administrative and leadership issues has greatly reduced Janet’s feeling of isolation. Janet said they share administrative documents and, more recently, discuss Education Queensland policy matters and the current trends of educational development. Janet indicated that these relationships with other teaching principals has increased her confidence especially in the area of leadership:

> You can’t do this job alone. I don’t think asking for help means you are demonstrating that you are incapable. It is demonstrating that you are willing to learn and to do your best. It has really improved my practice. (Interview 3: 57–58)

Colleagues not only share and support each other with professional matters, but they are available to discuss confidential matters:

I had a teaching friend in another town, whom I could chat to and tell all but when she went overseas I had no one. I found that very difficult. Then I decided to share my concerns and worries with colleagues. They were a help. (Interview 3: 66–68)

There are four other teaching principals in this district and we all have to deal with the same issues so it is good to chat over the telephone. Without these chats I would find the job very difficult to fulfil. (Interview 4: 110–112)

**Principal meetings:** Other opportunities to share work experiences with colleagues are the professional development days at which all principals of the region gather. These
events address Education Queensland issues; however, the issues often focus upon the needs of the larger schools according to Janet:

The professional needs of the small remote school are always overlooked at these meetings. (Interview 3: 24–25)

The meetings are only one day in length and take place at least 220 km away, so there is much time and effort involved in attending:

Makes a very long day. There is no time to debrief, to ask for guidance, to discuss an idea. (Interview 2: 28)

Janet said she has asked the Executive Director of Schools to lengthen the program to two days. Janet thought this would allow more time to debrief, establish networks and to discuss issues over a meal and this, she felt, was very important for the principal alone in his/her school:

The idea was overruled by the larger school principals, according to Janet:

A principal of a much larger school said the idea was ridiculous. “I can’t afford two days out of my school—just forget it”. (Interview 2: 384)

Janet said she canvassed the other teaching principals of the region and, by suggesting to the Executive Director of Schools, the following proposal was agreed upon:

All principals meet for the first day and we, the teaching principals stay on for a second day to further our networking and our professional development. (Interview 2: 390–391)

The issue of small school principals’ professional isolation has been further emphasised by the approach taken by Education Queensland in their recent workshops designed to inform their employees of recent changes in teaching and learning. Janet said that all workshops have been designed for the participants to . . .

. . . work with a colleague. That colleague is to watch you teach and giving you feedback, and all that. Teaching principals are alone. I am alone. (Interview 2: 298–299)

Janet indicated that she felt Education Queensland did not have an understanding of the teaching principal position, and was not supportive of those in contexts similar to her own. In addition, this lack of understanding, Janet said is further evidenced by the program run under the title of ‘Leadership Training’:
At the leadership days all principals and Education Queensland officials gather—they call them leadership days but I have never been taught a single thing about leadership—all just trial and error and listening to those who have more experience. All the examples are from larger school contexts where there are a number of teachers and other staff who support the principal. (Interview 2: 376–379)

Janet indicated her determination to find ways to reduce her professional isolation led her to hold further discussions with the new Executive Director of Schools:

I think with a new Executive Director of Schools, we can make progress towards improved understandings of our position. I feel Education Queensland is under pressure to make lots of changes and the ones with the loudest voice win so we need to make the teaching principal voice heard. (Interview 2: 381–383)

**Leadership opportunities and expectations**

Throughout the four interviews, Janet revealed a number of factors that influence her leadership practice. The following details these factors using the headings suggested by Janet:

- handling change;
- leadership in professional develop;
- direct leadership;
- collaborative leader;
- community leader; and
- curriculum leadership.

*Handling change*: Janet knew from past personal experiences:

As a new person ‘on the block’ you need to accept the work done by others first, and only if change is necessary for improved outcomes, do you negotiate change. (Interview 4: 690–692) I didn’t jump in straight away and make changes in the first term. Some people see that as an attack on their way of operating rather than seeing it as a way of improvement. (Interview 3: 142–143)

As classroom work was her first priority, Janet first targeted alterations to the daily program where she felt improved outcome would result:

I noticed the kids were very tired by middle session and this was their English time. Their maths was very good so I asked the kids if we could change sessions and do English in the morning and maths during the middle session. (Interview 3: 147–149)
After discussing the matter with the students, Janet introduced the idea to the P and C meeting and, as the students were present, Janet asked them to talk about the change with the P and C members. By doing this, the children accepted the ownership of the idea and the members agreed to the change:

The kids worked really hard and almost thought it was their idea so they made it work. (Interview 3: 151)

The success of this small event set the pattern for a number of future changes Janet said:

Using established relationships worked, so I used this approach a few more times until I became accepted as a community member. (Interview 2: 400)

I take all my ideas to the P and C meeting. I present them with my research and the reasons why a change is needed or why a new approach would benefit the children. (Interview 2: 403–404)

In response to being asked why she used this approach Janet replied:

You don’t leave yourself open for personal attack and you are seen as a team player not a principal that must be obeyed. (Interview 2: 411–412)

Also the principal before me was very popular, so I feel I can’t make changes unless I can show reason and I have the agreement from the P and C meeting. (Interview 2: 425–426)

**Leadership in professional development:** During the last term, Janet said she had taken her teacher’s aide to all Education Queensland meetings, which has resulted in a number of positives for both the staff member and Janet:

This has been a very valuable experience for her [teacher’s aide]: her commitment to her job and to the school has improved and we have common ground to discuss school matters. (Interview 2: 257–259)

Janet said:

I understand my role better now and through the action of taking the teacher’s aide with me, I have increased her commitment to the work. (Interview 2: 79–82)

**Direct leadership:** Janet indicated that there are times when she uses a direct approach to leadership, especially in areas where the community members are lacking knowledge:
When writing some of the education documents and during our visionary deliberations, I chose to show options and they [the P and C members] were encouraged to select the best option for them. (Interview 3: 179–181)

Janet felt that the lack of knowledge of the current educational trends was the issue as the community members just do not know all the recent research in teaching and learning, so they are unable to make informed decisions:

I just don’t have the time or the energy to find articles for them [community members] to read so they can select ideas for themselves. I have to make some decisions and share the choices with them. (Interview 3: 183–185)

**Collaborative leader:** Once everyone has access to knowledge, Janet said:

We work together collaboratively. (Interview 4: 651)

**Community leader:** Once she was accepted by the community and they were working well together, Janet said, she is now looked upon by the wider community as a leader of the community:

People seem to get the impression that because it is happening at the school and I could contribute further and be part of community decision-making. (Interview 3: 191–192)

This caused an issue for Janet because she was being pushed into a very directive role (being asked to chair the meetings) by the community members and with limited past experience, she feel inadequate to handle this unexpected responsibility. Janet said she accepted this role as it demonstrated her acceptance by the community and . . .

It has improved the support offered to me as principal and to the school as a whole. (Interview 3: 198)

To continue positive relationships with all community members, Janet said she has an ‘open door policy’ that indicates to staff, parents and members of the community that she is happy to discuss any ideas, concerns or misunderstandings:

My relationships with my staff and community members are very important to me. Especially now that I understand how this school fits into the community. (Interview 3: 17–18)

Positive two-way communication lead to trusting relationships, Janet indicated, and in such a small community where she is being looked upon as the community leader
these are essential for the smooth running of the school—she believes that these can be managed by making everyone feel valued:

I always make sure I say hello to everyone. I am always saying to everyone I have an open door policy and if you have anything to talk about that is great. I am more than happy to see you at any time, apart from during school hours, I tell them. (Interview 3: 43–47)

In a small school such as this, resources such as library books, stationery and sporting equipment are often in short supply, and there is little in the way of funds to employ specialist teachers. Janet said she needs to plan her budget carefully so that she is able to achieve the school’s desired outcomes, but she must work closely with the Executive Director of Schools and other officers of Education Queensland so that the best funding options are made available to the school:

We had the Executive Director of Schools visit on Monday and I had advertised widely asking the community to come along and be supportive, and they were wonderful. All the young children were there with their mothers. There were at least 10 young ones. It was really great. (Interview 2: 56–59)

I have to go in and bat for the school so we get the same services and resources as other schools. (Interview 2: 61–62)

Curriculum leadership: As teaching principal, one of Janet’s responsibilities is to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of the children and the community. Janet’s reading and research led her to the decision that the Philosophy for Education concept would greatly enhance the students’ outcomes. In the past, the parents had made it quite clear that literacy and numeracy should be the focus for their children. Janet said she assisted the parents to understand the benefits of her proposal and suggested that two community members should accompany her in her quest to determine the suitability of the Philosophy for Education program and be involved in its implementation into their school community if it was decided to implement it. Janet had told them:

I would like to take two members of the community with me to do the training and the school would pay. Two people would be good so that I can discuss things with the other persons and the three of us can work together in the classroom. (Interview 2: 310–312)

Despite Janet’s prediction that they would insist on sticking to the basics of English and maths, the community reacted favourably. Positive feedback was received from
all P and C members, which was quite a change from their past responses. This turnaround has been the result of Janet’s determination to find out how the school community views it school, and then building upon that to slowly make changes that will ensure a renewed future for their school and community.

This acceptance of change has been quite rapid, considering Janet has only been principal for 20 months. It was Janet’s opinion that her knowledge of the curriculum, confidence in her teaching ability to link the community expectations with Education Queensland expectations, involvement in community events, her open door policy and accepting the roles expected of her by the community were reasons why community members are willing to accept her ideas and changes to current procedures and processes.
Case Study School D: Alice, the teaching principal

The first part of Alice’s case study presents her replies to the introductory questions, ‘What is a teaching principal?’ and ‘Why become a teaching principal?’, while the second section details Alice’s replies to the numerous questions focusing upon the factors of influence upon her practice.

What is a teaching principal?

A teaching principal is a teacher—she has to lead the children, teach the children, and educate the children. They are a bit of a leader because a teaching principal has to lead the school and the community. Basically, a teaching principal is a person who likes teaching, who is also prepared to take on extra tasks like school management, cleaning, working with the community members etc. (Interview 1: 109–113)

Teaching principal is like . . .

. . . a juggling act. You have to juggle the teaching, the cleaning, the ground care duties, report card writing, the assessment, the curriculum stuff, the staff, the money, budgets, writing policy documents, working with a wide range of adults, trying to understand the community members—you have to juggle all these things around. (Interview 1: 116–119)

Why become a teaching principal?

Alice raised two points: first as a teenager she had a dream that teaching in the bush would be exciting, and second, as circumstances would have it she was not completely satisfied with a classroom teaching position so thought the time was right to head ‘west’ out into rural Queensland:

I was team teaching and I wasn’t getting on with the people I was teaching with so when they [Education Queensland] offered me a position here, I said yes. I had put in an application for a rural school earlier, for I always wanted to come out here. I had put in applications for about three years before I was given a position. (Interview 1: 249–252)

Asked why teaching in a rural setting appealed, Alice stated:

I don’t know—just something I always wanted to do. Dad had a bit of land on the coast of Queensland and I liked to run about like a wild thing and the bush looked nice and it appealed to me to go to a school in the middle of nowhere. (Interview 2: 42–43)
Alice said she was totally unfamiliar with the expectations of a teaching principal, but thought it would be:

. . . fun. (Interview 1: 8)

Factors of influence upon practice
The interview data described in this case study were collected during four interviews held during Alice’s 33rd and 34th months of service as teaching principal at State School D.

Alice listed the following as the factors that have influenced her leadership:

. . . being single in an isolated rural community has influenced my work as principal the most. This led to relationship and friendship issues within the community. This school’s part of the community—what happens here at school influences the community and what happens in the community influences the school—they are as one. I think Education Queensland doesn’t understand the impact the isolation has upon my situation. (Interview 3: 15–19)

. . . having to know all the curriculum areas because I have all the seven year levels to teach. Also multi-age teaching—I know nothing about multi-age. (Interview 3: 23–24)

There is so much to learn about the administration of this school and the documents expected that you can’t learn everything at once. I spend so much time doing managerial tasks. (Interview 3: 35–36)

From Alice’s data, the following headings, verified by Alice, were selected as organisers for the influence upon her teaching principalship:

o school context;

o lack of understanding by the employing body;

o personal beliefs about the position of teaching principal; and

o expectations of the teaching principal position.

School context
For Alice, the following aspects of the context influence her leadership practice:

o being part of the community;

o small local population;

o being single and confidentiality; and
Being part of the community: Being the only public building for 110 kms, most social and community events are held at the school. Voting in state and federal elections, local dramatic society performances, children’s weekly play group and social sporting matches are examples of the events held at the school.

Social tennis and touch football are the main community sporting activities. Social tennis has been played for years at the school. Alice said she started the touch football games and they were proving very popular. Alice said her sport innovation contributed to the growing respect the community has shown her:

There is a tennis court with lights in the school grounds. Attendances can vary from 25 people to as low as 3. All depends upon what is happening on the properties at the time. Touch football held every second Sunday attracts up to 30 people.

My touch football initiative proved to the community I was interested in their lives and this makes a link between the community and myself. I think this has contributed to my leadership practice. (Interview 4: 15–17)

Small local population: The population surrounding the school is very small. Everyone lives on cattle properties and these are spread along a wide valley between two rough, rocky ranges. Everyone knows everyone, and many of the residents have attended State School D as a child or worked as a part-time staff member. The school is part of their lives, past and present, and what happens at the school is important to everyone. Alice said this has a great influence upon her principalship because she is dealing, not only with the children and the staff, but with the whole community:

Out here you have to get on with everyone for they are your community and your neighbours. Any time you get someone off-side you have to live with it. It is so complex. They see the school as their school. (Interview 3: 9–11)

Alice said she has to tread very carefully. This becomes very relevant when poor staff performance becomes an issue:

The part-time staff members are my neighbours and my friends so relationships with the staff become very delicate if I need to discuss their work output. It took me a long time to pluck up the courage to
discuss the work of my teacher’s aide. I thought she was being lazy.

(Interview 3: 12–14)

*Being single and confidentiality:* Alice raised the issue of being a single teacher in a remote rural setting at the outset of the first interview. She felt that she needed emotional support and someone to discuss daily events. Being single:

... you go home to an empty house. There is no one to tell and share the day’s happenings with. I am so lonely here.

(Interview 1: 10–11)

In addition, Alice said she hears so much confidential information that at times she feels she can no longer bottle it all up:

At the end of the day if you have someone you can go home to chat things over with, all would be well, but being single there is no one. I can’t meet a friend at the local coffee shop and debrief. This place is so isolated. There is no one.

(Interview 1: 390–393)

For almost two years, Alice said her only friend was the teacher’s aide and they became very good friends, but casual discussions between herself and the aide about children and parents eventually made their way back to the parents and the situation became impossible. Confidentially had been broken:

I got to the stage where I needed to tell somebody something but I shouldn’t have used my aide as a sounding board because she knows too many people in the community. She told others and before I knew it, everyone knew.

(Interview 1: 401–404)

Ringing my parents or friends in Brisbane costs a lot of money. When I was teaching in Brisbane I just went around and visited them.

(Interview 2: 185–186)

Alice cited other single teaching principals who have raised the issues of isolation, loneliness, depression and lack of motivation:

I know of one single teaching principal with the same needs and feelings as I have. She has contacted the Executive Director of Schools for help. Another [single teaching principal] is giving up this position because the isolation and the community pressure of being a teaching principal in a small school has become too great.

(Interview 2: 190–192)

Depression sets in, Alice said:

I felt so lonely. Sometimes, I just want to stay home and not go to school to face another day.

(Interview 1: 410–411)
Distance from professional support services and professional development: Specialist support persons—such as the speech therapist, guidance officer and learning support teacher—are reluctant to visit Alice’s school owing to the distance and the unsealed roads:

There is a lack of contact with specialists at our school. The type of gravel road and the distances means nobody wants to come and visit or they come once but will not come a second time.

(Interview 1: 285–288)

Alice indicated that when she is allocated a visit from a speech specialist, up to half the time available is required for travel to and from the school, as no overnight accommodation is available in the vicinity of the school. Face-to-face time with a child is limited and follow-up visits are difficult to arrange. The specialist is not prepared to travel such distances alone again, Alice stated.

Working face-to-face with other principals is difficult because the closest school principal is 110 km away. By the time I travel to meet with another principal, I could have written half the document. I have to get in my car and travel 110 kms one way all on gravel roads. I went two weeks in a row and got two flat tyres. Where do I get a flat tyre mended? It takes at least a week to send it into town on the mail car, have it mended and to be returned via the mail car. So I do not really blame anyone for not wanting to visit me for I do not want to travel to them.

(Interview 1: 317–324)

The consequence for Alice has been an inward-turning self-reliant approach to the principalship. Alice said she preferred to write and develop policies by herself and this was supported by her lack of interest in contacting and rarely visiting fellow teaching principals for guidance with document writing and policy interpretation. There is a network of teaching principals established in the region, but Alice becomes involved only on rare occasions. Alice thought she could eventually solve any school issue and she was better off doing this herself. Being so isolated, Alice felt the best way to survive was to be self-reliant.

Lack of understanding by the employing body

Alice indicated that, at times, the officers of Education Queensland did not seem to understand her concerns. When Alice needed help with a staffing matter, she felt only limited help was offered:
I telephoned Education Queensland about a concern but they say it is not a problem. They didn’t want to know about it, and then when the problem hadn’t gone away in six months and I had done everything I could think of—they then decided they had better come out. There was an incident here last year—it took six months for them to actually help out with the situation. (Interview 1: 293–296)

Alice also feels that Education Queensland does not understand the impact that distance has upon her practice:

There are meetings run by the bigger schools during school time but I am not willing to give up school time, even though I might learn something. I can’t see travelling 220 kms is worth leaving the children for a meeting. I think the meetings should be held out of school hours or on weekends. If I get a flat tyre, I am stranded without a car for days. (Interview 1: 302–305)

This lack of support has become one of the important influential factors on Alice’s principalship.

I ‘go it alone’, I rely on my past knowledge, old lecture notes etc. to survive. You know you can’t access services sometimes so I don’t even bother to try now. I look for other ways of getting around the problem instead of hitting my head against a brick wall. (Interview 1: 310–312)

**Personal beliefs about the position of teaching principal**

Alice’s belief is that the management and leading of a school is the teaching principal’s responsibility and this belief has greatly influenced the type of communication she encourages between herself, the staff and the parents. Alice encouraged the staff and parents to share their ideas for school improvement, but once this is accomplished, she develops the ideas and writes the policies herself:

All I would like to know is what the community expects from the school, rather than trying to get the community to come in and get them to write and develop policies for the school. (Interview 2: 80–81)

Alice maintained this approach throughout her two and half years at the school.

Alice also believes that the children are the key to positive communication because, through the process of demonstrating confidence in her classroom teaching, the local community knows that the school is progressing towards satisfactory outcomes:

The kids have to be enjoying school and want to come to school and respect me. If the kids respect me as their teacher and their
principal, the parents and community members get to like me as well. (Interview 3: 6–8)

Once all communication and interchanges with the community members are positive, Alice indicated positive relationships begin to build and over time, she now thinks she has become the ‘principal of their school’:

Once the kids respected me, I found it so much easier to maintain positive relationships out in the community. In such a small community this is essential if the school is going to help the young people to learn. I found once I proved myself in the classroom, the community listened to me. (Interview 3: 123–126)

Alice stressed the importance of becoming part of the community. The success of the touch football games is an example of being accepted and Alice indicted she thinks this will lead to positive relationship development in the near future:

I had to become part of the community and their acceptance of my idea of the touch football games was an indication to me I was accepted. I can build on this now. If I had not been able to do this I think I would be at odds with the community and my principalship would be difficult. (Interview 3: 225–227)

Expectations of the teaching principal position

This section is divided into three factors:

- management of the school;
- curriculum knowledge and multi-age teaching; and
- available teaching space.

Management of the school: For the first 18 months, Alice said she had a wonderful time:

I just taught and cleaned the school. If there was any paperwork to do, the administrative assistant told me what to do. She managed the school and me. (Interview 1: 355–356)

Having not attended an induction workshop or any principal meetings during the first 18 months, Alice said she was totally unaware of the major managerial tasks until the administrative assistant left:

Boy, did I suddenly find out what a teaching principal had to do. I knew nothing except what I had learnt from the administrative assistant over the first 18 months. Now I had to sort out the
Alice discovered she has many more tasks to fulfill other than teaching and cleaning. She indicated she is overwhelmed with work and has to work day and night to complete it all:

I teach during the day and if I am to sign anything, I wait until after all classroom tasks are completed. Then I can think about the finances, paying the part-time staff, ordering resources etc. That means I work every weekend and well into the night each weekday, but at least I know I have them all completed correctly.

She said she has tried to handle the managerial tasks and teaching during the school hours, but with 23 students in 7 different year levels, she found this was impossible. Her solution has been to delay all tasks, other than teaching, until the end of the school day when her teaching preparation for the next day was completed:

Alice admitted that Education Queensland has found mistakes in her account books and they returned many forms for corrections. To prevent this from happening again, Alice said:

I do one thing at a time. Even if this means staff have to wait an extra day for their wages. I am accountable for everything here.

I have also allocated money for a cleaner. I can’t do that as well now.

**Curriculum knowledge and multi-age teaching:** Having all seven year levels has highlighted the importance of knowing the curriculum thoroughly, Alice said:

Knowing the curriculum expectations is very important for you can’t learn everything when you start this job. You must know the classroom work otherwise you can’t handle sudden visitors, telephone calls, requests for help from the administrative staff member or fixing leaking pipes or clogged toilets etc.

Having 23 children in 7 different year levels is an enormous task, she stated and she had not had multi-age teaching experience prior to accepting this position. In addition, the outcomes-based approach to teaching has increased Alice’s workload:

It took ages and ages when you start planning and teaching using this new outcomes-based approach. As well, I am trying to use the
multi-age approach. The hours I spend preparing my school work are very long. (Interview 1: 101–103)

Further, Alice said she has no funding to employ specialist teachers such as music and physical education. This means she has no spare time in a week because she has to teach these curriculum areas. Alice said she had contacted Education Queensland but they cannot provide additional funding until next year:

Our school was forgotten last year when Education Queensland allocated funds for specialist teachers. (Interview 1: 47)

*Available teaching space:* One final aspect of teaching at State School D is the minimal teaching space. Alice says she has to adapt her teaching style to accommodate all the children in a small space. There are constant safety issues:

At first I found this very restrictive to my thinking. There is nowhere to put the children’s bags, the electrical cords lie all over the floor, and if I set up work stations everyone trips over each other. (Interview 2: 245–247)

The current student numbers are greater than the capacity for which the building was initially designed, so Alice finds everything very cramped:

The staffroom in my last school is larger than the classroom and storeroom combined here. (Interview 2: 250–251)

To date, her requests for additional classroom space have fallen ‘on deaf ears’, according to Alice. Alice indicated she thought it was her lack of credibility in the position that has been the reason why Education Queensland has not responded to her request:

I think if I had been longer in the principalship position, Education Queensland would take more notice of my requests. This will come in time as my experience grows but I just wish they would listen to me now. (Interview 3: 71–73)

**Alice’s understanding of leadership**

Initially, Alice believed that as long as she found out what the community wanted, that is all she needed to do:

I found out what the community expects from the school and myself, and I went from there. So much easier than trying to get the community to come in and discuss their needs and to write these during a number of meeting. I can do it all on one weekend and
simply present it to the P and C meeting for their comments and agreement. (Interview 2: 158–161)

Alice also indicated that she did not have the time or the energy that was required to pursue shared visions and goals and, least of all, to focus upon creating conditions for group-negotiated approaches to policy and strategic writing.

I just didn’t have the time to keep asking for feedback on my documents. There are so many changes and so many documents to be read and to write. (Interview 2: 27–28)

Regarding staff leadership Alice indicated:

I try to guide the new administrative assistant towards independence but I do have to check everything. (Interview 2: 15)

When asked ‘What hinders your leadership?’ Alice replied:

Misunderstandings between people; my lack of knowledge; being alone; having no one to discuss school matters with and making the mistake by disclosing private details to the teacher’s aide. (Interview 3: 325–326)

But Alice said she has changed her approach:

I have had discussions with the Executive Director of Schools and she is encouraging me to read a few research articles and to think about my leadership. She is good. I wish I had had these conversations with the previous Executive Director of Schools during my first year as teaching principal. I may be organising the school in a different way. I will try her suggestions at my next school. (Interview 3: 85–89)

When asked for further clarification Alice said:

Knowing the new Executive Director of Schools supports me; knowing a little more about what is expected of me as a teaching principal; having positive connections with the school community have all contributed to my leadership practice. (Interview 3: 328–331)

In response to a question about what was the focus of the articles she is reading and the discussions she is having with the new Executive Director of Schools Alice stated:

Learning how to say things differently to staff and parents, and value of sharing ideas with colleagues and the school community. Also taking risks by asking questions so my practice does improve. Also how to work collaboratively with community members—showing my position, my role, in a different light. (Interview 4: 328–331)
When asked if this has altered her practice, Alice replied:

Yes, I am beginning to lead the school now, working with the community to develop future plans for the school, to achieve improved student outcomes and to make things better for the community.

(Interview 4: 480–481)
Case Study School E: Suzanne, the teaching principal

Suzanne’s case study begins with her replies to the introductory questions: ‘What is a teaching principal?’ and ‘Why become a teaching principal?’ The second section details Suzanne’s replies to the questions focusing upon the factors of influence upon her work as teaching principal.

What is a teaching principal?
Someone who is dedicated, energetic, enthusiastic and looking for a challenge. (Interview1: 2)

Teaching principal is like . . .
. . constantly changing hats and trying to walk in two sets of shoes—as a teacher and the other as a leader. (Interview 1: 11–12)

Why become a teaching principal?
Suzanne says this position allows her to be a principal—she has wanted to have a school of her own for years:

I taught dance for 10 years and loved it but it didn’t give me control over the curriculum or the whole education of the students. I thought I could offer more. (Interview1: 18–19)

I love it now—made many mistakes to start with, but now I am going well. (Interview 1: 21)

Suzanne said:

It has been a time of personal growth and learning. Sometimes I was totally lost and didn’t understand why things were going wrong, but now I am beginning to understand how this community works and the place of the school within the community. (Interview 4: 641–643)

Influences upon teaching principal practice
The interview data were collected during four interviews held in Suzanne’s 34th and 36th months of service as teaching principal.

Suzanne listed the following as the factors that have influenced her practice:

The factors that have influenced my principalship are: communication with everyone, my part-time staff and the parents especially; the community and their needs for their children; not knowing what to do or what was expected of me by Education Queensland, and thank goodness I know the curriculum really well
with all the classroom experience I have had. But lack of multi-age teaching caused me problems. (Interview 3: 7–10)

Help offered by Education Queensland officers and my new understandings of how the community members must be involved in the decision-making processes of the school. (Interview 3: 45–47)

From Suzanne’s data, the following headings (verified by Suzanne) were selected to represent the influencing factors on her practice:

- communication and relationships;
- community;
- ‘thrown in at the deep end’;
- curriculum knowledge and multi-age teaching strategies;
- professional support to improve practice; and
- leadership.

**Communication and relationships**

Communication will be detailed using three headings:

- school community and officers of Education Queensland;
- students; and
- colleagues.

*School community and officers of Education Queensland:* Initially, Suzanne was so enthusiastic and ‘full’ of ideas for her school that she omitted to share her ideas with her school community:

> I realise now that I went in feet first and told the staff and the parents what was going to happen in their school. I didn’t listen, and often I just changed things without telling anyone. (Interview 3:17–18)

Due to this style of communication, the resultant negative relationships caused a number of families to transfer their children to another school at the end of Suzanne’s first year at the school. Relationships are very important, Suzanne indicated:

> Initially, I chased away any likelihood of positive relationships by my poor communication skills and my need to implement change. This was done at the time without consideration of others. Now after two years of intensive repair work, relationships with all—parents, staff, students and community members—are very positive.
This has proved vital to the successful outcomes we are now experiencing at this school. (Interview 3: 11–15)

According to Suzanne, the improved relationships that have led to growing trust and respect, have allowed her to begin implementing her visions for the school. Many initiatives that were previously rejected during the first year of her principalship are now being considered in a positive light by all members of the school community:

I have learnt much and this mistake I will never make again. In the larger schools where I have taught, I did not ever see the importance of good communications and positive relationships. Teachers were allowed to teach and we just implemented change when and as we thought best. Parents and other teachers simply followed along. (Interview 3: 22–25)

The broader community was not considered. (Interview 4: 620)

Communication with the Executive Director of Schools, on the other hand, has always been very positive and Suzanne said she greeted any suggestions offered in a very positive manner. The Executive Director’s guidance indicated to Suzanne that new attempts were needed to re-open communication with the school community. Suzanne’s acceptance of the assistance offered by the Executive Director of Schools, and a supportive relationship which developed with the officers at Education Queensland (such as meeting procedures, proofing school newsletters), has taught Suzanne a valuable lesson which has eventually led to positive communication and relationships with the school community:

I learnt so much from the officers at District Office and I was so willing to try again for I wanted to make this principal position a success. (Interview 3: 28–29)

If I had not been willing to accept help, my health and my career would have suffered. (Interview 3: 31–32)

These factors, positive communication and relationships with the local community, had the greatest influence on Suzanne’s practice. She said she learned the importance of listening to the needs of the staff, parents and students, and of thoroughly explaining her ideas before implementing them so that misunderstandings were corrected. Moreover, she invited and accepted the involvement of community members.
A turnaround was experienced and soon students were returning to the school. Suzanne was certain that this positive change was partially due to her improved communication skills. Not only did improved communication lead to improved relations with the school community and increased student numbers, it also meant that Suzanne was able to share her vision for the school:

> Positive two-way communication is the key. Mutual trust between the principal and school community opens the way for all possibilities. (Interview 2: 31–32)

But, now Suzanne says her days are very fragmented:

> Being the only full-time staff member, there is no one to share the focus; everyone wants to talk to me: the book salesman who suddenly arrives on the doorstep, parents, Education Queensland officers, building maintenance personnel, mailman, bus driver and other community members. (Interview 3: 396–398)

**Students:**

> I just so enjoy the surprises, the achievements that each day brings to the students in my school. (Interview 1: 328–329)

During the first year of her work at State School E, Suzanne said the students simply did as she told them because she was the principal. But two years later, Suzanne indicated she felt her relationships with the students were positive and they trusted her to help them. She said she looks forward to their achievements.

**Colleagues:** Suzanne avoided contact with other teaching principals of the region until the school situation improved, and Suzanne and the school community were on better terms. Suzanne said she felt vulnerable, and she did not wish her colleagues to be aware of her predicament.

**Community**

The community has had an enormous effect upon her work, Suzanne indicated:

> Not meaning to but I chased them [members of the school community] away in the first year. I lost children from the school. But now the children are returning and the school community is supporting my actions. We are working together. (Interview 3: 19–21)
Suzanne has demonstrated her understanding of the power of the local community and, more importantly, has realised that without the community her school could not exist.

The first step to improve community relationships, Suzanne indicated, was her willingness to join the local tennis club and to support them in their fundraising activities. The local tennis club meets once a week, uses the school facilities to play, and is central to many of the social activities of the community. The officers of Education Queensland encouraged Suzanne’s participation in community events and this contributed to improved positive outcomes for her and the school.

Second, Suzanne accepted an invitation to judge the show work at the local show in the town 108km away. Her success, she said assisted her acceptance by the school community:

I had not joined any community groups for I was too busy at the school, but District Office staff said I should and to demonstrate my support for their fundraising events. It was amazing, the community members were pleased I joined and very soon I was in the thick of things helping and being part of their events. (Interview 3: 51–54)

The community members valued conservation elements (the way things were done when they went to school) of schooling. Suzanne said:

They were happy with one computer, the 3Rs were best. Technology no way. (Interview 3: 245)

Suzanne said that over time she has been able to reassure the school community that learning was highly valued, which developed trust between herself and community and enabled her to move forward with the unconditional support of the community. She says that the community appreciates her compassion and energy, and her concern for the future of their children. The school has become a place for intellectual growth, a safe risk-taking environment and a place that endorses both solid traditional curriculum and current educational trends.

Third, driving the school bus in the afternoon when necessary, further improved relationships as Suzanne stated she was able to have many informal chats with parents and neighbours at their homes. This development improved relationships between both community members and Suzanne.
‘Thrown in at the deep end’
Suzanne said she was not offered any assistance via an induction programme. She was ‘thrown in at the deep end’ but:

This did not worry me, I just wanted to get in there and do it. I had ideas bottled up for years. I could handle the teaching as I had taught for eight years and I just made what sense I could out of the administration. (Interview 1: 91–93)

There was an experienced part-time administrative assistant at the school so they worked together completing forms etc. The assistant knew what needed to be done so she acted as a guide directing Suzanne in fulfilling Education Queensland’s requirements, ordering resources and many other administrative tasks. Sometimes Suzanne said she made mistakes and forms had to be resubmitted. This, she said, frustrated her as time was lost but eventually correct ways were learnt. Fitting all the tasks into each day, Suzanne described as a constant worry. To help solve this predicament, Suzanne says she time manages so certain jobs are completed at certain times of the week:

There is not enough time so I cut corners or just don’t do some things. (Interview 4: 331)

I spend most weekends planning my teaching, and during the week days I do the administration. (Interview 4: 335–356)

There were opportunities to attend regional networking groups of fellow teaching principals but:

I was invited along to local network days with other teaching principals. But I was too busy and it was a long way on dirt roads. Or so I kept telling myself. I knew things were going wrong and I did not wish to tell anyone. (Interview 2: 46–48)

In hindsight, Suzanne admits that she should have attended these groups and listened to how other principals ‘do the job’, especially during her first year. During the last nine months, Suzanne has started to participate and even hosts such days at her school.
Curriculum knowledge and multi-age teaching strategies

Suzanne indicated she has a solid handle on the curriculum, and had attended all the current workshops and updated her knowledge before her promotion to teaching principal. However:

I believed, during my first year here, I had to ensure the entire curriculum was covered. (Interview 4: 563)

Knowing and teaching all the syllabi etc. is not enough. This is what I found out. You need to know what interests the students and what parents and the community members want for their children. Knowing the education system is not enough. (Interview 2: 57–59)

Suzanne said that during her second year she learnt, from the officers of Education Queensland, she must connect with the community and develop units of work linked with community interests.

They were so helpful. They could see I had kept up-to-date but was not using this knowledge to make connections with my school community. All those wonderful units of work I thought I could use at my new school were shelved and we developed new ones for this community. (Interview 3: 65–67)

It is hard making links with the locals. But once I became more aware of the community, I started to see community possibilities. (Interview 4: 571–572)

In addition, multi-age strategies are essential, according to Suzanne:

I had not worked with so many different year levels before and I just couldn’t. The officers of Education Queensland introduced me to multi-age teaching and I learnt how to teach one area of work to suit all the levels of achievement I have in my school. I wish I knew these strategies before I came to this school. (Interview 3: 121–124)

Professional support to improve practice

Suzanne could not begin to work collaboratively with parents, staff and community members on vision development until well into the third year of her principalship. Relationships between herself and the community were fully mended and all parties could look to the future:

We are now able to identify our goals, articulate them, and create a school community vision that not only supports student learning but contributes to community growth. (Interview 3: 231–233)

Suzanne said her practice improved:
Education Queensland was always very supportive and as I learnt more, the Executive Director of Schools further developed my newly found skills by offering professional development opportunities and mentorship. (Interview 3: 210–212)

The Executive Director of Schools has proved to be a trusted colleague to guide future actions, this has been a key to the improved school outcomes and promising future for both the school and Suzanne as teaching principal.

**Leadership**

Suzanne detailed two leadership approaches and the consequences of each.

Initially, Suzanne used a very authoritarian approach:

> I decided what needed to be changed and I went ahead and did it. I was a bully. (Interview 2: 205)

> Families started to leave the school and the staff members were very unhappy. (Interview 2: 209)

Following discussions with Education Queensland officers and becoming part of the community, Suzanne adopted a different leadership approach:

> I listen to the needs of the community and I justify my reasons for change. We share ideas, and together we decide the best way to achieve them. (Interview 2: 231–232)

> Families are returning to the school and we all work together. (Interview 2: 240)

> I don’t know what this type of leadership is called but maybe a ‘working along side with everyone’ leadership. Anyway, it works and everyone, the staff, students, parents, and community members are now fully involved in our school. (Interview 3: 307–309)

Suzanne’s ‘working along side with everyone’ leadership approach has been a result of personal reflection and professional development.
Case Study School F: Bill, the teaching principal

The first part of this case study presents Bill’s replies to the introductory questions; ‘What is a teaching principal?’ and ‘Why become a teaching principal?’ The second section details Bill’s replies to the questions focusing upon the factors of influence upon his leadership.

A teaching principal is . . .

A mat—honestly everyone in this community wants to have a say and wants to rub their ideas on to you. I knew you were going to ask this question. So I have thought about it—a Jack of All Trades but that does not say how I feel. Education Queensland wants you to do things, the parents want you to do thing, the community wants you to do things, the children want you to do things. You know, I am hardly ever asked what I want to do. When I was a classroom teacher that question was asked often by the other teachers and by the principal and by other teaching friends but here it is different. Or is it the nature of the job? I don’t know for this is the only school I have had. (Interview 1: 193–201)

I feel like a mat. (Interview 1:203)

Teaching principal leadership is like . . .

. . . being a good listener to everyone—the parents, the children, the community and Education Queensland. I listen to all and find the best way to fulfil all their needs. I need to survive so the best way for me is to listen and carry out their wants. (Interview 1: 221–223)

Why become a teaching principal?

Bill indicated he thought he was a good teacher and his former principal suggested he try for a promotion to a teaching principal position.

In response to the question ‘Do you find the position as you expected?’ Bill replied:

I really knew little about the position but it was a way for promotion and I am a good teacher so I just thought I could learn all the rest. I didn’t have an induction workshop. I just try to work out what is to be done. All those forms are a concern but if I do something wrong Education Queensland staff ring or they return the forms, and they tell me how to correct it. I really did not think about the job— actually I just thought I would have more freedom than being in a large school but not so—the community, the parents, Education Queensland all want me to do their biding. (Interview 4: 61–68)

Asked if he enjoyed this position, Bill stated:
Yes and no—the challenge of the seven grades is hard work and very time consuming. Trying to keep everyone happy is another challenge. I want my next promotion so I am playing the game very carefully—I keep looking over my shoulder. (Interview 4: 112–114)

Influences upon Bill’s principalship

Bill indicated at various stages throughout the three interviews, the influences upon his principalship:

The major factors upon my principalship are the isolation of the school, and the attitude of the members of the school community. The curriculum content I teach is in response to the rural setting and the school community’s expectations. (Interview 2: 129–132)

I have tried to communicate with the community members and the parents but they are not listening. Also I tried to follow my immediate past principal’s approach with the part-time staff but they are not interested in change so I just leave them be. (Interview 3: 94–96)

From Bill’s data, the following headings, verified by Bill, were selected as organisers of the influences upon his principalship:

- local context;
- isolation;
- communication with parents and students;
- Bill’s curriculum expectations versus parents’ view of the curriculum; and
- staff opposed to change.

Local context

Bill divided local context into two areas:

- school facilities; and
- visibility.

School facilities: The school is the only public building in this remote community. The school doubles as the community meeting place. Bill attends all community gatherings at his school for two reasons:

... (a) being a single fellow an opportunity for a meal out is always welcome [meals are often served during meetings and functions]; and (b) I need to open and lock the school facilities and I am accountable for all school equipment. (Interview 1: 211–213)
These functions do appear to offer opportunities for communication and relationship building with parents, but Bill finds these functions very confronting because parents try to influence his teaching choices:

   Certain parents ‘bail me up’ even on these occasions in the hope they can point me in the ‘right’ direction re my teaching and the management of this school. (Interview 3: 152–153)

The community events held at Bill’s schools are not occasions he looks forward to, he said, and he would prefer that these events were held elsewhere but as the school is the only facility available, Bill must participate.

*Visibility:* The close proximity of Bill’s house to the road and having no privacy screening offers all community members many opportunities to know Bill’s every movement. Bill said he was unaware at first that his actions created such interest:

   Everyone knows all my movements especially after dark. Now, I leave lights on at the school and in my house to all hours. I even park my car around behind the house, but if you look hard enough you can still see it. This pressure really gets to you. (Interview 1: 456–458)

The pressure of having no privacy has influenced Bill’s approach to his rural teaching experience. He said he experiences discomfort, frustration and disillusionment and, as a result, dissatisfaction with this teaching principalship:

   I find questions such as “You were up late last night” very disturbing. I can’t turn around without someone knowing and then everyone in the community knows. (Interview 1: 464–465)

The visibility of his actions which has led to a network of community ‘gossip’ has influenced Bill’s practice. He longs for long weekends and school holidays:

   I enjoy my times away in the larger centres east of here, where no-one ‘watches’ me. I can be myself and I begin to relax. (Interview 2: 127–128)

*Isolation*

The remoteness of the school has a major influence upon Bill’s professional and personal life. Bill discussed this influence under two headings:

   o professional life; and
   o personal life.
Professional life: Bill’s past teaching experience was in schools in large centres where the population exceeded 10,000. Bill says he feels very isolated and alone in this remote setting:

This school is a long way from anywhere—isolation on an immediate basis—sometimes I do not speak to another teacher for over a week. The nearest school is in the local town 117 km away and it is another one-teacher school. (Interview 1: 5–7)

As a beginning teaching principal, Bill said he finds this isolation overwhelming for three reasons: lack of professional contact with other teachers; almost every day there are managerial tasks of which he said he has no knowledge; and lack of multi-age teaching knowledge:

I miss the sharing of professional knowledge, talking about my teaching, and the general staffroom discussions. (Interview 1: 304)

I have only been doing this job for two years so at times I don’t know what to do with Education Queensland documents, and often the documents are returned because I didn’t do them correctly. Teaching is OK but I haven’t had any multi-age classes before so I find the assessment particularly difficult. (Interview 2: 71–73)

I have to learn everything as I go along. I make so many mistakes. (Interview 2: 96)

Bill said he is not willing to be part of the local principal network because he doesn’t want to tell others about his lack of understanding of the position. In addition, he is reluctant to ask for guidance from Education Queensland officers because that would indicate his lack of knowledge:

I don’t want to be ringing Education Queensland staff all the time because I am sure they will think I am not up to this promotion. (Interview 1: 152–153)

The consequence of lack of professional relationships with teaching principal colleagues and Education Queensland officers has led to his inability to access support mechanisms that may begin to solve his negative attitude towards this teaching principal situation.

Personal life: Bill said the isolation has also influenced his relationship with his current girlfriend. Teaching friends have advised Bill not to invite his girlfriend out into his teaching community for reasons of confidentiality and personal privacy. As a
result, Bill takes advantage of lengthy telephone calls, and travels east on all long weekends and school holidays. Being unable to make connections between his personal life and his school life has influenced the way Bill views the school and the community:

> Everyone knows what you do out here and all the talk that would follow throughout the community. They are such nosy people. I keep my two lives quite separate. I am not part of this community. (Interview 2: 21–23)

**Communication with parents and students**

Bill indicated that he accepted this principalship with high hopes and positive ideas with the dream of working together with staff and parents, but he said:

> . . . things have not worked out that way at all. Communication with everyone is strained at best. (Interview 3: 41–42)

Bill discussed communication under the following headings:

- parents; and
- students.

*Parents:* There appears to be a lack of trust or respect between Bill and the members of the school community. He says his attempts to develop positive two-way communication were soon dashed when the parents would not listen to, or even consider his ideas for the school:

> I tried to copy his [Bill’s immediate past principal] positive approaches to sharing ideas and asking parents and community members for ideas, but this school is so different. Parents here just want to tell me what I should be doing. (Interview 2: 7–9)

Bill has not indicated that he wishes to alter the situation:

> Certain parents take every opportunity to try to push their agenda and this puts me under a lot of pressure. (Interview 2: 85–86)

> Over the past 12 months I have been keeping a list of what the parents want by my bed so that I can survive my time here. It is as simple as that. (Interview 3: 168–169)

This lack of relationship building has affected his leadership as he has been unable to implement any of the visions he had for the school community. Further, Bill said he
has been unable to work with the community towards the development of a future vision for the school.

Students: Student communication is very positive. Bill said:

We have fun. They love playing games with me. I see them in the community—they like to dance and pull me about—I try to balance their time with me—but they soon go to bed or play with friends so it all works out. They are a good bunch of children—no discipline problems. They are often very tired at school because they have been out until late shootin’, but other than this, all goes well.

(Interview 1: 187–191)

Positive communications with students appears to have established student respect, but with other members of the community, communication seems to be at a standstill.

Bill’s curriculum expectation versus parents’ views of the curriculum

Bill indicated that his knowledge of the expectations of different year levels has proved to be invaluable:

I know what are the expectations of each year level. As a teaching principal, you must know what to do in the classroom first and foremost. Then you have time to work on office duties etc.

(Interview 3: 25–27)

But lacking multi-age knowledge:

... has created many worries. I am still unsure how to cover all of the curriculum, especially how to find the time to assess everyone.

(Interview 4:10)

Bill believes that the interests and abilities of the students should influence the units of study selected but Bill said the students’ interests were very limited. They seem to enjoy:

‘kangaroo shooting and pig hunting’. (Interview 1:331)

All children prefer to be outdoors than indoors so I have a gardening unit running. As well I am developing a multi-sport area and a fun area for playing under the building. This will give them somewhere to play out of the hot sun and out of the rain. It has been hard work interesting the children. All they want to do is write and talk about ‘pigin’ and shootin’. (Interview 1: 335–338)

But at the heart of his curriculum selection, Bill said, is the pressure exerted by the parents:
It is all reactive isn’t it? When I come to think of it when I was in the urban school I selected units I enjoyed and ones that would benefit the students’ future. Here I am just finding work that the students will enjoy and the parents will not complain about. (Interview 1: 495–497)

As a result, Bill’s curriculum knowledge and beliefs are overshadowed by the will of the parents. It appears to Bill that the parents and the community members are the dominating influence in the school community. Bill indicated that they pressure for curriculum selection to favour their beliefs:

The community is made up entirely of Anglo-Australians. They are rather a biased group of community members, because they ‘hate the blacks’ [Australian Aboriginals] and the children have taken on these beliefs. There are no other cultures in the district. (Interview 2: 159–162)

I have to teach Aboriginal studies but I know very little so I use a few videos. Last year, a group of schools had a day of camp cooking, throwing, painting and dancing—all run by a travelling group of Aborigines. Great, this function helped me out heaps but the parents said they didn’t want their children to attend again this year. (Interview 2: 173–175)

The parents and the other community members also want to show the nearby communities that their school is the best. Occasions for showing off their children and the school include the Queensland Country Women’s Association competitions, and the local show held at the showgrounds in the nearest regional centre. Both are held annually. The parents feel their children’s work reflects upon them personally:

I hate public displays of schoolwork. It takes so much effort and this community wants their children to win. I find the pressure to always do well a worry. Last year we clean swept some sections and the community and the parents were thrilled. So wrong! The parents did a lot of the children’s work. (Interview 3: 260–263)

Bill said this approach to school work is against his personal philosophy of education:

It goes against my beliefs. But I heard from one of the other teachers in another one-teacher school that you must do as the community says in nearly everything otherwise they will push you out. The teacher here before me was very ill and was up against the wall and at loggerheads with the parents. He could not cope and asked to be transferred. (Interview 3: 275–278)

Bill stated that he needed to understand what the parents and community members wanted and the best approach was to hold school open days twice a year:
Some parents and community members are very pushy about what they want to happen in the school. All come to P & C meetings [Parents and Citizens] and most open days, so I can find out what everyone wants and my door is always open. The community is a strong force here. (Interview 3: 440–442)

Bill indicated he was sure he was tolerated because he played cricket for a Queensland schoolboys’ team:

They value sport highly (Interview 3: 215)

Sport and lots of it. The parents like me playing with the children out on the oval at lunch time, so I fit in sport whenever I can. (Interview 3: 222–223)

**Staff opposed to change**

Bill wanted to talk about the part-time staff using two headings:

- skills of the staff; and
- confidentiality.

*Skills of the staff:* Bill said, the staff members prefer things to be as they have been in the past, so any attempt to alter their practice has met with resistance:

> The part-time staff members have been here for ages before me and all seem to be staying on, so I let them do things their way. I found when I first arrived I made a few suggestions to alter procedures. Oh dear, the body language! So I learnt quickly. It is not all that important—as long as the children are kept safe and their learning moves ahead—I just let the staff do their own thing.

(Interview 1: 250–255)

The resultant relationship with the staff, Bill indicated, is based on the approach ‘you keep out of my way and I will keep out of yours’.

*Confidentiality:* Confidentiality is a very important part of the teaching principal position in such a small remote area, according to Bill. The children and the adults retell many personal stories to him and the staff, but Bill said the staff gossip. Bill said he has not experienced this before but he says he has been unable to stop the staff gossiping:

> The staff gossip all the time especially on the days when the teacher’s aide and the administrative assistant are here together.

(Interview 2: 238–239)
Confidentiality is my concern. I just hope visitors don’t hear the staff talking. I don’t tell anyone things I hear. I have to be on my guard at all times. (Interview 2: 235–236)

Bill said because he continues to keep his own counsel and does not participate in ‘gossiping’, he is further alienated by the staff.

**Leadership**

The interview process concluded with a focus upon leadership.

When asked ‘How do you lead your school?’ Bill answered:

I don’t. (Interview 3: 451)

In response to me asking why, Bill responded:

I tried using the approach my previous principal used but no one here is interested in any of my ideas. They just want me to do what they want. (Interview 3: 456–457)

Bill said he decided to:

. . . let sleeping dogs lie and I backed off from making any suggestions to the staff and the parents. (Interview 4: 460–461)

I want a promotion, so I am not going to try to set up any communication or to try to introduce any new ideas. (Interview 4: 467–468)

Bill’s desire for promotion has influenced his decision, because he said he had heard how the school community had influenced the promotion chances of past teaching principals at State School F. Bill is happy to accept things as they are and to patiently wait until his three year term was completed:

If the parents have not complained to Education Queensland, I should be offered a promotional transfer to another school after completing three years here. (Interview 3: 471–472)
Chris, State School A: Factors of influence and consequences
After first two interviews

**Educational factors—**
* Personal beliefs—connect with students' interests, background and prior knowledge, being a learner yourself; students need to develop independence
* Partnerships with parents improves student learning
* Beliefs held by Chris and local parents—high expectations for student learning; importance of technology

**Leadership factors—**
**Positives**—valuing human resources—knowledge of others; thinking of the students; ensuring everyone was cared for and valued
* using different approaches—direct; collaborative; creative to suit the occasion

**Consequences—**
Enhances leadership possibilities

**Relational factors—**
* Build upon established positive relations—laid back approach using humour; accepting others; trusting and valuing others
* Becoming accepted as a local through—valuing the locals; being involved in local events
* Becoming a valued member of the community
* Positive principal-local community relationships

**Management factors—**
* Overwhelmed by numerous tasks, time
* Initially maintained past procedures—supports feelings of others; understanding past and current

**Consequences—**
Enhances leadership possibilities

**Professional factors—**
* Leadership committee
* Mentor
* Network of other principals
* Will apply for a promotion

**Consequences—**
Enhances leadership possibilities

**Knowledge gained** increased understanding of the position
**Consequences—**settled into position quickly thus
**Consequences—**enhanced leadership possibilities

Working together to plan future

**Consequences—**
enhanced leadership possibilities

Negatives—lack of rapport; lack of acceptance by community members; being too busy with management issues; not joining into local events

**Consequences—**
hinders leadership possibilities

VII
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Leadership.


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